

Interview



Kathleen Dean Moore

Oregon State professor of philosophy

Director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas,
Nature and the Written Word

Co-editor of "Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a
Planet in Peril"

October 21, 2011

Q: Are there any lessons that you think the climate movement should be drawing from Occupy in terms of strategy or branding?

A: "We are all in this together. The lines that connect jobs-environment-education-health are strong and undeniable. The time has passed for an environmental movement. The time has passed for a climate change movement. This, finally, is the big one – the coming together of people who care about the future, and do not want to gamble it away to enrich "people who despise us." The last phrase is from Carl Safina. The analogy between tectonic shifts and the Occupy is deliberate. The big one will shake us all."

Q: Is having so many messages within one movement an effective strategy or does it make success much harder to accomplish?

A: It's reporters who are asking for a single message, an elevator speech. That's lazy, asking the movement to simplify itself, shed outliers, hone a message that will surely deceive by omission. The whole point is that there's not a single problem or focus point. The cancer has spread throughout the body politic. Every organ is affected. Let the reporters do their job, which is to listen carefully, refuse to over-simplify, acknowledge complexity and interconnection, connect the dots.

Q: What do you think about the organizing structure of Occupy, how it's touted as leaderless?

A: "Blessed Unrest" (the title of the 2007 Paul Hawken book). It's a reference to an unprecedented situation in which activity is springing up like grass everywhere. There will be oaks among these grassroots movements. But they have to grow.

Q: What are your thoughts on the connections between the Occupy and climate movements?

A: The Occupiers are connecting the dots all over the place. Climate change is a huge dot. The economic breakdown is another. Etc. But they all connect to one central place, which is the funding of elections (and, of the elected) by huge and powerful centers of wealth – mostly corporations, mostly destructive and extractive corporations. This has created a situation where the government is fundamentally controlled by those who would risk or wreck the (name your favorite: economy, environment, our children's futures) for their own short-term gain – the 1 %.

We have an oligarchy – the government of the many by the few. (Note from a philosopher: Plato predicted this. Every democracy, he said, will evolve into an oligarchy, as the wealthy purchase votes and power. Every oligarchy will evolve into chaos, when the people decide they've had enough).

The consequence is, of course, that the destructive few now control the regulatory agencies and any regulations that might have limited their recklessness and greed. They have the consequent power to close off options for resolving the emergencies, to block every government act that might prevent the injustices and to prevent the unbelievable stupidity of wholesale damage to the systems that sustain our very lives. Connecting the dots to climate change, it now appears that “corporate interests” are willing to take down this entire way of life (and the biota that support it, and the children who depend on it) for short-term gain. This is monstrous and obscene.

It's wrong because it's undemocratic. It's wrong because it's unjust. It's wrong because it is disastrous – especially as it prevents any meaningful effort to stop belching climate change gases.

This is what the signs are saying: Get the money out of politics (and politician's pockets), so we can be a democracy again, so we can enact the measures that will save us from sure environmental catastrophe. Self-created environmental catastrophe has taken down many civilizations before ours. But this time, the self-inflicted catastrophe of climate change will take down also the great Earth systems and relative stability that have allowed the evolution of the world as we know and love it.

We CAN draw down CO2 to livable levels. But not until we draw down the power of those who are enriched by destroying the conditions of human thriving.

Q: What do you find, if anything, different about the Occupy Movement than other movements you've witnessed in your lifetime (such as Vietnam, civil rights, anti-nuke, women's liberation)?

A: It lacks music. Seriously. The greatest, most powerful political force in American history is people moving together down the street, holding hands, and singing. Music makes the difference between a mob and a movement. So far, we have a mob. If someone wants to make this movement “sing,” they will compose the Anthem for the Future.