

“HOPE” the Essential for True Sustainability Praxis

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Abstract

The understanding of the science of ecology allows most individuals to identify and propose solutions to environmental problems that make a sustainable future questionable. However, being able to generating solutions to environmental problems alone will not cause them to be enacted by individual or social groups. For personal or societal change requires motivation to see one through the challenges implementing changes required. To generate change an individual or group must have sufficient hope that to change will result in greater good then to continue the lifestyle currently lived if true sustainability is to happen. We know the average USA citizen’s lifestyle requires the resources of over four planet earths and is not sustainable. Hence, for United States citizens, to adopt sustainable lifestyles, sustained effort motivated by the virtue of Hope are needed. This action sustaining virtue of Hope has to be grounded in belief that there is a greater good to be attained by sacrifice and a duty or responsibility to contribute to this greater common good. This paper will address how the virtue of Hope is seen as an essential part of understanding Sustainability from three different perspectives. The notion of “Active Hope”, “Authentic Hope” and “Anticipatory Hope” in relation to sustainability will be addressed. I will conclude by arguing that the idea of “integral ecology” is a more comprehensive way to look at sustainability then the often currently defined triple bottom line. Integral Ecology encompasses a spiritual dimension of a sacred dimension of creation including humans, that accounts for the psychology, theology, sociology as well as scientific ecology involved in not just identifying solutions to the environmental problems of today but of providing the hope essential to enacting challenging lifestyle changes the solutions pose.

Introduction:

The United Nation Bruntland Commission Report (1987) states that, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” This is a broad definition with minimal guidance for what it will take to address the changes needed to achieve true sustainability. The necessary human education needed to generate behavior changes this definition implies have been addressed by several recent authors of books looking at the relationship of ethics and the environment.

Macy and Johnstone in “Active Hope” state,

“Human populations and consumption are increasing at the same time as essential resources, such as freshwater, fish stocks, top soil, and oil reserves are decline.... Given these adversities, it is no surprise if we experience a profound loss of confidence in the future. We can no longer take it for granted that the resources we’re dependent on – food, fuel, and drinkable water will be available. We can no longer take it for granted even that our civilization will survive or that conditions on our planet will be hospitable for complex forms of life.” (P.1)

They conclude that we need to begin by acknowledging that our times confront us with realities that are painful to face, difficult to take in and confusing to live with. Yet the reality is that it is our individual choice to choose how we will respond to the overshoot and collapse economic, political and ecological realities of our day.

Similarly, John Nelson-Pallmeyer states that the chaotic times we live in encompass,

“unprecedented levels of wealth and income inequalities, ecological limits to growth; problems with oil use, supply, and dependency; the destructive political influence and priorities of money eyed interests and corporations and the distorted priorities of a national security state that privilege expenditures for war and war preparation over other important needs.” (Xii).

He proposes the need to have Authentic Hope and to be willing to see the challenges as opportunities with limitless possibilities,

Third is the 2011 thesis by Butkus and Kolmes, “Environmental Science and Theology in Dialogue”. It is a comprehensive review of the science of ecology and different perspective of theology presented to substantiate how science can inform theology and theology can inform science. A rationale for an ecotheological perspective of having Anticipatory Hope, to address the “ecologically unsustainable human conduct threatening future human and nonhuman generations” (P. 1)

All three of these well development arguments laid out by these authors suggest that education that develops and understanding of the virtue of “hope” is an essential component for a true sustainable praxis in ones daily life. However, before addressing the nuances of each the idea of hope, an understanding of what sustainable praxis means is needed. Butkus and Kolmes turn to Paulo Friere who defines praxis as “reflective activity” (P. 17). Taken from liberation theology, praxis implies the ethical dimensions of living faithfully by engagement in liberating activity in solidarity with the oppressed poor (Gutierrez, 1973). It encompasses a spiritual dimension or context for the daily living practices that contribute to sustainability as defined by the Bruntland Commission. Given the ecological crisis reality as the context for living today, hope is essential to avoid despair and the other psychological numbing ways used to cope with reality. Each of these types of hope has something unique it brings to strategies for finding the possibilities and perspectives that sustain one in the ability to be active change agents that make an individual and collective difference in challenges of today’s ecological realities.

Defining Active Hope

Macy and Johnstone begin by identifying the two different meanings people generally give to hope. The first involves the attitude of hopefulness, expressed when our preferred outcomes seem reasonably likely to happen. The second meaning focuses on personal desires. It is rooted in what we hope for and what we’d like or love, to take place. Active hope is presented in comparison to passive hope. Passive hope is about a person waiting “for external agencies to bring about what we desire” while “Active hope is about becoming active participants in bring about what we hope for. Active hope is a practice, it is something we *do* rather than *have*.”” (P. 3). In their view Active Hope is not naïve.

Rather it requires: 1. A clear view of reality, 2. Identification of what we hope for in terms of the direction we would like to move in or the values we'd like to see expressed, and 3. Identification of the steps we need to take to move ourselves or our situation in that desired direction. (P.3)

From their perspective, "Active hope does not require our optimism, it can be applied even in area where we feel hopeless.... We focus our intention and let it be our guide. We activate our sense of purpose and discover strengths we didn't even know we had. Being able to make a difference is powerfully enlivening; it makes our lives feel more worthwhile. So when we practice Active Hope, we not only give but we receive in so many ways as well. It is about stepping into a state of aliveness that makes our lives profoundly satisfying." (p.4). Poetically put:

Trusting the Spiral (p.35)

Active Hope is not wishful thinking.
Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued
by the Lone Ranger or by some savior.
Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life
on whose behalf we can act.
We belong to this world.
The web of life is calling us forth at this time.
We've come a long way and are here to play our part.
With Active Hope we realize that there are adventures in store,
strengths to discover, and comrades to link arms with.
Active Hope is a readiness to engage.
Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths
in ourselves and in others;
a readiness to discover the reasons for hope
and the occasions for love.
A Readiness to discover the size and strength of our hearts,
our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose,
our own authority, our love for life,
the liveliness of our curiosity,
the unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence
the keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead.
None of these can be discovered in an armchair or without risk.

Active Hope Implication for a True Sustainability Praxis

The primary function of Active Hope is to circumvent the despair and sense of not being able to cope with the overwhelming facts about environmental along with all the other stressors of daily life. They propose that we need to first find "gratitude" for what is good in our individual and collective life.

Second is to honor the pain we may be feeling for the world conditions instead of trying to avoid or deny it. We need to be aware that, "Our pain for the world not only alerts us to danger but also reveals our profound caring. And this caring derives from our interconnectedness with all of life. We need not fear it." (P. 38). In fact by honoring the pain, "we break the spell that numbs us to dismantling our world" (P. 79). Indeed, in every spiritual tradition, compassion, "to suffer with", is prized as an essential and noble capacity." (P.67).

The third aspect of this ongoing spiral for living life is to “see in new ways”. We belong to many circles in life. Arane Naess in his classic environmental article, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World” defined what it means to be an ecological being with “a wider sense of identity that arises when our self-interest includes the natural world”. He says, “When we include the natural world, we are brought into a much larger story of who and what we are. Recognizing ourselves as part of the living body of Earth opens us to a greater source of strength. We come from an unbroken lineage that has survived through five massive extinctions. Life has a powerful creative energy and manifests a powerful desire to continue. When we align ourselves with the well-being of our world, we allow that desire and creative energy to act through us.” (P 94). We need to come see that while individually in the universe we appear small and insignificant, within the larger contexts of an unfolding universe every speck of matter, each part of creation is unique with something special to contribute in the time and space of existence. That each of us do individually contribute to the unfolding process of the universe in active or passive, positive or negative ways. Each human has the choice to act knowing that, “Doing what is right for present and future generations may at times cause inconveniences for our families, jeopardize the career prospects of our colleagues, decrease profits for our employers, or even conflict with the law. Doing what is right can leave us facing conflicting loyalties as well as opposition and intimidations. (p. 96).

And finally with new understanding we “go forth” to make a difference, to make change, to live Active Hope.

This is grace. P.115

Macy, Joanna, 1991, “Dharma and Development: Religion as Resources in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement”, rev.ed Sterling, VA, Kumarian Press.

Today, as we take risks
for the sake of something greater
than our separate, individual lives,
we are feeling graced
by other beings and by Earth itself.

Those with whom and on whose behalf we act
give us strength
and eloquence
and staying power
we didn't know we had

We just need to practice knowing that
and remembering that we are sustained
by each other
in the web of life.

Our true power comes as a gift, like grace,
because in truth it is sustained by other.

If we practice drawing on the wisdom
and beauty
and strength
of our fellow human beings

and our fellow species
we can go into any situation
and trust
that the courage and intelligence required

This “Going forth” requires people to stick out their necks. But based on understand that we area a part of a symbiotic universe, “we can never know for sure how the future will turn out, it makes more sense to focus on what we’d like to have happen, and then to do our bit to make it more likely. That’s what Active Hope is all about.” (167). This practice of Active Hope involves being an activist for what we hope for in the world. We know that the future isn’t yet decided so there is room for us to play a role in influencing what will happen. Having a vision and the intention endow the present moment with direction while Active Hope sees one through the challenges of manifesting the vision beyond intention to reality.

In summary Macy and Jonhstone conclude:

“We live at a time when the living body of our Earth is under attack and when the attacker is not an alien force but our own industrial-growth society. At the same time, an extraordinary recovery process is underway, a vital creative response we call the Great Turning. What helps us face the mess we’re in is the knowledge that each of us has something significant to offer, a contribution to make. In rising to the challenge of playing our best role, we discover something precious that both enriches lives and adds to the healing of our world. An oyster, in response to trauma, grows a pearl. We grow, and offer, out gift of Active Hope” (P. 238)

Defining Authentic Hope.

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer says he writes especially for people whose awareness of one or more of these daunting environmental problems lead them to doubt their capacity to shape a positive future. His use of Authentic Hope is rooted in learning to be able to view

“serious problems through the lens of possibilities and choose authentic hope over inauthentic hope or cynicism. He believes, that if we do so, then our future can reflect our hopes more then our fears. He says, When I speak of “authentic hope” I mean hope we embody in all aspects of out lives in response to problems we have examined honestly, courageously, and rigorously. (P 1-2)... Addressing serious problems and repelling despair requires authentic hope. The opposite of authentic hope isn’t despair. It is inauthentic hope. Inauthentic hope is optimism disconnected from reality.” (P. 5). From his perspective, “the heart of inauthentic hope is an irrational faith in our country’s good intentions or in technology’s ability to solve any and all problems.... Fantasy solutions that are disconnected from reality (P. 6) Solnit, Rebecca, 2011, “Hope: The Care and Feeding of”. www.tomdispatch.com April 1.

Using similar logic to that expressed by Macy and Johnstone, Nelson-Pallmeyer turns to Rebecca Sonit, who says,

““ Hope... is based on uncertainty, on the much more realistic premise that we don’t know what will happen next... When it comes to the worst we face, nature itself has resilience, surprises, and unpredictabilities. But the real territory for hope isn’t nature; it’s the possibilities we posses for acting, changing, mattering – including when it comes to nature.” A view of hope that is rooted in the mainstream science of symbiotic relationships expressed as *endosymbiotic theory* by Margilis and Sagan’s work (1977). Simply put, “Life did not take over the globe by combat but by networking” (P. 98).

Thus, “Authentic hope requires us to choose alternative pathways and redefine prosperity on “a credible vision of what it means for human society to flourish in the context of ecological limits.”(P 14)... “ Our challenge is to envision pathways to a fairer more just and more ecologically responsible economy, to see ourselves as actors capable of tackling problems and to take action because to do so is the right thing to do and because we believe it is possible that our efforts could enhance the life for ourselves and future generations” (P. 8)

And if it is this we desire, then hope requires honesty and honesty today likewise requires hope according to Nelson-Pallmeyer. For him, “Hope is more than an idea we come to after weighing all the pros and cons. Hope is ultimately a choice we make that leads to action. To be authentic, hope must be embodied through creative, persistent engagement.” (11)

Nelson-Pallmeyer believes hope informs and guides our choices on how to live as authentic beings,

“to defy that which is bad and tempts us to despair, and to act on our deepest desires for a better world... Authentic hope is rooted in the capacity to view or experience injustice without being overwhelmed because we also see existing evidence for and the possibility of greater goodness. This way of seeing allows us to recognize and cultivate hope in ourselves and others. Authentic hope is active and resilient and is guided by vision and values.... It is this capacity to see and hold on to beauty, compassion, and joy that allows us to act and to live with hope while confronting the problems of the world. (151-3)

Authentic Hope Implication for a True Sustainability Praxis

In quoting from “The optimism of Uncertainty” by Howard Zinn, Nelson- Pallmeyer asserts,

“To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolish romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history of not only cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifices, courage and kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are many- where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents and to all that is bad around us, it is itself a marvelous victory.” www.TheNation.com/doc/20040920/zinn.

The future becomes a reality only by how the present moment is being lived. “Soft landings” are defined as the resolution of key economic, political, social and ecological problems in ways that lead to a sustainable future a future that happens in increments present moments by everyday choices. But

“soft landings depends on millions of people changing their behavior and promoting better public policies. It is unlikely, however, that people will be persuaded to change course by better data alone. When we confront people with inconvenient facts they often respond with greater resistance to change. Ideology trumps facts. We are more likely to have a meaningful discourse if we engage people at the level of their intrinsic values involving family, relationships, friendships, and community. (P. 160).

Fundamentally He believes that we need a new definition of what success means. It needs to go beyond the economic bottom line and materialism. Even extending success to encompass people and planet as well as profit is insufficient. What is needed is a success definition that includes the “ethics” of finding some “sacred” nature to creation.

(P.160). A sense of community that includes not just humans but finds innate worth in everything that is part of nature.

This individual change of attitude that redefines what is important in life has to be extended to community.

“In each of our communities we need to discuss how to make a radical revolution in values so that we can help this nation gracefully reject the folly of empire, respect ecologically limits, and transition to a caring, meaning-based society...the values we chose to emphasize will impact quality of life now and for generations to come...The values and narratives we affirm and those we reject will determine how we understand present difficulties and how we approach the future. If we choose values that encourage us to behave magnificently, then soft landings are possible. If we choose values that divide us from each other and the natural world, then our difficulties will surely multiply.” (161-2)

Turning to the work of Paul Hawkins and David Korten, Nelson- Pallmeyer concludes,

“Problems are grave, change is happening, and possibilities are immense. Paul Hawkins sees so many people worldwide dedicating their lives to transformation and healing the planet that it is nearly impossible not to be hopeful. His hope is active and resilient. Amidst competing evidence, he chooses to live according to narratives of possibility, imagination, and conviction. Authentic hope requires that we take an honest look at the data and its implications. It may surprise many of us that the data contains not only bleak science but inspiring evidence of human commitment, resiliency and hope. Seeing this can help us choose hope and join with others to commit our lives to...restore the earth, build positive peace, and achieve soft landings (165).

Asking a final question of each of us he quotes David Korten,

“By what name will our children and our children’s children call our time? Will they speak in anger and frustration at the time of the Great Unraveling, when profligate consumption lead to an accelerating wave of collapsing environmental systems, violent competition for what remained of the planet’s resources, a dramatic dieback of the human population, and a fragmentation of those who remained into warring fiefdoms by ruthless local lords? Or will they look back in joyful celebration on the noble time of the Great turning, when their forebears turned crisis into opportunity, embraced the higher- order potential of their human-nature, learned to live in creative partnership with one another and the living Earth, and brought forth a new era of human possibility? (P. 173)

Defining Anticipatory Hope

Butkus and Kolmes present both a theology and a science of sustainability. The idea of anticipatory hope emerges from the Franciscan rooted ecotheology of Denis Edwards. They summarize it as:

“From the ecotheology of Denis Edwards the first centrality of proclamation and practice is to embrace “ an orthopraxis in the light of God’s coming reign. Second is a “commitment to an ecologically sustainable economic and political system and to a lifestyle congruent with sustainability.” Because the reign of God, the primary symbol of salvation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, means the restoration and renewal of all creation, the Christian ethical praxis of sustainability ought to be grounded in and motivated by this ultimate horizon of Christian faith: the hope of God’s redemption. In light of this claim, the ethical practice of sustainability is the praxis of hopeful anticipation (to some degree all Christian ethics is anticipatory of God’s reign.) It is the praxis of anticipatory hope that the future of Earth, the transformation of creation is in God’s salvic design, requires our participation.”(170-1)

“Sustainability, therefore, defined theologically, means that it is the ethical praxis of hopeful anticipation in the future restoration and renewal of creation and it requires the practice of ecological and social justice to restore, sustain and maintain the integrity of creation.” (P. 171)

From the scientific perspective, “Environmental Sustainability includes concerns about human ecology as well as natural ecosystems. Defined environmentally, a sustainable situation exists when an ecosystems energy flows and nutrients cycles are stable or fluctuation within a normal range of variability; when the species diversity and population level of organisms are robust and self- supporting; when habitat diversity and the areas and connections of natural habitats allow organisms to carry out all stages of their life cycles; when toxic man-made materials or materials extracted from the Earth’s crust are not accumulating in the soil, air or water; and when ancient energy sources derived from long – deposited and converted biomass are not destabilizing ecosystems through climate change.” p. 69 & 172

Anticipatory Hope Implication for a True Sustainability Praxis

“Sustainability, defined theologically, means that it is the ethical praxis of hopeful anticipation in the future restoration and renewal of creation, and it requires the practice of ecological and social justice to restore, sustain, and maintain the integrity of creation.” p. 171

The three dominant forms Willis Jenkins’s thesis for a Christian ethical response to the environmental crisis: Ecojustice, Stewardship, Ecospirituality p. 171

Key social and economic points for a sustainable future (p.171-172)

1. Restraint in Consumption
2. Efficiency in resource utilization
3. Option for the poor and authentic development (not degrade the world)
4. Personal liberation and social-institutional transformation. (move beyond objectification of both resources)

New Way to Speak of “true” Sustainability: Integral Ecology

Richard Louv Sustainability rooted in ‘static’. Not a very good descriptor of what we are concerned about when addressing the status quo of the western United States lifestyle. We do not have 4 or 5 earths of resources and we do have 7 billion people. Since 1950 we have used up more fuel and resources than in all the human history before this. In the Business as Usual culture of industrialized economies, it is considered normal to consume thirty-two times the

quantity of resources and to produce thirty-two times as much waste as those living in nonindustrial societies. Diamond, Jared, 2006, "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive". New York, Penguin Press.

Integral ecology is a comprehensive framework for characterizing ecological dynamics and resolving environmental problems.

It is comprehensive in that it both draws upon and provides a theoretical scheme for showing the relations among a variety of different methods, including those at work in the natural and social sciences, as well as in the arts and humanities. Integral ecology unites, coordinates, and mutually enriches knowledge generated from different major disciplines and approaches.

Integral ecology can be: a) applied within a discipline (e.g., by integrating various schools of ecology); b) applied as a multidisciplinary approach (e.g., by investigating ecological problems from several disciplines); c) applied as an interdisciplinary approach (e.g., by using social science methods to shed light on economic or political aspects of environmental values); and d) applied as a transdisciplinary approach (e.g., by helping numerous approaches and their methodologies interface through a well grounded meta-framework). Sean Esbjörn-Hargens Michael E.

ZimmermanIntegral

Conclusion

I have argued that Hope is a virtue that is essential for true sustainability praxis and that the concept of true "sustainability" is better represented by the term "Integral Ecology". Unless one has hope for a "better" or greater common good there is little reason to sustain and move through the challenges a lifestyle with less material wealth as we in the Western culture need to do for true sustainability praxis. As much factual information as there is on the demise of the environment because of human action today, it is only with a dispositional or attitudinal change that true modifications that shift success from strictly an economic base to loving relationships with all of creation that real change will be sustained. The virtue of hope, active, authentic and anticipatory types, each allow individuals and groups to hold fast to not just a vision but the practices of actions that sustain of "better life for all. From the scientific understanding of an unfolding universe we can take solace in knowing that out of the utmost chaos, nature resiliently defines new ways of being that are sustainable. At least that is the fundamental ways of nature before human interventions and inventions. As Paul Hawkins says, "How do we imagine a future when our commercial systems conflict with everything nature teaches us?"

I believe as Butkus and " conclude, "All faith communities will need to come together to provide an ethical, moral, and influential voice and most importantly, "walk the talk of hopeful anticipation." (P.193). It is their view and my

hope-filled view that the hoped-for future most people desire is in our hands now, and that faith, with a good dose of scientific knowledge, will allow us to realize a sustainable future.

And to teach others about learning to live sustainably today requires not just an understanding of the triple bottom line but also the spirituality of a multifaceted hope dimension defined by Integral Ecology. Or more simply put, we need to include a dimension of “hope” to the now classic Triple Bottom Line addressed in sustainability education for the development and implementation of changes that will encompass a true sustainability praxis.

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