WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY AND WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

Monday, November 17, 2014
12 - 1:30 p.m.

Museum of Northern Arizona

Facilitated by: Dr. Matthew Goodwin, NAU Department of Philosophy

12:00 p.m.
Welcome and Introduction
Ms. Andrea Houchard, Director, Philosophy in the Public Interest

12:15 p.m.
Community Discussion
Dr. Matthew Goodwin, NAU Department of Philosophy

1) What makes a practice sustainable or unsustainable and why are things increasingly cast in this language?

2) What are the costs and benefits of sustainable and unsustainable practices?

3) Can we really be sustainable without community obligations? And what are the grounds of such obligations if they exist?

1:20 p.m.
Closing Questions and Recap of Discussion
1) What makes a practice sustainable or unsustainable and why are things increasingly cast in this language?

Key terms to know when discussing sustainability as well as sustainable or unsustainable practices:

**Oikos (Οἶκος):** Ancient Greek word for household, dwelling, or family. The root word for the prefix eco- used in both *economics* and *ecology*.

**Economic:** Something or someone who is practiced in the management of a household or family, is thrifty, frugal, and economical.

**Ecology:** The branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment. The interrelationship between any system and its environment.

**Sustainable:** Capable of being endured or borne; bearable. Capable of being maintained or continued at a certain rate or level. A natural resource which is exploited in such a way as to avoid its long-term depletion.

**Conservation:** The practice of seeking to prevent the wasteful use of a resource in order to ensure its continuing availability.

**Preservation:** Deciding what's important, figuring out how to protect it, and passing along an appreciation for what was saved to the next generation.

**Resilience:** A notion concerned with the fragility of our systems and infrastructure; focused on trying to account for extreme weather events into the planning and construction of infrastructure old and new. The difference between resilience and sustainability is this: the concept of sustainability revolves around wanting to rebalance the world, while resilience focuses on managing inevitable imbalances.

**The Three Pillars of Sustainability:**

![The Three Pillars of Sustainability Diagram](image-url)
In Plato’s Republic (written 380 B.C.E.), Socrates and Glaucon imagine an ideal State in order to examine what justice might mean in such a place. In this State they discover something about sustainability.

Socrates says that people will want to “produce corn, and wine, and clothes, and shoes, and build houses for themselves. . . . And they will take care that their families do not exceed their means; having an eye to poverty or war.”

But, Glaucon, says this will not be enough: “you have not given them a relish to their meal.”

Socrates agrees, people want “a relish—salt, and olives, and cheese; and for dessert, figs, and peas, and beans; and they will roast myrtle-berries and acorns at the fire, drinking in moderation. And with such a diet they may be expected to live in peace and health to a good old age, and bequeath a similar life to their children after them.”

But Glaucon pushes further: “people who are to be comfortable are accustomed to lie on sofas, and dine off tables, and they should have sauces and sweets in the modern style.”

Socrates points out this is not just any State, but a luxurious State with a “fever,” and in such a State we shall be more likely to see how justice and injustice originate.

“Many will not be satisfied with the simpler way of life. They will want sofas, tables, and other furniture; also dainties, perfumes, incense, courtesans, and cakes, and not just of one sort only, but in every variety; we must go beyond the necessaries, and will require art, gold, ivory, and all sorts of exotic materials.”

“Then,” says Socrates, “we will have to enlarge our borders; for the original healthy State is no longer sufficient. And the country which was enough to support the original inhabitants will be too small now. Then we will desire a slice of our neighbor’s land for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth.”

“And so we shall go to war. Shall we not?”

“Most certainly,” Glaucon replied.
2) What are the costs and benefits of sustainable and unsustainable practices?

**Benefits** of sustainability:

- **Increase in competitive advantage**: consumers may be more likely to be interested in a company or organization if it is environmentally friendly, promotes fair labor practices, and promotes health and safety benefits.
- **Increases in productivity and reduction of costs**: sustainable practices mean efficient operations. This combined with conservation of resources could make an organization’s operations less costly.
- **Improvement of financial and investment opportunities**: with efficient practices, an organization may experience more revenue. Because their practices are sustainable and efficient they could be more likely to outperform other organizations.
- **Minimization of carbon footprint and consequential energy efficiency**: seeking ways to minimize pollution leads to implementing production methods that do not harm the environment as much. By using environmentally friendly methods, an organization may find it is consuming less energy, therefore, spending less money. Additionally, it helps maintain a healthy community.

**Costs** of sustainability:

- **Cost of shifting practices**: some businesses and organizations may have unsustainable or environmentally unfriendly practices. Making these practices “greener” may have significant short-term costs.
- **Longevity of products**: a business may prefer a plastic that lasts longer and looks better than an alternative with a shorter life span, that is less aesthetically appealing, and would also entail higher short-term costs. Styrofoam is an example of something degrades very slowly. That means low costs for businesses but high costs for the environment.

3) Can we really be sustainable without community obligations? And what are the grounds of such obligations if they exist?

Here is a model to try to visualize to whom we might have obligations or responsibilities to respect and care for:

![Diagram of obligations and responsibilities]

What priorities would you change? Is there a place for responsibilities to animals, natural features like rivers or canyons, or for future generations of people? Do we have obligations only for other people, or to other entities, like a place?

**Sources**

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*Hot Topics Café, November 17, Museum of Northern Arizona*
HOT TOPICS CAFÉ COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
The “hot topics” in the Hot Topics Cafés are selected by community members that represent diverse constituencies and viewpoints. We thank our committee for their participation. *Voted on Fall, 2014 “Hot Topics.”

Flagstaff & Winslow
*Celia Barotz
Flagstaff City Council
*Frankie Beesley
Program Coordinator, Friends of Flagstaff’s Future
*Joe Boles
Professor Emeritus, NAU College of Arts and Letters
*Carynn Davis
Executive Director, The Literacy Center
*Coral Evans
Flagstaff City Council
Jean Malecki-Friedland
MD MPH; County Director and Chief Medical Professor and Chair, Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Miami Miller School of Medicine; Co-Founder, The Compassion Project
*Jacque Gencarelle
Northern Arizona Behavioral Health Association
*Barbara Hickman
Superintendent, Flagstaff Unified School District
*Bob James
Retired from Lockheed Martin Space Systems; Member, The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany; Member and Docent Museum of Northern Arizona University; Member, The Boy Scouts of America—Silver Beaver
*Sherman Stephens
Flagstaff Community
*Craig Van Slyke
Dean, NAU W.A. Franke College of Business
*Micahel Vincent
Dean, NAU College of Arts and Letters
*Harriet Young
President, American Association of University Women; Chair, Flagstaff SpeakOut AZ

Sedona & the Verde Valley
Karen Daines
Assistant City Manager, Sedona
Paul Friedman
Sedona Citizens for Civil Dialogue
*Darrin Karuzas
Principal, Sedona Red Rock High School
Tom O’Halloran
Keep Sedona Beautiful; Board Member, Verde River Basin Partnership
*Judy Reddington
Arts and Letters Advisory Council, NAU; Board Member, Museum of Northern Arizona; Board Director, Sedona International Film Festival
*Steve Segner
Owner, El Portal; Chair, Lodging Council, Sedona Chamber of Commerce
Jessica Williamson
Sedona City Council

Ex officio
Robert Breunig
Museum of Northern Arizona
Andrea Houchard
NAU Philosophy in the Public Interest
Scott Sanicki
Sedona Public Library
Jona Vance
NAU Department of Philosophy
Hiedi Wayment
NAU Department of Psychology
Robin Weeks
Other Lifelong Learning Institute, Yavapai College, Sedona Center
Randy Wilson
Arizona Daily Sun

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NEXT FLAGSTAFF HOT TOPICS CAFÉ:
Bullying: How should we behave?
Wednesday, December 3, 2014
Museum of Northern Arizona
6-7:30 p.m.