

Dear Msc 7

We have tried this week to find ways of understanding the living world that we inhabit quite separate from any concerns about sustainable business, corporate social responsibility, and the everyday world in which we all earn our living. This has been a deliberate choice, since we, as staff, have always believed that it is not possible really to appreciate questions about sustainable business unless we are quite radical in our understanding of the ecology of our living space.

I use the word 'understanding' deliberately, rather than thinking, because, as we have tried to show, thinking alone is inadequate. This is why I started from Gregory Bateson's argument that, if we accept that we are participants in an ecology with multiple feedback loops and emergent properties of self-regulation, we are essentially part of a wider Mind, the mind of Gaia. Logically, the whole of mind cannot be grasped by a part of mind; all we can understand is arcs of the greater circuit. And conscious mind, seeking short term purpose and coupled with powerful technology, will be grossly destructive. This is a fundamental truth on which I think we can all reflect at length (see Bateson, 1972a, 1972b).

So we have tried to understand our living world, yes, through ideas and intellectual propositions, some of them rooted in rigorous traditional scientific investigation, and some maybe less widely accepted. These ideas are wonderful in their own right, but they also take us to a position or attitude outside our living space—and we can never be outside it, we can only be participants within it.

So we have tried also to take you into a participative view, remembering Bateson's idea that we may recover the 'grace' of interconnectedness and intimate interdependency through metaphor, art, beauty... When he writes of the primrose on the river's brim he is essentially saying that 'to experience an aesthetic response is to recognise a fellow mental process' (Charlton, 2003:196). We have done this by sitting by the river, through Stephan's Tai Chi, freefall writing, the imaginative ceremony of the Council of all Beings, through the immersion in the walk by the river Dart, where at times we have had to fit ourselves to Gaia as we clambered over rocks and under branches, rather than insist that Gaia fit us as we do in our civilized world. Maybe in piling on these experiences you have felt we have not given enough time for rational reflection: for this I apologize in part, for it is also in part an intentional immersion.

In doing this we have used some words that may have been uncomfortable, words that are usually avoided in management education: sacred, spirit, mother earth, anima mundi. We have invoked the living earth as a sacred place. In particular, the Council of All Beings can be seen as having an animist or almost pagan dimension that carries some awkwardness.

I want to say that we have not done this because we are proselytising, because we want you all to become animists or Buddhists, or just for the sake of being controversial. Rather we do this because we believe that the division between religion and science,

between faith and inquiry, between the sacred and the secular, which was forged at the time of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, is part of the problem of sustainability. As David Loy points out in his book on a Buddhist History of the West (Loy, 2002), many of the features of our much-vaunted secular society are actually responses of problems of meaning and identity that are essentially religious, and in particular the forging of a human individual identity separate from the natural world.

Bateson argues that the most important task is to learn to think in new ways, and I think Stephan pointed to this when he showed how easily the scientific information about 'planetary systems science' allows us to step outside of our participation in Gaia and ask questions that from the existential inside are ridiculous.

The question then comes about in what language to speak to heal this split. I am grateful to Leen for bringing St Francis' Canticum to the Council, because it shows how the Christian tradition has addressed the issue we refer to as deep ecology. Meister Eckhart, the great medieval Christian mystic, expressed a similar view when he wrote that every creature is a word of God and a book about God (Fox, 1983a). I do think it is important to note the thinkers with sympathy to a deep ecology view who come from the Christian tradition: I do commend to you Tom Berry's writing, in particular the essay A New Story in The Dream of the Earth (Berry, 1988), in which he distinguishes between the salvationist aspect of the Christian teachings to which we are accustomed, and the revelatory which he argues has been relatively ignored. Berry's later book is also good (Berry, 1999), there and interview with him in the trolley (Reason, 2001) and we have also ordered a video of him. Matthew Fox, writing from a Christian base of creation spirituality, is also important: he starts from the notion of our original blessing in being born in this wonderful earth, and argues that the divine is immanent in the earth as well as transcendent, a *panentheist* doctrine (Fox, 1983b, 1991, 1994).

But the difficulty in using only Christian imagery is partly that so many of us are 'post Christian' and partly that the issues of how we understand our planet are so closely tied up with the history of Western thought which is so bound up with Christian thought—and in particular the conflicts between Catholic and Protestant and their relation to the living earth, which I believe are still key determinants of our cultural patterns; and the systematic destruction of the immanent view in the burning of the witches and in the distortions of St Francis and Eckhart's message. Read *Cosmopolis* by Stephen Toulmin to see how the Enlightenment thought was forged in the crucible of the uncertainties brought about by the religious wars of that time (Toulmin, 1990). Read Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: the roaring inside* (Griffin, 1984) for a wild feminist perspective on the destruction of the female nature. There is of course plenty of other ecofeminist literature as well

If we only use secular language, the religious and spiritual will come back to haunt us, in a classic return of the repressed. As Bateson mused, it is funny that just at the time that the Catholic Church was moving to saying mass in the vernacular, the kids were chanting Hare Krishna on the streets of San Francisco. And we cannot, should not, ignore the impact on our culture of Eastern and indigenous religions: European culture has always

been radically pluralist, even promiscuous, in its cultural identity. So our use of animist language, which borrows from many sources, is our attempt to speak in ways about a sacred planet that we feel are appropriate for the C21. Charlene Spretnak approaches these different languages in her book *States of Grace* (Spretnak, 1991).

Then as I walked along the river, reflecting on these things, I was remembered Indre's exclamation at the end of Council of all beings that it was as if she was waking from a strange dream. It reminded me of Puck's lines toward the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

If we shadows have offended
Think but this (and all is mended)
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear

I actually thought the third line was 'That you had wakened from a dream' but Google corrected me!

But in a sense, as you go home from here, it will be in some ways as if you had slumbered here, and that you will be as wakened from a dream! Life is a dream, forged by our interactions with each other, our use of symbols that keep our dream in place. The dream of our life is held in place by the symbols of the dream, and as Richard Rorty points out, the way to change those symbols is not to prove that one set is more correct than another. When we want to argue persuasively for a new view of phenomena, he says we are caught in a 'contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed vocabulary which vaguely promises great things' (see also Reason, 2003; Rorty, 1989). This leads to the key notion of redescription: 'a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument for cultural change'.

So as you may leave the dream of Gaia, which we have invoked here, you may awaken to the dream of our everyday modernist world. It will be so easy, the symbols will be all around you. Schumacher College keeps another dream alive. I hope the strange things we have asked you to do and the way we have spoken will awaken you to another dream, for which you will find your own form, your own language.

With good wishes

Peter

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Chapter V. Aesthetic engagement and the grace of relatedness.

The previous chapter provided a detailed examination of the twenty-seven publications which most clearly chronicle Bateson's progress towards his mature understanding of the importance of aesthetic process to planetary wellbeing.

It may be useful to summarise Bateson's insights. His central insight was that active engagement within aesthetic processes can enable us to see beyond the "*purposive consciousness*" which has led us into ecological peril. Our conscious awareness is largely limited to the satisfaction of immediate desires by the most direct ways available. We have lost our access to the wisdom accrued in evolution and even to the greater part of the fruits of our personal experience. We have absorbed the societal beliefs and constructs which foster our illusions of supremacy, dominance, separation from the 'natural' world and immunity from the consequences of our ecosystemic ignorance. We have to come to believe that mind and mental activity is something which only occurs significantly in relation to human brains, we think that 'mind' is a 'substance' divorced from the physical world and we perplex ourselves with the question of how it can interact even with our own physical bodies. We have lost, says Bateson, even that 'grace' which the animals still have: the more-than-conscious sense of our total dependence on the ecological systems within which we have been, so far, kept viable. One of Bateson's most penetrating insights is that when we are actively engaged with *any* element of beauty we are able to re-access much of the systemic wisdom that our total reliance on conscious thought and intention has overlaid and largely sealed off from us.

A Sacred World: The Ecology of Mind,
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