

Importance of a Holistic Ecological Perspective

Posted on September 17, 2018

The idea is that all the properties of a given system on earth, such as the biological, physical, social, chemical, mental, economic, and linguistic properties, cannot be explained or interpreted by its component parts alone. Rather, the components are determined by the system they are in that acts as a whole. The opposite of this concept is known as reductionism, which seeks to understand complexity by reducing it to individual components. The ecological perspective refers to the study of organisms in the science of ecology and how they interact with the environment as a whole. In the modern globalized world today, there are opportunities as well as risks for social-ecological systems. Identifying credible future changes in social-ecological systems and finding ways to achieve desirable environmental and social conditions are key challenges for sustainability science today. In this regard, we attempt to highlight the importance of taking a holistic ecological perspective, whether it is in the social-ecological or the cultural-ecological and environmental context.

Social and human ecology differs from cultural ecology in trying to describe how specific cultural patterns and features originated, that are associated with different areas, instead of trying to use general principles to derive patterns for a particular cultural-environmental situation. The holistic ecological view of culture sees all its aspects as interdependent functions, although the degree of interdependency or its kind may vary accordingly with certain features.

“For if such factors as demography, settlement pattern, kinship structures, land tenure, land use, and other key cultural features are considered separately, their interrelationships to one another and to the environment cannot be grasped.” (Haenn and Wilk, 9)

The ecological perspective of biology helped it include many neglected physical or environmental factors to let it broaden its interests. Similarly, anthropology was also affected. The study of human society from an ecological perspective also provides us with greater context and holism by emphasizing human productivity from a biological basis and complementing the cultural ecological approach. The complex links of mutual causality are stressed, which contribute to the demise of cultural deterministic or environmental approaches to anthropology and take it towards a greater interactional or relational approach to make their analysis. They, however, disassociate themselves from the concept yet find it useful. The Gaia theory is also based on the holistic ecological approach that bases its existence on different planetary feedback mechanisms that look towards optimizing the conditions for life that all come together to form a genuinely single system. However, it does not seek to intervene in human lifestyles.

“Both ecological ethics and spiritually inspired holism require a change of worldview. A harmony with nature, the avoidance of pollution, the discussion of the possibility of all life has its own intrinsic

value, self-realization rather than economic growth and consumerism, appropriate technology, recycling and thrift, and the organization of human communities on a regional basis, with great attention paid to minorities, are all found at one point or another in the literature of advocacy.” (Haenn and Wilk, 64)

In order to be able to recognize human rights or community values, a priority ranking system and second-order ethical principles must be applied that are able to specify the particular conditions under which individualistic and holistic principles should be accepted. There is a tendency, however, for some to lay greater emphasis on external changes that portray a simpler living; therefore, it is important to repeatedly stress that this holistic ecological approach towards life seeks to integrate both outer and inner aspects of human existence into a purposeful and satisfying whole, this is when the approach becomes beneficial and practically implementable.

When these interdependencies of existence are understood, then they begin to create that required effect. For instance, when it is realized that fish must be protected from dangerous pesticide runoff, it will also protect humans and vice versa. The ecological holistic perspective allows us to view environment, culture as well living as interdependent components part of a whole system, therefore protecting the system itself carries prime importance for all the components to thrive. The necessity of sustainable population growth and sustainable agriculture is also necessary to understand, and the reforms of the “hierarchical holistic view” make it a vital precondition. The hierarchical holistic view is the holistic ecological approach’s answer to both environmental individualists and as well as environmental holists. Most ecologists and environmentalists subscribe to them, but neither their environmental holism nor environmental individualism is able to provide that environmental sustainability needed today.

The most ethically defensible way to achieve a sustainable environmental future and to achieve planetary protection is the “hierarchical holism” middle approach that stems from the holistic ecological perspective of viewing society, life, culture, and the environment. Just as the ecological perspective towards biology helped in the study and classification of many functions and how species formed patterns in interacting with themselves and the environment, the holistic ecological perspective in anthropology is important for us to understand the mutual causality of human socio-cultural phenomena. The environment and the culture are seen as an Interdependent system in this way that encourages us as its components to interact with it, keeping the consequences, costs, or benefits it will have on the entire system as well as how the system will have an effect on us. The hierarchical holism theory finds a middle ground between individualists and environmentalists and finds the equilibrium between ecology and ethics that the other approaches lacked.

Works Cited

Nora Haenn, Richard Wilk. *The Environment in Anthropology: A Reader in Ecology, Culture and Sustainable Living*. New York: NYU Press, 2006.