

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

Hello everyone. If you like environmental ethics and the intersection of that with ecofeminism and social justice as much as I do, I trust you will enjoy this conversation with Heather Eaton.

I'm thrilled to welcome you, Heather, to today's conversation as a very special guest. Thank you. Thank you very much, and I look forward to our conversation. So let me introduce who is Heather to our audience. Heather is a professor and researcher at St. Paul's University in Ottawa, Canada, with expertise in environmental ethics, eco theology, and the intersection of spirituality and social justice. Her work explores how religious traditions and ethical frameworks can address pressing environmental issues, such as climate change and sustainability.

I'm very happy actually to know that Heather has been involved in the UNCED 92, so the Earth Summit, and since then has also somehow been involved in the Earth Charter. So we'll get to know and learn more about that. Thank you so much, Heather. Thank you. My pleasure. So we'll start with a question precisely on that, understanding that you were part of this 92 Earth Summit UNCED. You are involved in that, in the issues related to environmental ethics and sustainability since then. How do you see humanity consciousness evolving or not over the past 30 years or so?

It's a very interesting question because I think the amount of energy that's being put into notions of ecological literacy, ecological integrity, sustainability, eco justice, they have flourished everywhere in the world in most cultures. So that to me is a huge seismic shift. The difficulty of course is that it's not influential enough to push hard enough against the hyper-advanced capitalism and the aggressiveness of Euro-Western cultures, I would say, which are quite aggressive. So these are very competing visions.

So what the Earth Charter, the vision of the Earth Charter or the Rio Declaration or UNCED, which was really the beginning of a really global conversation from the Brundtland Report to the present. And I think if you follow that as I have, you'll see a massive change in conversations. So that's very true. So I think the consciousness has shifted. I think it's still pushing against the old paradigm of capitalism, patriarchy, violence. I think the old paradigm, and that's if you looked at the news today, you would think the old paradigm runs the show because it's the news is very difficult.

But in those of us who have really worked on ecological issues and eco justice issues, that conversation can be had now. And it really, in 1992, it was a nascent new conversation. So we've seen a lot of changes and we've seen the work on the Forum of Religion and Ecology. We've seen like UNEP and now they have Faith for Earth. We see the Earth Charter and all the books that are associated with it and all the programs, Earth Democracy, Ecological Civilizations. I mean, there's a great deal of work happening.

It's just simply isn't mainstream. So we do hope it will become mainstream. Can you briefly share with us your journey linked with the Earth Charter, with sustainability and ethics? And when did you get involved with the Earth Charter and why? Well, there's two parts to that, well, probably three. But one is I grew up on Lake Huron in Southern Ontario, which was a very beautiful place. And I say that because the natural world figured very prominently in my early life and has ever since. So I think my education of living on one of the Great Lakes, it just, it was just deeply embedded in my person.

And so then there's a long life here, but I studied, I studied religion and ecology because I was very interested in spirituality. I was very interested in depth visions. And so I was doing my doctorate at the beginning in 1992 when it was the Earth Summit. So I went to the Earth Summit or the unsaid in 1992 in Rio. And that's when the Rio Declaration was presented. The Rio Declaration is a much more watered down version than the Earth Charter. So the Rio Declaration sparked a conversation to say, how can we go deeper?

And so I did work with Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grimm, Stephen Rockefeller, Rick Lugsten, the people who are big Earth Charter proponents. And we, I mean, Stephen Rockefeller took the Earth Charter all over the world to have it negotiated and discussed and bring it to its current form. And I always thought it was an exceptional document from the very beginning. So the shift from the Rio Declaration to the Earth Charter to me made it a global document. And so I have worked with it ever since. It's come out in this final form.

And for many reasons, one is that it was very obvious to me in 1992 that we need a vision that is comprehensive, but we need it to be deeply rooted in ecological principles. And that the Earth Charter is one of the very few documents. I mean, I know Vandana Shiva's work on ecological democracy and other people's work, but it's not in, I prefer the Earth Charter because it has these ecological principles, ecological literacy, ecological integrity. And that's the beginning. And the beginning is, you know, we're part of an evolving universe.

The Earth is our home. So these concepts need to be fleshed out. And even in such a small document as the Earth Charter, they were fleshed out. And then I also worked a great deal with Thomas Berry, who is someone who talked a lot about the need for an Earth community, the need to understand we're part of an evolving universe. I've worked a great deal with Mary Evelyn Tucker on Journey of the Universe and all of these other side initiatives that complement the Earth Charter. But that's really all I've done for 30 years is work on all of these kinds of issues in multiple different ways from gender, justice, religion, conflict, peace, non-violence, you know, all of the aspects of the Earth Charter I have personally studied and invested in and then taught them.

So you are a researcher. You are also a professor and educator. How have you used the Earth Charter in your work? In that sphere of action that you have in influence? I'm often asked about examples, practical examples, concrete ways to show how people or how someone have been using the Earth Charter. So can you share with us in a way that could inspire others, a concrete example of how have you used the Earth Charter? So in almost all my courses, people have to study the Earth Charter. So we have a class on it, a three hour class on it, but they have to come prepared to study it.

And that's usually at the beginning of a course, not at the very beginning, but so people understand the need for comprehensive visions and need for very specific principles. So the Earth Charter has very specific principles, as you well know, that need to be looked at individually. So economic, justice, ecological justice, peace, non-violence, democracy, things like this. So when I present the Earth Charter, we go through it very carefully. And I also add very contemporary realities so that when we're studying, for example, peace and non-violence, I have people study efforts for peace and non-violence in the world or democracy.

And then what I have done over the years, so you probably have done this too, but we used to present a lot of ecological disaster data thinking that if people understood what was happening, they would change their ways. And yes, I see you shake your head. So after about 15 years, we realized that does not happen, actually. And so now in all my courses, I have students find a project in their local area that they can invest in. And then they come and present it in the class. And so for example, it could be on fast fashion.

It could be on food security. It could be on microgreens. It could be on local foraging. It could be on the waterways in the Ottawa area where I live. It could be on gender. It could be... I give them a complete free range to say, go find something you love. So it connects to something deep in themselves. And I always say, make sure it's something you can do after the course is finished. So I have students who've worked on seed heritage, protecting wildflower seeds in the Ottawa area. And now they're involved in the seed bank in the Ottawa area.

So we have lots of NGOs in Ottawa. And sometimes students go work in NGOs. But to me, that has been pedagogically inspiring for me to realize disaster data is necessary, but more minimal than I used to do for sure, but actual projects of change that are local. So that students feel they can actually do something. Because as I'm sure you know, when people find out what is really going on with the planet, even in a cursory level, ecological despair is an easy place to go. So people need to feel there's something worthwhile to do, something worthwhile to think, somewhere they can go and be influential in their might be their church group, it might be their mosque.

I had a student this is term who said, I'm going to go talk to my mom about about environmental issues. Do you have any resources? So of course, I send young men lots of resources. So and he's interested actually in all of trees in protecting all of trees. But what I like is the variety of projects. And then what I find is when students hear all the other projects, it's a bit of a counter to despair. So that's how I teach. I just finished a course in integral ecology. We covered all kinds of things, but we did two weeks on projects.

And they really love them. They find them inspiring. And it is, it puts all of the larger perspectives into practical action. And I think that really helps people helps young people because they need hope. Yeah, and put hands on practical examples. Precisely. And thank you for sharing that this shows illustrates a concrete way on the needs to work from the context of where each one is rather than from a theory that sometimes people don't connect. But we can connect theory through the context and the reality of people, right?

The day to day life or something that's of their concern. I think when people can find a project, they don't feel as isolated. They don't feel as alone. They meet like-minded people and that engenders ecological activism, ecological action. And I think that is the place we need to work. We need to be. Anyway, so I try to bring those into the classroom and then students go in to do these projects, in addition to all the theoretical and all the other bits. But we do look at Journey of the Universe.

We study the Earth Charter very carefully so they can see there's so many elements and you can work in any of these. You can just pick a thread, so non-violence or economic. So all of the work on ecological economics, you know, some people are working now with various small institutions on their ecological financial debt and how can they not invest in mining companies or things like this. So there's lots of ways to put it together. People are very creative. Yeah, indeed. So when the Earth Charter was first envisioned a bit over 30 years ago, the context was even before the end of the century, what this new millennium even.

Time was different during the time in which the Earth Charter was drafted. The consultation and dialogue was in the 90s and then it was launched in the year 2000. So now, nearly 25 years since the Earth Charter was launched, do you think the Earth Charter is too relevant to current times? What do you think about this? Are there any ideas, for instance, even when you share with your students? If you find any walls, questions on the relevance of the Earth Charter to current times? Occasionally, occasionally, well, let me do it two different ways.

One is the need for a worldview shift, even though people may not have the language to say we need a common ground, we need a shared vision, we need ecological integrity. That's, people know this and some might say, you know, so I have some students who say, where's the practical application of the Earth Charter? And then one answers, whatever you're able to do is the practical application of the Earth Charter. It's everything, it's anything. So if you ask me if it's relevant, I still teach it four times a year in portable courses.

I give workshops on it, I write about it. And I think when people understand the need, why is this comprehensive vision so important? And when I say vision, you know, it's not a pie in the sky, it's just, it's principles, principles of ecological literacy, which is one of the things I really like about the Earth Charter is that the ecological dimension is very strong at the beginning. But then the need for democracy, I mean, how could anyone who's paying attention to the news today not realize the need for democracy and functioning democracies?

And so to me, the Earth Charter is as relevant, if not more now, because now in such a fragmented world where violence, I mean, we are, you and I are living in a world where there are far more wars than there were in 2000 when the Earth Charter was launched and they're very violent, potentially genocides are happening. I mean, it is a very serious moment in terms of violence, nonviolence, armament, ecological sustainability. I mean, these conversations are so critical today. And so to me, the Earth Charter has a great deal to offer when people become aware that their nation state vision is not leading to any kind of well-being for the majority.

It's just simply not. And my experience is people can see it, but sometimes you have to spell it out. So the resistance might come where people say, this is a great document to put on your fridge, but I don't know how to use it. So I've heard that, but I have to say, if you spend enough time with it, that's why I don't just assign it, I unpack it. We work with it. We look at each of the principles. We look at the differentiations among the principles and connect that to contemporary news, contemporary realities.

So I find that connecting that with contemporary news and realities is a very good idea. Thank you for that. Heather, what do you think are the key ideas that we that makes the Earth Charter so special, unique, useful? Yes, that's a great question. Well, just as I mentioned, I just have the Earth Charter here. So I think the ecological, first of all, the respect and care for the community of life. This is an image of an Earth community. This is not common parlance in most western parts of the world or urbanized parts of the world to talk about an Earth community, to talk about the integrity of the whole, to talk about the biosphere, to talk about to talk about bio regions instead of nation states and moving from geopolitical to ecological.

A lot of people trying to look for common ground don't do that in as much depth. And then the second one is, of course, ecological literacy. And it is very odd, but I have students when they say, go through all the food you eat in a day and tell me where it came from. Make a list. So you'll understand food. How does food work? So ecological literacy is not strong in the western world, or I'll speak for Canada. It's not strong. And that to me is rather unique in the Earth Charter. And then the third one that I think is unique is peace and nonviolence and democracy.

So when I compare it to other documents on, well, ecological civilization or Earth democracy or any of these other initiatives, cosmopo-ecocosmopolitanism, a lot of them don't contain all of those elements. And nonviolence is a conversation we must have. And I, just as an aside, but I did go to India seven or eight years ago to study nonviolence and to participate in a Gandhian Yatra of 100,000 people. And that changed my views on nonviolence. And then I came back and started teaching courses on nonviolence and conferences and publications and conversations.

And I'm involved in the Mahatma Gandhi Peace Council in Ottawa. And that is so it's a, when people say nonviolence, people roll their eyes because they think nonviolence is too endemic. And so again, that's another area that I think is unique to the Earth Charter and absolutely critical. I'll just say a little bit about the eco-justice part. The social and economic justice. I mean, there are a lot of the people who worked on social justice issues prior now work on eco-justice issues. But often in eco-justice issues, they remain anthropocentric.

They're really about what is the environmental impact on their work in justice. But I think the Earth Charter reverses that and says it's the Earth community first. So it's justice for the whole Earth community. And so I think it confronts anthropocentrism, but in a fairly gentle, subtle way. And I think again, that's one of the great insights of the Earth Charter. It doesn't come down with humans versus nature. It blends it together. But probably you, like myself, for 20 years, we would talk about Earth community and the answer would be, well, you don't care about justice.

You think, no, no, no, it's a broader understanding of justice. It's not a neglect of justice. It's a broader understanding. It's a deeper understanding. Yes. You nailed it. It's really right on the point that I think the world is in much need of expanding that understanding of views. That is even not just about anthropocentrism against a life-centric approach, but it's maybe even both. Like, I think there are a lot of deals with that in a nice way. There are a lot of focuses, its work in world views around Earth ethics, trying to thrive an ethic of care and expand planetary consciousness.

But how can we bring that to education? So what is your take in terms of how and why, how we can maybe best be better in terms of fostering the ethic of care, planetary consciousness, Earth ethics through education? Well, to be honest, I think it depends on the institution and what are the ideological biases or orientation of the institution. I worked for many years in religion and ecology, and how do we situate religions in an Earth ethic rather than... So, I mean, in one very banal way, ecological integrity and ecological stability and sustainability are the foundation of civilizations.

They've found that the foundation of societies. And people tend not to think about it that way, that their health depends on ecological health, their economic depends on being less ecologically extractive. So there's those... To get a planetary consciousness requires ecological literacy. And so even though I have taught in theology, conflict studies, feminism, leadership, ecology, I always teach ecological literacy to say, how does this connect to religion, to gender, to peace and conflict studies, to leadership, so that people understand the planetary foundations of the biosphere, the biosphere's health is the foundation of peace and justice and democracy.

These are the foundations. And so I think it's difficult for people to understand what planetary consciousness means because it doesn't mean I have an awareness of the planet. It means a very deep understanding of ecological literacy. And then the other thing I would say is, in many of my courses, the students are quite international. And so they come from many different traditions, many different conceptualizations of the natural world or themselves or their society, their culture. And so what I also like about the Earth Charter is that you can come with your cultural specificity and find a place in the Earth Charter.

It doesn't say, you know, this is a Christian worldview, a Buddhist worldview, or... It's not really about that. It's much more foundational. And so to me, that helps people understand planetary awareness is quite primary. And it is not anthropocentric, but it just means we belong in this Earth community. We emerged from, we belong to, and our destiny is very much tied up with the destiny of the Earth community. That to me is... It can be a new thought for some people. But then when I get in a course, so in educational institutions, I think it needs to be...

I think more needs to be written on planetary consciousness, planetary solidarity. What does that mean? What does it mean to be a member of an Earth community? How do we unpack all of these? And I have... I'm lucky to be able to do that in my courses. But I have to say, you know, it can be a foreign idea for some people to understand what does that mean. But education is such a primary vehicle. It's a primary vehicle. And it concerns me

greatly when evolution is taken out of curriculum, out of science curriculum, when ecological literacy is not taught in public schools or with young children.

I would say most Canadians have no idea where their food comes from. So even that basic. And where? Yeah, so that's a very large gap. So education is not necessarily helping us to expand our views and actually limiting to... I think so. To certain things we can see, but not beyond, such as, I don't know, something that we see in our plate. You touched on that very... I try to bring it right down to their plate, you see. I try to say planetary consciousness is also what you eat. So how do we do this?

So it's to make it real for people, to make it conceptually articulate and attractive, but also to make it, what does this mean in your day to day? You touched the point that is very important that we often come across, which is people, some people, depending on their context, that say, well, thinking about caring for the environment is a luxury that we don't have when it's first to give food to people. So there's this difficulty to address this. How do you answer that? Well, that's... What I first do, and I've heard it many, many, many times, is it cannot be an either or.

It's not meaning... If we don't have food security, if we don't think long term with food security, the immediate portion of food is just such a small, small effort in a large problem. So I hear this... I haven't heard it so much in the recent years, but I certainly heard it for 20 years of this comparison of ecology versus humans. And you see, that is indicative of the split we're trying to heal. That's indicative of what the Earth Trout is trying to put together to say ecological health and human health are connected, ecological justice and human justice are connected.

And there are dire situations of human suffering. I mean, there's no question, and conceivably, they're more acute today than they were 20 years ago. It's conceivable. If we look at the amount of environmental refugees in the world, they far surpass political refugees. So, but if the reality is without ecological integrity, that will only get worse. So it isn't about stopping any of the work of justice, social justice, distribution, trying to share the benefits and burdens of a society. It's expanding it to say, if you want to have health in your community, and people are getting sick from the water, from affluent, from let's say a corporation, you have to look at the water as well as human health.

You have to look at the water ecosystem. You have to understand how human health is related to ecological health. Human well-being is related to ecological well-being. And I think when people live in very urgent, difficult day-to-day survival, they will say, That's a luxury. And I wouldn't necessarily disagree. I have traveled in much of the world and seen an immense and intense poverty of people living very dire situations. So that means there's a greater burden on the affluent part of the world to do more.

There's a greater part on those who have a little bit more time, financial possibilities for us to do more.

I'm sure you know Bill McKibbin, Bill McKibbin who did 350.org. So I heard him speak a couple of years ago and he said, Everybody over 60 should be in jail.

You know, we can't give it all to the Greta Thunbergs of the world. You know, this young woman who is, you know, putting all in the line, Greta Thunberg. Amazing. But we also, those of us who are older, we need to do quite a bit more than we're doing.

Heather, what are your thoughts on the intersection among the natural world, ethics, human well-being and worldviews? Actually, many people think ethics are not useful.

So that would be interesting to hear your thoughts on it. So can you clarify all of these in terms of worldviews? Because we understand you have worked a lot on worldviews and packing that. How are our worldviews shaped in the different kinds of worldviews we can encounter?

Worldviews are a very subtle social process, right? But they're very subtle and it's more like the water we swim in. And so we're, unless we can jump out of the water, we're unaware that we're swimming in a worldview. And they're taken very deeply into our personal identities. So worldviews are, or social imaginaries, they are hard to shift.

So that's for sure true.

Sometimes I think about gender, the 20th century dealing with the change of the definition of what is a woman, which I think the 20th century around the world and still today obviously are grappling with gender equity. What does gender equity mean? And that shift is taking place. It's not necessarily elegant and graceful and it's certainly countries like Afghanistan are a colossal outrage on gender. But the worldview has shifted.

And so I take solace that an ecological worldview slowly but surely, maybe with stewardship before people understand Earth community, they can understand stewardship. So I think it's a slower process for some cultures, some people. I think when the Western world puts its focus on economics as the dominant framework, ecology is very hard to integrate. So one part of the worldview shift is seeing economics is not the bottom line. Ecology is the ecological integrity is far superior. In fact, economics rely on an extractive ecological economy.

So I mean, worldviews are a package of ethics and values and beliefs and identity and social norms and social organizations and governance. So they're quite a tapestry, all of the component parts of a worldview. And the difficulty is we don't have a habit of critical reflection of our own worldview. Like, why do I believe what I believe? You know, why do I assess things this way? Why do I ignore, I don't know, bird song? And why does somebody else pay very close attention to bird song? So those conversations are depending on the culture and the person and the dynamics can be difficult because usually if people have a very dedicated worldview and I would consider religions to be some of the most dedicated worldviews.

They are harder to shift in many respects, even though there are, of course, resources in each religion, anywhere in spirituality, there are resources, ethics.

But to get to get a very strong environmental focus in religions, I mean, that's been a lot of work for a lot of us. So worldviews are complicated. It's a complicated concept. It's a

complicated dynamic. I think they are shiftable, but sometimes it's from the edges. You know, to say, to say, okay, let's talk about my experiences to challenge anthropocentrism in the Western world head on is usually just results in a conflict. It's usually while human versus nature and you want to say, well, no, that's not, that's not it.

So I think the conversations around ecological sciences help us a lot. Science is a language that has more stability than beliefs, you know, if then beliefs.

So there's many ways to go about it. I don't think it's a simple process, but it's true. I think the worldview shift is absolutely critical. And I think, yeah, I mean, it is, it's just that it's not a one step process. It's a long process. Yeah. And it means it requires a social shift, not just a personal shift. We have to have a social shift.

You have worked for many years on ecofeminism. Can you clarify what does that mean? Your thoughts on ecofeminism, but also the relationship of ecofeminism, the current world challenges in ecological worldviews. Sure.

So ecofeminism came about in the 1980s, basically, with two, two facets. One is that in many cultures, women in nature are connected ideologically. Somehow in the teachings of a culture, they'll say women are closer to nature than men. So women are closer to nature, men are closer to culture. And these dualisms become normalized and believed as if they are true. And of course, women are not closer to nature than men. I mean, these are the same things that we do. I mean, this is not a valid understanding of women, men, nature, culture.

And so ecofeminism came about to say, we need to dismantle the women nature construct, especially in the Western world, which uses it to dominate both. So, you know, Francis Bacon would say something like, you know, nature's void of spirit, women are void of spirit, and these can lead to the oppression of both. And this was historically documented and excavated by ecofeminists. So that's one side of it. The other side of it is even the UN by 1996 said that women are the first victim of environmental degradation, because women often are involved in subsistence farming or care for their families, food security, subsistence, food systems.

And so when there are environmental degradation, women often feel at first. And so these two prongs of women nature and feminism and ecology came together. And it was also in an era where so the Chip Co movement or Wangari Matae, the Green Belt movement, or the work on the Love Canal, this was all organized by women. And so it became clear that there's a whole generation of women activists dealing with ecological issues or social ecological issues. So all of that, ecofeminism is a lot of things, but those are kind of the basic tenants.

And then how do we shift the worldview so that this women nature degradation is not a belief that is operating? That is, of course, more challenging in some religious worldviews than others, especially around women. But the language of human rights and ecological rights, they go together fairly well. So women's rights, human rights, ecological rights, this is a kind of language that can make sense to people. What can make sense to people is to not...

How do I want to say this? So some cultures have a very essentialist belief about women that so Vandana Shiva would be a person who has a fairly essentialist understanding of women, and that fits far more readily in the Indian context than it would in North America. So in North America, I mean, ecofeminism challenges head on any language that puts women as secondary citizens or devalues nature because it's considered feminine. It is deconstructing the hypermasculinity of the culture, criticizing the hypermasculinity of the culture, which is, of course, rather difficult in the Western world right now.

But anyway, ecofeminism does a lot of things, but it's really an analysis that historically women in nature were connected and degraded together, considered of less value to men and culture. And not to raise up both as higher, but to say we just need to deconstruct these dualistic kinds of thinking and see humanity more as a whole and see humanity as part of an earth community with earth rights, human rights, gender rights, these kinds of things. So that's a big agenda as well.

You mentioned essentialist view. What does that mean? So essentialist views come from heavily patriarchal cultures, which can be many cultures of the world, where women are understood to be different than men, essentially different. So women are more nurturing, caring, kind, sweet, quiet, and men are more active, social change agents, protectors. But you see, that's really just a pillar of patriarchy, because men are not protectors in the world. That's not how it plays out. It's not that they're not. It's just that they're not all that.

The gender essentialist views that women are essentially different than men, doesn't play out if you actually look at the empirical studies of women's brains are not different than men. Men have more upper body strength than women. But if you study something like resilience or resistance or pain tolerance, these come out, women are very strong in all of these. So essentialism is a belief. It's a belief that women and men are essentially different. And of course, women's bodies are different than men and women give birth. But because women give birth doesn't make them essentially a different character.

It just means women give birth. And of course, not all women give birth and not all women love being mothers, you know, not all women are kind and sweet and nurturing. And lots of men are wonderful caretakers and are very kind and sweet and nurturing. So the eco feminism in the West has tried to deconstruct essentialism. People like Vandana Shiva or others in different cultures, it's too culturally embedded to deconstruct, even if it's empirically true.

And also true in many countries in Africa, which I visited, essentialism is quite deeply rooted.

Now your work often intersects with social justice. How do you connect environmental issues with the broader social issues like poverty and human rights? You already mentioned some of it, but can you just comment on it a bit more?

So all the work in ecology that my colleagues and I have done for many years is to never sever the conversation of justice from ecology. Never sever it, never break it. There are so many difficult injustices that are systemic in the world. And they, I remember early on, I don't know if you remember, Kirkpatrick Sale, who was saying, you know, really

what we need to do is save the planet and the human community will kind of come afterwards. And of course that was in the 1980s and that will never work, you see, because the injustices are too systemic and the suffering of people is too present. So how do we connect it? So, you know, conversations around environmental rights and human rights, connect them together. Conversations around social justice and eco-justice.

And eco-justice is a large span of things from animal studies.

I've gone to Africa many times to study the human-animal conflict.

It's so easy to say, of course, humans have a priority over elephants, but if you really think about it, why do we prioritize human life over ecological life? So these conversations, they're never straightforward, but how do we understand that it's an earth community that has to thrive together?

It has to thrive together. It has to survive together. I mean, it's difficult to talk about thriving today because things are too difficult, but really there isn't a future. Even the most practical anthropocentric person can see there's no future without ecological sustainability and social justice. They go together. So sometimes it's just painstakingly spelling it out, giving the empirical evidence to say, you know, people without water are often people who, so if you look at all the environmental refugees of the world and you look at the situations they're fleeing. Now, a lot of social unrest can come out of environmental degradation. People have to connect that. So you can't dissect the social justice component or the injustices from ecological degradation because they cause each other.

They influence each other. So even, you know, it doesn't really matter which angle you take it from, from the suffering of the world or a vision of earth community.

The issues of justice and ecological sustainability go together.

And so it can be, you can be a deep ecologist or somebody who's interested in stewardship, but the connections are not that hard to make. But one has to make them for some people because they, they might, their preference would be to separate them and say humans have the priority in justice conversations. Thank you. Thank you so much. So we are coming to an end to our conversation, but I still would like to ask you, what is the central theme of your current work and research? How do you see this contributing to a broader field, this broader field of environmental ethics and ecotheology?

So my current work, I spent five years developing these programs in integral ecology. So they're integral ecology and you know, Laudato Si has a version of integral ecology, but it existed prior and it exists. It's been developed much since, but that it's an integral view, which is in essence what the Earth Charter is doing. It is an integral ecology view. Integral meaning social, ecological, political, ecological literacy, democracy, non-violence, these principles are part of all part of integral ecology. So I teach programs in all of these, well, what would be the principles of the Earth Charter, they are connected. And so to me of all the work I've done over many years, I think the work in integral ecology has traction for people from multiple cultures and contexts and belief systems.

And it fits very well with what the Earth Charter does. So when I lay out what integral ecology is, all the component parts, and then we study the Earth Charter, they see, oh, that's a vision of integral ecology.

And so this is where my energy is these days, is teaching all kinds of courses and publications and conferences and conversations and workshops and all of it on this vision, which, you know, we have to be very thankful for the work of the Earth Charter, but it blends very well into the current new conversations on integral ecology, environmental humanities.

These are, and they're very multidisciplinary, they're very open, they're very culturally open, and they are future oriented. Yeah, well, I'm very happy to know that there is so much work being done on integral ecology in your end, and I'm really, I have great admiration and appreciation for the work you have been doing for decades on all of this, and especially so because you're using so much the Earth Charter. So thank you so much, Heather,

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