

Hope for a Cause as Cause for Hope: The Need for Hope in Environmental Sociology

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Published online: 30 October 2007
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Abstract Hope is a crucial component of agency involving the setting of goals, visualization of obstacles, and increasing willpower in the effort of achieving a desired goal. This hope is not simply optimism and is potentially a bridge between structure and agency. Yet, the powers of hope in sociology have been greatly unexplored including the ability of collective hope to create social change. This lack of hope is particularly poignant in environmental sociology as the sub-discipline looks for solutions to some of the greatest challenges humanity and the planet faces. This article discusses the undercurrent of pessimism in environmental sociology and calls for the integration of hope as it is necessary for generating potential social environmental change.

Keywords Environmental sociology · Hope · Pessimism · Eco-Marxism · Ecological modernization

The study of environmental problems from a sociological standpoint is positioned at an interesting juncture. The environmental sociologist learns both the biological and social issues surrounding environmental degradation, thus s/he has a huge matrix of causes and potential solutions from which s/he can derive research. Understanding of the biological brings the knowledge that humans are changing the world dramatically and potentially harmfully. The environmental sociologist also studies all the social hurdles that stand in the way of fixing and preventing this degradation. What is the environmental sociologist to do? Some can release themselves from the torture of this knowledge by claiming to be just researchers not activists. But if it is argued that no science is made in a vacuum then there must be awareness of the consequences research has on both the actions and attitudes of society. With this

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point in mind, I argue that environmental sociology must become aware of the pessimism it engenders and find methods to build hope for the environmental cause.

Pessimism can be a powerful emotion particularly for the desire to create change both personally and collectively. My argument for the incorporation of hope within the environmental sociology discipline is grounded in the nascent theory of collective hope (Braithwaite 2004b) which I believe can bridge a divide between structure and agency in environmental sociology. I will first define hope for the current context, and then discuss how environmental sociology engenders pessimism using theories of the treadmill of production and ecological modernization. Finally, I will examine the role hope can play within environmental sociology to increase the possibility of social change.

The Hope Process

Before I use hope in reference to environmental sociology, the term must be conceptualized as distinct from the everyday use of the word (as in “I hope it doesn’t rain”). Contemporary researchers, particularly social scientists, have discussed hope very minimally (McGeer 2004). Hope, as defined within this limited amount of literature, includes more than a simple desire for a certain outcome—it is a desire that is inseparable from agency. McGeer (2004: 103) uses the definition of hope as, “a cognitive activity that involves setting concrete goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals, and tapping one’s willpower or agency to move along pathways to the specified goals.” Psychological evidence on the power of individual hope found that people high with hope show psychological, physiological, cognitive, and behavioral advantages (Drahos 2004). Hope is powerfully linked to agency as well as particular improvements to the individual’s life before any hoped for results are achieved. As McGeer (2004: 105) so eloquently describes, “[To hope] is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact.”

In relation to environmental sociological theories, hope would seem to be simply an aspect of agency—an agency that many believe is controlled by societal structures and can have little impact in changing the environment. Yet, hope does not involve a utopian analysis of a situation. The hope that is vital for social change arises when people know that agency is limited by forces beyond their control (McGeer 2004). Hope is the acknowledgement of the divide between structure and agency and the force that prevents us from disengaging when faced with obstacles. A disengagement due to the lack of hope results in the release of agency: where no effort is made because there is no belief in any action making a difference. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Without mentioning the term hope, Larsen et al. (1993) state an idea most people would agree with: if people believe the present or future can only have negative outcomes, they are likely to act according to these expectations proving themselves correct.

Since hope is beyond mere wishing for an outcome, it requires the additional expectation or anticipation of an outcome. Hope requires planning to induce the desired outcome in a daily manner to combat what could be a depressing fate if the outcome is not achieved (Drahos 2004). This point is particularly important to environmental sociology in combating the depressing fate many perceive if

environmentally destructive lifestyles are not changed. By providing a tool for plan creation, hope is a vital part of the feedback loop between planning, action, and outcomes that generate or alter expectations and hope. Substantial hope, as Pettit (2004) defines, is a delicate balance between the power of structure and agency. If one is over-dependent on outside forces to achieve his or her goals, then the possibilities of agency are reduced. On the other hand, too much focus on individual powers can lead to utopian notions, ignorance of potential constraints, and an inability to seek assistance from others in striving for goals. Both of which provide a foundation for disenchantment, frustration and despair as the goals are not achieved (McGeer 2004). Another author, not mentioning the term hope, supports the role of hope as agency stating, "...if people don't trust in their ability to have the outcomes [they desire]... they will be reluctant to participate further and often withdraw their support. They will—ultimately—be disempowered" (Lawrence 2005: 161).

The above description of hope relates most directly to the individual level, so how does hope function collectively? A few researchers have looked at collective and public hope (Drahos 2004; Braithwaite 2004a, b; Courville and Piper 2004) in attempt to create a more sound hope theory. Drahos (2004) focuses specifically on what he calls public hope, hope that is created and used by government officials to sway the public. For example, there is a tendency of governments to create illusionary mechanisms, "designed to manufacture and/or reinforce publics' convictions that environmental problems are being competently addressed when in fact the opposite is true" (Davidson 2004: 478). Public hope is often not linked to the direct hopes of individuals in society. Once the government separates itself from individual hopes within the society and the public notices, the maintenance of state institutions grows more difficult because the state cannot adapt to changing circumstances within its populace.

Collective hope is different from public hope. Public hope can become manipulative and must have proper checks to maintain its congruence with individual hopes of the populace. In contrast, collective hope is not regarded as solely a state function and more often relates to grassroots and non-governmental agencies trying to make a difference in society. Braithwaite (2004a: 146) defines collective hope as, "a shared desire for a better society, articulated through a broad set of agreed-upon goals and principles, developed and elaborated through socially inclusive dialogue." The connection between hope and agency is still evident in collective hope. To become involved in a social movement or group oriented towards change, individuals first must decide if the collective goal is what they desire, if the goal is possible, and if their contribution will be worthwhile to the collective process (Braithwaite 2004b). These three points will be important in examining the setting for hope in environmental sociology.

The hope process involved at the collective level can also increase cooperation at all levels of association from the individual to interaction with governmental agencies. Collective hope is directly related to cooperation: when collective hope is high, cooperation is high. Hope in the collective sense must be equipped to account for contradictory hopes by other groups. This is where the agentic power of hope is most crucial. Agency is used to plan for obstacles because substantial hope is said to be flexible and ingenious in its methods to work with obstacles (Braithwaite 2004b). Obstacles must be included as a natural part of the process; if obstacles are seen as

insurmountable or ignored, the agentic power of hope is dissolved and despair arises. Also, as Milbrath (1995: 108) states, “In this sociopolitical atmosphere [referencing the U.S.], the very idea of trying to move a society to a sustainable condition seems like such a huge undertaking that many conclude there is no point in trying. They may refuse to think about it and refuse to listen to people who may offer good ideas. The resulting sense of hopeless malaise turns the belief that society will not change into a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Collective hope allows for more individuals to visualize the goal, any potential obstacles, and make more flexible plans for obtaining the goal. Social movements and groups create the possibilities for change and bring together all required elements, which would not have occurred without hope for the specific outcome.

Hope does not imply that all goals are attained, just that the goals are made possible because of the hope process. By being involved in collective hope, individuals are less likely to lose individual hope and slide into the despair and self-fulfilling prophecy (McGeer 2004). In the collective process, hope is maintained through the groups’ positions as responsive vehicles for change. Yet groups do dissolve and Pettit (2004) posits that hope is lost or perceived as lost by members of the group first, which leads to the backslide into individual despair. Ironically, the only thing that could have held the group together was sustained hope.

Collective hope is a stimulus for social change. By turning individual hopes into group hopes the possibility of success in achieving the desired goals is increased (Courville and Piper 2004). Hope as an agentic power leads to the organization of social movement groups in the first place. Hope then not only provides a stimulus for agency, but the agency enforced is one that *can* affect the structure of society. In this manner, hope is spread from the group to outside individuals increasing the group’s power, which in turn increases the hope for the desired outcome: a perpetuating cycle as the group increases the probability of successful social change. Hope then can be seen as, “a renewable resource for social change” (Courville and Piper 2004: 57). This resource can maintain a movement until the opportunity arises to succeed in the goal and create social change. Courville and Piper (2004: 58) state that the only requirement for hope is a, “worldview that proposes that development, betterment, and/or change is possible.” With that statement I will continue by evaluating the existence of hope within environmental sociology.

The Accumulation of Pessimism

Some authors have discussed problems in the classroom when teaching not only environmental sociology but also any sociology course due to the often unintended pessimistic critical views the discipline offers of society. Best (2001) discusses specific reasons he thinks explain the negative nature of sociology that relate to the discipline’s conscious and subconscious denial of what he considers progress. Describing the denial of progress as a major component in the undercurrent of pessimism Best (2001: 2) states, “The real reservation that our profession has toward talking about progress is that it is unseemly, and might encourage complacency and obscure social problems – particularly problems of inequality.” This fear he bases on the assumption of an attainable perfect society. But this perfect society is likely a

lofty dream, thus while inspiring optimism it only breeds pessimism when any and all efforts to change the world fall short of perfection (Best 2001). He continues reasoning that the progress in humanity (such as extended life expectancies, improved living conditions, etc.) becomes overshadowed by the effects of progress itself. As one social problem is lessened, others now shine for society's concern; progress creates new technologies that both create new social problems and new fears of societal collapse at the hands of uncontrollable technology (Best 2001). As Best (2001: 10) reiterates, "Pessimism and paranoia seem at least as likely to foster disillusionment and despair, as they are to inspire any sort of enthusiasm for further reform."

Johnson (2005: 46) makes a similar argument that sociology itself must fight pessimism to increase student civic engagement because sociology students understand, "that social problems are not fleeting, random, or reducible to individual behavior but are enmeshed in the fabric of society and are created by the daily workings of cultural, economic, and political institutions." This knowledge of social problems can destroy any dreams students had of individual efforts to make a difference. Social progress is again ignored out of fear that students will believe that the problems are easily fixed or, worse, not that bad to start (Johnson 2005). Johnson (2005) also points out that academics' cynicism is likely seen as the appropriate reaction to a realistic understanding of society, and any belief in progress could be condemned as naïve. Many other components of the discipline itself could be analyzed for a lack of hopeful content, but in the favor of succinctness I will more deeply analyze environmental sociology's relationship to hope.

Two of the main structural theories within environmental sociology are eco-Marxism and ecological modernization theory. Both of these theories analyze modern society's effects on the environment with eco-Marxism obviously blaming capitalism for environmental degradation and ecological modernization viewing the solutions to environmental degradation within the capitalist-industrial system itself. Under preliminary examination, ecological modernization is much more optimistic than eco-Marxism, but I maintain that neither provides hope as defined previously.

Eco-Marxism has been used by environmental sociologists in their theoretical development of the treadmill of production theory and metabolic rift. Central to eco-Marxism is obviously a critique of capitalism, stating that one of the inherent traits of capitalism is environmental degradation. Everyone is on the treadmill and, "unable or unwilling to get off" (Schnaiberg and Gould quoted in Foster 2005). As stated in Davidson (2004: 475), "...capitalist states inevitably contribute to environmental decline and are limited in their ability to promote substantive environmental improvement due to their necessary role in supporting the treadmill of production associated with capitalist economic growth." Capitalism is theorized as being incapable of dealing with environmental problems. Clark and York (2005: 407) in their discussion of metabolic rift (how the scientization of nature and mechanization of labor creates a divide between the natural environment and the human environment, while increasing the degradation of the environment) state, "Given that capitalism operates globally, there is no natural confinement or pressure to stop ruin of ecosystems, short of global collapse." The treadmill theorists argue that even modern eco-regulation by states and nations cannot stop capitalism's power to destroy the environment. Any regulations placed from the outside of

capitalism cannot control the drive for more and more materials, waste, energy, products, packaging, consumption, etc. Also, regulations or changes in technology often increase the requirement for energy and the rate of production itself. As more efficient processes are implemented, the drive for raw materials could conceptually decrease, but that does not actually reduce environmental impacts and instead increases the illusion that degradation is being reduced (Foster 2005).

The treadmill cannot be slowed or altered in this theory, leaving the only solution to be the complete elimination of capitalism to save the environment. Whether treadmill theorists place the main source of capitalism's problems at the production end of the treadmill (Gould et al. 2004) or the accumulation end (Foster 2005), neither provide viable solutions for current environmental problems. Foster (2005: 17) closes his discussion by indicating that the "unsustainable character of capitalism's relation to humanity and nature" is the most important point for environmental sociology to present. The metaphor of the treadmill of production is often used to avoid the actual use of the word capitalism, an ideological red button. If environmental sociologists cannot even use the name of what is critiqued, how can there be potential for change? The only choice is to destroy capitalism, a choice that has not been realized since Marx first discussed the inherent contradictions within the capitalist system at the beginning of the industrial revolution.

In reference to the issue of this essay, where can hope be applied in eco-Marxist theories? McAdam (1999) describes what is needed for a social movement to prosper is an, "optimistic assessment of the prospects of successful insurgency weighed against the risks involved in each action." The theory of the treadmill of production, while useful for analyzing root causes of environmental degradation, decreases the prospect of a successful environmental movement, or at the very least, if individuals have not lost all hope in stopping the largest economic system in the world, they have a long and arduous road ahead against the treadmill of capitalism.

Pessimism can easily become a dominant feature of environmental sociology, especially for those who desire social change. Pessimism in eco-Marxist theories grow as the complexity of environmental problems is realized. As Sheppard (2004: 215) discusses, "pessimism also tends to be a by-product of increased student awareness of the depth and breadth of environmental challenges that exist now and that are apt to exist and increase in the future." Because of the proposition that the change required to save the environment is a downfall of capitalism, individuals are more likely to lose faith in the ability of their personal or collective actions to have significant impact. Most importantly,

If revolution is unlikely and if small individual actions are viewed as unviable options, it is to be expected that the pessimistic mood will find a place to take root, especially when it comes to how students view the possibility of change. Under the sway of the pessimistic mood apathy and aloofness is apt to set in and the problems that exist today are likely to remain unaddressed, potentially becoming more serious and numerous (Sheppard 2004: 218).

As stated previously, the important steps in developing collective action and hope include the individual decision that the goal is both possible and that the individual's contribution will be worthwhile in attaining that goal (Braithwaite 2004b). In this case, overthrowing capitalism cannot be seen by many as an attainable goal for the

individual or social group, especially with the decline of communist and socialist states around the world. Also, how would an individual feel worthwhile in the attainment of this goal? There are not direct personal actions one can take to eliminate capitalism. Another step stated previously in developing collective hope is that the individual decides the goal is worthwhile. Yes, saving the environment is a worthwhile goal to many, but how many of those would consider destroying capitalism to also be worthwhile? The treadmill of production theory does not make plausible any of the steps for collective hope outlined by Braithwaite (2004b).

As revealed from the research on hope theory, hope is the fuel for agency and a mechanism of bridging the divide between the great sociological principles of structure and agency. While big goals are important, radical changes such as the downfall of capitalism reinforce pessimism by inciting the “what’s the point” mentality and the self-fulfilling prophecies that follow (Sheppard 2004). If environmental sociology followed the advice of Foster (2005) that the critique of capitalism is the most important point, then hope is diminished along with the agentic power of individuals and collectives to create change to improve the environment. David Brower (quoted in Sheppard 2004: 219) most succinctly summarizes my point, “we can no longer afford the luxury of pessimism.” While, the critique of the treadmill is important for analysis of how society reached the situation it is currently in, if environmental degradation is to be stopped solutions must be found and implemented now.

My second critique concerns the supposed contrary argument to the treadmill of production theory, which is ecological modernization theory. Ecological modernization is often noted as “optimistic” especially compared to the previous theoretical approach. Optimism is not the same as hope as I will soon discuss. This theory works within capitalism looking mostly to the development of new technologies that will “green” industrialism. Sustainable development is an example of using this theoretical perspective. The basic premise for environmental degradation is still situated within industrial society as in the treadmill theory, but what is necessary for correcting and preventing environmental damage is different. Modernity and the cultural, political, social, and industrial processes that accompany it are critiqued, but capitalism is not critiqued (Spaargaren and Arthur 1992).

Ecological modernization theory is used both theoretically to understand what development and change is necessary in current institutions to create a more ecologically sustainable society and practically for the formation of policy and political paradigms (Spaargaren and Arthur 1992). The main premise is that industrialism can be changed to maintain the substance base (raw materials) which in turn prevents destruction of the environment. This would seem to imply hope for society, especially when recycling is used as proof of the possibilities for ecological modernization (Scheinberg 2003). Ecological modernization offers society the solution of technology: solutions for society’s problems that will arise as developments in technology and innovations become available. This mechanism is dependent on the eventual realization by industrialism that its method of production is not sustainable, resembling an evolutionary process. “...With time, these actions will accumulate and the internalization of environmental costs will become a significant theme of reform in existing political–economic structures enabled by advance in environmental sciences and technologies” (Davidson 2004: 476). In the

strict conception of the theory, the state and regulatory agencies play little role in the restructuring to green production and consumption; industrialism is viewed as a constituent of the self-regulating free market with the ability to realize its own faults (obviously, at complete odds with the treadmill of production theory). Davidson (2004) cites statements that ecological modernization is the most important political ideology today, and that it may serve as a prominent force in social change in the near future.

Without delving deeply into the many critiques of this theory within environmental sociology, I want to look for the mechanism of hope within the theory, if one exists. Ecological modernization theory provides a much nicer view of the future than the treadmill of production. Plus, it offers solutions that do not require the complete overhaul of the economic system. Yet, optimism is not the same as hope. Optimism is described as a more superficial, unconscious part of the belief system whereas hope, as defined for these purposes, is an intention related to agency sustained by the cognitive act of planning including planning for obstacles (Pettit 2004). Hope then can only be considered a rational response versus optimism as an irrational, belief-centered response. Optimism, as offered by ecological modernization, removes most of the agentic powers of individuals and places the desired outcome in the hands of technology. This is similar to false hope, such as, “I hope it doesn’t snow today,” a hope that thoughts and actions have no effect upon. Drahos (2004: 33) highlights the consequences of not being an agent in the hoping process when he states, “The risk of hoping, but not being the agent bearing responsibility for the fulfillment of that hope, is that it is difficult to evaluate progress toward the hoped-for goal or indeed whether it remains a realistic goal.” Ecological modernization principles then can be used as a tool in public hope to manipulate society, preventing any challenges to current policies (Drahos 2004). As stated earlier, when collective hope is high so is cooperation. There is no hope or cooperation in ecological modernization due to the overemphasis on technological developments to solve society’s problems.

Both of these theoretical arguments, ecological modernization and the treadmill of production, contain a vision of utopia. Pepper (2005) criticizes both theoretical standpoints because of the unrealistic ideas of creating a utopia on Earth. All environmentalism, he argues, contains this end goal, a goal that is essentially unattainable stating, “...utopias as fantasy are part of everyone’s lives and are devoid of social change potential” (Pepper 2005: 18). Utopianism is utilized in the environmental movement to “inspire hope.” Yet, as explained above, hope surrounds an attainable, real goal using proper planning and realistic conclusions about the fate of the desired goal. Utopianism as offered by these environmental theories or any other part of the environmental movement undermines the true power of hope as a social change mechanism. As Breyman (1997) agrees, to truly be involved in the environmental movement for the duration that is required to create valuable change, the belief in utopia is contradictory. An honest assessment of the obstacles as required by substantial hope prevents “both unrealistic expectations and burn-out” (Breyman 1997: 7). Not only do these theories’ resulting pessimism and optimism diminish hope, so does their underlying belief in a potential utopia where humans and their planet live together harmoniously. Hope that can transform society through its connection with agency is a responsive hope that accounts for constraints to

improve the flexibility and ingeniousness in achieving the goal (Braithwaite 2004b; McGeer 2004).

The two theories look at opposite sides of the environmental equation: eco-Marxism focuses on the problems while ecological modernization spotlights solutions. Because of these differing viewpoints, the theories are also in opposition in relation to providing pessimism (eco-Marxism) and optimism (ecological modernization). Neither, though, provides hope. If too much emphasis is placed on optimism such as ecological modernization theory, one may not strive for the goal believing that it can be achieved without their participation. As opposite to eco-Marxism, this theory offers a probability of success that is too high for sustained commitment. Pure, unadulterated optimism also creates the risk of ignoring human fallacy: “To be excessively optimistic is to risk overlooking how ineffective human beings can be at changing undesirable circumstances. To be excessive pessimistic is to risk overlooking the possibility of change itself” (Sheppard 2004: 220). Once again, environmental sociological theory has focused on structure and in the process actually seized agency from society.

The Integration of Hope

The integration of hope into environmental sociology will not be an easy process. Sheppard (2004) discusses his battle with pessimism in the environmental ethics classroom. His proposal for providing hope includes focus on the cumulative nature of social change—nothing radically improves overnight and without many individuals’ and groups’ long-invested determination. This idea of incremental change and even the encouragement of individual and small group action outside the structure of government would require a temporary shelving of the structure/agency debate. Hope, I believe from the description here, is the connection between the two ideological camps, though it does call for more research on the subject specifically in the social movement sector. Without offering the slightest amount of hope to students and even those outside the environmental movement, environmental sociology is maintaining the crevice between structure and agency as well as eliminating the possibilities of change. As Sheppard (2004) states and the hope literature affirms, activists cannot just tell individuals to have hope. Hope must be substantiated by planning, action, and some view of results.

An example of a method to integrate hope into the sub-discipline is to use the concept of meliorism. Sheppard (2004) adopted the idea of meliorism, as introduced by William James and expanded by John Dewey, for his environmental classroom. The technique looks at the world as neither inherently good nor bad; it is only considered good or bad or gets better or worse by peoples’ actions (Sheppard 2004: 220). Within this viewpoint Sheppard (2004) uses, the environment does not have meaning until humans put meaning into it, giving it definition and form through peoples’ values and beliefs of what nature “should be” (Greider et al. 1994; Freudenburg et al. 1995). Using meliorism, environmental sociologists are offered a world of multiple possibilities, one of which is that the environment can change for the better. “It also may be the psychological disposition best suited to dealing with environmental challenges” (Sheppard 2004: 221). Without denying the theoretical

role of large and radical goals, meliorism provides the grounding for practical application of environmental sociology to the problems today. In Sheppard's (2004) classroom, the utopian ideal is peripheral to a sound perspective of smaller goals that are visibly achievable by individuals and activist groups. Meliorism can challenge pessimism and optimism as well as the two theoretical perspectives I have discussed by replacing utopianism and defeatism with an opportunity. Meliorism can be considered a mechanism of providing hope: it is awareness of the obstacles to the goal, the ability to see the reward in small changes, and attentiveness to a larger goal.

To tap into hope through meliorism or any other method, should be a conscious part of the environmental discussion. Marketers use hope to promote consumerism and production, two of the known enemies of environmentalism, and non-governmental organizations use hope to create change. As Drahos (2004: 19) states, hope provides the rationale for action as in, "Since I hope for X, I should do Y." The author continues mentioning how marketers attempt to tap hope in all situations (from personal care products to sports utility vehicles) because properly accessing hope as an emotion will increase the likelihood customers buy their product as an aid to achieve the hoped-for result. If environmental sociologists want "customers" to buy the "product" of environmental actions, then hope is a necessary component. Courville and Piper (2004) reiterate this point using the certification and labeling systems becoming popular in the environmental movement. Empowerment provided by non-governmental organizations increases choice and action options for individuals resulting in a phenomenon of collective agency. Hope is the vehicle for communicating empowerment and closing the structure/agency divide (Courville and Piper 2004: 50). Hope must be properly utilized in all dimensions of the social change cycle, from creating the agency to build collective groups to increasing involvement with established social movements. Hope then can sustain social change movements and also increase the potential for voice and power to realize the goals of the movement.

Institutions of hope move us collectively away from a social script that makes engagement in shaping our futures seem futile toward one in which we are expected to be active and responsible participants contributing to a vibrant civil society. Institutions of hope are part of the family of enabling institutions that offset, loosen, or challenge the constraints imposed by regulatory institutions (Braithwaite 2004b: 7).

The hope that has been described throughout this paper is a truly social phenomenon that deserves research attention along with power, structure, and agency (Braithwaite 2004b). In relation to environmental sociology, the very topic of study is not the most hope-inspiring. The issue of environmentalism engulfs everything from quality of life to the very survival of the human race—implying dire consequences if the environmental movement fails. Thus environmental sociologists, I believe, have an important job: the environmental movement must be aided by sociology's involvement and social change must be a major goal. "Interpreting the world in order to change it," (Breyman 1997: 5) would seem to be a goal that brings many into the study of environmental sociology in the first place. Even for those who do not plan to become researchers on these issues, the students of environmental sociology will be entering the world and will need sustained hope to continue to fight for change and potentially lead society out of its environmental predicament.

“Environmental sociologists should orient themselves by recent debates within sociology, which center around the theme of actor and structure, to answer the question of whether and to what extent human behavior is determined by social and/or environmental structure” (Spaargaren and Arthur 1992: 326). The challenge for the sub-discipline is to integrate the individual into the structural causes of environmental degradation. Negating the possibility for change through the individual or activist group by eliminating hope creates an emergence of pessimism and self-fulfilling prophecies that are incapable of positive change. Studying the mechanism for change is crucial to understand how both individuals and the social structure affect environmental decisions. This study of change must include the study of hope.

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