

Hearthstone
Anthro 415
Fall 98

Final Exam.

7) What were the four most important, interesting, and/or surprising things you learned in this class?

I decided to go to school to learn how to design ecologically sustainable communities, a skill that is very much needed today, that I have a strong interest in, because I was made homeless without my fault, and I resolved that putting my effort into wanting to be re-instated in other than ecologically sustainable society was not worth it. Therefore I have to find ways how to help the bringing about of such a society. Naturally enough, the knowledge necessary for creating an ecologically sustainable society has to come from disciplines that have connections with the science of ecology and from wholistic ideologies, because to live ecosustainably one has to reckon with the totality of all systems.

Especially interesting sounded courses with environmental themes; if anywhere, it would be there where I could learn things necessary for designing sustainable communities, because what (I reasoned) would be more important these days to teach in environmental courses than that? Therefore, for me taking courses with environmental themes is a particularly traumatic experience, because it seems that everything else is taught, but not what ecological sustainability (or any close equivalent thereof) is, a subject I feel is especially important to learn, before any of the other subject matters that are being taught in courses with environmental themes, due to the obvious, emergency nature of the state of the environment these days. Especially important because of the rapidly worsening of quality of life of not only humans, but most of the species on the Earth.

1) What greatly surprised me was that both, the Kinsley's book and the 415 course is lacking a model of what environmentalism is, supposedly, striving for. Such a model is, incidentally, lacking also anywhere else where environmental issues are the subject of discourse, as I found also. With such a model it would be possible to evaluate environmentalism as accurately as our rapidly increasing knowledge about the workings of ecosystems would allow. With such a model it would be possible readily to evaluate any aspect of today's environmentalism accurately, without any emotionality and unclearities.

And although Dr. Pepper's book is a great handy reference for anyone interested in studying contemporary human society, a great book it could have been had it been written from the standpoint of the desired result (achieving a state of harmony between humans and their environment, i.e. a model of what an ecologically sustainable humanity ought to be, according to the current knowledge of ecosystems and Earth ecosphere behaviours. Please see my working definition of "ecological sustainability in the appendix).

Then the evaluation of the entire environmentalist movement would become much clearer, simpler, and easier to understand. There would not have to be any concerns about whether this or that movement is anarchist, socialist or what not -ist. Any environmental movement phenomenon could be evaluated on how it is, or appears to be potentially effective in getting humanity to live in harmony with Nature. Furthermore, any ecologically sustainable ideology would come,

obviously, from actually *living* ecosustainably, then the other way around.

Such a model of an ideal, ecologically correct humanity is already possible to construct, enough is already known about the behaviors of ecosystems that would make this possible. Using such a model it would be possible to evaluate any human behavior and process quantitatively, how much it is close to being ecologically sustainable. Although I call this model "ideal", it would be not a utopian model, based on arbitrary notions. It would be firmly based in our knowledge of processes in ecological systems generally, and specifically in our knowledge of the Earth ecosphere.

.This model would describe an ecologically sustainable human society that lives in harmony with the rest of the ecosphere, a set of criteria with which to evaluate human behaviours as to their ecosustainability, a model that would be faithful to our current state of knowledge of ecological systems as closely as possible. There is already enough knowledge available to us, I believe, to make such a model useful for evaluating of any human behavior and processes as to how close they are to the ideal and do it so quantitatively. Having such a set of criteria would make possible to analyze each environmentalist movement's goals and see how they hold up to the standard. Such a model would surely be a focus of a perpetual debate and a subject to constant improvements. Such a model of ecologically correct humanity would be based on all the currently available scientific knowledge of how ecosystems work, and its accuracy would depend on the state of our knowledge.

It must not, however, be imagined that it would be any rigid model, that would dictate in detail what an ecologically sustainable humanity should look like. Using this model would merely be possible to decide how whatever process, or a behaviour would be according with the tendencies of an ecosystem towards achieving a dynamic balance.

One possible reason that such a model is not widely available yet could be that its existence would be threatening to our current social paradigm that is dependent on a cultural core that is antithetical to the notion of ecological sustainability.

Some people are aware of the environmental problems (obviously many are), but they wait for the political and science specialists to outline a course of action, and because those specialists' existences are controlled by the few who control capital (it should not be imagined that there actually are the "few". They are all of us who give our consent to the existence of present system, willingly or not.) and virtually no *significant* progress in advancing ecological sustainability is being made, because it is not in the interest of those who control capital to change things. Of course, in *name*, a plenty of "environmental" actions are being done left and right, but upon closer inspection virtually none has as a goal ecological sustainability, if ever any. Most of those actions do not deal with the causes of environmental degradation deep enough to have any lasting effect

There, after all, *is* an ecologically correct model of ideal humanity, but it exists underground, as if, and is not widely known, at least it is not being referred to openly, and whatever is being said and done in regards to environmentalism has no, or insignificant effect, because no effect is possible in a system that is antithetical to ecological sustainability.

For instance: I had been searching for University program that would have sustainable development as an objective. For a long time I could not find anything on the "net" and by asking around until I was referred a program by Yale and Harvard Universities who aim to rebuild a community on the Mexican border -- Ciudad Juarez. I was glad that I found something, but upon closer inspection it turns out that the community will be rebuilt by using outside money, that the project is not about showing the people who live in the community how to rebuilt

their town themselves without outside capital and using only local resources, which would make it closer to being sustainable.

How different it would be, if there would be experimental ecologically sustainable communities, say within "Nature" preserves (which today preserve "wilderness", but whose existence is threatened as long as the humans, who found those reserves continue to live ecologically non-sustainably)? It would be an ideal environment to test and to refine such an ecosustainability model.

Similar situation exists in today's environmental movement. A lot of ado, ever since the sixties, where it became obvious for many people that to live ecologically sustainably was the direction to go. However, today we are factually even *more* distant from living ecologically sustainably than ever (e.g. the notorious example of recycling. After some thirty years of recycling it is still very unpopular with the industry, at least seeing that, for instance, it is less possible to recycle plastic today than about ten years ago, when I could recycle most types of plastic, unlike today). Although, environmentalism became so popular that even the big corporation are using environmentalism to sell their products, but I do not think that this is the right kind of progress. It would seem that a lot of people are conscious of the need for some meaningful action environmentally, but on the street level it seems that people would not care less about the subject, they would seem to be more interested in acquiring more consumer goods, than in environmentalism, and those who might be interested in environmentalism are not even sure about its goals (an ongoing survey I am conducting). It is a very dismal situation.

2) Why there is no such model available is a speculation beyond the scope of this paper.

However, I feel that such a speculation should be a part (a basic part) of any and every course that deals with the our environment, eventually we might learn a great deal about human nature, and find out the real causes of wars and environmental degradation.

3) ...the Earth ecosphere is undergoing a major crisis, a crisis that is not caused by some stray asteroid, but by human activities. This fact is underplayed somewhat in the current debate on the state of our environment everywhere, where such a debate is held to the extend that this fact is not making the headlines, as it should. I feel this fact ought to have been a *major* component of the course.

Students ought to be made write reports on the state of the environment, just to make sure that everybody understands that there *is* an emergency.

4) I also feel that the fact that despite the concerns for the environment have been voiced for a long time already, the environment is getting worse exponentially (consider all the vital statistics -- an escalating depletion of resources, the still ongoing explosive population growth, global warming). Also many "green" ideas that were held since about the sixties, ideas that were ecologically sustainable, have been inexplicably abandoned (Kinsley, table on p19).

Any environmental course (especially ecological anthropology one) should, at least, attempt to analyze the causes for the general apathy that surrounds these grave issues, and the causes for abandonment of some early ecologically sound ideas.

1) What is environmentalism and how does it differ from environmental studies and from ecology?

Environmentalism is too wide a term to be described accurately. Originally (in an indirect connection with "**ecology**") environmentalism was a trend in determinism that held that the environment had a major role in forming a population's character. "Environmentalism" today describes mainly all the various movements that concern themselves with the ameliorating of the

degradation of environment caused by human activities. Only a small portion of those movements seems to base their activities on a sound knowledge of ecology, although many actions by the environmental movement are motivated by findings from environmental studies, from which ecology draws a lot of data also.

Most environmentalists concern themselves with the readily observable effects of environmental degradation (air and water pollution, oil spills, extinction of certain, but not all, species, etc.) without having a clear idea of what the outcome of their efforts ought to be. Environmentalism is a popular movement that has only a minimal connection with **ecology**, it would seem, interested in, for instance in saving of some arbitrarily selected species, which results in a situation that does not take into account the interconnectedness of *all* phenomena in the ecosphere (I gain this insights from the various environmentalist publications and from *Earth Times* that I have been subscribing to for a time, but I have to yet to see an article that would explain what sustainable development is supposed to mean virtually in all environmental literature).

Ecology advanced greatly in the recent years due to the increased concerns about the rapidly increasing environmental degradation and has a lot to say already about how ecosystems function. The most significant progress made in ecology is the realization of a tight and intricate interconnectedness of all processes occurring in the Earth's ecosphere. This realization is probably most advanced in the Gaia theory (there are many references to Gaia theory in Kinsley). This realization alone should be enough for forming a rough guidelines for the environmentalist movement at large, not only in a small portion of the movement -- the "deep" environmentalists (one of the main guidelines would be a commonsense, no degree requiring understanding that in a complex system activities should be kept as simple as possible, and any complex undertakings should be postponed until all the consequences of those would be fully understood, a vital fact understood by a few only, so far. In fact no great science is needed for to live ecosustainably, if common sense that dictates to do things in as simple way as possible, is followed. It is only the intraspecific competition among humans that, when it becomes more important than living in harmony with the environment, takes over any concerns about the environment and is responsible for environmental degradation. It would also seem that, coincidentally, there is a correlation between the increase of both, environmental degradation and progress in science, as there is a correlation between the rate of occurrence of cancer and the number of medical doctors in a community (Dr. Brown in Ecological Anthropology course, UHH). There might be a reason to believe that science owes its origins to human intraspecific competition.

2) What are five factors for comparing the different varieties of environmentalism?

I feel that of the many *factors* with which one could evaluate environmentalism only one has a direct connection with a goal that is worth a consideration: How *effective* is an idea, a process, or a behavior in establishing human behaviors that would be in accord with the overall dynamic processes within the Earth's ecosphere? Although such a state would be very hard to observe in the ecosphere, because of far too many variables, nor it is possible to model in a computer (for the same reason) in a near future, it is ,for practical purposes, safe to assume that all ecosystems tend towards a state of dynamic (cyclical) balance, towards an equilibrium, rather than towards disequilibrium, and there is no reason to assume that any larger ecosystems would lack this tendency.

The list of factors that we have been given in the 415 course (I am discussing those briefly in the appendix) does not consider the goals of environmentalism to any satisfactory degree.

Also, there could be an argument against evaluating parts, components of a system using criteria of the same very system, as the case is with using the list of "factors in the course handout to compare different varieties of environmentalism. A two different persons would come with different comparisons, the comparing would be very arbitrary.

However, should one use a model of ecologically correct humanity (the afore mentioned "ideal" - but actually real, because based on the knowledge of ecosystems behavior, model), one would have a quantitative measuring tool, that would allow for little arbitrariness. One would have a tool for evaluations that would not directly originate in the system from which the phenomena stem.

Besides, the results of using the ecosustainable model would be relevant, usefull for improving our behavior in regards to our environment.

A new way of thinking has to established. One that would get away from the existent, unrealistic academic attitude to one that lives in this world and immediately deals with the problems of those who nourish the specialists. "Pure science" should be pursued (to want to know everything there is to know is a natural human trait), however, "pure science" should be pursued only after the basic needs of people have been fully and adequately dealt with. If this state of affairs would exist, we would not even have any problems with the environment in the first place.

Then there would not be homeless, no crime, wars, pollution and any of the unnecessary problems that are overwhelming humanity now. There are many concerned scientists, but their hands are tied by their privileged position in the society. Either they please the "system", or they would have to join us, the homeless, which is a very horrible fate (whether they are conscious of this or not). Guess what they choose? (This is only a rhetorical question requiring no answer.) This is also the reason for all the great ado that is there concerning "solving" the environmental problems. It basically does not accomplish anything, it does not threaten the "establishment". "Environment" is on everybody's lips, it is a hot commercial item. And lo - behold! Curiously enough things are not improving, they are actually getting worse. There are not less, but more cars on ever growing road network. There is a gap widening between the "haves" and the "have nots", which is detrimental to lessening of the environmental degradation -- distressed people can not afford to care about the state of the environment. There are more people homeless now then before and their numbers is growing. Prison "industry" is becoming very lucrative (it is not thought likely that the prison population will stop increasing any time soon -- see the debate covered in virtually every issue of *Ka'u Landing* about building a new prison on the Big Island for the past year), the poor nations do not have a chance to ever achieve the level of affluence we (or rather some members of this nation) enjoy, there just are not that many resources to do it with. And if they ever did, who would slave for the affluent slaves of this nation? I am not citing any sources as I know that any literate person knows all about these facts, but no one is capable of doing anything, everybody is waiting for the outcomes of "more studies are required to fully understand these problems".

All the above is a reason why I do not copy the "list of factors" and make a story about five of them. They have no connection with achieving of the goals of the environmental movement. We might have as well been studying the classification of, say, butterflies; it would have as little to do with the reasons for environmentalist movement as studying classification of factors for comparing different varieties of environmentalism.

The job for any sincerely minded social scientist today is to keep on defining the goal for those who feed him/her, so that the masses don't have to think that to be environmental means to buy more ammo and a bigger fourwheel drive. One of the *chiefest* reasons for the environmental

movements being so fragmented and that no *significant* progress is being made is a total lack of as clearly defined goals (i. e. no definition of ecological sustainability at all so far!). Were there any goals being defined there would be less uncertainty as to what to do.

3-4) Which variety of environmentalism do you prefer and why?

The only variety of environmentalism that I would like would be the one done by people who actually want to start living ecosustainably right now. Unfortunately, one cannot live ecosustainably on one's own, it can be done efficiently only in a self sufficient community of like-minded people, and all the efforts that are done by various people (recycling, living simply, not practicing consumerism, buying environment friendly products) will not lead anywhere, because the vast majority of masses does not care to practice those. Such efforts will eventually become compulsory with the establishment of a totalitarian, ecologically correct, social insect-like society that will have to be sustainable due to greatly diminished resources. Now is the time actually start designing and building truly and fully sustainable communities to prevent such a totalitarian, ecologically correct state from becoming a reality. The tendencies for establishment of such a state are already discernible: poverty, homelessness, criminality (and consequently the prison population) is on the rise, and those people in those groups are not in a position to be able to live sustainably.

People who do have the leisure to talk about sustainability lead, on the most part, comfortable lives, and do not feel compelled to make any changes in their lifestyles right now. They would retain their hierarchical positions in an ecofascist society regardless.

Kinsley lists in his book a many admirable "deep" environmental philosophies some of those have been around for a long time (Kinsley, chapter "Modern Roots of Ecocentrism", pp167-238), philosophies that need, but to be lived in actual life. However those philosophies share a fate with any other ones that, although noble, by not being practiced do not change anything for the better in actual life. To mind comes "Love thy neighbor" in Ireland and many other places, and the "Bodhisatva ideal", that if really practiced could not but result, in all the Mahayana adherents living ecologically sustainably, in harmony with at least all the beings in our immediate environment. Practitioners of ahimsa could not practice it any better, but by living totally ecosustainably now, already, also.

There is only one meaningful approach to solving environmental problems. It is based on knowing that every human behavior has to comply with all other processes that exist, have existed, and will exist within the entire Earth ecosphere in order not to create adverse conditions for the well-being of human and any other species. This is a very simple knowledge that does not require any complicated science to be known. Direct and thorough observation is sufficient. Many a culture, present and past arrived at the same conclusion without possessing any science in our sense of the word, and would be living happily "ever since" had our mad civilization (mad, because it stopped living in harmony with their environment) have not come upon them, powered by our superior science, and stopped them from living.

Our scientists who pride themselves so much in standing upon shoulders of the great ones before them would do better to find a better, more wholesome footing (preferably ecologically sustainable, they could never do wrong then!), one that would not have its origins in a brutal culture that lived off enslaving others, and practiced science as a pastime (Ancient Greece). As it is, our scientists bear a tremendous guilt for the way our world is turning out. Let us hope it is not too late.

- 5) What are three ways in which ecological anthropology is relevant to environmentalism.
6) What are three ways in which environmentalism is relevant to ecological anthropology?

There ought to be a two-way, reciprocal traffic between ecological anthropology and environmentalism, I feel. Ecological anthropology should be useful to the environmentalist movement, which in turn should give a valuable feed back to ecological anthropology, as it would be, if we lived in an ideal society. Therefore I am going to treat the two questions together. Ecological anthropology *could* be greatly relevant to environmentalism in innumerable ways, would it only try to communicate ecological knowledge to the environmentalists, but judging from the debates going on among ecological anthropologists themselves, a very few really worry about the state of our environment, as is evident from professional literature and ecological anthropology discussion groups on the Internet. I subscribe to EANTHLIST, an Internet discussion group for ecological anthropologists and from reading of the postings one could surmise that all the participants live on a different planet, so much they seem to be isolated from the real world. In their world they have never heard of any environmental crisis, so much their topics are happily distant from issues that *need* solutions. I wish I would know of one discussion group where ecological sustainability *is* being discussed. It probably does not pay. The paymasters are not interested in the subject.

Appendix.

Question #2 “What are five factors for comparing the different varieties of environmentalism?”

I would like to argue that the “factors” listed in the course handout have only little, if any relevance to the presumed goal of the environmental movement -- the establishment of ecological sustainability of humans within the Earth ecosphere (a harmonious co-existence between the human species and the rest of the Earth ecological community).

Let me analyze the list of the “factors”.

1. DEPTH: shallow (reform)/deep (radical).

This dichotomy concerns itself only with the distinction between those two only from the point of view of the existing social paradigm: how disruptive would these ideas be should they ever be realized? This distinction - shallow/deep does not concern itself with how *ecosustainable* these two would be in effect, because although some ecologically “deep” could be considered ecologically sustainable, many do not have to be so, for instance some anarchistic, Marxist, and socialist ecologically “deep” notions (Kinsley, pp.17-34) that would be “deep” in affecting a profound change in our society should they ever actualize, but cannot be considered ecologically sound (“technofix” prescriptions” of “New Ageism”, Kinsley, p26, or see the table on p19 - “Adopted: ideas...” of “green ideas” in Kinsley. Many of these ideas are not, or never will be, ecologically sustainable, e.g.: plastics, large scale energy systems, etc.).

2. LOCUS: theocentrism, anthropocentrism, egocentrism, ecocentrism.

Only ecocentrism could be relevant to ecological sustainability, the others have no bearing on humanity’s living ecosustainably. It would be easy to imagine theocentrics, anthropocentrics, and

egocentrics living eosustainably just because they would have no choice, as it was happening in the ages ago when the cultural core of human populations was still not strong enough to imbalance the environment.

3. HUMAN NATURE: monistic/dualistic, cooperative/competitive

Ditto. Those concepts have really no relevance to living in harmony with Nature, living ecologically sustainably. It would be easy to imagine a monist not to be concerned about environmental degradation, because “all is one at all times”, and it would be easy to imagine a dualist to be concerned about the quality of the environment, because he/she wants to live in balance with the other part of the binary.

Only people who stem from a tradition where there was the need to contemplate the potential number of angels on the tip of a needle, would come up with a “factor “as such.

4. PLACE IN NATURE: internal, separate....

Ditto. It does not matter if one considers oneself either, as long as one lives ecologically sustainably.

5. METAPHOR: organism (Gaia)/machine (ecosystem).

Those two are synonymous, ecosystem could be perceived as a “machine” only by those who think that an ecosystem (presumably the Earth ecosphere) could ever be analyzed in its entirety.

6. RESOURCES: limited/unlimited.

The factor of resources is a difficult one to discuss; I imagine that there might be some people who might think that the quest for new sources of resources could go ad infinitum (the Moon, asteroids, Alpha Centauri, etc.), and be ecosustainable at the same time, it is only a question of *energy* to go and get more resources but that would imply a thorough ability of humans to control the environment, because that much energy usage implies a lot of heat waste to worry about. Humans might have the means to do incredible feats, but they still cannot prevent wars, abject poverty (even in USA, as every student of ecological anthropology doubtlessly knows), criminality, homelessness, etc.

7. FUNCTION: needs/wants, etc.

Each of the items could have a very broad meaning, and is *very* debatable for me to attempt to discuss. All the wants, needs etc. have to be seen in relation to ecosustainability to have any relevant meaning, not from the point of view of academia. Just one look around the UHM campus will tell you that those who run this campus are categorically *not* worried about energy and resources depletion at all!

8. LINKAGE(?): None of the items have much relevance to ecological sustainability, even a totally totalitarian, slave state could be run ecologically sustainably (consider social insects, pre-Ottoman Egypt).

9. POLITICAL ECONOMY: none of those listed has ever to be ecosustainable necessarily/

10. TECHNOLOGY: either of those two (soft, hard) can destroy the environment. Consider some of the Mayan empires that degraded the environment with “soft” technologies”, and the pre-Ottoman Egypt (with wheel, domesticated animals, etc., much “harder” technology than that of the Mayans) that remained in balance with their environment for millennia.

11. CHANGE: No guarantee that either dichotomy listed would have any bearing on the quality of the environment necessarily.

My working definition of “ecologically sustainability” (“ecosustainability”)

Since the term “sustainability”, “sustainable” (i.e. in “sustainable” development) as it is being used has a *very* broad meaning, I am using the term “ecologically sustainable” to describe behavior that is congruous with dynamically cyclical processes that occur in ecosystems that are in (more or less) at the “climax (mature) community” stage, or such a behaviour that is congruous with processes occurring during ecological development that result in establishing a “climax (mature) community”.

I believe that this is a definition quite sufficient for environmentalists’ purposes that allows not much ambiguity

To put it simply, a behaviour could be said to either go “along with the grain” of environmental processes in an ecosystem, or a behaviour could go “against the grain” of orderly environmental processes in an ecosystem causing a disruption. There is not a state between those two behaviors, any possible ambiguities would arise from our imperfect knowledge of ecosystems.

Bibliography:

Pepper, David
1996, *Modern Environmentalism*, London and New York: Routledge.