

The Four Noble Truths of BioThinking

I was thinking about the basics of my perspective on the environment when I noticed that they are very similar in structure to the four noble truths that underpin Buddhism.

In case you don't know them, they can be summed up as:

1. Suffering exists.
2. The origin of suffering is egoistic craving and attachment.
3. There is a way to the cessation of suffering, otherwise known as Nirvana.
4. This Way is the Eightfold Path: Right Understanding; Right Thinking; Right Speech; Right Attitude; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Concentration; and Right Mindfulness;

So here is my version:

1. Pollution exists

There are people who say that there is no problem, but if you are an environmentalist you acknowledge that there are terrible things happening to the natural world and to people.

2. The origin of Pollution is poorly-designed industry and agriculture

I'm using 'pollution' as a shorthand here for all environmental ills, including habitat destruction and so on. I think it's a pretty good word that anyone in the street can also understand. It is the design that's to blame, not the designers; they didn't know any better at the time.

3. There is a Way to have no Pollution

A surprisingly large number of people in the environment movement really don't believe this. I've asked large groups of people during my talks and it always amazes me how few think we can have no pollution.

4. This Way is the Fivefold Path:

- Right Flow of Materials (100% cyclic);
- Right Sources of Energy (100% solar);
- Right Type of Materials (100% safe);
- Right Use of Materials (Ultra-efficient);
- Right Treatment of People (Social).

What's also interesting is that many non-buddhists adopt the Eightfold path as a good way to live anyway. It can provide a good model for an environmentalist as well:

Right Understanding

Continually learn about nature and about new sustainable technologies and techniques.

Right Aspiration

Make a commitment to work towards 100% sustainability in your job and home life.

Right Effort

Get on with it. Do what matters, do what works.

Right Speech

Speak helpfully and compassionately about your work to everyone.

Right Conduct

Be sustainable in all your tasks; walk the talk.

Right Livelihood

Make your living from working on sustainability.

Right Concentration

Keep focused on your goal, avoid distractions

Right Mindfulness

What are you waiting for?