



Ambivalence and difference: counting between one and two in AESS

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I am deeply honored to receive the 2023 Freudenburg Lifetime Achievement Award. The Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences is made up of so many hardworking, heartfelt, helpful colleagues, and some of those I admire the most have received this award in the past. Thank you.

I had the great fortune to personally know and work alongside Bill Freudenburg, who sadly passed away in 2010. I first met Bill during his endowed chair interview at UC Santa Barbara in the early 2000s, where I served in the Department of Geography and the Environmental Studies Program before coming to Lewis & Clark College here in Portland in 2005. Bill's job talk addressed the northern spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest: His argument—repeated in several of his late 1990s publications (Freudenburg et al. 1998; 1999)—was that, contrary to timber rhetoric, there was no connection between spotted owl protection and a loss of timber jobs. He probably did not know that there was someone else in the room who had studied the spotted owl, and that was me, having returned to the region of my birth to do my geography dissertation on the most notorious recipient of Endangered Species Act protection in decades. I respectfully challenged Bill's broader argument that environmental protection rarely has an economic downside: Indeed, many forces have threatened timber jobs here in the Pacific Northwest, but environmental protection has been one of them. Things are not always win-win. Bill accepted my friendly amendment, and we became fast friends thereafter.

I was happy to assist when Bill led the effort to form AESS around 2005–2006. Bill knew the significance of a professional academic association from his many years in sociology, and he worked tirelessly and diplomatically to found AESS. I have a poignant memory of trudging alongside Bill—now I recall sporting a cane—up the hills of Syracuse University in the summer of 2007, the second of

three pre-AESS Environmental Summits, as we searched for our dorm rooms. I believe I again remember Bill, now moving much more slowly, in the fall of 2009 as he proudly participated in the first official AESS Meeting in Madison. The theme in 2009 was “Environment: The Interdisciplinary Challenge.” Bill intentionally put two S's in AESS to welcome practitioners from across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities as well as related professional fields, and that big tent was one I, too, welcomed, given my own mongrel background starting in the humanities, moving to the natural sciences, then building my career as an interdisciplinary social scientist.

Bill's sense that interdisciplinarity constitutes both our greatest gift and our biggest intellectual challenge in AESS remains timely, and I urge each of us to be mindful of the little corner we occupy under this big tent and how each of us might reach out and mingle more across the disciplinary differences that define our field. I will mention this later in the context of the AESS Frameworks Project, but for now, I wish to honor—in these overly serious and suspicious times—Bill's famous sense of humor as he dedicated what proved to be the last years of his life building a national-scale professional organization of environmental studies and sciences—AESS. For that, dear Bill, each of us here is deeply grateful.

When I was notified of this award, I wondered if it was a mistake—or perhaps whether they figured I could not say no because I live literally less than one mile from where I would receive it, here in the Oregon Convention Center in Portland. Why a mistake? Well, for starters, no matter how gray my hair has turned—mostly from my own medical adventures of several years ago—Freudenburg sounds like a legacy award, although I have just restarted my career with two book deals, a recently launched Environmental Frameworks Project in collaboration with AESS, a new, expanded chapter for the environmental education nonprofit I founded on my land in southern Oregon, and so much else. But then I looked back at previous Freudenburg award winners, and for the most part, they remain active as well, so I will just think of it as

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a mid-career moment and look forward to what I can do alongside AESS colleagues in the future.

But, I do still feel ambivalent about receiving such an honor from AESS. I have certainly been a citizen of AESS for many years, but possibly a rather unruly citizen relative to the many good citizens who have long served our field. As one example, those familiar with my work know that I am generally underwhelmed with the concept of sustainability, seemingly sacrosanct in environmental studies and sciences. To me, and to others who have written on resilience science, political ecology, postnaturalism, or many other possible guiding frameworks, sustainability represents an understandable—although maybe not the most intellectually or politically insightful—reaction to a world of chaotic and confusing change. I organized a related AESS Meeting session in 2014 and published my contribution in a *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* paper titled “Theory In, Theory Out” (Proctor 2015). Looking back on those instances of unruliness, I now see a bigger need to model for my students an embrace of curiosity over judgment: We are so good at critique, or sometimes praise, but not so good at just wondering why, and curiosity, I increasingly believe, is the intellectual virtue that will advance environmental studies and sciences far more than judgment, however justified.

I actually recommend ambivalence to each of you as honorable in these times of change and confusion. I once wrote on ambivalence in the context of spotted owls and old-growth forests during a time in my career when I explored nature in terms of differing insights drawn from science and religion. Here is a bit of what I then said.

The term “ambivalence” is from the psychological literature of the early twentieth century. It means, literally, “both strengths.” There is a strength to scientific knowledge, a strength to religious insight. But when you mix them you become ambivalent. Science and religion present us with a set of paradoxes about nature given their ambivalent guidance, and paradox may be a good thing to the extent that it instills a proper sense of humility on all sides of debates over saving nature (Proctor 2009).

I call ambivalence “counting between one and two,” in contrast to understandable appeals for unity or agreement—counting to one—and too-prevalent evidence of disunity or disagreement—counting to two (Proctor 1998; 2005; 2013; 2020a; b). In our EcoTypes initiative (ecotypes.us), where I have collaborated with ESS instructors since 2017, I am more recently calling it *complementarity*, building on the work of the early 20th-century physicist Niels Bohr. Complementarity is a principle in which two opposing descriptions of reality are each true, yet a fuller truth arises from considering them both—or, as you will read on the EcoTypes site, “We disagree. That’s good! Our differing EcoTypes can

be a source of creative solutions.” When a student completes the EcoTypes survey, they are presented not only with their EcoType but also their complementarity EcoType: essentially, a personal framework, an environmental worldview or imaginary, that is their total opposite. This encourages the student to come out of their corner of this big tent called Earth and more deeply appreciate the possibility we explore in EcoTypes that *many care just differently*.

Odd notions like ambivalence, paradox, and complementarity are important to me because we live in, and must learn to live well in, a world of *difference*. Difference presents itself in the varied imaginaries of EcoTypes, and to return to that early AESS Meeting in Madison, difference presents itself in the varied disciplines that contribute to interdisciplinary ESS. This is one of the motivations for our AESS Frameworks Project, a professional development resource for AESS members exploring the environmental frameworks we have inherited and passed on—intentionally or otherwise—to our students. I define environmental frameworks as the structured assumptions upon which environmental knowledge and action are built. The Frameworks Project is collaborative and collective, as frameworks are more like shared paradigms than personal perspectives. In that famous early 1960s book by Thomas Kuhn on scientific revolutions (1962), no one questions paradigms until they no longer work, but in an interdisciplinary field like ESS, one can forever have multiple competing paradigms or frameworks because there can never be agreement on whether one framework works better than another. You might think of multiple frameworks as our strength, but most of us deal with this confusing landscape by remaining in our little corner of the big tent, embracing our preferred frameworks and avoiding or ignoring others.

So, in ESS, we have both sustainability, a framework of balance, and resilience, a framework of change; we have limits to growth, a framework of austerity, and political ecology, a framework of power; we have epistemological realism producing the facts of climate change, and we have social constructivism challenging those facts as colonial science. And when we teach, our students learn frameworks as well as facts, but they often apprehend frameworks as facts, as if, say, the tragedy of the commons—a framework quite germane to this Meeting’s theme, Reclaiming the Commons—were settled reality. The Frameworks Project encourages ESS instructors to embrace a more intentional frameworks approach, including and comparing more frameworks than just those in their corner of our big tent, so that students better appreciate, and build conceptual skills to better navigate, intellectual differences.

AESS will thrive, I believe, if it not only officially embraces cross-disciplinary differences but also offers its members intellectually exciting approaches to the challenges and opportunities we face in interdisciplinary ESS. I welcome your students’ participation in EcoTypes to discover a range

of personal frameworks and the possibility that many cares, just differently; go to ecotypes.us, where you can learn more. And I welcome your participation in two AESS Frameworks Project sessions scheduled for Wednesday, July 12, with an instructor's workshop in the morning and a discussion symposium in the afternoon. Please feel free to get in touch with me (jproctor@lclark.edu) if you would like further information or to discuss anything I have shared in these remarks.

Again, thank you to the AESS community for this honor, and thank you to Bill Freudenburg and many others in AESS for your lives of creative intellectual service.

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