

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AS A FRAME OF MIND

Michael Bonnett, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy of Education, Homerton College,
Cambridge CB2 2PH

Abstract

This paper will review some problems with taking the notion of sustainable development, *as a policy*, as the touchstone of environmental education and will explore some central strands to understanding sustainability *as a frame of mind*. It will be argued that at the heart of this interpretation of sustainability lies the notion of a *right relationship with nature* which both conditions our attitudes towards the environment and our sense of our own identity.

The contribution of certain influential eco-centric accounts to the idea of sustainability is critically evaluated and a sense of sustainability is developed which is neither anthropocentric nor eco-centric. It is argued that the essence of sustainability, so conceived, is intrinsic to authentic human consciousness and some of the metaphysical issues which it raises for education and modern Western society are indicated.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, ever since the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987, 'sustainable development' has been a key concept in debates on the environment. It has become pivotal in orientating our understanding of what the issues are and of what needs to be done. Not surprisingly, it has also become a strong motive in guiding thinking in the area of environmental education and, for example, is now established as an element of the National Curriculum 2000 for England and Wales. However, it is also apparent that 'sustainable development' is a highly problematic term, open to a variety of interpretations and arguably also subject to internal contradictions. These clearly need to be addressed if the concept is to serve a constructive function in our understanding

of environmental policy and, equally, such clarification is necessary to examining the possibility of education for sustainable development.

So what are the problems? They are myriad and have now been widely discussed elsewhere. (See, for example, Rist (1997), Bonnett (1999), Stables and Scott (1999) for some recent accounts.) In the section that follows, I will attempt to outline what I take to be some of the central issues affecting the possibility of education for sustainable development. But first, it may be useful to make a preliminary point about the general ways in which it might be thought that education can contribute to the goal of sustainable development. There are perhaps two main lines on this: first, that education can be a vehicle for actively promoting positive attitudes and patterns of behaviour that reflect the requirements of sustainable development. This approach has sometimes been termed 'environmentalism'. John Elliott (1999) suggests that it can be related to the 'school effectiveness movement' because it pre-specifies generalised tangible outcomes to be achieved by schools, such as, perhaps, reduced levels of school energy consumption, the establishment of an environmental code, pupil performance on appropriate attitude tests. In contrast to meeting such pre-formed standards, there is the approach which assumes that schools best further sustainable development by encouraging on-going pupil exploration and engagement with environmental issues in which the promptings of their own rationality are followed. Here the essence is to develop pupils' own critical ability and interpretation of issues in the context of firsthand practical situations that they confront. This 'action competence' approach, Elliott claims, is more consistent with the 'school development movement' as it is of a democratic character in which those immediately involved and affected decide the issues. On this model it is not the role of education to inculcate some pre-established environmental policy or code and in a significant sense there would be no generalised pre-specified curriculum content. Rather there would be the encouragement of a certain rational critical attitude towards environmental issues and their solution in local circumstances.

Now each of these approaches illustrates the kinds of problematic assumptions that can be made by different interpretations of 'sustainable development' in the educational context. The environmentalist approach assumes that it implies a systematic action

policy developed by those who 'know' and imposed on those who don't. Furthermore it is assumed that its success can be measured in terms of consumption levels, that its underlying values are largely economic and unproblematic, that relevant knowledge is generated by subject experts and that its implications for the moral/social/political structure of society are basically consistent with the *status quo*. 'Sustainable development' rapidly converges with 'common-sense' and an instrumental rationality determines the means for achieving a set of taken-for-granted ends.

In contrast, the democratic approach assumes the sufficiency of pure rationality to the understanding of environmental issues, in principle unfettered by externally imposed policies and codes. The ethics that it generates will reflect the shared purposes, aspirations and knowledge of particular sets of actors in particular situations. All very 'local' both geographically and historically. But in a society increasingly dominated by powerful exploitative and consumerist motives, is 'pure' rationality either possible or up to the job - especially if we consider the aggressive motives that Heidegger and others have argued to be inherent in modern rationality itself? There is also the point that for some there are significant *non-rational* aspects to environmental issues such as empathy, identification and a broader spiritual dimension.

Both approaches to education for sustainable development, then, in their different ways, raise the issue of the nature of Western rationality and its adequacy to understand and address environmental issues. This is brought into particularly sharp relief when sustainable development is considered as a policy.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A POLICY

As previously noted, the issue of the interpretation of the term 'sustainable development' has been remarked in a number of recent commentaries. In many ways the wide appeal which is its strength is also its downfall. By seeming to combine the highly desired goal of development with the equally highly desired goal of conservation of valuable things endangered, it is liable to be set up as a goal which is so obviously attractive as to divert attention from its problematic nature. Sustainable development is

something *everyone* can subscribe to, from enlightened captains of modern industry to subsistence farmers - the former concerned to create the conditions for sustained economic growth, the latter concerned to survive into the future and perhaps better their material lot there. Any problems are perceived not with the goal itself, but only with the means to achieve it.

But problems with the goal itself are revealed as soon as one asks the following kind of question: precisely what is to be sustained under the aegis of sustainable development, and at what level and over what spatial and temporal scales? It is at such a point that what might have appeared as massive consensus starts to break up and is in danger of being revealed as so much empty uplift. I do not intend to argue this point here as it has been well developed elsewhere, but because of their significance for the theme of this paper, I will note the following main issues:

i) *semantic*: it is possible for a society simply to interpret the term in ways that are congenial to it (i.e. involve minimum disturbance to the status quo) and thus, say, for Western-style economies to see it in terms of sustainable economic growth which could show scant regard for a more broadly conceived ecological perspective. Some users of the term stand accused of precisely this by, for example, Shiva (1992);

ii) *ethical*: varying assumptions are being made about the rights and duties of humankind to the rest of nature and, for example, whether any such underlying ethic should be anthropocentric, bio-centric, or something else altogether. This raises the fundamental issue of how any ethical dimension is to be grounded;

iii) *epistemological*: given the high degrees of complexity of the natural and social systems (and the sheer extent of the spatial and temporal dimensions over which they can operate) which are affected by human activity and our current very imperfect state of knowledge them, how are we to judge which actions will positively contribute to sustainable development? Even if the 'ends' of any policy were clear and regarded as unproblematic, are we in a position to judge the means? If not, how does one construct a policy in a situation where in practice it is impossible to avoid every action which *might* have detrimental consequences for the environment?

These seem to me to represent very significant problems for the idea of sustainable development as a policy, meaning by this a strategy or course of action devised by instrumental reason in the service of some fairly specific pre-specified goal.

This is likely to be particularly true for modern Western culture which, arguably, and as previously mentioned, is increasingly dominated by a set of motives which preclude the possibility of an approach to environmental issues which is genuinely open to nature. In such a culture, everyday values will need to be examined with a view to radical transformation. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Bonnett, 1999), it is not that we can simply turn to some other culture, assumed to be more eco-sympathetic, to provide us with solutions, for such guidance will necessarily lack the 'internal' insight into Western culture's own peculiar capacities and problems and its horizons of significance for interpreting them. Nor, of course, is it that modern Western culture is completely devoid of the necessary intellectual and emotional resources to articulate and address the issues. There are/have been obvious strands within it (and not only romanticism) which advert to a considerable *simpatico* with nature.

It will be argued in this paper that an adequate response to our environmental predicament in effect requires a *metaphysical* transformation, but one which precisely because of this must arise from within the horizons of significance with which our culture provides us - i.e. within the space opened up for us, made possible, by them. For it is our metaphysical horizons that fundamentally condition our sense of the real and therefore what is possible, what is fitting and what is fantasy.

SUSTAINABILITY AS FRAME OF MIND

The previous section of this paper has observed that sustainable development conceived as a policy, while in some ways a highly attractive notion in that it promises to meld aspirations for an improved standard of living with the perceived need for conservation, is also a highly problematic notion which is open to a range of interpretations, subversions and internal contradictions as well as raising severe

epistemological problems. While it is not my position that progress cannot be made on such matters (at least in principle) – and indeed, as indicated in this paper progress on the semantic front is well underway – some of the ethical and epistemological issues remain so far from satisfactory resolution that one is invited to explore an alternative approach to the idea – namely, sustainability conceived as a frame of mind. It should be said immediately that this is not simply an attempt to circumvent difficult issues, but rather it enjoins us to focus on an issue which presumably must underlie any policy development, viz., *what constitutes a right relationship with nature? What should be our basic stance towards the natural environment?* As we shall see, this not only raises a set of questions about basic understandings of, and motives towards, nature, but also about human identity and flourishing which are also, of course, implicit in any proper understanding of sustainable development.

Presently, we will examine some influential views on the above questions, but firstly it will be helpful to provide a preliminary definition of ‘nature’ itself. ‘Nature’ has many senses and the idea has a long history in which it has been constructed and interpreted in a large variety of contexts. For the purpose of this paper, I will mean by the term ‘nature’ that sense of a self-originating material/spiritual world of which we are a part, including the powers that sustain and govern it. Such a world is essentially *independent* of human will, but not *unaffected* by it. Thus, even in the case of our own physical nature we can do things that affect the well-being of our bodies, but what that well-being essentially consists in and the powers which it has to maintain itself - and with which we ‘interact’ for better or worse - are not things of which we are the authors. In this sense, I agree with McKibben (1989) when he speaks of its independence of human activity being essential to the meaning of ‘nature’, but disagree with his claim that because there is no aspect of nature which has not been affected by human activity (e.g. through our effects on the global climate and atmosphere) that nature is at an end. Here, perhaps, he conflates ‘nature’ with ‘wilderness’.

To turn now to the issue of sustainability as a frame of mind. A number of thinkers have intimated the importance of this and, of course, any view of how we should treat the environment expresses or assumes a certain frame of mind towards nature. Thus a straightforwardly anthropocentric environmental ethic which privileges enlightened

human self-interest clearly does this, as, indeed, does the view that seeks to include *all* sentient life in a morality based on the maximisation of pleasure/happiness and the minimisation of pain (e.g., Singer, 1993). However, these views can be seen as lying well within that constellation of ideas which constitute the current Western outlook and thus, when presented, require little if any disruption of what is taken to be common sense. Though Singer's view may require a degree of adjustment for some, it might be said to be quantitative rather than qualitative, the avoidance of the unnecessary infliction of pain being an entirely familiar motive.

But there are other views which, while still rooted in aspects of the Western tradition, make greater demands on Western consciousness through requiring an increasing extension and depth of sympathy/empathy towards the flourishing of things beyond ourselves, which, arguably, amounts to a *qualitative* change of outlook and ultimately may lead to a transformation of what we take ourselves to be. For example, Paul Taylor (1986) claims that through a heightened awareness, we can perceive that all living beings are attempting to realise their own good and that rationality requires that humans respect this in the same way that it requires respect for individual human beings seeking *their* own good. Here we have a Kantian style argument concerning what is our rational duty: that something analogous to respect for persons be extended to all members of the bio-sphere. Taylor argues that we must see ourselves as equal, interdependent members with all the others in the 'great Community of Life', 'None is deemed more worthy of existence than another.' (p. 157). This hardly resonates with dominant Western attitudes.

Transposing this idea from the context of a 'duty ethic' into the context of a 'care ethic', Freya Mathews places much emphasis on the attitude of identification with - and therefore affirmation of, and Eros towards - all other self-realizing entities which constitute the 'ecocosm'. For her, this constitutes a new extended sense of ourselves and is central to being an 'ecological self'. Thus Mathews claims that:

The thesis that we, as human selves, stand in a holistic relation – a relation of 'oneness' – with the cosmos itself, promises more than a list of ethical prescriptions. It promises a key to the perennial questions of who we are, why

we are born, what is our reason for living, etc. In short it promises to throw light on the *meaning* of life. (Mathews, 1991, p 147)

Whatever else, this underscores a very important point: our relationship with nature, whatever its kind, is an important aspect of our own identity - and thus of our self-knowledge. The way we regard and treat nature - the whole which sustains us and of which we are a part - says a lot about the sort of beings we are as well as the sort of beings we regard everything else to be. In this sense Heidegger (1939) was right in seeing that there is an important sense in which the idea of 'nature' that we hold defines our understanding of, and attitude towards, both the world and ourselves. This means, of course, that it will also set the contours of what can count as human flourishing. Thus it is apparent that the issue of sustainability as a frame of mind is not simply the issue of our attitude towards the environment, but represents a perspective on that set of the most fundamental ethical, epistemological and metaphysical considerations which describe human being. A perspective which is both theoretical and practical in that it is essentially concerned with human practices and the conceptions and values that are embedded in them. It thus requires a re-consideration of the metaphysics expressed in Western attitudes, where by metaphysics is meant not the study of some highly abstract and abstruse realm which can only be known, if at all, *post hoc*, but the set of fundamentally orientating motives which are working themselves out in our time and which are expressed in, and form, the basic contours of our understanding and behaviour. (See Bonnett, 2000 for some development of this view of metaphysics and its implications.)

Charles Taylor (1983, p.142) refers to understanding in the pre-modern era in which our understanding of the order of things was bound up with our understanding of ourselves, because we perceived ourselves as an integral part of that order. 'And we cannot understand the order and our place in it without loving it, without seeing its goodness, which is what I want to call our attunement with it.' This sounds like a psychological generalization rather than a strictly logical claim, and amongst other things assumes that we love ourselves. Yet, if we substitute for the problematic term 'love' (which rarely comes to order), the term 'value', there does seem to be a certain logic to it. While formally it may be possible, for example, to despise ones origins and

what sustains one, this seems an *empty* possibility which cannot be factually (in the Heideggerian sense) endorsed by those who have not somehow mentally either separated themselves from their origins and what sustains them, or who have come to despise themselves. Of course, in a holistic understanding, there is a level at which ‘goodness’ always means that which is in some way good for *us*, because we are part of a system and therefore what is good for that system must benefit us. But this is not Taylor's the real point. (Though it does seem to be key to the development of Freya Matthews’ views which we will consider presently.) The issue here is less ontological and more about essential human nature in the sense of how things are *experienced*. I take it that Taylor is making the point that love is the appropriate and natural human emotion towards that which truly sustains us. Thus alienation from nature and from self are highly interrelated and key to our ability to knowingly despoil the environment. If we love (value) ourselves, we will love (value) that which supports us.

This view suggests that part of education for sustainability as a frame of mind will be to reconnect people with their origins and what sustains them *and* to develop their love of themselves. But what is to be the underlying spirit of this ‘reconnection’? What version of a ‘reconnected’ orientation towards nature should be sought? For example, both anthropocentric and bio-centric attitudes are forms of connection. What is to be the source of non-arbitrariness in value judgements in this area?

Richard Smith (1998) is keen to show that the kind of ‘attunement’ to which Taylor alludes need not involve high degrees of mysticism and may be found in a wide range of everyday activities. For example, it may be found in the activity of a craftsman who has developed a feel – in a certain sense, a love – for his material and works with it in a way which respects and responds to its own properties. He uses the term ‘attentiveness’ to denote that careful perception of things in which the demands of “the insistent, selfish ego” are put aside, and in which we “exercise patience, determine to see things justly, and refuse the consolations of fantasy” (p. 179). In such attentiveness the small contingent details of ordinary life and the natural world may be loved and respected. For Smith, this does not require a mystical neo-romantic merging of mind with nature, but involves a sense of the standards implicit in self-understanding and self-mastery, testing ones actions against the internal goods of an activity and that

which constitutes the genuine mutual flourishing of self and nature. But what are these 'standards' and from what exactly do they emanate? 'Self-understanding', 'self-mastery', 'internal goods', and 'flourishing' are highly contestable notions.

Perhaps a paradigm case of such attentiveness would be the idealized relationship between mother and child in which high degrees of intuitive sensitivity to the needs of the infant are present and in which a certain reciprocity of feeling and satisfaction develop. Transferred to interaction with the world in general, the criterion of such attentiveness seems to be something like the life-fulfilling quality of our working relationship with things. But is even this heightened notion of 'attentiveness' sufficiently qualified to sustain the kind of relationship with nature that Smith seeks to establish? Are certain unacknowledged values being assumed which lend the notion much of its power as long as they remain hidden from critical scrutiny? For example, could not a farmer, say, display just such attentiveness, in terms of what Smith has so far made *explicit*, in the running of his battery farm? Could he not be constantly and responsively attending to the egg-laying potential of his chickens? He *need* not be motivated by greed (which it could be argued would not be compatible with his flourishing), but perhaps by an appreciation of the simple elegance of battery farming as a solution to the problem of food production. In what sense can 'nature' make demands on him and why should the farmer see himself as part of nature in *spiritual* terms? That is, why on this account should he attend to *nature*? Why should his *spiritual* well-being require *this* focus?

It is interesting that Freya Mathews (1994) makes a similar kind of assumption. Thus:

A person will count as flourishing only if she is culturally as well as physically and materially well-off. She is culturally well-off if she is richly fulfilled in her emotional, imaginative, artistic, intellectual and spiritual life. *The culture that enables us ... to flourish as human beings is precisely the culture that understands and represents our interconnectedness with Nature.* (p.156) My emphasis.

At first blush at least, this sounds highly stipulative and begs a host of questions concerning the centrality of closeness to nature to the good life. Such a sentiment would certainly not be shared for example by many pre-romantics who saw wild nature as the antithesis of civilisation, and therefore of human fulfilment. Furthermore, could not a person suitably orientated derive all of the aspects of being 'richly fulfilled' listed by Mathews through a deep absorption in, say, Formula One motor racing?

So, again, the issue is raised as to what is the metaphysical basis of our relationship to nature? Is there any sense in which our ontology involves or requires a connection characterized by sympathy, empathy and identification - and if so, in what sense?

Mathews provides an interesting position on these matters, which because it both reflects and refines an influential set of views emanating from the 'deep ecology' movement and also has clear implications for sustainability as a frame of mind, I will take up in a little more detail here. Following the views of Naess, she suggests that:

'When we recognize the involvement of wider wholes in our identity, an expansion in the scope of our identity and hence in the scope of our self-love occurs' (ibid. p.149)

We identify with the rest of the 'ecocosm' and wish to affirm it as part of ourselves, properly conceived. But, of course, if the 'ecocosm' were itself essentially meaningless or even destructive, then our identification with it could only undermine our own sense of meaning and worth - or legitimate our own destructiveness. Such identification could hardly be a basis for love or conservation. So, Mathews claims, the 'ecocosm' must have its own positive, creative telos. In this sense it must be a 'self', have a will to exist which is its *conatus* and of which we are a part.

It is in this human participation in the cosmic process that the meaningfulness of our relation to nature may be found: through our awareness of our interconnectedness with it we experience a love for this great self, a love which is actually constitutive of, or a tributary to, its own *conatus*, its own will to exist. (ibid. p.155)

Central to this view, then, is the notion of the 'ecocosm'. The ecocosm is ' .. a self-realizing system which is internally interconnected in an ecological - and therefore also in a topological and substantial - sense' (ibid. p. 147) where 'ecological' refers to a system in which individuals are seen to exist only as parts of a larger whole and in their interrelationship with other such parts. Thus we are held to flourish when we live in a way which sustains the eco-system in which we and all others flourish.

This stance is based upon an underlying notion of substance monism which she argues is 'sanctioned' by modern (quantum mechanics) science – and thus represents a certain continuity with the dominant arbiter for thinking within the Western tradition. However, there seem to me to be three criticisms of the kind of view which she espouses. I list them below in ascending order of magnitude.

First, her views about what is viable - and therefore can be a component of human flourishing – only work at the level of species or culture, not at the level of the individual. Despite her protestations to the contrary, it seems obvious that an *individual* could flourish, even in the terms prescribed by Mathews herself, in ways which are deleterious to the environment in the long term. And even at the species level, the issue is raised as to what is to count as deleterious - deleterious from what or whose standpoint? Clearly any particular state of the eco-system favours some members more than others - and some not at all - namely those that are made extinct. It is hard to suppress the suspicion that the semblance of genuine eco-centrism is a veneer which when scratched reveals a powerful, because disguised, anthropocentrism which prioritises those states of the ecocosm assumed to sustain human flourishing.

Second, and leading to a similar conclusion, her argument can constrain us only to identify with those parts of the greater whole which we perceive to support *us* – e.g. *not* the malaria bacillus or AIDS virus. But this essentially seems to return us to an anthropocentric position of a fairly conventional kind; aggrandized somewhat it is true, but sheer enlightened self-interest nonetheless. In which case we have to ask what does her position offer the conservationist which is not offered as powerfully but more

simply by straightforward enlightened self-interest as a motive? And shorn of its holistic pretensions, what does it offer to the idea of sustainability as a frame of mind?

Third, her argument is viciously circular. She simply derives from human identification with the ecocosm values which she has previously overtly or covertly inserted in it. There is no convincing independent argument to show that it possesses these values.

Eco-centric ideas have the virtue of challenging us to critically examine unbridled conventional anthropocentrism and may be suggestive of important alternative attitudes, but they lack the intellectual resources to replace it. (See, also, King (1997) on this.) I wish to argue that ultimately they fail because they give too little credence to the special position that human consciousness has in the greater scheme of things. They ignore the way in which the idea of reality itself is human-related, that things only 'show up' (to use a term coined by Taylor (1992) in this context) in the space which is consciousness.

This leads us to examine the possibilities of an approach which is neither anthropocentric in the conventional sense of seeing our relationship with the environment as properly orientated around human interests or wants, nor eco-centric in the sense of subsuming us in, or subordinating us to, some greater whole. Such an approach would run along the following lines. Taken as a theory of *meaning*, anthropocentrism points us towards an essential element of truth. Things are always revealed to us in a context of human concerns and practices and their reality is therefore always conditioned by such concerns and practices. Notions such as care, sympathy, empathy, identification, responsibility, which fundamentally bring things close (and are celebrated by eco-centrism), are only possible for entities which operate at the human level of conscious functioning - indeed, we might say that such qualities are partly *definitive* of it. Thus things show up - in a sense *become* the things that they are - within individual and cultural horizons of significance and in this sense are indelibly human-related. To allude to an illustration I have used elsewhere (Bonnett, 2000) the precise qualities of aspects of nature are revealed in their reciprocal relation to certain artefacts, such as a sailing boat. Such an artefact is finely attuned to the non-human elements in which it is to perform and thus brings them more sharply into relief,

as, for example, the play of water displayed by the bows sheering through it and throwing it off in a particular way.

However, to recognize that things are human-related in this way - and this is the partial truth embodied in eco-centrism - implies neither that their meaning and existence is purely a product of the mind, nor that our evaluative or ethical stance towards them need be human-centred. Consciousness, alone, is not the author of things, it, itself, *is* only in its relationship with things. Consciousness is nothing without its things: things constitute consciousness as much as consciousness constitutes things. Consciousness *is* the space where things stand forth and the precise quality of conscious space at any moment is conditioned by these things in their standing forth (with all their cultural significances).

On this account we are not the author, but the *occasioner* of things, and also of intrinsic value - in that only entities functioning at our level of consciousness can confer or recognize values - but we are not the only *bearers* of intrinsic value. Thus it is perfectly intelligible - and, for example, very characteristic of some aspects of our experience of nature - to be deeply affected by the sheer otherness of non-human things. Consider the feeling of deep respect that can be evoked by the inscrutable massiveness of a Californian Redwood or for that matter, the delicacy of a ciliate protozoan in a drop of pond water viewed through a microscope. Not to mention the possible emotional impact of a mountain, a galaxy or a god. This is to reassert the significance of a poetic dimension to human awareness and suggests a broader, and more demanding, conception of the contribution that the curriculum can make to environmental education. Sustainability as an attitude of mind seeks openness to as many facets and significances of nature as possible and thereby involves a certain basic *simpatico* with the non-human.

Now, an important feature of this view is that it locates the essence of sustainability in the nature of human consciousness itself - i.e., in the very event of being conscious at this level - and thus differs both from conventional anthropocentrism and eco-centrism which can be regarded as veiling modifications of consciousness, the one legitimating an arbitrary narrowing of concern, the other advocating an arbitrary expansion. On this

view, concern itself - and primordially - involves that openness, responsiveness and responsibility to things which are the essence of sustainability as a frame of mind. Thus, this argument roots the notion of sustainability in the notion of *truth* and its centrality to human being. Truth as our awareness of things disclosing themselves and our sense of the fittingness of the language which both facilitates and expresses this ('le mot juste'), lies at the heart of human consciousness. In constituting a celebration of what *is*, relatively unsubverted by external instrumental motives (though it may be apprehending such motives, or arising in a context set by them), its 'pure' sustaining nature is also the essence of sustainability as a concern to let things be (as they are in themselves) - to safeguard, to preserve, to conserve. This is clearly quite a different sense of sustainability to that which seeks to 'sustain' *in order* to have ready to hand a resource required for some further purpose (such as economic growth). This argument also implies a sense of sustainability whose denial would involve alienation from our own essence and therefore from our own flourishing. For authentic human being the central attitude of sustainability is not a bolt on option but a necessity.

Thus the possibility of education for sustainable development seen from this perspective involves a radical interpretation of the notion which retrieves non-instrumental conceptions of development and human flourishing and which at the same time recognizes the special place that humankind has in the cosmos. While drawing on strands of thought central to the Western tradition, it clearly runs counter to many motives and values which are currently ascendant in Western society and is therefore likely to be viewed as politically and economically uncongenial.

Prevailing values and social/economic/political arrangements determine what will appear as problems by directing attention away from their own problematic nature. If we are to enable pupils to address the issues raised by sustainable development rather than preoccupy them with what are essentially symptoms masquerading as causes, we must engage them in those kinds of enquiry which reveal the underlying dominant motives that are in play in society; motives which are inherent in our most fundamental ways of thinking about ourselves and the world. That such a metaphysical investigation will be discomforting for many seems unavoidable, but it promises to be more productive in the long term than proceeding on the basis of easy assumptions about

the goals of sustainable development, as though it were a policy whose chief problems are of implementation rather than meaning.

Finally, it hardly needs saying, in an educational context, aspirations to promote sustainability as a frame of mind which retrieves that receptive/responsive relationship with things which it has been held is constitutive of authentic human consciousness, must necessarily be located in a practical way of life that does not so insulate us from the power and gift of nature that we lose the sense of our intimate connection with it. This has clear implications for aspects of education which fall outside the formal taught curriculum, such as the attitudes and values expressed in the ethos and practices of the school and the status it accords to different activities and relationships and versions of success in life. (See, for example, Bowers, 1995).

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