

“This I Believe” essay on the environment

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I consider myself an environmentalist, but I believe the movement is seeking much more than the protection of the environment from human assaults. I believe that environmentalism is a human potential movement. It offers us the chance to ask what kind of beings we want to be and to enact a beautiful vision of human life on Earth. Environmentalism seeks to deliver the fullest, healthiest expression of human existence in the context of a robust, thriving non-human community.

I believe that humans are not only part of nature, but also play an important part in nature. We are organic beings, all of our actions occur within a larger ecological framework, and we reside within these ecosystems. Our creations are natural – houses and factory dormitories are no less natural products than are birds’ nests and beehives. Our economy, to the extent that it stems from us as natural beings, is also natural. Though the patterns of human life and society as they presently exist are not centered around Life broadly speaking, neither in the way that they function nor the goals toward which they operate, these are historical contingencies that can, and I would argue must, be changed.

Even though humans could accurately be described as environmentally ‘bad’ historically, I believe our species can become a force for environmental ‘good.’ Rather than seeking to be less bad or have ‘zero impact,’ we as a species can, and again I would argue must, alter our lifestyles, industries, and patterns of development to become environmentally integrated and create an ecologically beneficial impact on the environment.

Quite simply, I believe that environmentalism is, at its core, is about one thing: life. Life, in all its complexity and diversity and beauty, in all its manifestations in the plant, animal, human, and bacterial worlds. Life, the only thing that could matter to us as living organisms. The visceral, joyous lust to live and flourish among the expansive wonder of this planet we simply call Earth, the source and stage of our existence.

I believe that what the environmental movement strives for is not so much sustainability, but rather vibrancy. Humans living as if Life was the principal thing that matters in life: their own lives, the lives of other humans, the lives of organic beings generally, the vitality of the living systems that produced and continue to sustain us. To live life fully amongst life lived fully: this is the ultimate spirit of environmentalism.

To breathe in the fresh air, to drink clean water, to eat delicious food from the healthy soil, to mindfully inhabit, care for, and contribute to the systems that create and sustain us, to live happily together in the broader community of life. Without these things, life is meaningless.

I believe that environmentalism provides a fresh reason for and way of living against the postmodern force of nihilism and creates new purpose for human life on Planet Earth. I also believe that environmentalism answers the question of what is the human role in ecosystems: we are healers of ecosystems and facilitators of abundant living systems for ourselves and the rest of life on Earth. Ecovillages are small attempts at living vibrant lives.