

Human Ecology and Ecological Humanism

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ABSTRACT In the present paper the statement on principles of both ecological humanism, as well as human ecology is discussed. This statement is evolved by personal experience and thinking and discussion with friends, colleagues and number of other people.

The big picture posed by the coupling of the terms human and ecology gets lost all too easily, whether with minor details or the daily round of activities or the petty divergencies and irrelevancies of our lives. To make good use of the concepts, "human ecology" and "ecological humanism" a set of clear principles or guidelines may be helpful. Accordingly, for my own personal use, I drew up a tentative statement which may be of interest or help to others. My statement represents principles of both ecological humanism, as well as human ecology.

The statement evolved from my own personal experiences and thinking, dialogues with colleagues and friends, and a unique exchange of ideas with several people *via* e-mail over a year or so. These recent communiques have been, as we say here in New Zealand, a lovely opportunity to explore ideas.

In looking for principles about ecological development, our ideas led to and then triggered agreement, debate and further thought. The draft statement is designed to elicit, solicit and welcome reactions and further dialogue.

HUMAN ECOLOGY, ECOLOGICAL HUMANISM, AND DEVELOPMENT - PREMISES

Through a stimulating exchanges of ideas and information with friends, I found myself thinking deeply about human ecology, ecological humanism, and ecological development. The story of these friends and the exchanges has yet to be told, and that is another chapter. For now, I feel a need to state some beliefs, naive

or otherwise, with the intent of writing that which I feel and think, to aid my personal and professional growth and development.

The Premises

1. It is better to know and to be aware than it is to hide - even though the future and the content of what we get to know may be difficult, frightening or worse.

This statement came from reading about various accounts of human despair. For some people, the more you know the worse it looks "out there." Equally, the statement derives from various statements about people who are waking up, *i.e.*, becoming aware. To me it seems that we must face the present reality and future scenarios with full information and equally full awareness, as complete as we can muster.

However, we may also need to recognize that many people can not handle the brutal truth of what may be an ugly future scenario that may descend upon us, that they need shields or beliefs that protect them. Though we can gently nudge these people, they have to become awake on their own. We can not forcibly waken them, although we can stimulate ideas, create appropriate settings, and set up opportunities.

I am reminded of the old saying, the night is darkest just before the dawn.

Looking at the scientific information available, I confess that the future of mankind is pretty dark out there, and I despair sometimes too. But, on the other hand, we live in the here and now, and the future is predictions - not reality. We can and do influence the future, and so full information, even and perhaps especially that which is shocking and dreadful, is valuable. Understanding the truth of our situation is helpful, just as action too is essential. But our actions must be based on accurate understanding of the here and now. Even with action, we may not succeed - that is part of the dilemma of being alive. We do not know the outcomes for our-

selves and our civilizations and globe - but then, we never did know before the present time either.

2. Knowledge is not wisdom.

The massive information resources that we have created must be placed in perspective, moderated, measured, evaluated, studied, analyzed and critiqued, continually and deeply. A place continues to exist for the rational mind, as well as scientific, humanitarian, socially oriented and every other type of mind. Those of us with a good education, strong life experiences, position or status, or other fortunate situations, must use what we have to moderate information in sensible ways. We must circulate ideas, exchange thoughts, engage in group learning processes with diverse others. In that process, we can enable others to become aware and to use their own beings towards achieving worthy ends via meaningful ways, however they define that process.

3. The past does offer information, but not answers and not wisdom. We need to study the past, carefully and in depth, but we cannot look to the past for all the answers to today's problems and issues.

Various observations, for example, about the contract people have with their land and environment, are often based on history. Many people have given up on the use of history, and fail to find value in study and analysis of what has been in the past. Still, the traditions, information, events, and ideas from the past have a tremendous effect upon us. Any rejection of history is, I think, only partial, that is, even though we can not find the answers there, we can still learn from history and use that knowledge. Our current situation may be unique, but that does not mean that we can afford to ignore what was, or deny, or avoid. We can use history and go on via extrapolation and prediction and eventually action based on our understandings of historical progression.

4. It is human and good to seek survival and advantage, as people have been doing that for millions of years, and that is not different from animal and plant life which also seek similar outcomes given our global environment.

When one speaks of biological imperatives

and the interests of individuals, that makes me think that yes, those are given, but, at the same time, the effects of a good education are such that one does not act in short term modes and for self interest only. Unfortunately in our times, we seem to have more than our share of short term private profit motivation and people who have excessively greedy selves. In the long run and for the public good and for the environment, this is sheer disaster. The "me" generation and attitudes formed by extreme views about the value of oneself are one of the worst excesses of global failure.

Still, survival and the struggle for advantage are going to continue, only I and others hope that the longer term views prevail and that group or collective or interactive modes of thought and action will increase. The United States is particularly caught up in a negative short-term attitude. Many other countries have of course joined the United States in turning out more and more greedy leaders and elites. The gap between rich and poor is extreme, and appears to be growing faster all the time. This need not be so.

5. Education and awareness can influence people seeking survival and advantage to think in longer ranges and for wider groupings than self.

Education is important, for changing cognitive and emotional structures and behaviours can create and does quite different results. I think back to the various training and educational experience I had personally, and confess that at the end of those experiences, I was different. I was in some cases made more aware, in others reduced to an almost automated state through an extremely intensive training programme. As a teacher now, I know that some individuals can and do respond and become different as a result of educational experiences. I have also seen that in the field of professional practice. Thus some educational experiences are great, others may actually reduce awareness and growth. One must distinguish between good and poor education and outcomes.

6. The present is filled with contradictions and confusion. The chaos is scary and frightening. We live in a time of change, dramatic change, perhaps more than at any other time

in history. So, it is natural that we should be frightened and confused, for if we were not, we would be ignorant and out of touch with reality.

Times of change have come and gone repeatedly, witness Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin, and others who documented great changes in world history. At such times, the old ways of life cease and new forms or styles begin, thus creating feelings of unease. Death and birth are major life events, and we are witnessing and taking part in the birth and death of a civilization how witnessing and taking part in the birth and death of a civilization - how marvellously exciting, but also how dreadful. Our puny little selves are caught up inextricably in these larger scenarios, and our influence is minor, if any at all. That is frightening.

7. Wonderful new possibilities are opening up thanks to our new technologies. But they must be used appropriately.

The old cliché about think globally and act locally is already passe. We now have opportunities to think and act at a wide range of levels, from internal states of our own being, to our selves as persons, to our families to the various groups to which we belong, to many organizations, to our communities, to our varied nation states and regions, and indeed, even to the global organization of humankind itself. What is really remarkable is that we have the technological means in our hands (computers and the Internet) to act at all of these diverse levels and to have an effect. Although social arrangements may influence or even control us, we in turn can control or at least influence some of these social arrangements. The technological underpinnings may be a bit more difficult, for those who seek advantage are likely to find new and powerful control mechanisms. Vigilance, education, legal rights, care and concern, awareness, and attention to charters, constitutions, and bills of rights are resources that may be extremely useful.

8. Those who seek advantage are likely to continue, unless and until we can devise social arrangement that enable them to modify their behaviour.

That is, we can and should teach the elites, entrepreneurs, and especially those who would

become elites the accountability and responsibility are part of the contract, otherwise they are going to be in social strife that will make their situation untenable and their personal lives miserable. Enlightened leadership is responsive and accountable, unenlightened leadership should be opposed by all people who are "aware".

9. The environment has been damaged, terribly.

Of this environmental destruction, I and most others around the world have no doubt. There is no getting around it, we as a species have virtually destroyed vast parts of the environment, and we are caught up in arrangements that continue to damage the environment. We can change, but changes may or may not be "in time." Changes of the scale required may be insufficient. I feel convinced that we must seek to restore what we can, to renew and rehabilitate, and to find new ways to accommodate to that which is par of us - the environment. Opportunities are many

10. We are redefining the very concept of human being.

Adaptable without parallel, the human animal has potential for more and more and more, and so any static state previously attained has in the longer run proved to be a way station only. We are a long ways from where we are going. And the pain is exciting, interesting, intriguing, indeed fascinating. I enjoy it, each and every day is new and marvellous. Who knows the answers when we have only begun to think about the questions!

CONCLUSION

Human ecology, ecological humanism, and ecological development are concepts central to our time. Setting up and stating principles or premises can give us guidance and direction in our daily lives.

Reactions from others would enable me to grow, to learn, to become more aware. Therefore, I must circulate my ideas about ecology, about humanism, and about development widely. I will personally be thankful for replies and commentary. In the same way, I hope that others will gain from my own search for understanding.