

A STORY

There is a story of overarching significance for every one of us and for society as a whole. Yet it is understood by only a small section of the community. It is the story of life on Earth and of how humans fit in to this story. It is a true story.

We refer to the understanding of this story as *biounderstanding*.

Why is this story of such great significance? Here, very briefly, are just some of the reasons.

- It conveys a sense of perspective crucial for understanding the true nature of the human situation on Earth today.
- It tells about the history of life on Earth and about the coming and going, especially over the past 600 million years, of myriads of life forms, leading to the rich network of interacting and interdependent living organisms that make up our world today.
- It tells us how the whole living system – the biosphere – works.
- It tells us that all animal and plant life depends on green plants which capture energy from the sun – the energy necessary for life
- It tells us how the nutrients that living organisms are made of come from soil, water and air, and how they are eventually returned to the non-living environment to be used again by other organisms
- It tells us that our species, *Homo sapiens*, appeared on Earth around 200,000 years ago, or roughly 8000 generations ago. The Industrial Revolution was just getting under way around 8 generations ago. The anthropogenic changes in the global atmosphere and climate have become important in the lifetime of many of us here today.
- It reminds us that we humans are living beings, products of the processes of life and totally dependent on them for our continued existence and wellbeing. Life processes underpin, permeate and make possible our whole social system and everything that happens within it. Keeping them healthy must be our first priority, because everything else depends on them.
- It tells us that we are essentially the same animal as our ancestors of, say 20,000 years ago – an animal adapted through evolution to the conditions of life of hunter-gatherers. Our innate characteristics, including our innate health needs, are essentially the same as theirs. This fact has great relevance to our personal lifestyle options and to public health policies and urban planning
- It shows how human culture – that is, the shared knowledge, beliefs, assumptions and priorities of human societies – has emerged as a powerful new force on our planet.

But most important of all, biounderstanding makes it makes it very clear that:

- The massive growth of the human population and the current explosive intensification of use of material resources and energy and discharge of technological wastes by human society are unsustainable ecologically. If present trends continue unabated the collapse of civilisation is inevitable.
- The survival of civilisation and the future wellbeing of humankind will require big changes in the scale and nature of human activities on Earth.
- At the root of the problem is the fact that the dominant cultures of the world are unaware of these ecological realities. They have lost sight of the fact that we are part of nature and totally dependent on the processes of life which underpin our existence; and they have no grasp of the scale, nature and seriousness of current human impacts on the ecosystems of our planet.
- There is no hope of overcoming the current threats to civilisation unless there come about revolutionary changes in the worldviews, assumptions and priorities of these cultures – changes based on a sound understanding of our place in nature.

Furthermore, biounderstanding provides important insights about the essential characteristics of a sustainable and healthy society of the future. It can generate a vision of a society that is truly in tune with, sensitive to and respectful of the life processes on which we depend and of which we are a part.

The most urgent need at the present time is therefore to spread this kind of understanding across human communities worldwide as rapidly as possible.

The survival of civilisation will depend on whether the dominant cultures of the world come to embrace this understanding in time to avert ecological collapse.