

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Welcome to Academically Speaking. This podcast is designed to provide our listeners with an opportunity to engage with subjects and topics related to student academic success. How we think and what we do is important to how we become citizens of this country and of the world.

Welcome to Academically Speaking. This is Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, vice provost and dean for the College of Undergraduate Studies here at the University of Central Florida.

And in another episode of celebrating faculty, we are featuring today Dr. Richard Plate. In our last episode, we had the wonderful opportunity to feature Dr. Leah Gaines, who shared much of her experiences coming into the academic space and becoming a college professor.

So today, we have Dr. Richard Plate, who joined the University of Central Florida in August of 2016 as a lecturer in Environmental Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Dr. Plate is a central Florida native who holds a PhD in interdisciplinary ecology from the University of Florida, and has degrees in English and chemical engineering from Clemson University in South Carolina.

He has taught courses in environmental science, environmental ethics and politics, marine resource management, and writing. He has authored numerous articles on human dimensions of natural resource management, and co-authored a textbook on sustainability. Dr. Plate's Research focuses on how people learn and make decisions about complex social ecological systems. Welcome Dr. Plate.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And we're happy to have you on this particular episode of our podcast, as we continue to celebrate faculty in the College of Undergraduate Studies. So just to get us started, tell us a little bit more about your background. We know that you went to that institution up the road from us for your PhD in interdisciplinary ecology, which I find fascinating.

But what I'll find more fascinating is that you have degrees in English and chemical engineering, so that's quite the combination. So tell us a little bit more about your academic background.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah, yeah. No, it's a bit of a mixed bag there. I knew fairly early on that I wanted to do something working on environmental challenges. My dad was an engineer, so engineering just seemed to be the best first. I didn't really have much direction beyond, I wanted to be addressing environmental issues.

So at Clemson, they didn't have environmental engineering at the undergraduate level, so chemical engineering was kind of the next closest thing. So I ended up in that.

The summer before my senior year in my undergraduate program there, I worked at an environmental consulting firm, and got to see what the environmental engineers do at an environmental consulting firm. I had a pretty solid feel that I did not want to be doing what they were doing, but I was three years into a four-year degree. It's not a bad degree to have. So I went ahead and finished that.

Took a few years, frankly. I was traveling. I ended up getting a Fulbright before going back to the master's program. I was able to travel a bit, do a bit of research, or assisting with research anyway.

And the English, I've always enjoyed reading and writing. I have come to see it now. It's hard to know, when you're looking back at the decisions you've made, you can find a sort of meaning to them and a

symmetry that probably wasn't there as you were muddling your way through along the way. But at this point, I really do look at my experience in English.

So again, at the time, I just loved reading books, writing about them, talking about them. And I still do see stories, whether it's fiction, whether it's cultural stories, narratives, around narratives, around narratives that have a large impact on why we do the things that we do.

We answer questions like, what does it mean to have a good life, or be a good person, or be striving for this or that, within the context of our own personal stories? And then rippling out from there to much broader and broader scale stories.

So largely I think, the most interesting books to me, I guess, I'm thinking fiction now, are the ones that have really rich character. That really allow you to vicariously experience a lot of their inner workings, and seeing the wheels turning in their minds at why they're doing what they're doing. And I really enjoyed that part of it.

So for me, the doctoral program, the graduate program at UF is set up very similarly to our Environmental Studies program here in that there are some core courses, and then you can take from a large range of courses. So you can, to a large degree figure out... We've got a very big umbrella to work within.

So my focus was largely on more of the social side of things. As you said, how people think about environmental systems. But I had folks in class with me who were doing research on nocturnal animals eating in Paraguay kind of thing. So it was really broad range, all working under this umbrella of environment.

And for me, what that program did was allowed me to combine some of my technical background with my more, I guess, humanities or social science aspects in terms of how we think and put those together in a way that for me, fits really well now. And I think actually, in some ways, having a weird background makes you not that great a fit for lots of jobs, but the perfect fit for those jobs that you really want to get. And I feel like that's how I feel here at UCF anyway.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That's a really interesting background. And the thing that really caught my attention was knowing more about this notion of interdisciplinary ecology, and being in a program where there are some core or foundational ideas within, and there are opportunities to explore other things under some particular perspective or viewpoint, in the context of that.

And so when we think about interdisciplinary ecology, if you had to describe it to your garden variety, run-of-the-mill undergraduate student, how would you describe that particular field of study?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah, it's funny. So it was a fairly new program when I started. I just heard about these arguments that happened before I got there, but they were arguing about what to call the program.

One of the premier ecologists at the university who was pushing for this program thought that interdisciplinary ecology was essentially a redundancy. He thought it would make them look stupid by having this sort of redundant... Because ecology is inherently interdisciplinary-

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

But how many people know that?

Dr. Richard Plate:

And that's it. And I take his point. But a lot of people, if they think of ecology as interdisciplinary, they think of it as chemistry, biology. They think of it as still the natural sciences. And so for me, I think that that possible redundancy is actually necessary to signal that we're talking about broad interdisciplinarity.

So to get back to directly answering your question, I would describe it as we make decisions about environmental systems all the time in terms of what we're going to buy for our groceries, how we're going to run our own households, who we're going to vote for. Policies at the city and state level affecting water, affecting how we're going to prepare for hurricanes in Florida. All of these things.

And certainly, those natural sciences play a large role in that. But there's so much else that gets baked into those decisions when it comes to emotions, and relationships, and institutions, and all of these things.

So interdisciplinary ecology... This is kind of how I describe environmental studies as well, as a broad label for a field. It can encompass all of that, all of those.

So I tend to see it all in terms of different ways of looking at issues to help us make decisions. And we need those different disciplines, and we need to integrate insights from those different disciplines in order to really feel like we're addressing those issues in a nuanced and fuller understanding than otherwise.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And that makes a lot of sense to me. So I have a background on interdisciplinary studies for my master's degree. And one of the things that I found interesting about that was that you could take a topic and basically look at it from a variety of different viewpoints, and gain different meanings on that topic.

So for instance, I'll use myself as an example. When my niece was living with me, and in high school, I really would've preferred to have her go to school close to campus. Because that meant driving one vehicle, taking her to school, going to work. And at the end of the school day, she could either walk to the office, or I could pick her up from school and drive back home. And I knew that the ecological impact of doing that would mean that I have a smaller carbon footprint, I'd spend less money on gas, so forth and so on. But on the other side of it, the school that was closest to our home had a better theater program for her.

So my concern was that means she's getting on the bus that has a bunch of students on it, and she's allergic to certain things, and the bus is spewing all kinds of fuel out. Then if she has something after school, I still have to pick her up in my car, and take her home. And I'm like, "This is absolutely bananas."

Now it ended being the best thing for her, but that broadened my carbon footprint from maybe 10% to 50%. So we make these ecological decisions every day without being aware of it.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Right. Exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So tell us a little bit about your research, your current research, and some of the things that you're working on now.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah. So my teaching drives a lot of my research now. So my earlier research was on complexity and systems thinking. Systems thinking I describe as critical thinking skills for understanding complexity, complex systems. Like ecosystems, like societies.

And so how, if we can learn those skills, does that improve people's ability to understand environmental systems? And that was really what drove my early research with my dissertation. And I've gotten back to that a little bit looking at... So I do teach a fair amount of systems thinking. Resilience thinking is very similar. It just coined it as something new to call it, basically. And I do a fair amount of that in one of the courses that I teach. So I'm looking at developing online tools to see how that improves systems thinking.

And then the other thing that really fell out of a different course that I teach, a capstone course, is just looking at the concept of hope within the context of sustainability in some of our more challenging environmental issues, and the directions that they're going. And looking at particularly how students who plan to have a career addressing environmental issues, how do they frame hope, and what tools can we offer in order to make them personally resilient through those careers?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And I would be so bold as to say that those of us who engage in sustainability practices are signaling our levels of hope or aspirations of hope, that something good will come out of those practices. Right?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Right. On some level, just about everything we do has some sort of future focus, which has hope layered in there. I guess what's interesting about it to me is when you juxtapose it with goal setting... So with goal setting, often the more effective goals are the ones that are very specific, right? Because then you've got something to visualize. So there's that on one side of it. In the context of hope, it's a term that can mean so many different things and have so many different layers. So there's hope in a very specific outcome.

And then there's a hope as almost an attitude, a perspective I'm taking on. So whatever happens, I'm still going to be working toward a better future than if I wasn't working toward to address whatever the issues are. And I guess it's that second one.

The first one honestly kind of scares me a little bit. When we talk about some of the goals staying within two degrees Celsius in terms of climate change, I don't know where I'd put my money on that one in terms of those two degrees. I would suspect we're going to be beyond those two degrees. But I think being a little bit beyond those two degrees is way better than being way beyond those two degrees.

So I would hate to have goals become a source of cynicism once we don't meet those. Then what do you do with your career, behavior, that kind of thing?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It's interesting because I remember seeing something on the news one day where they were talking about how air quality, and water quality, and other environmental factors were experiencing signs of benefits in the midst of the pandemic, because people weren't driving cars, and all kinds of other things were happening.

So now we have environmentalists who are saying, "Now we know what we should do if we want to improve the environment." Because we didn't have airplanes in the sky, we didn't have cars driving. And we saw all these things starting to change almost rapidly, even in the first two weeks that we were shut down, that we thought were going to be just two weeks.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Right. Sure.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So there's this whole notion of hope that's also built on unexpected outcomes of situations that might not have seemed hopeful.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Right. Right. Exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So when you started talking about your research, the first thing you said was that much of your research is predicated or attached to your teaching. And so I'm interested to know why you like teaching. And talk more about some of the things that you're currently teaching.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah. I've always liked being in a classroom and interacting with students. I don't suggest that this should be the decision rubric for students necessarily, going through their own paths.

But I didn't necessarily know with any of my degrees, what I really wanted to do with it exactly upon finishing it. What I knew was that this is a really interesting thing that I want to play with for a while. Really interesting idea, or set of ideas, or what have you.

So I think I just really like working with these difficult concepts and ideas, and chewing on them with other people, and really getting into a much more nuanced understanding of these and how these could play out in the context of real-world dynamics.

So eventually I had the PhD and they were like, "Well, you got to start teaching more now if you want to stay a part of this atmosphere." And that's what I've done, and I've taught a lot of different topics.

My first job coming out of my doctorate, I was at a field school in Turks and Caicos Islands looking at marine resource management down there. The one common denominator is that interaction with students. You can throw me into lots of different situations. If I know the content or I can learn the content, then I'm probably going to do okay. I'm just building up a rapport with the students. That's what I really enjoy about it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So what are you currently teaching that... I'm especially interested in knowing about something that you're currently teaching that you're finding fascinating or that's turning out much differently than what you expected.

Dr. Richard Plate:

So I just developed a new course last fall. So this is the second time we're running it now, called Science of Sustainability. And we developed it because we wanted to make sure that our students had a really strong scientific background with their degree.

And I have to say, again, I know more what you may think of as biological ecology than your typical social scientist probably does, because I do deal a little bit more with that. But again, my research has almost wholly been on the social side of it.

So what I ended up doing was taking what was one or two weeks of a course, of a survey course, or a foundations course. And I pulled that and then just expanded that into what do I really want to be able to say about this, and what do I really want students to know? In terms of addressing a lot of misconceptions. In terms of just understanding in this case how atoms and molecules are moving around, and how that affects our lives.

So that's been a real joy and a real learning experience in many ways, to get into those. And I really have learned a lot from just engaging with that material more deeply, I guess I should say, than I ever had before. And now it's really fun.

So I'm using our new tool, Yellowdig, which is an online discussion tool. What that does that our other tools, at least ones that I've used, haven't done before, is allows for students to have more autonomy over the topics that they're going to discuss with each other.

So seeing how apply these kinds of scientific ideas, or concepts, or mental models, and how they use them to interpret local news stories and things like that, or contemporary stories has just been a real joy.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So we know that there's this one fabulous course that you are teaching on The Science of Sustainability, that's in the Environmental Studies program. So tell us more about the Environmental Studies degree program, and what it's designed to do, and what opportunities students might have? Excuse me. In relationship to engaging in a major like Environmental Studies.

Dr. Richard Plate:

The purpose that I see for our degree... And we have two tracks that students can take. We have communication and planning, and we have the sciences. So all students will take the same set of core courses, including that science and sustainability course that I mentioned. And then depending on the track, they'll focus more on those kind of natural sciences, or focus more on communication, policy, that kind of thing.

On whichever side they take though, I see the goal as they will be the leaders in driving productive conversations about the types of environmental challenges that we're facing right now.

So some of them might be closer to the taking soil samples, and water samples, and chemical analysis. So even those folks, you need to know, why are you asking the questions that you're asking in your research? Environmental studies, it's very little evidence, just curiosity, purely for curiosity's sake.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

In education, we would call that action-oriented.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

[inaudible 00:22:05] asset-oriented rather than deficit-oriented.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Okay. I'm not familiar with that. Asset-oriented?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Asset.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Asset-oriented. Okay. Interesting. So getting to think about that, how is this information that I'm collecting going to be useful later? And by whom can it be used by?

And then on the communication and planning, I see that as a lot of interpretation there. A lot of being able to be that link between, find the data on the one hand, scientific data, and people understanding that. Expressing it or allowing people to consume it in a way that's going to be meaningful to them, what they can understand, what matters to them. That kind of stuff.

And then vice versa, being able to have that communication go the other way so that to some degree, anyway, it is some of those general and public concerns that are driving some of that research as well.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. And shifting the conversation just slightly, I want to talk about the way in which we're engaged as a society in general. And it seems that as a society, we are having a difficult time discussing our views with viewpoints that are different from our own. We're in this moment now where if we disagree with someone, it becomes automatically contentious, as opposed to learning how to disagree respectfully with people and being appreciative of other people's viewpoints, even if they are different from your own. So why is it important for environmental studies majors to be able to contribute to or lead productive discussions about how to address environmental challenges?

Dr. Richard Plate:

A lot of our environmental issues touch very personal parts of our lives. So we end up with a lot of stakeholders that are involved in these conversations, that are coming at these issues from vastly different perspectives.

So we tend to view someone with a vastly different perspective than our own, as a barrier of some kind. "I know how this all works. I get it, and this person needs to get it, and then we can all move on." That's often our go-to approach.

And I try to encourage our students to see people who again, have these vastly different views from their own, as resources. Because I take it from the assumption of our own blind spots. That we all have blind spots, that we all have limited understanding. No matter how long we've been studying or researching a particular topic, we're always coming at it from our perspective, and we're not going to see everything. And by definition, those folks who have that vastly different perspective than yours, they're seeing things differently. I try to have students think more in terms of what can I learn from this person rather than how can I browbeat this person into believing exactly what I believe?

And it doesn't mean I want students to be gullible or easily swayed, but certainly to have a more nuanced understanding. In lots of ways, partly because I think they can learn more about the system that way. But also on a purely, almost, even a Machiavellian level, if your end goal is to get that person behaving differently than they're behaving now, then it behooves one to really try to understand why they're behaving the way they're behaving now.

So I do an exercise with students in my foundations class where they have to pick environmental issues that they care deeply about. Identify a specific behavior within the context of that issue that is the worst thing you can think of doing in terms of acting responsibly within the context of that issue.

Then I have them come up with a character. A realistic person, nuance. They can't use stupid or selfish. They have to push beyond the labels we want to put on people who don't agree with what we think. And they have to come up with why is this person behaving this way. I think that kind of approach helps us to avoid villainizing people and really get at, "Well, what do we agree on?"

Because you spend so much time focused on points in disagreement, and often don't take enough time to go, "Well, let's look at where the common ground is first." And then that helps us to identify the specific point of contention that we have here, and then let's try to manage through that, now that we've got this understanding.

I think COVID-19 showed a lot of people how again, it's an issue that involved science, a lot of fairly new science, a lot of policy things, a lot of very personal decisions. And I think everyone get to see how messy those kinds of discussions can be. In an environmental context, we've been dealing with that kind of stuff for decades. Similar dynamics of those situations.

So being able to manage those, not to be able to come up with all the answers. Because the answers we're going to be able to have to come up with along the way, and those might change as we learn more and what have you. But being able to foster those relationships that are going to help us navigate those challenges now and into the future, is where I think our students can really find their niche.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And that's a really interesting way to look at it. I couldn't help but think about something I had seen on TV. I'm a huge Downton Abbey fan. I know it's kind of quirky, but I'm that nerdy professor that watches all the period pieces.

And I remember seeing an episode early on in the series where Matthew Crawley, who was the heir to Downton Abbey in the estate, comes into the town. They assign him a butler and all of the other accoutrements of aristocratic living.

And he's a middle class guy. He's a lawyer who's used to dressing himself, and not having to dress in a tuxedo and tails for dinner, and all of those things. And he's just pushing it away, and he's wagging his finger at Lord Grantham like, "This is a waste of time and money." Blah, blah, blah, and so forth and so on.

And the poor guy who's assigned to him at the Butler is frustrated because he can't do his job, because this guy is pushing away at all of these things.

And the conversation that Lord Grantham has with Matthew Crawley is, "It's not that we think all these things are must haves. It's about the fact that the people who serve in these roles, they have a purpose. They want to feel like they're useful. And if we get rid of them, they no longer feel like they're useful."

Now, did it mean that Lord Grantham or Matthew Crawley were right or wrong? No, it was just a different perspective on that kind of life and that lifestyle. And so being able to help our students understand that there are different perspectives to all kinds of issues, and how do we get all these people together to have that conversation in a way that's meaningful for both sides is important.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. No, I think that's a great example of how often we talk past each other. Everyone is saying things that aren't necessarily untrue, but they're never really addressing the other perspective, and what's at the heart of those other perspectives.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:



Absolutely. So in your opinion, if there is one thing that people can get right now to address environmental issues, what would that one thing be?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Wow. Okay. I have a few different answers to this. So one thing I would say is... I guess this is the suite of things. But becoming informed and voting, letting what you know about the environmental challenges that we're facing. And those environmental challenges overlap completely with social challenges.

Too often I think, they seem to be pitted against, like we have to either care about environment or these social things. And absolutely, they come together. Absolutely. So becoming informed about the challenges that we're facing and allowing that to inform one's decisions on a ballot.

I think even the most environmentally conscious of politicians, they're going to focus on the issues that are going to move votes, that they feel like their constituents want them to focus on. I would like to see more of that pressure. So a lot of people care about environment, but it ends up being fifth, sixth, and seventh in line of issues that they vote on when they go. So bumping those environmental concerns up and really letting those have a role in one's decisions for voting, I think is important.

And I open with that because that... That's not to take us off the hook for our own individual behavior too. But I do think a lot of the big changes that we're talking about will have to come from policy changes, that then facilitate the types of behavioral changes that we're looking for.

That said, I'm an incrementalist. So I feel like everyone can do something right. For me, I think it's important, to my point earlier, to not little others for what they're not doing necessarily environmentally. But I think if each of us can try to figure out what's one extra step I can take this week, or this month, or whatever.

So for example, food is probably our closest relationship to the environment. You can live in the middle of New York City, and you're connected to the environment by what you eat. A much broader kind of footprint of land, by which we're eating.

So making one switch to a more responsible product, whatever that is, based on whatever one can afford. And then that becomes the norm, that becomes what that product costs you. So a lot of what we think of as expensive or not expensive of different items, it's relative to what we're used to seeing.

So for me, I'll just use this as an example. I don't know what a dozen eggs cost from a factory farm, because I just never shopped there. So I know what eggs cost that I think are being produced in a more ethical manner, in a more sustainable manner. So making that little switch along the way. And a lot of the times, those switches do require more money being shelled out.

So I make sure with my students, that's what I tell them. "I get that you're on a budget right now, that your refrigerator is not going to be filled with the most responsible choices one could make. And don't beat yourself up about it, but figure out what you can do. What works within your budget?" And food, I think, because it's something that's just so personal to us, is a great way to-

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And there are all kinds of little things that anybody can do that would have an impact in relationship to the environment. So for instance, carrying your own shopping bag as opposed to using a plastic bag. Or if you have to get a bag from the supermarket, to get a paper bag instead of a plastic bag, because paper is recyclable.

And it's interesting that sometimes, people don't think that some of the little things that they're doing are making a difference. But there's always something that each of us can do incrementally that costs little to no money really, and sometimes can even save you money.

So for instance, if you're looking to buy new furniture... Outside of a bed, I wouldn't recommend buying a used mattress. But you could almost get anything from a variety of different websites where people were selling something that they've already had, as opposed to buying something brand new. And I could probably go on for days about that kind of stuff, because I do that kind of stuff regularly.

Dr. Richard Plate:

But I think that's true. I tell my students, "Every dollar you spend is a vote for whatever had to happen to bring that product or service into being." So vote with your money as well. Absolutely. Yeah.

There was an interesting study where they were looking at decreasing energy consumption in households. And the thing that made the biggest switch was just putting the electric meter, electricity meter where you could see it from the kitchen window, and not in kilowatt-hours. Because kilowatt-hours aren't particularly meaningful to us.

But you put dollars and cents in there, suddenly without any other instructions about what to do, you saw Jurassic reductions because people would see those pennies adding by the minute kind of thing. And, "Well wait, what happens if we turn this off then?" And suddenly, people become more environmentally conscious. So you're right. The economics, the finances can actually support the more responsible behavior.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So one of the things that most people in American society know a little bit about in relationship to the environment is Earth Day. If you went to elementary school, public school somewhere, or you watch the news, or PBS, somebody's talking about Earth Day right around when it's happening. And depending on what community you live in or what kinds of things you're involved in, you might end up planting a tree, or getting a plant as a gift, or whatever. So let's talk about why Earth Day is important, and what's typically encompassed in Earth Day.

Dr. Richard Plate:

So I tend to view Earth Day kind of like I view Thanksgiving, or Mother's Day, or Father's Day. So on the one hand, every day should be Earth Day. It's not like you disrespect your mother 364 days out of the year, and then appreciate her one day. So on one hand-

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Some of us wouldn't live past that one day, right?

Dr. Richard Plate:

That's true. So we should be paying attention to our relationship with the environmental systems that support us. All of us, we're breathing air, we're drinking water. We need food. We're biological beings at a fundamental level. And becoming conscious of that is important.

So I see Earth Day as setting that time aside to make sure we're emphasizing those connections, to maybe reset a little bit. It's so easy to let day-to-day frustrations or whatever, to let these other things fill our attention, and then stop thinking about this fundamental connections that we have. So Earth Day

is a chance to, I think, reset, to become more aware of those connections, and then also more aware of possibilities.

So often the Earth Day festivals that you see around are usually filled with really interesting, or different things to buy and to switch out from what you're already buying, or different ideas to save energy, or save water, and that kind of thing.

So I see it both as conceptual, that kind of really focus on it, take a moment to. And when you don't make a point to do that other times to really think about it now... And then it also just becomes that mixing ground for new ideas, practical ideas.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So I'm going to challenge our listeners and viewers as Earth Day approaches, to think about some one thing that they might do that day, that they wouldn't typically do, that might contribute to the environment.

So when I was in elementary school, Earth Day was the day that we were not allowed to watch TV, which didn't bother me because I read books all the time. But my siblings, that was a whole other thing.

But it also encouraged us to go outside and play, to have a picnic, or to grill outside. Because all the electronics were off. Couldn't watch TV, couldn't listen to the radio, couldn't do any of those things, because it was Earth Day. So that was what we did. I think everybody can do something that could actually become a new habit that would contribute to the environment.

So I'm going to challenge our listeners and viewers, to think about that one thing that they can do on Earth Day that would contribute to our environment and to society as a whole.

And so now, we have entered our speed round section of our discussion today. So the speed round, as I call it, is an opportunity to learn more about our guest, about a variety of different things. And so I'm just going to throw out a bunch of different questions, and you answer them with the first thing that comes to your mind. I'm going to start with a couple of easy things that you don't have to think about so much. Okay? So first one, favorite song?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Favorite song.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That was supposed to be easy-

Dr. Richard Plate:

That was supposed to be easy. I have musicians that I like. When it's the song... Because I think of the sentiment. Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head, because of the sentiment of the song. If I had to say one song, that would probably be it. I sing that to my son a lot. Poorly, but I sing it to my son a lot.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

All right. Favorite TV show?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Probably The Good Place in terms of the relatively recent shows. I thought they just did an artful job of some pretty heavy philosophical issues, in a light, fun, and practical way.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite move?

Dr. Richard Plate:

The Big Lebowski. I actually insert Big Lebowski references into a lot of my quizzes, and I'm getting fewer and fewer students who recognize them. But I get a few and then we laugh.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Favorite place to vacation?

Dr. Richard Plate:

We like to go to new places as much as we can. But my wife is from Norway, so we do make it back there more often than any other place. And I get a big kick out of that. Especially now, I have a four-year-old, so we want to make sure that he has a sense of those roots as well. So I'd say Norway.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite musician?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Probably Tom Waits right now. Maybe Jack Johnson. Those are the two that I listen to a lot these days anyway.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite color?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Color blue.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Very good. All right, next trip?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Next trip. In June, we'll head down to the Keys, Florida Keys for a week. So usually pre-kid, we would do more adventure travel. Now, we move much more slowly with a lot more stuff too. So I think the Keys is just about the right speed for us, for this summer.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That sounds fabulous. All right. Past or present, who are three people you would invite to dinner?

Dr. Richard Plate:

So not necessarily living?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Not necessarily living, no.

Dr. Richard Plate:

Okay. Peter Matthiessen is a writer, both novelist and does a lot of science writing. Fair amount of it is set in Florida. Maya Angelou.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Love her.

Dr. Richard Plate:

I see both of them as village elders for the country, basically, or the world. Aldo Leopold wrote several books on environment, one called Sand County Almanac. It's sort of like my environmental Bible, I guess. So all my students get exposed to some bit of Leopold in my classes. Three. I think those would be the three. That would be an interesting dinner for sure.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I bet. Okay. One last question. If you could speak any foreign language fluently in this very instant, what would it be?

Dr. Richard Plate:

Interesting. Gosh. And then I would just have that language going forward?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yes.

Dr. Richard Plate:

So this could get me into a little bit of trouble. So Norwegian for family reasons, would be a wise choice. And I speak a little bit of Norwegian now. I'd probably do better with Norwegian. Spanish would be the other language, I think just because of the amount of people that speak it both in Florida and around the world. I've been in lots of situations where I wish I spoke better Spanish than I do. But I have to put an asterisk by Norwegian as well there, in case any of my family members listen. That's definitely on the radar as well.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Excellent. Well, thank you Dr. Plate, for joining us on Academically Speaking. We really enjoyed having you and listening to your thoughts around environmental studies and interdisciplinary ecology. I think this will be an opportunity for lots of our listeners and viewers to learn more about those subjects. And thank you for being here with us.

Dr. Richard Plate:

My pleasure. Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

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And thank you to our viewers and listeners. This is Dr. Theodora Regina Berry for Academically Speaking.