The Dualistic Nature of the Sustainability Problem

All problems have a dual nature: the obvious and the rest. Difficult social problems are difficult because they present themselves in a layered manner. Only the top few layers are obvious. The rest lie hidden beneath the blanket of complexity. Traditional viewpoints, such as those found in grassroots activism, traditional academia, and mainstream political thinking, can see only the obvious upper layers as shaded in green. (If you are reading this in black and white, this is the top layer and the left halves of layers 2 and 3.)

The flip side of the duality is seeing the problem from an analytical point of view. This requires realization that: Difficult problems can be solved only by resolving their root causes. This holds because ever since The Enlightenment pragmatic thinkers have held as their fundamental insight the rule that all effects have a cause that can be determined by inspection of the system.

The model shown is incomplete. Not shown are further subproblems, feedback loops, and low and high leverage points. However, the layers capture the essence of the duality. Presently nearly all work employs the traditional viewpoint. We hypothesize that once sustainability advocates grasp the dualistic nature of the problem they will shift their attention to the analytical viewpoint.

This model captures the essence of the research at Thwink.org. For further information on the tools required to apply the analytical viewpoint to the sustainability problem, as well as a preliminary analysis, please see the website.

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