

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2015

Department:Religious Studies

Degree:MA

Title:Revolutionizing the 'Modern' Environmental Discourse: Religion, Revolution, and Mountaintop Removal

This thesis engages the academic study of religion as a discourse for exploring a revolutionary approach to dealing with adverse environmental issues. Employing Buddhism as a heuristic tool, I present a unique approach for exploring issues of environmental injustice transpiring today.

Utilizing the theoretical approaches of religious studies scholar J. Z. Smith and sociologist Bruno Latour, I present the 'modern' paradigm, showing its constructed nature and problematizing its use of temporality, its dichotomous structure, and its linear model of causal relationships. I argue that the structurally flawed nature of modern discourses undermines the environmental discourse, preventing any progress from being made. By inverting the 'modern' model and examining interconnections between objects and ideas, I propose that we may begin to formulate a new intellectual framework.

I then propose that there is an existent model which inverts the 'modern' framework and that this model becomes apparent in Buddhist virtue ethics. I explore the emergence of a virtue ethic in Buddhism, recognizing that Buddhism does not intentionally perpetuate an environmental ethic. I argue that through the cultivation of a human virtue ethic, it becomes possible to re-imagine the human condition as an interdependent entity in the global environmental network. Employing the hierarchical model of compassion presented by scholar Alan Sponberg, I argue that Buddhism promulgates an environmental virtue ethic that could radically change the discourse on environmental issues. I then apply this unprecedented, inverted structural framework to one particular instance of environmental degradation and injustice transpiring today; mountaintop removal coal mining.