



## **Environment as Study, Science and Discipline**

By Dr. Mason Gaffney

Article citation:

Gaffney, Mason. "Environment as Study, Science and Discipline." 27 December 1975. Draft.

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Environment as Study, Science and Discipline

Draft by Mason Gaffney, December 27, 1975

Environment is the sphere of Earth with its many resources and interdependent systems that sustain, enhance or damage human life and welfare. Environmental Study concerns man as one of such resources and part of such systems, as man affects and is affected by them.

Natural Science focuses on resources and systems as such; Social Science on human beings and social systems as such; Environmental Study on natural resources and systems as media of human relations. ES concerns the relation of men to nature and through nature to one another. It concerns human institutions for constraining men's drafts and loads and demands that damage and preempt nature and so interfere with each other.

Environment construed narrowly comprises the part of nature which is public domain or no man's land over which there is little control and responsibility effected by tenure and market incentives, or beliefs and customs, or administrative regulation, or other institution. Environmental Study gives priority to this narrower construction of Environment while reserving some jurisdiction or purview of all lands with the thought that no tenure is perfect and that the public face of private activity becomes part of the Environment.

Environmental Study, like any subject, becomes a science in the degree that one approaches it with scientific spirit and method. It becomes a discipline in the degree that it requires training of mental, moral and perhaps physical powers in distinctive skills, concepts, techniques, attitudes, information, insights and perceptions needed to understand and to work effectively with the subject, be it for investigation, analysis, understanding, decision-making, or policy formulation. Its legitimacy derives from the felt need and expressed demand for it, coupled with the recognition of neglect in established disciplines of a subject which is secondary to the major focus of concern.

Environmental Study as a science and discipline is emergent and pioneering rather than developed and codified. As a scientific experience it affords less extended exposure to established systems of knowledge. In return it offers more of the creative and original scientific adventure of exploration at the limits of conventional approaches to knowledge. As a discipline it offers less specialization in a conventional division of learning. In return it affords broader diversified experience with several, coupled with specialization in the environmental aspects of each.

As a specialty it concerns, as well as its proper subject matter, the distinctions and interfaces among other disciplines which are more firmly bounded --- and sometimes, as a result, isolated and incommunicado. ES is ecumenical, intrusive, penetrating, linking and unifying. In an age of advanced specialization, with knowledge proliferating and being sequestered beyond the reach of a single mind to comprehend, environment is a concept for reintegrating and unifying many parts of the whole in the spirit of the Renaissance and of the men who adopted the motto e pluribus unum. As a judicial art it seeks to arbitrate and reconcile boundary disputes among disparate disciplines with clashing or nontranslatable value systems; as a positive art it seeks to team different specialists for work on environmental questions. It depends and draws on other sciences at the same time as it unifies parts of them in a discipline that is new and different because what is merely secondary, peripheral, incidental or inadvertent to them is central and primary to Environmental Study.

Environment includes the following specific resources and systems.

A. Kinds of resources

1. Air and air space, both broadly construed to include air proper, air-borne gases and particles, allergens, wastes, pathogens, odors, noise, heat, aircraft, radiation, etc.

2. Waters, including the oceans, lakes, streams and watersheds, ground water, runoff and precipitation.

3. Mobile organisms such as fish and game, predators, communicable pathogens, pests, seeds, allergens, soil organisms, and the interdependent ecosphere with its food chains, linkages, niches, and so on.

4. Common lands and public places: parks, public rights of way, wilderness, recreation and exercise areas, etc.

5. Unappropriated and unknown resources: oceans, ocean beds, undiscovered minerals, fugacious resources subject to capture, rights of passage, unclaimed radio spectrum, subeconomic, unknown and unclaimed resources of all kinds.

B. Public aspects of private property, persons and activities

1. The public faces of private resources: runoff, residuals, technological externalities, visual amenities of landscape and scenery, noise, odor, toxins, disease vectors, etc.

2. Urban interdependencies: neighborhood effects, synergism, nuisances, mutual interference, loads on common property, pecuniary externalities, etc.

3. Public health: communicable disease, nutritive basis of health, physiological activity as basis of health, etc.

4. Public behavior: courtesy, consideration, <sup>smoking,</sup> safety consciousness, noisiness, offensiveness, driving habits, assembly, ~~re~~productive habits, littering, mutual aid, social control, etc.

5. Intellectual-cultural environment: the public domain of culture, ideas, art, technology, etc.

### C. Provision for the future

Environment in the broad sense includes the capacity of the Earth to carry its load of people. Thus ES includes population dynamics and control; the economics of substituting labor for resources in production and consumption; and the conservation of resources for the future. Thus solar energy is an environmental study not just because it is less polluting but because it uses an inexhaustible source and conserves fossil fuels. Soil conservation is an environmental study not just because terracing controls runoff but because it saves soil and safeguards the food supply. The law of the sea is an environmental study not just because of ocean dumping and fisheries conservation but because the use of armed force to create and maintain oceanic tenures is a polluting and resource-using activity.

The purpose of Environmental Study is ultimately to prepare people to bring mankind into harmony and balance with nature. This means technological solutions that reduce the resource coefficients in production and consumption. It means attitudinal changes in the domains of ethics, sociology and psychology that civilize the primal urges of territoriality. And it means changes in institutions: economic, regulatory, political and administrative.

At the same time it must bring man into harmony with man. All human behavior toward the environment is a kind of public behavior, and environmental policy is ultimately the same as that which has concerned ethical and social leaders through all time, the eternal problem of controlling public behavior, of inducing people to act considerately in the great sphere of life beyond that controlled by narrow self interest.