Russell B. Doughty – Week 1 Essay

Here we will expand upon the attributes of Turner's contemporary definition of noosphere (Turner Lecture 1) to illustrate what just might be the single greatest factor influencing environmental policy and action (or inaction). A key benefit to accepting this noosphere concept is that it evokes awareness that H. sapiens are virtually in control of their survival as a species and have the capacity to respond to climate change in a sustainable, responsible fashion. Despite cultural, religious, geographical, economical and political differences, *cooperative* choices must be made at local, state, national and global levels to ensure human habitation does not destroy the biosphere (Turner; Vitousek 498).

Humans must learn to adapt as our environment and earth systems do, not simply manipulate the environment to maintain a perceived status quo. Even long-term models for SNR management should be flexible enough to accommodate predictable fluctuations. Unfortunately, the current global-socioeconomic system is built upon the unsustainable, static model of growth. Moreover, religious traditions and cultural norms have muffled rational dialogue and the vital cohesive action necessary, at all socioeconomic and political levels, to address the resource and environmental problems humanity now faces.

The scientific and academic community seems more or less in agreement that our current ~~**mode**~~ method of existence is unsustainable.[1] However, these sentiments have yet to become *the* priority among the general public. Why? Is it lack of education or complacency?

It is most appropriate to take a quick look at the faith values of the typical American citizen for several reasons; 1) American policy makers commit to their electorate that they represent the values and interests of those who vote for them, thus policy can be directly influenced by faith-based perspective; 2) America accounts for 25% of the world's energy consumption although it comprises only 4% of earth's population (UN World Population Prospects), thus small changes in our environmental policy could have drastic affects on the biosphere; 3) The United States has long been a leader in civil liberties, technological advancements and international policy. Unlike any other nation, it has an opportunity to lead the international community into a sustainable relationship with our biosphere; 4) The speed at which we tackle environmental challenges will depend on the efficiency and cohesion between scientific and cultural institutions. Our progress can be slowed no further than by the nonreconciliation between the institutions of faith-based perspective and public policy.

The first problem in the reconciliation between faith-based perspective and environmental policy is the *apocalyptic psyche*. <u>For those of this mind-state, the destiny of humanity and the earth can not be influenced by human action</u>. Sam Harris illustrates

[1] (Parallels can be drawn to Marx's theory of historical materialism; perhaps our self-awareness has created a new "mode of existence". As with the advent of boundaries, agriculture, feudal systems, and technology, humanity's relationship with its landscape is again changing and has kicked-off the current historical era.)

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the extent to which this psyche grips the American public, “Forty-four percent of American population is convinced that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead *sometime in the next fifty years*.” (Harris p. xi) The apocalyptic psyche is not limited to Christianity, and seems to exist, in some form, in virtually all major world religions. Moreover, the psyche has frameworked the secular values and self-rationalized actions of cults, occults and conspiracy theorists such as the Branch Davidians of Waco Texas, or the Heaven’s Gate clan (both of which committed mass suicide/homicide).

Second, faith-based institutions have created an economic, political, and ecological inefficiency. The obligation and burden of tithing creates: 1) substantial wealth (and power) for faith-based agenda that is hardly concerned with the environment; 2) a state-of-being in which donors *have the duty* to be profit-driven without regard for the biosphere; 3) the illusion that such donations fulfill some innate, human desire to positively impact noosphere; 4) an unsustainable cycle of growth.

With these terms in mind, let us return to our definition of noosphere. By declaring that humans have control is to say that a deity or supernatural force does not. This is the main distinction between the contemporary definition of noosphere and those provided by Tielhard and Vernadsky. Our new definition, seemingly accepted by the Amsterdam Declaration, puts to rest Descartes’ duality (Turner Lecture 1 p7). Finally, the apocalyptic psyche seems to have been purged from the academic and scientific community.

However, the same is far from true within our other vital institutions, such as in economics, politics and policy. If the apocalyptic psyche must be purged from these institutions as well, how can it be done? Imagine for a moment that religious and cultural leaders from across the globe formed their own declaration. Attached to this paper is the Amsterdam Declaration as presented by Schellnhuber, edited to reflect the reconciliation between faith-based perspectives. Such an assembly would give birth to the *sphere*[2] of knowledge, the framework of which will be central to answering the question, “Are there institutions that can preserve/establish social cohesion and international equity throughout the globalization process?” (Schellnhuber 10).

Many mention that using fear to scare people into environmental action is ineffective. That is because there is an institution in place that scares them OUT of the environmental arena. This institution annihilates the necessity for our species to be environmentally responsible by making the argument mute. The culmination of the apocalyptic psyche and its associated ignorant allocation of resources seem to have slowed environmental action to a snail’s pace.

Frustrations with these institutions are obvious. Clark, Crutzen and Schellnhuber have asserted that the transition to a sustainable noosphere is not dependent upon “miraculous technologies” or “drastic transformations of human society.” Rather, the transformation

[2] The term sphere here has been adapted from the perspective that a sphere most efficiently encompasses the whole of its parts. The *sphere* is a metapattern that could be used to describe the convergence of science and faith as independent developments with similar functions (Volk).

requires a “social capacity” and the “political will to turn this knowledge into action” (Schellnhuber 6).

In conclusion, development of sustainable methods of existence may ultimately rely upon the normative question posed by the Hilbertian Program: What kind of nature do modern societies want? (Schellnuber 9). Inherently, if there is to be an answer, it must be collective.

Edited Amsterdam Declaration

1. The ~~scientific~~ spiritual eye is re-directed from ~~outer space~~ heaven to our "living Earth", which operates as one single dynamical system far from ~~thermodynamical equilibrium~~ peace and harmony.

2. The ~~scientific~~ spiritual ambition is re-qualified by fully acknowledging the limits of cognition as highlighted by the notorious uncertainties associated with ~~nonlinearity, complexity, and irreproducibility~~ earth systems and biological processes; if the Earth system is a clockwork at all, then it is an organismic one that baffles our best anticipatory capacities.

3. The ~~scientific ethos~~ condition of the human spirit is re-balanced at last by accepting that ~~knowledge generation~~ spiritual enrichment is inextricably embedded in the cultural-historical context - there is nothing wrong with being particularly **curious about the items and issues that matter most for society and with** recognizing that the coveted borderlines between observing subjects and **scrutinized objects have often been mere constructions of a preposterous** reductionism. Thus the ~~research~~ spiritual community becomes part of their own riddles, ~~the research specimens~~ their spiritual quest become(s) part of its own explanations, and *co-production* becomes the (post)normal way of coping with the cognitive "challenges of a changing Earth".

References

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