



## PSYCHOLOGY-ECOLOGY-SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE

### **Declaration of Interdependence: P-E-S**

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1. The three primary contexts for all work to create a sustainable future:
  - Economic globalization
  - Consumer culture
  - Advanced ecological degradation – impetus for creating a sustainable future.
2. The primary definition related to sustainability is from the Brundtland Report:

*Sustainable development is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

– UN World Commission on Environment and Development (1987)
3. The exponential-growth century (1900 to 2000):
  - *Factor of 16* for energy illustrates exponential resource consumption: (1) population almost quadrupled – 1.7 billion to 6.2 billion and (2) energy per capita quadrupled. ( $4 \times 4 = 16$ )
  - *Crossover point*: Human activity now consumes more renewable resources annually than the earth's regenerative capacity to restore them. The Ecological Footprint Network estimates that the crossover occurred around 1980.
4. The Natural Step (TNS) articulates four principles required to achieve sustainability:
  - Cannot systematically place nonrenewable resources in the biosphere.
  - Cannot systematically place persistent toxics in the biosphere.
  - Cannot systematically degrade the earth's natural systems.
  - Must use limited resources efficiently and distribute them equitably.
5. The IPAT formula describes the dynamics driving ecological degradation:
  - **I**mpact (on natural world) = **P**opulation x **A**ffluence x **T**echnology
  - Population overview – major factor, but predictable
  - Affluence overview – global economy drives this upward
  - Technology – all of our eggs in this basket
6. The key role of the global economy and the capital markets.
7. Critics of global economy fall into 2 camps:
  - Camp of reformation (maintain global economy)
  - Camp of localization (supplant global economy)
8. The three contexts raise hard questions for the PES Conference (see backside).

# Hard Questions for the PES Conference

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**1. Genetic coding.** Humans evolved to respond to immediate stimuli including threats. Today, major threats, such as depleting ground water tables, loss of tropical rainforests, and extinction of species, seem remote in time and space. *Are humans capable of responding with urgency to threats that are remote in time and space?* Pertinent book: *New World, New Mind* by Paul Ehrlich and Paul Ornstein.

**2. Sense of Purpose.** What is the role of logotherapy and sense of purpose? See *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, an account of a Jewish psychiatrist in a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl observed that hope (even though a positive outcome is unlikely) is essential. He also noted that one should not allow the structure of one's surroundings to deny the fundamental right to live and die with a sense of purpose. *Are these concepts relevant in a world of relentless commercialization, commodification, and objectification?*

**3. Magnitude of Problems.** The ecological predicament created by human activity can seem overwhelming. *Can humans grasp the reality of overwhelming problems like global warming? If so, can the problems be taken seriously when an individual's contribution to a possible solution seems so small? Is denial an issue?*

**4. Hope vs. Fear or Hopelessness.** We live in a world of relentless bad news. *Can or should humans take in the reality of the bad news? What processes allow them to do so without (a) becoming fearful or hopeless or (b) losing motivation? How do psychology and spirituality come into play?*

**5. Impact of commercialization.** According to Thomas Berry, humans are genetically coded to be acculturated. In the past very dependent young children had to learn from elders about the natural world and how to use our senses to survive. Today, the acculturation process teaches us how to consume, and it shapes opinion to create the desire to consume. At an early age, our children are trained to live in a consumer culture with no connection to sources. *What are the psychological implications of commercialization?* Pertinent book: *Born to Buy* by Juliet Schor.

**6. Disconnection.** In modern societies, humans are increasingly disconnected from the natural world and from each other. *What are the psychological and ecological implications of this disconnectedness? Is connectedness to nature an innate human predisposition? If so, what are the effects of disconnection?*

**7. Electronic connection.** We live in an electronic, consumer culture. The average 18 year old spends 8.5 hours a day connected to an electronic device. *What is the impact of this electronic connection on one's relationship with nature and people? What is the impact on the brain? What is the displacement impact – how those 8.5 hours might otherwise be used?* Pertinent book: *In the Absence of the Sacred* by Jerry Mander.