

The Challenge of Expanding the WE Perspective

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Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

The ME and WE Human Perspectives

The ME perspective promotes individual values of getting, competition, reward and advancement. The WE perspective encourages communal values of giving, cooperation, sharing and belonging.

Evolution of WE from ME

At birth we enter the world all ME – totally self absorbed. We are first introduced to WE in the nurture and warmth of our mothers. We learn we must value this primary WE connection if ME is to be satisfied and sustained. As we grow up, we learn to expand this singular WE connection to include a generally dependable Family group to which we must also contribute. Then we discover the important but often less reliable WE value of friends. Our small communities are still less WE consistent, but we learn to at least basically commit in behalf of meeting our larger ME needs and goals.

More generally, culture promotes WE commitment at all levels to the degree it seeks to instill principles of social and ecological ethics and spiritual morality. In this regard, culture provides shared expressive and ritual activities that evoke positive emotions of togetherness among the participants which support an expanded WE orientation. In addition, to greater or lesser degrees, culture may encourage us to explore certain states of mind that promote a more generally comprehensive WE perspective.

ME as the Default Orientation

Throughout the process of WE expansion, ME remains the default position. All that lies beyond what is culturally WE circumscribed gets assigned to the ME orientation – foreigners/strangers, “different” others, “unrecognized” natural resources. The ME perspective supports biological survival, but unrestrained it is also the source of most ecological abuse and social conflict.

Balancing ME and WE Perspectives

Balancing the opposed ME and WE orientations at all scales is an essential challenge for all humans. As smaller bands and tribes in their local territories, humans learned to manage this social and ecological challenge fairly well for 97% of human history. By contrast, the relatively recent and rapid rise of huge, modern complex societies has generated the overwhelming need to restrain the competitive ME orientation and to expand the cooperative WE orientation to include much more extensive social, geographical and ecological diversity. Given the comprehensive and threatening array of global scale problems that plague modern human societies, it is not at all clear that we/WE will succeed.