



A Publication of
The Institute for Ecosophical Studies

Winter
Vol. IV, No. 4

HUMAN PEACE ... EARTH PEACE

Not enough attention has been paid to the connections between the obscene global military budget, now over one trillion dollars annually, and the deepening degradation of the planet. Activists for the environment and advocates of world peace and disarmament have their separate organizations, agendas and philosophies. This reflects the wider division between social justice and environmental advocates. The former are frequently criticized for their human-centeredness and narrow perspective while the latter are attacked for their opposition to economic progress and their first-world biases. In reality, however, the issues of military expansion, development and ecological soundness are intertwined.

The enormous amount of money spent on military hardware and personnel is unavailable for economic and social development. As a result, those nations and corporations which have a surplus of capital also have power over the fate of the land and its human inhabitants. Those nations which must rely on export crops for their capital to finance military and urban projects end up destroying traditional rural agriculture and forcing people into environmentally damaging behavior. The illusion of military might as a means of security for a nation-state blinds leaders to the tremendous sources of conflict and insecurity created both between economic blocs and within each nation by their policies.

Mary Evelyn Tucker in her article, "Peace Among Peoples Through Peace with the Earth," examines some of these issues and ties them in with the need for reforms in our educational processes. Outmoded and counter-productive ways of thinking about security, progress, and the human condition itself must be replaced with a more holistic view that sees the well-being of members of the human family as intimately connected with the ongoing well-being of members of the earth community. The overcoming of our divisions and the reconciliation with one another is impossible without a reconciliation with the earth. The first world will find no security by waging economic war on the third world and on the earth. Future generations will inherit our waste and rise up to curse our rapaciousness.

-- Don St. John

NOTE: We are planning another "Reader's Forum" for our summer 1989 issue (Volume V., No. 2). See page 7 for details.

PEACE AMONG PEOPLES THROUGH PEACE WITH THE EARTH

By Mary Evelyn Tucker

Let Us See (Pawnee Indians)

Let us see, is this real,
Let us see, is this real,
Let us see, is this real,
this life I am living?

Ye gods, who dwell everywhere,
Let us see, is this real,
This life I am living?

The reality of a crisis in our times is one that few people would debate although there are many different analyses of its causes, conditions, and cures. We are literally bombarded from many different directions with statistics predicting doomsday either by nuclear destruction or environmental degradation. I would suggest from the outset that these are not unrelated issues, namely military and nuclear build up and environmental pollution.

Moreover, those of us in education may be vital instruments in making the connections between the two explicit and in creating the possibility of change on a large scale. These are lofty words, perhaps, but not an impossible task. They signal a growing recognition that the issues of peace and ecology are, quite simply, those on which the future rests. The following statistics highlight the scope of the issue and underline the urgency of what lies ahead.

First, with regard to peace, let us look at a few figures on military spending in relation to development. During 1986, the year designated as the International Year of Peace, global military spending reached \$900 billion.¹ (It is now estimated at \$1 trillion.) This is more than 25 times that spent on development assistance to countries in need.² The U.S. and the Soviet Union together spend about \$1.5 billion a day on military defense. Present nuclear arsenals represent over 26,000 times the explosive force of all armaments used in World War II. All of this is at a time when one person in five in developing countries is

undernourished and one in five in major industrialized countries is overweight.³ The juxtaposition of such undernourishment and such overkill, one might suggest, has never been matched in human history. For any one who has traveled in third world countries, this juxtaposition becomes starkly apparent. Anger and resentment in the third world over such inequities will no doubt grow significantly stronger over the next few decades.

The size of our own U.S. budget for military expenditure in relation to the sorry state of education or social programs has caused many people to wonder what it is we are defending ourselves from or for. There is something deeply askew in a society where twenty percent are illiterate and where 60,000 homeless live on the streets of New York City, while we ponder the feasibility of Star Wars. Is this bringing us closer to or further from our goals of peace? These are familiar issues to all of us. Yet, because of the capacity of the human to adjust to circumstances, and because of the shadows of comfortable illusion created by the media, we cannot state them frequently enough.

Secondly, with regard to the environment and the use of natural resources, the statistics are almost paralyzing. One-third of the world's cropland is losing soil to erosion. Acid rain from industrial pollution continues to contribute to the death of forests and lakes in the U.S., Canada and Europe. Tropical rain forests are being destroyed at the rate of hundreds of acres per day in South and Central America. Along with this at least one hundred species a day are being eliminated. No comparable rate of extinction has occurred since the Cretaceous period sixty five million years ago. The depletion of the ozone layer is already being felt in the widespread increase in skin cancer.

Water is becoming a precious commodity across the U.S. where in many areas people have contracted intestinal diseases due to polluted drinking water. In this respect we are becoming more like a third world where

polluted drinking water has long been a fact of life. Increasingly, people are buying bottled water or putting filters on their taps. The danger is; we adjust so easily to this. Water is increasingly going to be a key issue around the globe, as all life forms are so clearly dependent upon it.

Because of the critical situation we are facing, and because of the need for educators to respond, curriculum materials have been developed for teachers regarding the severe pollution of Boston Harbor, and the efforts being made to clean it up.⁴ This type of attention to teaching students about the importance of the water cycle in relation to regional problems is an excellent model for other curriculums. Indeed, similar materials are now being developed⁵ for the Long Island Sound bioregion.

Finally, what must be factored into this discussion is the impact on the environment of technological and chemical "advancements". Barry Commoner puts it this way:

New production technologies have replaced old ones. Soap powder has been displaced by synthetic detergents; natural fibers (cotton and wool) have been displaced by synthetic ones; steel and lumber have been displaced by aluminum, plastics, and concrete;...returnable bottles have been displaced by nonreturnable ones. On the farm,...the amount of harvest acreage has decreased; fertilizer (much of it synthetic) has displaced land. Older methods of insect control have been displaced by synthetic insecticides,...and for controlling weeds the cultivator has been displaced by the herbicide spray. Range-feeding of livestock has been displaced by feedlots.⁶

The synthetic, plastic, chemical throw away world in which we live is taken for granted and hailed by many as progress. But we are beginning to realize, it is progress with a price.

The myth of progress or progress with a price

The challenge faced by the human community as we look toward the twenty-first century is one of grave proportions. At present we are living with a non-sustainable industrial bubble, that many feel will inevitably burst. For them it is no longer simply a question of why or wherefore but rather a question of when. The difficulty is that we are all caught within the industrial bubble. First-world societies enjoy many of its benefits, third-world societies want its profits, and few are willing to question the myth which supports the bubble. Unlimited progress and development through consumption of non-renewable resources are still seen as inevitable, desirable and sustainable. To question the myth of progress or development is considered by some to be simply romantic or impractical, or, even worse, un-American and anti-capitalist.

We are caught within the mirage of our own bubble and feed ourselves on the rhetoric of unbridled consumption. Its allurements is mirrored to us from Madison Avenue to Hollywood. Our educational system has become an instrument to provide labor and consumers to perpetuate the cycle. Employment outside the industrial bubble is less lucrative, less attractive, and increasingly less viable. Religious groups are still valiantly concentrating on issues of personal salvation and charitable acts, while psychiatrists piece together the fractured psyches of a population uprooted from a sense of meaning and values which once lent direction to human life. Our crisis, then, is educational and religious as well as economic and environmental.

So, we continue to despoil our rivers, foul our air, destroy our forests, poison our soil, and eliminate species; all in the name of progress. The irony of our unrestrained drive fails to even give us cause for pause. We are on a floating barge, where we are tearing up the planks to feed the furnaces. We are destroying the very sources of life on earth.

Too dramatic a scenario? Not according to Lester Brown's State of the World report or the Global 2000 Report to the President of the U.S. of Gerald Barney or studies from the United Nations Environment Program. The 1987 State of the World report notes that the radical changes brought about by humans in altering atmospheric chemistry, global temperature, and the abundance of living species "reflect the crossing that may impair the earth's capacity to sustain an ever-growing human population. A frustrating paradox is emerging. Efforts to improve living standards are themselves beginning to threaten the health of the global economy. The very notion of progress begs for redefinition in light of the intolerable consequences unfolding as a result of its pursuit." (p. 4) In calling for a rethinking of the meaning of supporting a sustainable society the study observes:

A sustainable society satisfies its needs without diminishing the prospects of the next generation. By many measures, contemporary society fails to meet this criterion. Questions of ecological sustainability are arising on every continent. The scale of human activities has begun to threaten the habitability of the earth itself. Nothing short of fundamental adjustments in population and energy policies will stave off the host of costly changes now unfolding, changes that could overwhelm our long-standing efforts to improve the human condition. (p. 4-5)

What is our response? We cannot minimize the scale of the crisis which we face. What is occurring is on the size of a major geological change in terms of alterations of the ecosystems and the varied species on the planet. While previous geological ages or extinction processes occurred naturally, this one is being driven by the engines of human blindness and greed.

For some, the sheer enormity of our difficulties results in paralysis--a fear, an inability, or an unwillingness to make the changes that are necessary. It is

easier to continue with present consumptive habits. After all, everyone else is. Future generations? Many seem to be saying, "Let them worry about it. There'll probably be enough to go around."

For most there is simply the pattern of addiction that pervades our society. Drugs and alcohol are only one manifestation of the larger addiction to progress and to a consumptive life style. Everyone wants a piece of the pie, and the sooner the better. The addiction produces an altered state, a kind of trance, and a fascination with technological processes which we assume will solve our human problems. Thomas Berry has called this addiction, and the belief in the myth of progress, a "technological trance." How to break this trance and wean ourselves from our addictions to progress and consumption remain the essential challenge, especially for first-world societies.

Part of the difficulty in responding to this challenge is not only the power of our addictions, but also the inadequacy of our educational system which sees the sciences and the humanities as two separate and often unrelated entities. Knowledge has become compartmentalized, highly specialized, and almost non-functional in relation to problems faced by the world community. Similarly religion and science are seen as virtually incompatible. Each tends to claim an exclusive hold on truth which allow little room for substantive dialogue. The irony here can hardly be missed. Our educational establishments have contributed to an unprecedented burgeoning of knowledge, while our religious establishments claim an ever more exclusive wisdom. Yet, our knowledge is not helping us solve the problems we are facing. I once asked the noted Islamic scholar, Franz Rosenthal, what he considered to be the cause of the fall of the Islamic empires from their height in the tenth and eleventh centuries. He said simply, "They drowned in knowledge." He went on to add, "I believe we are doing the same."

Relatedness to the Earth. Having outlined in some detail the range of issues before

us, namely, military spending in relation to development, the environment in relation to economics, natural resource in relation to technology, and finally education and its challenges, I would like to move on to suggest that primary premise of all change and indeed of all education in the future will be the understanding of our relationship to the earth. This is the ultimate bottom line of both survival and sustainability. There will be no effective peace until there is peace with the earth. The assault on the earth and her treasures has been underway for some time now. The earth is finally beginning to fight back. She will no longer serve passively as our battle ground or our dumping ground.

Our role as educators is crucial in this process of creating the possibility of peace among peoples through peace with the earth. It will require imagination and evocation, programs and practicality.

We cannot underestimate the importance of cultivating the imagination in ourselves as well as in students. Our difficulty is that while we have come so far in our scientific understanding of the universe, our imaginative and creative arts have not kept pace. We must recognize that the next phase of education is going to be as new for us, as it is for our students. We must become students again in order to activate our own imaginative processes in relation to the universe.

We need to cultivate new ways of holistic seeing. There are two important changes in perception necessary for the development of this seeing. One relates to time, especially to evolution. The other relates to space and our view of the earth. Both involve a new realization of our place and role as humans in the universe. It is important to recall that Darwin's theory of evolution is scarcely more than one hundred years old. This is a relatively short period for the shift in human imagination required by such a radical rethinking of time. Not many of us even now deeply grasp the significance of the story the scientists are telling regarding the development of the universe, the earth, life and human culture.

This view of time is complemented by the mysterious view of the earth from the moon which gives us a whole other perspective on space. As James Lovelock has described it in his Gaia hypothesis, the earth is a self-regulating living organism. He writes:

The new understanding has come from going forth and looking back to see the Earth from space. The vision of that splendid white flecked blue sphere stirred us all, no matter that by now it is almost a visual cliché. It even opens the mind's eye, just as a voyage away from home enlarges the perspective of our love for those who remain there.

The first impact of those voyages was the sense of wonder given to the astronauts and to us as we shared their experience vicariously through television, but at the same time the Earth was viewed from outside by the more objective gaze of scientific instruments. These devices were quite impervious to human emotion yet they also sent back the information that let us see the Earth as a strange and beautiful anomaly. They showed our planet is made of the same elements and in much the same proportions as are Mars and Venus, but they also revealed our sibling planets to be bare and barren and as different from the Earth as a robin from a rock.

We now see that the air, the ocean and the soil are much more than a mere environment for life; they are a part of life itself. Thus the air is to life just as is the fur to a cat or the nest for a bird. Not living but something made by living things to protect against an otherwise hostile world. For life on Earth the air is our protection against the cold depths and fierce radiations of space.

There is nothing unusual in the idea of life on Earth interacting with the air, sea and rocks, but it took a view from outside to glimpse the

possibility that this combination might constitute a single giant living system and one with the capacity to keep the Earth always at a state most favorable for the life upon it.

These two changes with regard to time and space mark a new era in the human imagination. How to see ourselves as part of an earth that is some 4.5 billion years old, and as part of this blue-green planet floating in space is a challenge neither Darwin nor most of our forbearers envisaged. New imaginative meditations, poems, paintings, dances, dramas, and stories will be necessary before we can reorient ourselves in such a universe. In particular, we must reevaluate our role in the universe and our relatedness to the earth as a species.

Indeed, one of the issues that is already being bitterly debated is between the social ecologists and the natural or deep ecologists regarding the place of the human in relation to other species. The social ecologists give a primacy to humans and their survival while the deep ecologists point out that the failure to realize that we are but one of millions of species has been part of the cause of our present crisis. This will be a key debate in the next decade, as we try to rethink priorities on issues such as species extinction and human survival on a damaged planet.

I would like to suggest that a method of being able to evoke this larger sense of the universe along with the particular sense of place will be an essential challenge for our curriculum. First, we must recognize that the earth is the basic curriculum. The starkness of that statement no doubt flies in the face of so many theories of education or graduate programs for training teachers. Yet as Thomas Berry has observed some years ago, the Earth is the primary educator. It is as simple and as complex as that. The earth is the primary healer, law giver, and producer of life.

With regard, then, to programs and practicality, a key to creating and implementing programs may be found in the

phrase, "Think globally; act locally." This may be an important method to help both ourselves and our students manage the demands of absorbing the new perspective of time and space we have just outlined. It may also be applied to the study of world history, world literature, and world religions which are increasingly becoming part of our curriculums. It can also be applied to the study of natural science and environmental studies. The universal and the particular must be constantly held in tandem if we are to become effective teachers and indeed midwives for the emergence of a new cosmological paradigm.

There are, of course, numerous practical programs which can be undertaken by children in schools which brings them closer to the sense of caring for the earth not only for the present but for future generations as well. Growing plants in the classroom, taking care of fish or pets, cleaning up a park, doing experiments for natural science classes, to mention a few. If these activities are undertaken with a sense of reverence for the earth as the sustainer of life, a new context for ethics may emerge. Then, violence towards the earth and all its life forms, can be seen as unacceptable in the same way violence towards human beings is unacceptable. It is essential to give children a vision of the excitement of being connected to life's processes, as well as to make them aware of the consequences of damage to the earth.

We need to collect and use evocative examples of both the global mode of reflecting and the local mode of relating which are essentially complementary processes.

¹ Ruth Leger Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures, 1986 (Washington, D.C.: World Priorities, Inc., 1987), p. 5. Some of the information in this paragraph was adapted from a paper by Professor Larry Rasmussen of Union Theological Seminary titled, "The Social and Moral Implications of Sustainable Use and Management of the Earth's Ecosystems."

2 See position paper on "Disarmament and Development" by the New Manhattan Project of the American Friends Service Committee, 15 Rutherford Place, N.Y.C. 10003.

3 Ruth Leger Sivard, op. cit.

4 For further information write to:
Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
Charlestown Navy Yard
100 First Avenue
Boston, MA 02129

or

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay
3 Joy Street
Boston, MA 02108

See also "Troubled Waters" in Business Week (October 12, 1987), pp. 88-104.

5 See the pamphlet written by Nancy Wright titled, "Long Island Sound: An Owner's Manual." This pamphlet is available from Wainwright House, 260 Stuyvesant Avenue, Rye, N.Y. 10580.

6 Barry Commoner, The Closing Circle (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1972) pp. 143-154.

7 Lester Brown's State of the World reports have been published yearly since 1984 by Norton & Co., Gerald Barney's Global 2000 Report was published in 1980 by Pergamon Press.

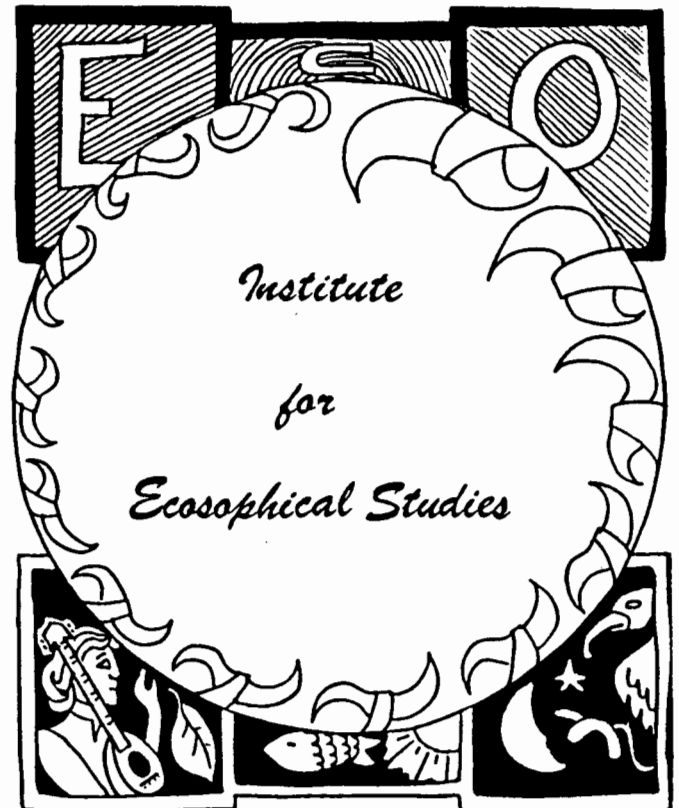
8 James Lovelock, Gaia. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

9 Thomas Berry's paper on "The American College in the Ecological Age" elaborates on these points for a college curriculum. It is published with a collection of his essays entitled The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988).

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ph.D. teaches at Iona College in New Rochelle, N.Y. Her book on the religious dimension of Japanese Neo-Confucianism will be published by SUNY Press in late spring, 1989.

ATTENTION: READERS

We are planning a summer issue dedicated to book reviews and suggested readings. You are invited to submit reviews of books or lists of suggested readings with a short description of each. What works have influenced your thinking on ecological matters? Consider our readers as friends with whom you wish to share information which might help them in their own reflection. We must, of course, reserve the right to edit material either to fit our format or to avoid unnecessary redundancy. Thank you for your moral and financial contributions in the past.



Teri S.

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The Institute for Ecosophical Studies is an educational non-profit organization located at but independent from Moravian College.

Ecospirit was aided by a grant from the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges.

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