

REVOLUTIONIZING THE 'MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE:  
RELIGION, REVOLUTION, AND MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL

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Abstract

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.