

Ecological systems and social systems can be considered in one of two ways, either separately or overlapping. It would be ideal to consider these systems as separate entities with separate parts and relationships vastly different from each other. Ecological systems would ideally negate the influence of human behavior; thus, one could look at only parts dealing with nature and natural systems. Social systems would ideally only include human systems and the relationships between individual human beings. Unfortunately, I think there is far too much overlap between the two systems to justifiably consider them separately. In modern times, or the alleged Anthropocene we are currently living in, humans impact ecological systems and conversely, nature and ecology impact society in significant ways.

As Paul Robbins discussed in his presentation, ecological systems are experiencing big changes as a result of human behavior. In fact, it is difficult to even define ecological systems without considering human impact. The biodiversity Robbins and his team researched was essentially artificially created by humans as many of the trees, plants, and resulting wildlife presence existed due to decisions farmers made in growing their crops. The farmers' decisions as to which trees created the most ideal crop-growing environment had a direct impact on wildlife, as trees offering more shade had larger canopies and allowed for natural growth in avian diversity. The social system of the farming industry and the economic incentive to grow the most marketable crops is inherently connected to the ecological system of tree species and avian diversity.

One of the other large overlaps between systems that I found interesting was the intersection of workforce demographic changes and wildlife presence. The social system of labor is undergoing big changes in Southern India, as labor for farming in the area is decreasing as a result of increased women in the workforce. Looking at just this social system, you may only see a positive change since more females working means positive social growth in combatting societal issues like sexism in the workplace. However, when looking at this change in terms of its connection to the ecological system, you get a

much different story. With overall decreased levels of incoming labor, there is less control over the ecological system containing tree and animal diversity. As Robbins mentioned, increased wildlife due to a loss of governing of the system is not always a good thing since it allows for invasive species to uncontrollably take hold of the system. I would argue that it is not only important to see the connections between social and ecological systems, but it is also vital to understand the tremendous impact, sometimes actually beneficial, that human behavior can have on nature. In many ways, humans have actually become an essential part of the ecological system, a part in which the ecological systems can no longer function without.

This idea raises a lot of philosophical questions for me. Even if the outcomes of ecological systems without human involvement are not considered desirable to us, does that mean that the ecological system is not functioning properly? Are humans making decisions on how ecological systems should function based on concern for the system itself or based on concern for human survival? It is somewhat hypocritical to me that many environmentalists feign “concern for the environment” when in reality they are just concerned about themselves and the impact the environment is having on humans. I think that this shows the inherent, underlying connection between society and nature. Humans have a specific perception of what nature is and how natural systems should flow, so humans have essentially defined the ecological system based on their values gained from the social system. This definitely makes me question my own goals in sustainability, since I have always thought of human intervention as a way to form a symbiosis of sorts between humans and nature. Maybe we have all been tackling this wrong and the only way to preserve either system is to eliminate the other entirely and break off all existing connections. In any case, I think it is extremely valuable to look intrinsically at how society has shaped human valuation of ecology and continue to work toward methods of overcoming such perceptions in the hopes of strengthening both ecological and social systems symbiotically.