There's a common vision of environmentalism that mostly involves giving things up, the basic image being one of ascetic sacrifice for the benefit of the environment and future generations. *Some* people actually are ascetics, and *most* people are willing to make big sacrifices in emergencies. But by and large, people aren't willing to give up the good life forever. So if saving the planet means living a crappy life, that's a hard sell.

I've been doing a lot of thinking about the relationship between sustainability and quality of life. If sustainability efforts are themselves going to be sustainable over the long haul, sustainability needs to connect with a vision of the good life. Interestingly, there's been a lot of research by psychologists into what makes people happy. Money and that consumption that it buys turns out to be (at most) only modestly connected with happiness. What does really matter for happiness? Good health, recreational activities, and most important of all, social connections such as friends, family, and civic activities.

Some steps toward sustainability actually save money by conserving energy and water. Others promote health, such as shifting people to healthier diets that have smaller environmental footprints. Improved public transportation, in-fill urban development, and walkable communities can improve health, reduce time spent away from family in cars, and provide better opportunities for social connections. Getting people involved in sustainability efforts can help build social capital and give a sense of satisfaction from helping the community. At the same time, all of these are also good the planet. (Look here for much more detail about all this.)

When you read about environmentalists in the newspapers, it's usually in connection with something that they're *against*. We need to hear more about what a sustainable society would actually look like. I think many people would find it an attractive vision.