

The Last Word

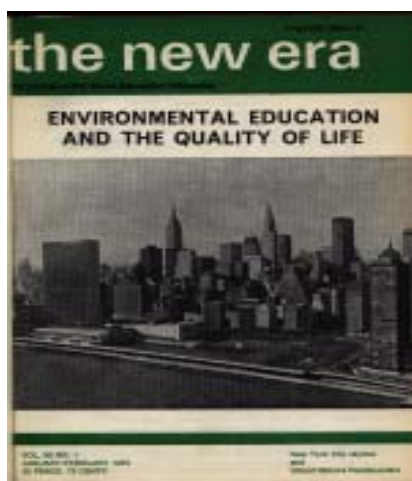
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Attitudes and Values for a New Life Style: extract from "Toward an Environmental Ethic" by Marion R. Brown, in vol.56, no.1, January/February 1975:31-2

The social binding for a way of life shared by the members of any group or community, local, national, or international, lies in its central core of fundamental values. Shared commitment to living according to certain basic values (perceptions and beliefs of what is held to be of worth; worth doing, believing in, living for) enables the members to function as a society. All values held by the individuals may not be shared values. But certain values, necessary for basic social interaction for the functioning of the society, must be recognized and accepted by most people as the 'good' or 'right' rule of behaviour by which all members are to live. Although there may be some exceptions, as anthropologists have pointed out, exceptions prove the rule in that no-one could be considered an exception unless there was a rule.

An environmental ethic involves concern with environmental values; what shall be positively valued as 'good' or 'right' for human beings to do as they relate to their environment; or negatively valued and rejected. Such values would refer to relations of human beings to each other and to other animals, plant life, earth and its natural resources, air and water. Such values would envisage man as a part of, rather than apart from the environment. Since we know that we live in an interdependent world where prevailing westerlies and ocean currents carry pollution and radiation around the world; and where population pressures, monetary imbalances, inflation, unemployment, and food shortages are world-wide

in their manifestations and effects, it is obvious for the welfare of our planetary environment that some values must be shared and actively supported by all the world's inhabitants; internationally accepted and enforced in law. However, some values will be appropriate to specific sub-systems, ecosystems peculiar to certain geographic locations and climatic conditions, and such values would be shared appropriately only by persons living in those ecosystems.



Study, discussion, broad communication on the subject of environmental ethics and values, and conscious selection of values in relation to environmental consequences of action taken in pursuit of these values, seems preferable to leaving the judgement of what is to be 'right' or 'wrong' to the haphazard push and pull of whatever vested interests happen to be activated to defend values at a particular time and place. Moreover, if we are to change our customary ways of living now and prepare for a dynamic on-going process of change in values according to feedback from the monitoring of environmental consequences, of actions in pursuit of these values, we will need to understand what we are doing.

What we are able to do will expand with effort, experience and new knowledge and each step will prepare the way for the next. Unconscious resistance to change and fondness for old accustomed ways may be overcome by anticipation of the fresh and new, and escape from the drawbacks of the old.

Further information about the origins and history of New Era in Education is in our forthcoming website
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