

August 25 Myra House Celebration

A. Dr. Philip Clayton:

(10mn)

1. nature spirituality cant be disconnected from:
 - a. one's own surrounding ecosystem
 - b. the web of life
 - c. the holism of the person...

B. Elizabeth McDuffie

(8mn)

2. As one lives out nature spirituality in the face of climate change we see the first two nexus that Dr. Clayton pointed out, our surrounding ecosystem and the web of life as a whole shifting in grand ways, and we suspect that they are also shifting in ways that are unperceivable. When I think about the topic for this talk, solutions to sustainability, in light of the changing climate currents, I find my experience as a competitive swimmer to be helpful. For a long time I believed that I was manipulating the water and propelling myself through it and during this time I was a terrible swimmer. Finally, I came to understand that it was not I moving the water, but instead the water was moving me, or rather the water and I became a system of movement. I could not function as a separate system from the water and hope to propel myself forward despite the water's resistance. Good swimmers know that they must learn to use the water's resistance to propel themselves in whatever direction they want to go.
3. It is easy to make the same mistake when we think about sustainability. Thinking that we use our surrounding ecosystems and the web of life as tools to propel ourselves forward is what has brought us to face our current situation of climate change and pending consequences. I myself continue to believe that I can do something about it when in fact it is now well-accepted¹ that we cannot reverse the damage we have done to bring about climate change. So the most important conversation we can have when we talk about sustainability is what are we sustaining? Are we attempting to sustain human civilization as it is or a new form of human civilization? Or is "sustainability" an empty promise since we already know that the climate will not be sustained, nor will our current way of living. Are we sustaining life? Life itself exists precisely because it is not sustainable: life comes and goes. My thoughts are that it is no longer a race against climate change, we have to stop thinking that we are the ones that manipulate the water, but climate change is propelling us into a new way of living and being in which we recognize that our selves, our surrounding ecosystem, and the web of life are all parts of one system and the best way to move forward is to find our place within that system and become a part of it... move with it. Through my eyes, the best solution for sustainability is to set it aside and hope instead for change. Changes in

¹ Add reference

culture that help people to see who and what we are amongst the web of life and the ecosystems that support it, changes in business and policies that reflect the natural cycle of an ecosystem, and changes in our selves that help us adapt to new climates. The most sustainable practice is not trying to sustain our ways of life or the current climate but adapting to a new way of living in which the self, the web of life, and the ecosystem are all parts of one system working together to keep life in flux with death. The irony is that as living beings we need other forms of life to die in order to keep on living yet we continue to insist that life, especially human life, must be “sustained.” Life, by definition, is not sustainable. It is not something that is maintained, it is something that moves, adapts, and changes. Swimming coaches talk about kids who “have a feel for the water” those kids are the ones that get it and excel, their bodies and the water work together to move them in the most effective and efficient way possible. We need to get a feel, like those who are a part of Myra house are getting a feel, for the web of life and our surrounding ecosystem. When we get it, like the star swimmers, we will see that sustainability in relation to life does not exist. The web of life, ecosystems, and even our selves are constantly in flux, changing and adapting as necessary to keep life and death moving. Sustainability has connotations that suggests we must find ways to maintain, even though what we really need to do is change.

4. Dr. Sohn was kind enough to give me a tour of Myra house a couple of weeks ago and he spoke about how to keep things going he and the community at Myra house have had to make many changes and adaptations along the way in order to assist the life that is growing here to flourish. Perhaps rather than seeking to sustain, we ought not only be open to changes but actively seek them. Seek new ways of growing our food that are not sustainable but creative and suitable for our ecosystem and the larger web of life as we experience being a part of it. The biggest challenge in the quest for sustainability is letting go of finding practices that can be constant and unchanged and accepting that reaching for a status quo that we can maintain will only stop us from being open to change and adaptation that will lead to the flourishing of life rather than just keeping our heads above water.

C. Dr. Philip Clayton
(5-7mn)

5. Concrete examples of the way one can live out nature spirituality in the face of climate change
 - a. Use examples from Myra House and plans for Claremont Lincoln Center for Sustainability