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EDUCATION FOR A NEW WORLD VIEW

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Can education help in the cultural healing that seems necessary to cure a sick environment? David Orr (1990), playing devil's advocate, suggests that education is not the solution but part of the problem. Knowledge is power, and the more we know the more we throw our weight around. After all, he says, well-educated people not illiterates are wrecking the planet. Schools and universities are morally bankrupt, most research is worthless busywork, while new knowledge creates increasing ignorance of how to handle it - witness the exposure of our ignorance of the atmosphere by the CFC ozone-destroying fiasco - and so he asks, "Is Conservation Education an oxymoron?"

Orr's point is that education continues to serve an outworn system that fabricates human-wealth "goods" at the escalating cost of environmental "bads," including the extermination of other species, pollution of water, air and land, deforestation, expanding deserts and the degradation of soils. Top-loading the system with ever more data and facts to foster an "informed society" - a traditional role of education - does not counter the world's increasing instability. Western culture is disoriented not so much from lack of information as from wrong values and beliefs, chief of which is the conviction that humans have the God-given right to dominate, control and manage the entire Earth and all that is in it. If education proceeds from this axiom it is indeed a threat, adding fuel to environmental conflagrations rather than helping to dampen their flames.

Fortunately the attitudes that are sapping the environment's health and sabotaging prospects for a viable future are not instinctive but cultural. They can be changed by better understanding the planet's history and our own natural history, by better appreciating the evolutionary story that relates us to other organisms, and by better comprehending ecology that dissolves the boundaries between ourselves and the landscape ecosystems within which we live. Comprehension generates its appropriate values, chief of which - with things revealed to us as important - are sympathy and care.

Should values be taught in school? Inescapably they always are. Whether we like it or not, ethical standards are implicit in all subjects taught. Recognition and acceptance that education is necessarily normative clears the way for more important questions: What values should be taught? What values are in harmony with ecological truths? Then education's task is clarified as the leading away (*educo*) from conventional beliefs/values/attitudes that the realities of a worsening world are proving false. Its duty is to foster a new frame of reference for all that we think and do, a reorientation toward deeper and truer insights that have the power to set this and succeeding generations on a more charitable and creative path vis-a-vis the surrounding world.

So Little Ecology for the Mind

The historian and educator Hilda Neatby (1953) recounted a story about Lincoln Steffins, editor and author, who travelled to Europe just after his graduation from university. The turning point in his education came when he met a group of Oxford men and listened to their discussions. "Those men never mentioned themselves," he said. "Their interest was in the world outside of themselves...their conversations...established in me the realization that *the world was more interesting than I was*." Neatby added, "Here is as good a definition of education as any: the discovery that the world is more interesting than oneself. It is also a good definition of citizenship, and of mental health."

Hindsight from the 1990s shows the revelation is deeper than Neatby, Steffins and the Oxford men suspected, for in their time the appreciation of human ecology was weak and "the world" meant only the universe of society and culture, comprising human thoughts, words and deeds. The matrix of civilization, the natural world from which the built and cultural environments are drawn, was unimportant. Only people mattered. Works of art drew metaphorically on nature but without a deep sense of its importance. T.S. Eliot's important poem *The Waste Land*, written in 1922, is less a prescient judgement on the state of the world than a melancholy commentary on a failed society - and on Eliot's failed first marriage.

Fortunately, just in time, the literal truth of the statement that the world is more interesting than ourselves is gaining converts (Mungall and McLaren, 1990). The world's interest lies not only in its beauty and creativity but in its inherent worth. Both the moon-shots of Planet Earth from the outside, showing an integrated ecological system, and a growing conviction on the inside that we deep-air animals are fouling the vital layers of our abode, are conducive to a speedy re-evaluation of the world and our just role in it.

In revising school curricula both perspectives, that of the planet-as-whole and of people-as-participants within it, cry out for primary attention. The two together, comprising human ecology, should be; both; together; combined; educationally; revolutionary; understanding; human; ecology civilization; will; continue; it; self-serving; and; suicidal; way; guidance; ecological; comprehension; meaning; use; also; traditional; curriculum; subject; border; further; possible; will; continue; to; stray.

Appreciating the Planet as Ecosphere

Western religions, arts and sciences reflect a cultural obsession with two relationships: Man to God, and Man to Man. Earth and Women - symbolically related and stigmatized as inferior - have largely been ignored. Their joint rediscovery today is the other side of a growing suspicion that what comes naturally to the combative male in an aggressive economy is no longer appropriate. Widespread environmental degradation is the sign that the limits to belligerent exploitation of a fixed Earth-space have already been exceeded. A less masculine approach to the people-Nature relationship recommends itself. Henceforth, a higher degree of care, compliance and cooperation will make for a sustained and better home.

The Home to which we belong and to which we must adapt is the Ecosphere, literally the Home-sphere. For 4.6 billion years it has evolved under beneficent sunlight as a unitary being, differentiating related parts - atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, sediments, organisms - in an ongoing process that will continue for several billion more years. Notice that organisms are one kind of differentiated *part*, integral with air, water and soil of which they are composed. Late comers such as we, tracing our history of humanness for only a few million years, nevertheless stem from an ancestral line that goes back to the beginning of time. Our species is one twig on a branching tree, rooted in air/water/soil, whose bacterial origins have been found imprinted in ancient rocks three and one half billion years old. Organisms are simply one expression of the Ecosphere's creative vivacity.

The idea that "life" and "organisms" are the same is a harmful half-truth. How long would organisms be alive if separated from the supportive Ecosphere? Without sunlight moderated by the atmosphere, without earth-heat, without water and air, without minerals and nutrients, no organic things could be conceived nor could they survive. Therefore life is a function of the Ecosphere and its sectoral land and water ecosystems. Protecting and maintaining *them* is the only way to protect and maintain life, including our lives. To separate Earth's surface into animate and inanimate, biotic and abiotic, living and dead, devalues the inorganic as "mere environment." It sets up organic things like us as all-important, allowing exploitation and ruination of the rest. Education should teach the truth and value of complete Earth Spaces as superior to the inorganic/organic parts that they encapsulate. Only then can the various disciplines of the sciences and arts be set in a life-supporting context.

People Participants in the Ecosphere

Note that *all* human learning needs to be reoriented and not just the sciences. A sense of the profound importance of human ecology will radically alter our view of politics and economics, of philosophy and religion. The related history

of these four fields points up the problem.

Both the story of philosophy since Plato and the story of religion in the Judaeo-Christian tradition clearly show that only people have mattered. On this questionable base the liberal tradition that grew out of the 18th century Age of Enlightenment built a strong case for individualism. The doctrine asserts that the person is the primary reality, an object of intrinsic importance with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness through acquisition of property. Society is secondary, a prudent gathering together by contractual agreements in order to protect the rights of individuals. The liberal view has of course been challenged by a parallel communitarian tradition claiming that people are better understood as sexual beings, social beings, cultural beings. Without the support of others they cannot exist, reproduce, think and act. Therefore each person is a part of the collectivity. The vaunted rights of individuals have no meaning without social responsibilities which provide the basis for individuality.

All political and economic theories are organized around this individual/society dichotomy, championing liberty or equality, freedom or justice, privatization or communal ownership, the free market or the planned economy. Yet both sides share a common people-centered philosophy that implies an indifference if not antipathy to Nature. On the one side is our self-congratulatory species marvelling at itself:

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! (Hamlet, Act 2, Sc. 2).

On the other side is the mere Earth, often treated as dross. Nature, said C. S. Lewis (1946), is the material world after all of human worth has been wrung out of it. From this prevalent viewpoint, other-than-human nature is without inherent value. There it is, just so much stuff for us to manipulate, exploit and transform - according to Francis Bacon, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, respectively.

Sickness in the Ecosphere is symptomatic of these wrong-headed beliefs. Battered nature is insisting that a third possibility be explored. Beyond the individual and the society, though including them both, lies another substantial reality: the Ecosphere. It is no contractual expedient, not a prudential organization, but a supra-human reality that transcends in time and space the dialectic of individual/society, offering a higher level synthesis and presenting new possibilities to the question of who in the World we are. It tells us that people are ecological beings - parts of the Ecosphere's sectoral ecosystems - and people's rights and social responsibilities must be harmonized to that indisputable fact. Social, political and economic order may be only a matter of agreement between autonomous individuals, but ecological order follows laws of a higher level - not

those enacted by one species for its convenience.

In educational theory this means elevating ecology to a position of leadership over the unruly social/individual duo that, straining in opposite directions, generates social disharmony and paralysis. The goal of human ecology - the search for a healthy people/Planet relationship - must set the direction and be the arbiter of conflicting "truths" that knowledge of the collectivity and of the individual yield. Human ecology has much to contribute on the subjects of progress, personal freedom, aesthetics, private property, social welfare, population growth, national aspirations and the constructive pursuit of knowledge. The goal of a liberating education - understanding what it means to be human in a living world - needs first attention in the curriculum.

Faith in Science

We in the West have led the way in convincing the world that progress is action, progress is change. Furthermore, we have been leaders in devising the mental and physical tools for progress: science and technology. Underlying our dedication to action and change is the faith that all problems, including environmental problems, will yield to science/technology.

Science and its methods are so pervasive in our culture that they have come to be the exemplar of how we ought to think and act: objectively and rationally. Other equally important modes of knowing - artistic and affective - have been blurred by science's prestige. It has offered young people the promise of selfless service and a high calling in the search for Truth. The status of science, along with its language of mathematics, is preeminent in educational curricula. In this there lies a terrible danger.

Science is a cultural pursuit, meaning that it is rooted in our western philosophical tradition. It both reflects and reinforces society's dominant values and goals. As a body of confirmed knowledge and as a way of getting knowledge, science has been human-centered not world-centered, homocentric not ecocentric. Its traditional agenda, hidden because unquestioned, is service to humanity no matter what the costs to the rest of creation. Its traditional goal is manipulation and control. Its methodology is intensely masculine, aggressive, competitive and non-affective. The answer to the question, "Why are so few women attracted to science?" is staring us in the face.

Science is instrumental, a means harnessed to human goals. As long as the goals are wrong, science will be part of the problem not the answer. Because of its inertia, because of its vast literature of control/manipulation, because of its focus on remaking nature for human convenience rather than on understanding and working cooperatively with nature for sustainability, science itself needs to be rescued and renovated. Science's new direction must be the caring search for

knowledge that is harmonious with a larger-than-species vision, ecocentric not homocentric.

Ecocentric Education

For the last 25 years educationists have recognized the ballooning importance of the environment. How do we deal with it? We must establish a curriculum that challenges and encourages teaching and learning about the environment, environmental concerns, environmental classes, environmental ideas, environmental subjects, environmental focus, environmental calculation, environmental recognition, environmental subject, environmental special, environmental mathematics, environmental importance, environmental budget, environmental recognition, environmental department, environmental establishment, environmental leadership, environmental finance, environmental life, environmental preservation, environmental importance, environmental ecology, environmental ideology, environmental requirements, environmental eruptions, environmental schools, environmental centers, environmental subjects, environmental whickeys, environmental otherness, and environmental harmonization.

A core curriculum reflects a consensus that certain subjects have paramount importance. The core ensures that everyone is exposed to the great truths of a culture and to the means of communicating them. I contend that in today's world *human ecology* must be the single essential core.

This is not an argument for ecology misconceived as a subdiscipline of biology, studying populations and communities of plants and animals in laboratory and field. Such traditional "science" is useful insofar as it introduces young people to the natural world and its marvels, trivial insofar as it perpetuates the myths of objectivity and truth-as-quantitative-measurements. Human ecology is far broader and deeper, considering all people and their cultures as components within an evolving ecological system, the Ecosphere. People as parts must serve the whole - or bring on their own pathological demise. Humanity's arts and sciences must harmonize with the greater surrounding reality - or speed the race to an ignoble end.

Conclusion

"Education For A New World View" suggests a fresh purpose for education in the Age of Ecology: to lead learners away from the ignorance of their species-centered universe to a wider more invigorating view of planet Earth as a creative being, inviting humanity's cooperation and care. Such a purpose, necessary to reorient humanity to the right order of things, challenges education at its deepest levels. It cannot be met simply by increasing the ecology content of the biological sciences nor by ingeniously exploiting those occasional sympathetic references to Nature within the arts curriculum. The goal - new to us and strange - requires a radical reversal of emphasis, shifting the spotlight away from humanity and focussing it on the World-in-which-humanity-exists-as-part.

H.G. Wells' opinion that education is always in a race with chaos seems amply verified today. We desperately need to learn a new way of knowing - a new kind of science, one equally attractive to women as to men - whose goal is compassionate service to the Ecosphere and to humanity as a symbiotic part within it. With such science providing the New World View and lighting the path, the Humanities and Social Sciences might also be reoriented ecologically. On the other hand, why should they not lead the way, giving the cue to the natural sciences?

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