

The Fearful Notion of Being Reasonable

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Accuse almost any person of being unreasonable and they take offence. Accuse them of poor judgement or of being extremist, and they may even get angry. And why not? People pride themselves in being reasonable, as they should. Otherwise how would people have a good basis for making decisions and taking action on behalf of themselves, their families, communities and country?

The meaning of "reasonable" according to Webster's dictionary is "sound of mind or judgement...good sense...sensible, not extreme, sane...to listen to reason or act according to reason."

This indicates that nearly all people lack a sense of reason. For if reasonableness were a widespread characteristic of people, then the Earth would not be in such serious trouble, and getting worse fast. One could say that the Earth and its natural systems are dying because most people think they are acting reasonably and responsibly.

In view of the accelerating destruction of the planet and the active and deliberate participation of all governments and almost all large corporations in this destruction, the question should be asked: just how does one recognize reasonable decisions, activities and public policies? Which human activities and policies, long taken for granted, are in fact unreasonable, or even extremist?

Reasonableness or lack of it has a lot to do with who we think we are on this planet. Most of us humans value ourselves, our families and cultures above all things. To government and corporate decision makers, nature has no value--except as a provider of goods and services for people alone. The majority assume that humans are the greatest, wisest and (some even believe) the highest of all things. This self-valuation-above-all cult is said to be "anthropocentric" (i.e. human-centred) as opposed to "ecocentric" which means placing supreme value in the Earth and its evolved systems and natural processes. Thus, activities, rules, conduct and attitudes that support people-centred values are accepted as reasonable, while those that threaten, undermine or destroy them are declared unreasonable. Laws, language and infrastructure have historically developed in country after country to reinforce and legalize humanity's collective anthropocentric perspective.

Some environmentalists and philosophers are now declaring that Earth's natural systems are far more important than people. A tiny patch of natural ecosystem is more important than an equal sized corn patch, because the first sustains planetary systems while the second sustains people alone.

The ecocentric valuation perspective says that the vast majority of reasonable people--today's politicians, business leaders, educators, bureaucrats and other decision makers are in fact unreasonable or "unsound of thought and judgement...lacking sense...unsensible, extreme,

insane...unable to listen to reason or acting according to lack of reason. This is because their policies of development, growth and progress are destroying the very basis for life on Earth.

What these observations suggest is that some indigenous people and all leading edge environmental activists and radical philosophers are the only reasonable people around. This is because, first and foremost, these people place primary value on the Earth and the orderly functioning of its old-fashioned, evolved natural ecosystems. In sharp contrast, governments that refuse to pass laws to protect planetary processes, and industries that pollute and destroy the Earth's lands, waters and wild species (while claiming that they are reasonable) are in fact turning out to be the most destructive extremists of our time.

For thousands of years humans considered it reasonable for our societies to expand and "develop." Economic growth is still championed and attained through exploiting, converting, polluting and destroying that Earth's time-tested natural ecosystems which are directly responsible for the health and stability of the planet. Such human activities are widely accepted as being wholly reasonable and responsible.

Most of us are still proud of having "pioneered" in "improving" and "taming" the wild world of Nature to suit our immediate advantage and comfort. It was reasonable to do these things, to destroy a part of the Earth to advance the "human enterprise." But it is no longer reasonable to continue along this path of treason against the Earth. This path is also a hidden assault against people, today and tomorrow.

Things are upside down. They need to be turned right side up. The threats to global ecology cannot be reversed unless more people adopt reasonable attitudes and take reasonable actions. American environmentalist Aldo Leopold offered an ethical guide to thought and action. He noted that: a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Now you can initiate some challenging and potentially useful conversation at committee meetings, cocktail parties, and at the office. Ask this question: If people are in fact so reasonable, then why is the Earth in such trouble? You just might spark a tiny ray of hope by inspiring an ecologically sensible meaning to the familiar admonition: ***Be reasonable!***

<i>Examples of how the notion of what constitutes being reasonable can change when one adopts an ecocentric valuation perspective and follows Aldo Leopold's maxim</i>	
<i>Unreasonable (Anthropocentric)</i>	<i>Reasonable (Ecocentric)</i>
"a deep devotion to raising human beings by the billions"	"the planet already has 10 times the number of humans it needs"
"all economic growth is good"	"economic growth is killing us"
"new subdivisions are good"	"additional subdivisions are destructive of human and ecological values"
"megaprojects are justified"	"megaprojects cause more harm than good"
"harnessing or destroying Nature to expand 'human progress' is good"	"destroying Nature is bad; restoring Nature is good"

[Other Ecocentric Texts](#)