Thought on Tap #5 (Environmental Issues)

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Transcript:

Introduction:

00:00:00.030 Bretton Rodriguez: You're listening to Thought on Tap a monthly podcast about the role of a humanities in the world today

00:00:03.810 Carlos Mariscal: brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities department at the University of Nevada, Reno.

00:00:07.020 Bretton Rodriguez: This is Bretton Rodriguez a lecturer in core humanities and a co-organizer of Thought on Tap

00:00:15.389 Carlos Mariscal: and this is Carlos Mariscal, an assistant professor of philosophy and also a co-organizer of Thought on Tap

00:00:19.470 Bretton Rodriguez: and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion at the University Laughing Planet. This month we're talking about the role of the humanities in addressing environmental issues and now here's Callum Ingram.

00:00:34.079 Callum Ingram: Thank you all for coming out tonight, spending your wild sort of penultimate day before spring break, hanging out with us. This is a good microphone location, y'all can hear me fine? All right, cool, so welcome to Thought on Tap. This is your monthly fix of news, views, and brews, fact snacks and clap backs, ideas, IPAs and inspiration, all with the uniquely humanistic vents. We are able to do this thanks to the lovely hosts we have at Laughing Planet, the Core Humanities program, and the College of Liberal Arts. One of the great things about our sponsors they provided food—be shameless, help yourself it's right up here no one will judge you for going for the free quesadillas, so please do it. I am Callum Ingram, I teach in the Core Humanities and Political Science departments here at UNR, including courses in environmental political theory and an environmental history of modernity. I'll be serving as moderator for our discussion tonight but from where I sit I think rather than talking about myself I'd prefer to kind of kick things off tonight with just a little bit of talk about the upcoming apocalypse. So, there's an article that's been making the rounds recently, an article entitled "Deep Adaptation: a Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy," which has been making the rounds in activists and academic circles. Behind the cheery title, the paper and it's argument are in fact quite grim. Based on a survey of available climatological

and social sciences research, it's quite likely that it's too late to stop climate change from killing millions or billions of people, eradicating species, and reducing life on earth to a futile struggle. To quote the papers author, Jim Bendele, "When I say that climate change will cause starvation, destruction, migration, disease, and war I mean in your own life. With the power down soon, you won't have water coming out of your tap, you will depend on your neighbors for food and some warmth, you will become malnourished, you won't know whether to stay or go, you will fear violently being killed before starving to death." This might bear a certain resemblance to some of you who spent some time around a philosophy department, a certain pessimistic British philosopher's description of the natural state of humanity. To sort of quote ish from my guy, Thomas Hobbes, "Whatsoever is consequent to a time of climate catastrophe where every man is enemy to every man the same as consequence at the time where and men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them with, in such a condition there is no place for industry because the fruit thereof is uncertainly and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society in which is worst of all"—maybe this is the bumper sticker y'all if you've got any Hobbes heads out there you have— "Continual fear and danger of violent death in the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." In the article, Bendele offers that this is likely to be the state of things within a decade or two, rendering your education, all of our careers, and nearly everything we've done or set out to do with our lives useless and pointless. The future is less Star Trek than Mad Max, our energies would be better spent fortifying a bug-out shelter in the mountains than they would be trying to pass a Green New Deal, pushing for nuclear energy, or hoping for some sort of technological, economic, or policy solution to climate change. Enrollments in the worldwide network of global grief support groups run by 350.org has sharply increased in recent weeks. So that's to say that the topic of tonight's panel is the role of the humanities in addressing environmental issues. This is, of course, a very broad topic, an urgent topic, and a topic that we should hopefully, fruitfully discuss in many ways, it's also one that we don't nearly have the necessary time to fully discuss in the time allotted, so there's a very good chance that many of you will leave here tonight feeling disappointed in what we did and didn't talk about, how we talked and failed to talk about it and the myriad remarks we've made along the way and if that's the case, I'm sorry. At least the apocalypse is coming and that dissatisfaction won't seem that important pretty soon. One last little bit on my kind of background for the discussion-- the questions I'll be asking for tonight-- I've got six broad assumptions that I'm making that are informing the questions I ask and y'all can take them or leave them, it doesn't you know matter that much. First there are many environmental crises in the world, second humans are responsible for most of these crises, third there have been environmental crises in the past, fourth humans were not responsible for them, fifth and-- here's where we start getting controversial-- a version of the rule "You break it you bought" it rains, humans have a responsibility toward the environment-- whatever that is, we'll talk about it-- and one another-- whoever you are we'll talk about it-- to address these crises, and sixth and maybe most on point, the humanities can help us in bearing this responsibility we have with knowledge and grace. In order to figure out the nature of these crises and our relationship to

them, we have an excellent panel assembled for you tonight. My hope is to pose a few questions to them, get the thoughts of our panelists on these questions, and then open up to you, hopefully for the last 15 or 20 minutes of the hour we've got so that you have your own opportunity to basically you know kind of bear your grief in public. To introduce our panelists, we have-- I guess we'll start kind of working closest to me and across-- we have Deborah Harry, who serves as a lecturer for the Gender, Race, and Identity program at the University of Nevada, Reno. She's previously served as an adjunct faculty to GRI since 2013; Harry's research analyzes linkages between biotechnology, intellectual property, and globalization in relationship to indigenous peoples rights. Harry also teaches online courses for the University of Nevada, Reno, UCLA's tribal learning community and educational exchange program, and UC Denver's Department of Political Science. Harry's Numu of the Northern Paiute from Pyramid Lake, Nevada. [Applause] Next down the line, we have Elizabeth Koebele, who is an assistant professor in Political Science at UNR. She earned her PhD in Environmental Studies from the University of Colorado, Boulder where she studied Colorado River water policy. She now teaches courses in environmental and climate change policy and researches Western water management, natural disaster policy, and collaborative governance. Elizabeth was inspired to pursue her graduate studies in Environmental Policy while writing her undergraduate thesis on the Romantic poet, "Percy Shelley's Environmentally Engaged Aesthetic of the Sublime," if we could welcome Elizabeth. Next down the line we have Ran Duan, she's a visiting assistant professor at the Reynolds School of Journalism here at UNR, her research interests span the areas of environmental science and visual communication. Her current work particularly focuses on the use of animation in environmental news, visual communication of natural disasters, risk perception, and the implications of these areas for journalistic practice. Duan has been published in leading peer-reviewed journals such as climatic change, environmental communication, environment and behavior, human ecology review, social science quarterly and international communication Gazette. She holds a PhD in media information, a doctoral specialization in environmental science and policy and a master's degree in journalism from Michigan State University. Then finally we have Michael Branch, professor of literature and environment and University Foundation Professor of English at UNR. He is co-founder and past president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment and co-founder and series co-editor for the University of Virginia Wah-Hoo-Wah press book series: Under the Sign of Nature Explorations in Eco-criticism. He has published 9 books and more than 200 articles, essays, and reviews, Mike is the recipient of the Western Literature Association Awards for both creative writing and humor writing, the Ellen Molloy Desert Writers Award and the Nevada writers Hall of Fame Silver Pen Award. For books he's published in the last few years are: Raising Wilde in 2016, The Best Read Naturalist, Nature Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson 2017, Rants from the Hill 2017, and How to Cuss in Western in 2018, which I desperately need to read. He is currently working on a new book called Hunting for Jack lope. Alright fabulous, so I want to start out with maybe obnoxiously broad set of questions. So, if our topic for tonight is the environments and environmental issues, then I want to ask our panel what we mean by the environments. Are humans' part of the environments or is it better to think ourselves as distinct from it? I know their particular author's genres or other sources that you believe offer unique insight into these questions.

00:10:12.240 Debra Harry: [In Paiute] Good Evening my relatives, my name is Debra Harry, I am a Kooyooe eater from Kooyooe Pah (Pyramid Lake). [In English] Good evening everybody, my name is Debra Harry I'm from Pyramid Lake, we call ourselves Numa or more specifically Kooyooe Pah meaning that were the eaters of the Koo Yui fish found only in Pyramid Lake. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to share a few thoughts about some of your profound questions that I got a chance to look at this afternoon after midterms. Obviously, I mean I can't think of one indigenous author that argues for the separation of humans from the environment, every single author, every indigenous scholar that I know speaks from the foundational position that all life is interconnected and so that's how they approach their analysis in terms of looking at any of the sciences or environmental issues. To think about it otherwise is pretty much what's gotten us in a lot of trouble as a human species because if we think that somehow we can exist outside of nature in the environment that our actions have no impact on the world around us then we might think that we're immune to any negative damage that's been done to the earth and so that would be a very dangerous way of thinking and I think that's basically what we've suffered from is that idea of separation, that idea that you can have disciplines that exist in silos without understanding its relationship to other sectors of study or that even sectors of society whether it be political, educational, social, economic, cultural spiritual those things exist in a silo they don't they're all interconnected they make up a complete whole of a community of a people, of a nation.

00:12:20.990 Elizabeth Koebele: Thanks for inviting me tonight to speak. I have a couple of thoughts on this question, I couldn't agree more that I think it is impossible to kind of separate humans from the environment. A couple reasons why I specifically think about even places where humans aren't located very often-- where we don't actually go very often-- our impact is still reaching those places, our impact through air pollution, our impact through acidifying our oceans, our impact is fully integrated into all places on earth and so that's something that I think about. I'm a social scientist, I'll just put that out there now and that I kind of crossed boundaries into the humanities a little bit but I also work quite a bit with physical scientists and I study mostly water policy and I end up working a lot with hydrologists and there's kind of Innes history in that world of studying river systems as just physical systems and measuring streamflow kind of without thinking about how we change land use or put dams on rivers and what impact that has on the species and other land around rivers but I think what's really cool is that there's been sort of a growing sub movement, a new subfield that we call socio-hydrology that's something I'm increasingly interested in that really does say, "We're integrating these two systems, we need to think about how human impacts of natural impacts kind of feedback and how they're fundamentally undissectable," I guess. I also think about just kind of echoing some of the sentiments that Debra shared that if we think about these, if we think about humans and the environment as separate that's problematic for a number of reasons. I think about an article that many of you may be read kind of a foundational article that has plenty of its own critiques but *The Trouble With Wilderness* by William Cronon, for some of you read that and thinking about how if we kind of characterize wilderness or nature as this other, we're less likely to think about air quality in our own neighborhoods, we're less likely to think about taking care of our city parks, we're less likely to think about the kind of

nature we live in and I'll just echo that I think that's one of the many roots of why we end up abusing nature and degrading our environment over time.

00:14:44.310 Ran Duan: Well, thank you for inviting me, I'm very happy to be here today. As I see, environment consists of both built environment and nature environment and of course we can now separate humans from our environment and I think that's also dependent upon how we build the concept of nature. So, sometimes we think like people usually respond to our survey questions like we of course think we are part of the environment but we need to have more objective measures of what they really think. They probably report that way but in fact they don't have this nature relatedness so we need to have more precise measurement of people's perceptions of their connections to nature so that's how I feel about the separation between environment and human world and also I think the I agree with the Elizabeth's point and currently we have this trend of the othering of the environment. I would suggest like Naomi Klein's book and she has a lot of books and talks focusing on the concept of othering versus belonging and I feel that's something we could look into and also we could look into concepts like nature relatedness and to see how people implicitly associate themselves to nature like we can ask them factual questions and instead of attitudinal questions like, "How often do you visit parks and how do you behave," and right so those kinds of issues are interesting and worth discussing.

00:16:36.250 Mike Branch: I think it's heroic of you guys to be here to discuss the apocalypse before spring break, that just doesn't seem right to me at all I'd like to encourage you all to go home and start having fun immediately. Apparently Callum didn't know-- I've never met him before-- he didn't know there were children in the room, incredibly depressing way to begin this whole thing just incredibly bleak, I'm having none of it. Anyway, these guys I think it said largely what I'd like to contribute except to say that in anticipation of a discussion of the role of humanities fields you know I'll say that I think the trajectory of a lot of humanities fields has been pretty similar which is that we began with a pretty circumscribed notion of what this nature was that we were supposed to be looking out for, so in my field of eco-criticism literature and environment studies you know we really started with a core of you know nonfiction nature writing by privileged people who went to national parks during the summer and you know that was good enough to get us started but I think is really really important if we want to expand the appeal and the accessibility of the environmental movement to transition to some much more ecumenical sense of what nature is, what environment is, it has to include indigenous cultural concerns, it has to include environmental justice concerns but it also has to include vernacular landscapes right it has to be about our backyard, about our city park, about our home river and I really see that transition happening in environmental history, environmental philosophy, cultural geography, my field of English so I would just say yeah you know environment maybe is a dangerous word because when we say something like environmentalist, we might be referring to a demographic or a conceptual category that's pretty archaic you know, we need to really be talking about both built-in natural environments in their interaction with each other but mainly if people are gonna care they have to understand that you know this is a big tent movement everybody needs to be in it and that it really isn't a sort of old-school preservationist Enterprise anymore, it's really about learning to

understand, appreciate, and protect our local environments and we traditionally haven't done a very good job of that so I'm really glad to see that in all of our fields there's a lot of really positive change in that area.

00:18:48.130 Callum: Great, I'm kind of disappointed, I was hoping for a contrary and somewhere in there to be like, "Humans are not nature, we're separate and above or unredeemable below," it didn't pan out. So maybe move a little bit from talking about the environment generally to environmental issues specifically environmental problems and crises. Imagine it's not controversial, if I said that, "Humans have been causing a lot of environmental problems and that we've been doing so more so over the course of recent centuries and decades," some people see this as a problem, some people don't see this as a problem, and probably the biggest chunk-- although this is just speculation I don't have any data to back this up-- a lot see it as a problem but don't really do anything about it other than recycle. So, I guess my question is like why are we doing this? Why are humans causing so many environmental issues and why are we so unwilling to face up to what we've been doing to the world? I don't know if we want to kind of work back the opposite way, I know you just put the mic down, but you know shake up the order a little bit.

00:19:57.250 Mike: So, I'm asked to explain why we've just done everything wrong for the ast few centuries?

00:20:04.240 Callum: Yes. [Laughing]

00:20:12.460 Mike: You know, I think I think a lot of our problems stem from essential value systems that are not adaptive you know and that that sounds really reductive and essentialist and sort of scientistic but you know I really do think that we behave from what we believe, we act out of value systems whether they're acknowledged or unacknowledged and we produced a value system to build kind of industrial capitalism on and it turned out to have a lot of inherent structural weaknesses that we hadn't really thought about. I guess I would just say that I think in the environmental movement we do a lot of sort of hacking at the symptoms of things instead of trying to get to the causes, I mean the symptoms are our behavior but the causes are usually associated with some essential value system so you know environmental Philosophers would talk about anthropocentrism and trying to make a transition to biocentrism and that's the kind of thing that it takes a lot of beers to argue over but I do think it's important you know when we're talking about policy issues to remember that you know even policy is a manifestation of belief and that ultimately our core value systems are what consciously or unconsciously produce our actions. I think part of what those of us in the Academy can afford to do that some policy makers can't afford to do is step way back look at the big picture and ask where did these ideas come from that are not adaptive, that are not healthy for our communities, how can we question them, and how can we really think in a pervasive structural way about the value systems that produce the beliefs that have us and the fix that we're in. So, that's the kind of thing people on the outside don't like about us in the Academy right like we're not on point with the problem we want to talk about the big stuff but if you chase symptoms all day without asking hard questions about the causes of those

symptoms then the same problems will manifest in different places in different times so I guess I would just put in a word for the kind of deep thinking that I think a lot of humanities disciplines help to promote and endorse.

00:22:20.450 Ran: Yeah and thank you for the question. Yeah, I feel in terms of what humans are the causes of environmental problems I want to emphasize the structural problems like Mike said. I think we currently focus too much on the individual lifestyles and how that contribute to the environmental degradation in the meantime I feel there are a lot of contextual level issues like we need to look at the structural right like urbanization, the modernization, and all these contextual level factors play an important role and yeah I agree that the people currently are unwilling to engage with environmental protection and behaviors and I feel like one of the most important factors here is psychological distance and we currently we think environmental issues are far away and in far away in time and in space and they are socially irrelevant to us and also involves a lot of uncertainty. All these different aspects come together and what people would think that the issues are not that urgent and also I would like to mention the concept for need for cognition because environmental issues are usually very complicated, right the environmental systems are harder for general lay persons to understand so they have to use the cognitive process to understand the issue. Although we mentioned the knowledge deficit model and people are not willing to engage in environmental issues because they don't have enough knowledge and that theory cannot sustain itself in a current time. We talked about the other factors that contribute to the inaction but we also want to mention the knowledge like deficit model, I think that's still playing a role and also the need for cognition and people with-- especially some people-- they like to challenge themselves to learn about new stuff like the environmental science process, the biophysical chemical processes but some of them don't have the need, they don't want to challenge themselves to think about these complicated issues so that could also contribute to them like the unwillingness, the inaction in the environmental engagement. Yeah, so, these are the thoughts I have for now.

00:25:05.600 Elizabeth: Thank you, guys, I should have sent my entire climate change policy class to this yesterday before they took their midterm because they had a bunch of questions on cultural theory and whether the deficit model works and things like that so I appreciate your thoughts there. I was thinking in a similar vein when I saw this question, we talked about this in my class all the time lately about how our kind of broader world views about the way that nature works whether we think nature is a resilient system or whether we kind of have a fatalist view and we think natural processes are just kind of stochastic that determines how we engage with marital issues, what we think about environment issues. There's actually like quite a bit of pretty cool social science data to back this up, there's a pretty famous environmental social scientist Tony Sarawitts and he did a number of studies that show that humans world views and their affect toward environmental issues, they're kind of emotional responses are better predictors of the way that they perceive environmental risk than anything else; than their wealth and their associated demographics, than where they live, than they're actual even personal experiences with you know if their house has been flooded or if they've you know experienced a heatwave or something like that than these kind of cultural

views and our effective responses are so important to how we think about climate change and other environmental issues. So I think that that echoes what's already been said, I also think that I have to be honest when I think about this question it's hard to change things we find convenient. I ride my bike to work most days but when it's raining I really like having a car and I live in an apartment that's usually freezing so sometimes I'm really glad to turn on the heat and even though I kind of know those environmental impacts, the processes that cause them are convenient to me and I think it's really hard to place that in this broader conversation. You know it's stepping back, how do we think about how all these processes are interconnected and how do we separate that from our individual kind of day-to-day means. So yeah, just some thoughts there.

00:27:19.010 Debra: Thank you, I think, is there anything left to be said? [Laughing] I'm not sure I like the reverse order, no I really appreciate the comments, I couldn't agree more with the idea of values being a big piece of the problem, structural issues so it starts to get very complicated very quickly when we start to look at different environmental impacts and concerns. I think, you know, for myself when I read this question, I thought about-- and I have the liberty to think from a different perspective or a world view-- and recently I used John Mohawk's presentation he did that at the Bioneers conference, he's passed on now but he's a Mohawk or a Seneca scholar doctor at the University of Buffalo and he was talking about the fact that this isn't the first climate catastrophe that human beings are facing and he reminded the audience that the Hopi speak about this be in the fourth world that there were three previous environmental collapses that have brought us to where we are and in those three previous ones humans did have a hand in creating those and so the Hopis and their prophecies remind us that we have a responsibility so that we don't create another collapse. So, when I read Robin Kimmerer *Braiding Sweetgrass* and she talks about her pledge of allegiance to the natural world, to plants you know not to politics but to the world, to the natural world. When you think about things like the Seneca greetings which is a basically an acknowledgment that they used to start every meeting or every ceremony and what it does is it situates human beings in the environment, in the universe and so they acknowledge and they give thanks to the Sun, and the moon, and to the winged ones, and the fish, and to the insects, and to all of nature, to water, to medicines, and so on so that that sets the context for making decisions about the future and even things like the seventh generation, that every decision we make today, we have to think about its impact on the seventh generation yet to come. These are profound powerful ways of being, they're not myth, they're how we relate to the world, it reflects our responsibility to the natural environment and it's not real and that's what counters the selfish individual live for the moment kind of attitude and also I think you know if you look at the values it's the predominant value is that man sits over nature and that couldn't be more untrue for us as indigenous peoples in terms of how we view a relationship to the world.

00:30:43.230 Callum: Thanks, yeah so I guess we have, I think hopefully laid a little bit of groundwork for sort of thinking about what is the environment, what's humans relationship to it, what are we doing it, why are we doing it, maybe some of the sort of potential future orientations we could have but I guess I'm gonna ask the like tortured academic question next,

which is like okay what can I do as a humanist to actually do something good, which has tortured me for a long time and so I hopefully will be able to resolve this by asking you all rather than a therapist or something. In part of this is like, so the humanities as a name for a kind of general orientation, social sciences are guilty of this as well, I mean there's a certain kind of bias built into the name itself right it's the study of humanity it's a so day of social structures maybe this is one of the reasons we see so many academics identifying themselves as post humanists, anti-humanist, transhumanists, meta- humanists, cyborgs, eco-centric, and the like but I guess the question that I have for y'all is: what role do you see the humanities and Social Sciences playing in addressing environmental issues, in particular what role do we play potentially in a relationship to the hard sciences, or policymakers, or citizens, or even maybe what can humanists do for the natural world itself and I guess we'll put Elizabeth on the spot for this one.

00:32:16.600 Elizabeth: Alright, so I have a couple different thoughts here that I want to share, one I think the humanities have the opportunity to be really powerful motivators, to even just start thinking about these environmental issues I remember reading Ed Abbey and thinking about people putting sand and stuff in the gas tanks of BLM vehicles because they were upset that they were building dams and thinking like wow this is a really cool and interesting take on these issues and I kind of think now that some of that same role for the humanities is sort of this boundary object term we like to throw around, something that helps us kind of think across disciplines so that we can maybe relate to and share but we bring different perspectives on. A couple of the things I wanted to mention is something that was really important when I was kind of more deeply embedded in humanities training was this idea of narratives and what narratives do and I think as social scientists we're currently stealing that from the humanities, I work in the policy field specifically and we analyze policy debates as narratives we look at how people construct each other as characters, there are kind of scientific ways to chart this and quantify it and I think that's really interesting that we are going into these things and trying to understand policy debates through these lenses. Another role that this is kind of played or a flip side of this is narratives have been really important for me and my work to communicate ideas to policymakers so for instance I was working on a project where we were studying how water utilities transition to more sustainable water management practices across three major cities in the US and we wanted to take some of our findings to these water utilities. We realized we couldn't just bring them graphs of hydrology and all decision-making and all these other things and what we ended up doing was we ended up composing a short that was in word narrative of that utility story for them over time and kind of filling that in with data that we found to be kind of important driving decisions and I was shocked at how many people thought like, "Wow this is really cool," we had a bunch of other utilities call us and say hey can you make our narrative and I was like, "Okay cool, I'm really seeing the benefit in using this kind of storytelling to communicate and so I think that's important. I think the last thing I'll say is as a policy person-- someone who studies policymaking processes—I analyze media all the time and that's a hugely important data source for me because I think it tells us so much about how people write about their problems, how people communicate with one another and on the flip side of that how we can use media to tell a different story, so I'm specifically thinking about a couple

studies I've done on the communication of wildfire and right after a wildfire we see these big ideas in the media about connecting wildfire to climate change and the need to mitigate and have a different relationship with the way we manage our forests and then that slowly fades away and we see totally different kind of coverage later about wildfires and usually that turns into like how quickly our neighborhoods rebuilding their McMansions. We totally see the story shift over time and I think that that is another way that the humanities can really inform this is by reshaping that story, refocusing us, taking that opportunity to have kind of a bigger idea and shape a bigger narrative in a way that can be more productive than may be that fast-paced typical media cycle that we often see.

00:35:56.940 Ran: Thank you for the question, yeah as I see as a media scholar and I feel like we need to do a lot of work to solve the communication problems in the process. I feel like our research currently focuses a lot on the strategic communication like a top-down approach, we study how to change people's beliefs and how to encourage their environmental friendly behaviors and how the mass media affect their behaviors and we also study the mistrust and the misinformation spread in the media and how the mass media makes a negative effect on the general population but what we need to do is to change that to the bottom-up approach to see how people communicate with each other, like we can use the participatory approach to think about the issue, like we don't need to focus only on the mass media but also on the communities like the indigenous people and how they do their storytelling and how they have their own ways of communication right so that's something we can think about and especially in the media communication research field, something we can think about, how to innovate the ways of communication and to push things forward and also I feel like currently as media scholars we focus a lot on the individual level media use and currently we know there are mutual influences between media use and environmental perceptions and those with environmental friendly perceptions, they currently like to selectively attend to the environmental TV programs and they want to approach the media information to get more knowledge about environmental issues and for those who are frequently media and news consumers and they are positively influenced by the media and they also think more positively about the environment and willing to engage with the environmental issues but the all these discussions are at the individual level, we need to think about the media systems at the macro level, like how does the media system play a role and there are some studies like focusing on the role of media's system and actually with less developed media system and the people in those kinds of countries will not have that much environmental concerns so the media system can also play a role and need to have this cross national studies and uniting both macro level and micro level factors, so these are some points that we can think about and also worth discussing and in the media studies field and also in the broader social science field.

00:39:13.579 Mike: Okay, I'll keep my answer really short, but before I get to it I wanted to come back to what Elizabeth said before about riding her bike and driving her car. We have got to have more fighting hypocrites in this movement, more people who don't have to be perfect in order to participate and I think it's great that she rides her bike as often as she does and whether we, people like us want to admit it or not, people who are outside powerful movements to encourage environmental responsibility perceive us as judgmental and

condescending, this is not productive and I really think that it's important for everybody to send the message that we don't have to be perfect to be making a difference and we get into this kind of toggle mode where if we're not an environmental saint, we're an environmental sinner and it reflects a habit of mind that I think is really dangerous, so good for riding your bike is what I wanted to say and it's okay to take your car sometimes too. I guess I would give two super quick answers to this question about the role of humanities, one is absolutely as Elizabeth said narrative. I mean this is vitally important I mean the great Paleolithic invention is story, it's something that everybody responds to, it doesn't matter what the medium is, what the message is, we are hardwired for story and the second concept that I think is useful in the context of narrative is translation. When I work with people in the hard sciences, for example, you know they are producing incredibly useful data that can inform our decisions but their data often are not informing our decisions because they're not being translated into stories that really matter to us and I always think the hard scientists are gonna feel like I'm stealing their gig like I'm usurping their authoritative way of describing the world the opposite is the case. Most hard scientists really value the role and participation of people who can help to translate their life's work into the kinds of stories that people find compelling, so I think you know the ultimate bottom line answer for what is the role of the humanities is to be able to tell stories that people respond to, care about, and will understand and data doesn't change our behavior but stories do, so I think that's the bottom line for me and Debra you get to be last just like you wanted.

00:41:29.630 Debra: Well, I guess I first have to take issue at the use of the term hard sciences because I advocate for intellectual pluralism that there's many knowledge in the world, many sciences and so on and so I think we have to bring down the head of Western science and institutions that promote and perpetuate that many of the indigenous scholars that I've read and worked with, whose center their knowledge systems in the center of their research really promote their knowledge systems which are based on all of the same things that Western knowledge systems are based on you know tried and proven over time to be true and oftentimes those findings eventually become confirmed by Western science and oftentimes are paces ahead. I'm also an advocate for community-based research, I think communities know best the changes that are happening in their localities and they're the best suited to engage in that kind of research that can feed into a broader discussion from that base and I think that's all I have to say on that.

00:43:06.739 Callum: Thank you, so I want to be sure that we have time for questions from the audience so I'm gonna do something awful to the panel and say let's do one minute answers to one final question but it's a small one so it's okay or it's really two questions so it's really awful of me to really ask you to do this in just one minute but I'm gonna do it anyways. So the first of the kind of two concluding questions I want to end with is stolen from Lennon, who himself stole it from a novelist: what is to be done if humans and humanists are to have a role to play in writing environmental wrongs what do you think could be some productive next steps and channeling my old undergraduate advisor for the second part of the question-- shout out to Harlan Wilson if he's listening out there in radioland—the anarchist, Emma Goldman once said that she didn't want to be a part of a revolution where you couldn't dance.

Environmental issues are generally a bummer to talk about in activism and scholarship are often deadly serious undertakings. Is there any cause for fun in the environmental movement or is the proper orientation the deep pessimism and despair that we began with? So yeah, about a minute—just fix it all.

00:44:15.709 Ran: Okay, I'll get started. I think as a media scholar, I feel looking forward we need to have some non-traditional ways of communication. For example, I'm currently working on the use of animations in environmental stories, so I'm thinking about animations and also other forms of communication like the use of humor and sarcastic perspectives and a lot of interesting components we can include in a communication process and that's probably one way to solve the issue to make the storytelling process more interesting and I also want to emphasize that as a media scholar we want to look at the cultural perspectives and do more in intercultural comparisons to see how other cultures deal with environmental issues, so taking into consideration of that because there is no one-size-fits-all solution and we need to think about the context and do more across national research.

00:45:43.249 Debra: No problem, so I would say that I'm gonna recast the question. I would say that the problem is that there's not enough fun, I would say that the problem is there's not enough seriousness in the issues that we're facing and that the party is essentially over and that you know for the environmental work that there's no time to waste, that everybody has a role, and that we're not going to find fun in that. That's not to say that we can't enjoy living in life, but on this issue I would say the party's over.

00:46:13.709 Elizabeth: Alright, I'm gonna talk about what my entire career focuses on in one minute. My specific focus in policy is something called collaborative governance, what those processes are, processes that involve stakeholders, we've heard about a multiple knowledge systems, community based knowledge, those sorts of things. I'm interested in processes that bring together people from all sorts of different worldviews and value systems and we put them in a room and we have them hash out problems and sometimes it takes a really long time like the order of decades and takes a lot of money and a lot of resources and we definitely don't get everyone's views and that's a problem and we can do better being representative in those collaborative governance processes, but I do see those as a hopeful place. I've seen some amazing things happen when you put together people and force them to think about where they're interdependent on one another and on the environment and I'm happy to say that at least in my world of water policy, we are seeing those processes happen more and more often, thinking about a process that went on between the US and Mexico, tons of political contentiousness at the southern border, right we can't deny that but somehow we have people coming together to send environmental flows to the Colorado River Delta, to think about native peoples who live there and think about native species and endemic plants and animals that benefit from that water that we're sending down there, so I know it's not perfect but I think collaboration is my cause for hope.

00:47:48.960 Mike: Yeah that's a hard one, I guess I would say that collaboration is important, that scaling problems is important so that we can find a way into them where we feel like

we're making a difference and we're not just facing something huge that we don't know how to start with but I guess the core opinion I have on this which is fundamentally unpopular and often not at all persuasive as you will soon see is that you know the essential problem with arguing that we need to fully viscerally recognize the seriousness of our situation is that it demonstrably results in paralysis and fear and hopelessness and so I spent a lot of years being that sort of voice crying in the wilderness about everything that was wrong and finally got frustrated that that rhetoric didn't seem to have much traction, especially with the communities of people who I thought most needed to be brought in to the conversation. I'm really an advocate now of trying to find ways to make this series of problems more accessible to people, it's so easy to accuse me of pure naiveté but I really believe that hope motivates people and that despair does not, so psychologically my starting point is people have to have a way into, it has to be scaled so they feel like they can make a difference, so in all of my recent books I'm experimenting with using humor writing to approach environmental problems, it's not the only way in, it's not the best way in but after lots of years of writing you know dire and serious things that were read by 12 people who were already concerned about the same issue, I really have found humor work has opened my writing to a much wider audience that's much more diverse and it has brought in people who wouldn't otherwise be interested in the topics so I'm not endorsing that for everybody and I don't think it should be a party but I think we have to be realistic about what motivates people and what shuts them down and we have to learn how to adjust our rhetorics to be able to meet people where they are and give them a way into something that doesn't just trigger despair and paralysis.

00:49:56.869 Callum: Alright thank you very much, alright so yeah we can push our luck for 10 or 15 minutes right now, well 10 minutes probably for you all to pose questions if you have questions for the panel as a whole or for a particular member of the panel, raise your hand you shall be called on. I will ask that you grab the mic so that your voice will be preserved for posterity as well or Sidney will deliver it to you, okay fabulous.

00:50:23.839 Questioner: Thank you so much for presenting tonight, I think there's a lot of really wonderful frameworks for thinking about issues and collaboration that were mentioned tonight such as Mike Branch talking about hard data and translating it into story, intellectual pluralism, and collaborative government structures and I guess part of my question is you know as far as addressing like UNR and like academic institutions as a whole within those frameworks that you mentioned that are all very appealing like what are your concrete strategies for bringing more of interdisciplinary involvement at you know within your own classrooms or own departments. I know, for example, I love Gender, Race, and Identity program and I think they obviously are doing a lot of interdisciplinary work but whether or not that's included people in hydrology or biology you know that's a different issue and I also recognize that funding might be an issue here and so I think any environmentalist can understand that like the global issues are local and so within our own local institution like what are we doing to create this more collaborative narrative in our hometown?

00:51:43.959 Elizabeth: Yeah, I think that's a great question. The incentive structures are against it, I'm an assistant professor, it's scary to think about trying to get tenure when I try to

publish in engineering journals and you know communications journals, we share environmental communication and a couple of those and yeah they're serious institutional disincentives to that. That said, I would agree with what Michael said before, it's so pleasant to know that we have so many people who are willing to work across disciplines right now. I think I'm the only social scientists that participates in the Global Water Center for instance right now and people are excited when I talk and that's pretty cool but it's hard to be comfortable with that I mean I feel myself doubting that I have the same amount to contribute as other people and so I think yeah there are kind of structural incentives, there are kind of personal incentives. I think the more that you can get involved in interdisciplinary programs, the better. I came out of an environmental studies program-- I don't even think I know what environmental studies is—my graduate education felt like it was like a mile wide and an inch deep but I feel really lucky that I can go from talking to people about how to discuss climate change in Congress to talking about how to save the pupfish in Devil's Hole and kind of spanning those boundaries even if I don't have all of the knowledge and just kind of being open to what other people have to add to that. So yeah, I think you hit the nail on the head, there are a lot of disincentives nut it's really important.

00:53:12.849 Ran: I can speak to that, I think as a journalism professor, a lot of students in the journalism school want to think about the reporting of science and environmental issues so we can use journalism school as a center point and to train students to connect scientists and the general public to train them how to translate the hard science into understandable stories and also into interesting stories, so for me I came from journalism background also got the double major in environmental science and policy, so I learned about environmental systems and which usually involves both natural systems and human systems and economic systems and social systems so I learn about this biophysical and chemical processes so that makes me feel more comfortable interacting with natural scientists and I got connected with them and UNR also through some Department events and we have a Lunch and Learn event in a journalism school and we just started a new program in visualizing science which will also play a big role in the communication process, which also facilitates the interdisciplinary collaborations at UNR.

00:54:44.040 MIke: I'll just say quickly that I think we're doing a great job of diversifying our environmental curriculum across disciplines at UNR so I think there's been great progress in that area but as a parent I really feel like you know do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do doesn't work and so one of our greatest teaching tools is the physical plant of the campus itself. John Saiga Beale was here earlier he's the environmental manager for UNR and you know students are learning value lessons every day when they walk across our campus: do we have LEED certified buildings, how do we handle our water etc.? You know that Emerson's idea that architecture is frozen music, right that the building's themselves are a kind of ossified version of our value system so I do think we need to keep pushing the university as we grow and develop to make sure that we think of our campus as a teaching tool, not just as a place to go to a class where learning happens but that learning about environmental values and sustainability happens in how we run the physical plan of the institution itself. We're doing better than we did, but I think we need to keep our focus on that because students are experiencing that

physical environment every day and they're sort of absorbing what values that physical manifests.

00:55:53.830 Debra: I don't really have much more to add, I think you know the interdisciplinary nature of the work has to be deliberate and a part of the challenge is to get some of the disciplines out of their silos and committed to looking at cross you know cultural, cross-knowledge issues and so that's a bit of my work and a bit of my mandate to do that.

00:56:24.100 Callum: We started a couple minutes late, so I guess if anybody else wants to sneak in a question.

00:56:30.940 Questioner: So, as it seems to me that those issues become very I mean not seems to it's like a fact that this issue is very very partisan, it's been divided along partisan lines and of all the issues in the world, I have the most trouble understanding the other side of it how you could be against fighting climate change. So how do we speak to people who just don't believe us, think we're crazy and this is a conspiracy theory?

00:57:00.850 Elizabeth: Yeah that's a really good question, I think there are places where we can find or ideally find parts of other people's value systems that do resonate with protecting the environment so someone mentioned already the idea of kind of dominion over the environment on this panel and human superiority over nature but yet a lot of people kind of reinterpret that same story as at least if we're thinking in kind of the religious sense of Dominion as human stewardship over nature and if we can reinterpret some of those stories I think about how we can reach people who may be you know we're seeing one of the groups that is least likely to support climate action is Evangelical Christians but yet we're seeing a huge movement within that religious sect that says you know we're actually responsible for being stewards of the earth and if we can kind of connect with people on those narratives. I think that's really that's a really important in-road to that that said it's super hard right because we know kind of changes this global problem, those of us who think that global problems requires global solutions, that's a fundamental non-starter for some people who want to think about things through a market or want to think about things they're only individual action. So, figuring out ways, maybe different ways to attack the same problem, different ways to shape these narratives to communicate with people and maybe we're not selling them on hey become an environmentalist or climate change supporter those sorts of things but maybe we're selling them on this you know a certain action may actually resonate with what you already believe.

00:58:42.370 Ran: Yeah I agree with that, the storytelling it's essential like how we craft the message and to resonate with the audience and I think that currently what we want to do most is to like engage the disengaged population so we need to think about like their belief in value systems and think about what messages we can craft and avoid the possible backlash because current research and latest research shows that if you emphasize too much on the consensus and probably will trigger some backlash among people who don't believe in climate change so we need to think about the experimenting different messaging strategies.

00:59:30.190 Debra: It's interesting because we're sitting in the belly of the beast you know one of the very few countries of the world that takes this position where the vast majority of the countries of the world have been pushing for a global agenda and push in the UN climate change convention and the science and the data already speaks to this and you can choose to turn a blind eye to it but that doesn't change the truth and so you know for people in this country who are holding that position, it doesn't matter whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, you're not going to survive if you don't have the ability or the knowledge to survive the changes that are coming and you know Pacific island nations are already feeling the effects, they already see the effects, their whole communities have already been removed and relocated to other places you know you can't deny that fact. I think the US has to get its head out of the sand because we're like an island trying to pretend that it's not really for our own benefit for those who are profiting from that position so they're not gonna willing to change from that position.

01:01:06.750 Mike: Yeah, I mean there's a reason nobody wanted the mic right you know that's an impossible question but I would just say that it sounds like a truism but I really do believe in trying to find common ground and I come to that as a teacher you know I can't look out at my thirty students and say I care about the 15 of them who agree with me on something right. A good example is you know I used to help run this conference and for years it had been called the North American Interdisciplinary Wilderness Conference and then when I came here and wanted to bring the conference and host it here, I was inviting all these ranchers to come to the conference and they wouldn't come right because wilderness is a bad word in the Great Basin to a lot of agricultural and rural people because capital W wilderness means designation, means lack of access to land, etc., so I just said, "I want these people here," so we changed the name of the conference to the North American Interdisciplinary Conference on Environment and Community so it was a it was a mouthful and who cares they came and they talked about how much they loved the land and all of these environmentalists who were anti-ranching, we sat and we listened to these people talk about a multi-generational connection to place, how much they cared about Nevada, etc. and I think getting out of our frameworks a little bit right like how does an animal rights activist talk to a hunter who claims to care about preserving wildlife; we have to figure out how to do this so I'm like you, I'm just incredulous that people don't understand why I'm so brilliant on all these topics but I think ultimately being right doesn't help, I mean that's kind of where I come down as a teacher is just you know feeling like I have the correct opinion at the end of the day hasn't really accomplished much so I don't care how tiny the victory is like what can we start with that we agree on and if you can build trust then you can create some things from there. I'm ultimately really much more hopeful I think then most people are and partly it's because that's what I'm always looking for is where is that point of connection where we share something that we care about and then let's not worry about the other 98%, let's start there and see where we can go but I agree that it's difficult.

01:03:26.280 Callum: Alright well, I'm sure you all have more questions, I'm also sure that our time is up and so I would encourage you come accost our panelists who stand between us in

the door so you can ask whatever questions you see fit. I'd like to thank our panel one more time to give them all round of applause [Applause] I also want to thank Laughing Planet again, Core Humanities program, College of Liberal Arts thank all of you for showing up tonight please stick around there's little some quesadillas scraps over here, so have at it, yeah thank you very much.

THE END