

Kurt Langmead
Essay
STS300, "The environmental context"
Autumn session, 2004
Science, Technology & Society
University of Wollongong

EF! ONLINE FORUM

DISCLAIMER: Any content on this forum is strictly the opinion of the individual users, and is not at all endorsed or supported by EF!

jcfreak: anyone online?
[several minutes pass]
anna882: yeah, I'm still up
jcfreak: still awake! what time is it for you?
anna882: just after midnight here in cal
jcfreak: california? you from the states then?
anna882: yep
jcfreak: hmmm....
anna882: what's that meant to mean?
jcfreak: nah, just kidding mate! You yankees just get a bad rap down our way sometimes! I mean, you've got Arnie as governor and George W in charge! ;)
anna882: HEY HEY HEY - don't associate me with the shit that you see on TV - fuck the bush administration
jcfreak: whoa, take it easy mate!
[several more minutes pass]
anna882: so where you from?
jcfreak: australia
anna882: oh, you're an aussie!
jcfreak: yeah, just like steve irwin! LOL!
anna882: that guy's insane, have you seen him jump on the alligators?
jcfreak: it's with crocs over here though... :)
anna882: oh, right - so what do you do with yourself?
jcfreak: i just go to university down here in tasmania - studying environmental science
anna882: hey, i'm a student as well, but i'm doing political studies here at college in Santa Cruz.
jcfreak: so what are you doing up so late on the EF!¹ forum tonight?
anna882: it's one of my passions i suppose
jcfreak: LOL! my passion is derived from the need to research an assignment that's due tomorrow! :(
anna882: oh yeah, what's it on?
jcfreak: just something about the environment movement.
anna882: well, at least you've come to the right place - other organisations like Greenpeace are really starting to give me the shits.
jcfreak: how so?

¹ Earth First! (EF!) is a frontline environmental movement that utilises direct action to protect the wilderness and draw attention to critical environmental issues. Techniques ranging from grassroots organisation and legal procedures to monkey wrenching and civil disobedience are utilised by the EF! movement. Source: <http://www.earthfirst.org/>

anna882: well, i'd tend to agree with those who are saying that they are becoming an increasingly lighter shade of green². Unfortunately this just reduces them to some sort of fund raising organisation³.

jcfreak: i must admit their stunts have been getting progressively tamer over time.

anna882: the problem is that they really don't bring a change in individual behaviour...and it's not just Greenpeace. It seems like the entire environmental movement is getting soft.

jcfreak: i'd say it's probably due to the shift from activism to negotiation that's being made by environmental groups⁴. By reducing the confrontation, i suppose it allows easier access into the decision making process.

anna882: that is so weak

jcfreak: weak?

anna882: it's just making compromises and tradeoffs at the environment's expense.

jcfreak: it does allow green integration into the power structures

anna882: but it's the power structures themselves that are the problem. The existing social system itself is almost entirely responsible for the environmental degradation that occurs today.

jcfreak: ooh - someone's getting all political! Sounds like you're one of those anarchists or something! LOL

anna882: spot on!

jcfreak: what - are you serious?

anna882: yeah...you got a problem with that?

jcfreak: no no, it's just that anarchists have kind of a bad rap

anna882: so not only do i have a bad rap cos i'm from the states, but also because i'm an anarchist? i can't win!

jcfreak: LOL! so you are dead set an anarchist? i thought that was only for psychos and terrorists! ;)

anna882: not exactly!

jcfreak: so why anarchism?

anna882: in the end it all boils down to the fact that i don't believe people can have legitimate authority over each other, nor should people be made to submit to anyone else⁵.

jcfreak: without order and leadership, society would literally revert to anarchy!

anna882: but without change to the current system, there will be no satisfactory solution to the current environmental crisis.

jcfreak: all i can think of is a Lord of the Flies situation developing⁶!

anna882: did you have to study that in grade school as well?

jcfreak: yeah

anna882: true anarchism is not about the removal of order. It is about the removal of hierarchy⁷.

jcfreak: surely institutional reforms are more realistic than an entire political revolution?

anna882: the problem is that reforms don't remove the Power⁸.

² Notion, H. (1990) Greenpeace - getting a piece of the green action. *Philosophy and Social Action* 16(3), p36.

³ Beder, S. (1991) Activism versus negotiation: strategies for the environment movement. *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 10, no 4, Dec. pp53-56.

⁴ Beder

⁵ Kymlicka W. (1990) Contemporary political philosophy – an introduction. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

⁶ 'Lord of the Flies' (William Golding) is a prose fiction text concerning a group of boys who become stranded on a deserted island. A state of chaos and anarchy is reached when there is a rebellion led by Jack against the leadership of Ralph.

⁷ Kymlicka

⁸ 'The Power' refers to any industry or state that is willing to destroy the earth in pursuit of power & financial gain. Source: Flood, A. (1995) Anarchism & the environmental movement. Workers Solidarity Movement. http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/talks/envir_anarchism.html

jcfreak: so what's the way forward?

anna882: well, i see activism as the only means to destabilise the system within which we are a part. Ecotage, monkey wrenching⁹ - it's up to us to take action for the people when democracy won't. and that's why i support EF!, although not all anarchists would agree!¹⁰

jcfreak: in all honesty though, is a change to anarchism for the sake of the environment possible without a violent revolution?

anna882: it's important that you understand that there are many of us out here who follow anarchism without actually supporting or expecting a social revolution on the scale that you expect. The most attainable and realistic anarchist influence in the near future will be the growth of commune-style living¹¹. This is in the same vein as the many protest camps of my brothers and sisters across the globe who are out to stop clear felling of forests.

jcfreak: i can't see the upper or middle classes surrendering their positions of relative affluence for the commune way of life

anna882: capitalism is the root of all evil. I'm not saying that it should be forced upon people - i just believe that the option of living a more sustainable and natural way of life should be available without the current associated stigma¹².

jcfreak: getting back in touch with nature?

anna882: yeah - and i hope that it will make individuals more accountable for their actions¹³.

jcfreak: and what about the political side of things?

anna882: a system of village self-rule has got to be approached in order to attain public environmental awareness. Like i was saying, the community is too isolated from the damage they are doing to the environment. But by genuinely involving people in the decision making process, they become more aware of the effect that their choices have on the surrounding environment

jcfreak: i agree

anna882: in the long run, i see anarchism as the only realistic means of achieving this accountability, and ultimately it would allow the natural goodness of humankind to be expressed.

jcfreak: natural goodness?

anna882: in an ideal anarchist state, the very source of evil is absent...¹⁴

jcfreak: what - humans?

anna882: huh?

jcfreak: well, if you were to remove the source of evil, then we'd have to remove ourselves as well. humans aren't inherently good. in fact, they're naturally sinful.

anna882: don't get religious on me

jcfreak: well, actually...i'm a christian

anna882: i suppose that explains your user name...i thought religion was only for psychos and terrorists! ;)

⁹ 'Ecotage' and 'monkey wrenching' aim to hinder and disrupt environmentally destructive practices using means such as disabling and destruction of machinery and infrastructure.

Source: Beder

¹⁰ Murray Bookchin attacked the 'deep ecology' movement, with special attention paid to EF! founder Dave Foreman (author of 'A field guide to monkey wrenching and ecodefence') for his "eco-brutalist" and "misanthropic" philosophy. Source: Sonn, R.D (1992) Anarchism. Twayne Publishers, New York. pp. 112-113.

¹¹ Flood

¹² The anarchist typically "desires a oneness with nature" that could be fostered by a move to communal life. Source: Forman J.D. (1975) Anarchism - political innocence or social violence? Franklin Watts Inc., New York.

¹³ Flood

¹⁴ An anarchist believes 'The Power' is the only true obstacle in the way of human 'goodness'. Source: Flood

jcfreak: ha ha - very funny! But in all seriousness, the Bible says that we are all sinful from birth¹⁵.

anna882: you actually believe that bullshit they brainwash you with in the bible?

jcfreak: the same bible which just happens to be God's word

anna882: the church is exactly the kind of thing i'm opposed too. It's the epitome of an exploitive hierarchy that results in misery and oppression¹⁶.

jcfreak: it sounds like you're more opposed to the social control imposed by organised religion. I'm as much against that side of the church with all its tradition as anyone.

anna882: but to even believe in a god...that's just a sign of social deprivation and mental insecurity.

jcfreak: not if that god is real

anna882: fuck off - show me the proof

jcfreak: Jesus - he represents the point in history when God actually became human.

anna882: and you are basing that assumption on what exactly? Oh that's right - the bible says so!

jcfreak: Jesus was an anarchist

anna882:???

jcfreak: he was opposed to the Pharisees and their hypocritical position of power within the old testament Jewish system of worship. In fact, he was opposed to the same kind of religious social control as you are.

anna882: that's true

jcfreak: so you're an atheist?

anna882: yep

jcfreak: but you believe that Jesus is an historical figure...

anna882: don't start fucking with my words. actually, christians are one of the major reasons for the exploitation of nature by humans - it's just bullshit.

jcfreak: i agree with you. so much damage has been done throughout history in the name of christianity. There seems to be this widespread ignorance among western religions about the effect of man on the environment¹⁷. All i can say is don't write it off just because of the mistakes of sinful humans.

anna882: that's a joke. i don't see it as ignorance but arrogance...and you christians just use the bible to justify the destruction of the environment.

jcfreak: i think it's more a combination of both. for example, there is a verse in genesis that says God created man to not only work the land, but care for it¹⁸. This role of stewardship is so often overlooked in favour of more anthropocentric verses that are misread to encourage human domination and exploitation of nature. christians like Augustine who forbid cruelty to animals only when there is a detrimental effect to humans take biblical teaching greatly out of context¹⁹.

anna882: so you can't deny that you christians put yourselves above nature. When it comes down to it, environmental issues are left by the wayside in favour of human gain²⁰.

jcfreak: that is often the case.

anna882: always the case

¹⁵ Psalm 51:5 (NIV)

¹⁶ Miller, D. (1984) Anarchism. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London and Melbourne. pp. 8-9

¹⁷ Berry, T. (1994) Interview - ecology and religion. Maryknoll Magazine, USA.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:15

¹⁹ Passmore, J. (1974) Man's responsibility for nature. Duckworth and Charles Scribner.

²⁰ Berry

jcfreak: well, the Bible does say that man was created in god's image to rule over creation²¹. This was how god planned the world to run, and it would have worked fine if it weren't for sin.

anna882: even if this were true, i don't see how religion offers any reasonable means to achieve a solution to the environmental crisis.

jcfreak: in a way, you're right. the apostle paul in his letter to the roman church says that the whole of creation is stuffed up because of this problem of humans turning their backs on God's rule²². So it follows that the environment will continue to suffer as long we continue to interact with it. Not only do humans require salvation, but nature as well²³!

anna882: so just sit back in apathy?

jcfreak: not at all! remember, god did command us to care for nature. Creation is a reflection of god's wisdom, so it deserves respect and preservation of the natural order for its own sake²⁴.

anna882: so what would a christian environmentalist like you suggest?

jcfreak: well, the recent environment movement has called for a rapid reassessment of christian environmental values²⁵.

anna882: that's long overdue

jcfreak: i'd say the rise of deep ecology is the most recent contributing factor concerning this shift towards considering the inherent value of the environment alone²⁶. However, religious worldviews (e.g. christianity) have generally received more support from the New Age movement²⁷.

anna882: what's that again?

jcfreak: from what i saw on a site earlier, it can be divided into 2 branches²⁸. While there is a pop culture strand concerned with new age spirituality, the alternative accommodates christianity more readily.

anna882: so you support the alternative strand?

jcfreak: not necessarily - one guy who follows that strand suggests a redemption theology by which man is capable of perfecting nature in order to partially redeem himself before god²⁹. However, this tends towards salvation by works rather than the Biblical notion of by grace alone. Caring for the environment is not a means of getting to heaven.

anna882: there you go! That is my point exactly - any christian response to environmental concerns is anthropocentric, in that all actions are governed by the quest for individual salvation.

jcfreak: hmmm, i don't have time to explain it - maybe we'll have to agree to disagree! ;)

anna882: even so, i think controversy like this is often beneficial for the environment.

jcfreak: i suppose...

²¹ Genesis 1:26-28 (NIV)

²² Romans 8:19-22 (NIV)

²³ Collins, P. (1995) God's earth - religion as if matter really mattered. Dove/HarperCollins Publishers, Australia. p.95

²⁴ Collins p.95

²⁵ Sessions, G. (1993) Deep ecology worldview. Associated University Presses Inc. USA.

²⁶ One component of 'deep ecology' suggests that both human and nonhuman life on earth has intrinsic value that is independent of the usefulness of this creature for human purposes. Source: Sessions

²⁷ The 'new age movement' claims to assume a postmodern spiritual worldview. Source: Sessions

²⁸ Sessions

²⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, expanded upon the Spaceship Earth proposition by Buckminster Fuller (1971) in order to fuse Christianity with evolution and technological advances. Source: Sessions

anna882: sometimes the challenges made to basic assumptions within a debate can lead to the exposure of problems and issues³⁰.

jcfreak: oh yeah

anna882: however, controversy is usually carefully sculptured by political rhetoric³¹. As a result, the associated arguments often become irrational and stubborn. The government also has better access to funds, resources and the media in order to fend off public challenges.

jcfreak: i've noticed that political parties regularly debate issues here in australia merely for the sake of obtaining the votes of specific demographics.

anna882: it's the same over here. In fact, the mechanics of controversy seem pretty universal. There will always be a component of society that aims to exploit and manipulate those around them³².

jcfreak: so much for the inherent goodness of man! ;)

anna882: no, this conflict seems more a product of class struggle within a capitalist society³³. The upper-middle-class is generally supportive of environmental initiatives because this will further improve their quality of life.

jcfreak: but the upper class doesn't seem to care about the environment

anna882: not just the upper class, but both the rich and the poor tend to be less inclined to show environmental concern. The poor are opposed to environmental laws and regulations that potentially restrict income, while the upper class can afford to maintain their destructive affluent lifestyles. That is where a breakdown in classes is required

jcfreak: like communism?

anna882: no - where communism fails, anarchism would work

jcfreak: ok, i can see that class does play a role in controversy, but it can't be the only reason for conflict. My big problem with anarchism is that it seems to promote individualism³⁴. Once each member of society begins to make their own choices and govern their own actions, there is much potential for conflict and harm.

anna882: like i said in an earlier post, i'm not supporting the total removal of rule - just the abolishment of hierarchy. That is where village self-rule comes in.

jcfreak: in theory it sounds like it could work

anna882: well, since there has never truly been an historical anarchist state, it is difficult to predict the actual outcomes of such a revolution.

jcfreak: that's true - maybe i should look into forming the "Christian Anarchist Party"...

anna882: not to be confused with the "Christian Antichrist Party"!

jcfreak: LOL!

anna882: shit! look at the time. I've gotta get to bed - i'm heading out to a tree-sit in ramsey gulch early tomorrow³⁵. SAVE THE REDWOODS!

³⁰ Mazur, A. (1981) The dynamics of technical controversy. Communications Press Inc., Washington, D.C.

³¹ Mazur

³² Sprout, H. & Sprout, M. (1978) The context of environmental politics. University Press of Kentucky, Lexington. pp. 47-48

³³ Seitz, J. (1995) Global issues. Blackwell Publishers, USA. pp. 173-176

³⁴ Miller

³⁵ The Santa Cruz division of EF! (SCEF!) is largely concerned with the protection of Ramsey Gulch Forest from the 'Redwood Empire' backed by the California Department of Forestry. Several tree sits are currently in place in an attempt to save this wilderness area from clear felling. Source: EF! <http://members.cruzio.com/~cruzef/>

jcfreak: good luck! well, i've gotta finish this assignment - maybe i'll catch you on here another night. oh yeah, thanks for your thoughts as well...maybe i'll just submit these postings as my assignment! ;)

anna882: ha! i wouldn't like your chances of passing if you handed in just this!

jcfreak: as long as the marker doesn't mind lack of punctuation and sentence structure, i'll be sweet...LOL! nah, just kidding - i better get back to work then

anna882: seeya

jcfreak: later