

Democracy, the Earth, and You

a one-day course on Creative Responses for the Twenty-First Century

This course has been prepared by staff and friends
of the non-profit educational organization

Realistic Living

The framers of this course assume that the ecological crisis has become the central emergency within which all other challenges cohere. This course is also about: world-wide poverty; global economic tyranny; the dissolution of democracy through big money control; misinformation through advertising, public-relations propaganda, and political spins; the oppression of women; the oppression of racial and cultural groups; and terrorism as both a policing challenge and a signal that critical planet-wide conditions need to be corrected.

Each presenter when teaching this course to specific groups, may want to lift up one or more of these issues for additional context and elaboration.

For example, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 widened the perception of many people that we all live on one planet and that our lives may at any moment be affected by people, grievances, and places we know little about. For some groups the course might consider how these terrorist events have moved us beyond perspectives we used to view as normal.

For other groups, current events in feminism or eco-feminism might be lifted up for additional context and elaboration.

In other words, flexibility and creativity are recommended for adapting this course to specific groups, places, and times.

Also, there are at least three alternative ways to use these course materials:

1. As a study document—reading and studying together the four presentation scripts—and then, if appropriate, doing the suggested group process after each study period.
2. As a cassette-tape presentation and discussion—playing a tape of each of the four presentations—and then, if appropriate, doing the suggested group process after each tape.
3. As four teacher-created, oral presentations based on the presentation scripts—each followed, if appropriate, by doing the suggested group process.

The third method is perhaps the most effective and provides the most flexibility for adapting the program to particular groups. It is, of course, the most demanding, for it entails mastering the enclosed scripts and transforming them into oral speeches that are the presenters' own talks.

This course might also be enriched by adding appropriate videos to the presentation period. Bill Moyers, for example, has produced many videos that would be appropriate. Some are listed on the resources handouts.

A PowerPoint presentation of this course is also being prepared. Contact Realistic Living for information on acquiring the files for the PowerPoint presentation.

The entire construct might also be grist for building another course on some aspect of this general topic. For example, one might do a program on election reform and use parts of this course as contextual material.

Though all these flexibilities are assumed, the following constructs presuppose that one or two persons are going to teach this entire program in four 90-minute sessions on a single day—two sessions before a noon meal and two after. In addition we are suggesting that fifteen minutes be used to introduce the day and the class to one another and that a fifteen-minute break be taken between the two morning sessions and another between the two afternoon sessions. (*See the agenda sheet in the course handouts.*)

Formal Aims

With this agenda in mind, let us notice the basic flow of the course content:

Session one explores broad overviews of the world in which we live.

Session two examines some of the crucial facts and prospects that reveal the extent of the ecological crisis and the need to create a new mode of society to meet these challenges.

Session three focuses on the core blocks that must be overcome in order to make a significant difference in actual historical outcomes. (This session focuses especially on big-money control of our democracies and the extensive misinformation about meeting the challenges we face.)

Session four suggests how we overcome these blocks and thus our hopelessness – how we might move step-by-step in group actions that meet our pressing challenges.

This content is further outlined in the next few pages and then spelled out in detail in the four presentation scripts.

Interior Aims

In addition to these formal aims, this course also has personal or interior aims. The topics of this course have been put together in the above sequence in order to assist people:

1. To overcome the belief that it is *too difficult* to think through fresh master overviews of the world in which we live.
2. To work through reluctance to give up *comforting misinformation* and to experience the tragic yet glorious truth of the actual challenges of our times.
3. To work through *doubts that anything significant can be done* about challenges of this magnitude.
4. To embrace *the wonder of being overwhelmed* by tasks that are clearly too big for us and for which we all are woefully unprepared.

Teaching Style

To fulfill these aims, a respectful teaching style needs to be used. This course is not intended to be a political spin or a brainwash or counter-propaganda to the propaganda of the status quo. The course is intended to assist people to think through their own authentic experiences of the

times in which they live. The facts and perspectives provided may seem overwhelming, but they are intended to be provocative gifts of possibility rather than oppressive, debate-ending arguments for a solidified ideology. This course intends to increase flexibility of thought rather than harden thought into a new dogmatism.

Teaching in a manner that supports such values is not easy. It means being firm and persistent in challenging solidified delusions and yet allowing space for people to think and speak from their own living center rather than knuckle under to the teachers. Such a teaching style supports the view that there are no super-authorities. There are just hard facts and personal experiences pulled together into meaningful overviews—overviews that will be changing for the rest of our lives.

These style recommendations imply delivering presentations that are lively overviews based on the presenter's own experiences, personal thinking through, and interpretation of the relevant facts.

These style recommendations also imply leading group processes which focus on hearing honestly from each person and on training the entire group to listen pristinely to each person. Such a group-process leader not only avoids being a dogmatic tyrant but also discourages the participants from playing the role of dogmatic tyrant. When pristine listening rather than indoctrination is the style of the group process, all participants have the opportunity to think through for themselves what they have experienced and how they are going to put together their own visions.

This style of teaching can only be learned by practicing it; nevertheless, many potential teachers of this course have a natural aptitude for this style of teaching, for it is based on the common skill of being a good listener to the thoughts and feelings of others without losing track of one's own feelings, thinking, and personal presence.

So we invite anyone with passion for the content of this course and for fostering creative discussion to consider teaching this course or in some manner making it available to others.

Sincerely submitted,

The Staff and Friends of Realistic Living

Democracy, the Earth, and You

Creative Responses for the Twenty-First Century

**a one-day program of four 40-minute presentations
and four 50-minute group processes**

1. Master Pictures of the Ecological Era

The first presentation invites the group to think more deeply and consider fresh stories about our times—about the ecological crisis and the next era into which we need to move.

The first group process allows the participants to share their understandings and questions about their vision of present realities and possible futures.

2. The Ecological Crisis, Facts and Prospects

The second presentation explores key facts and prospects that comprise the ecological crisis, where “crisis” means both the ending of old ways and the possibility of beginning anew. This presentation explores how our crisis cannot be met without constructing a whole new mode of human society.

The second group process allows the participants to share their specific concerns and their need for greater knowledge about this crisis.

3. Core Blocks to Progressive Change

The third presentation tells about the rise of the giant corporations, how popular democracies are being undermined, how truth itself is being suppressed, and then explores sources for our hope.

The third group process allows the participants to share their experiences of our corporation-dominated society and their vision of and questions about hope for meaningful changes.

4. Strategies for Planetary Transformation

The fourth presentation explores strategies for getting from our present difficulties to a viable future. It also examines why we feel overwhelmed by these challenges and why we should bother to play our part.

The fourth group process allows the participants to share how they envision social transformation taking place and to explore the specific roles each feels called to play.

Democracy, the Earth, and You

Creative Responses for the Twenty-First Century

An Outline of the Flow of Presentation Content

1. Master Pictures of the Ecological Era

Thinking for Ourselves about Reality
Society out of Balance with Person and Planet
From the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic Era
Telling the Universe Story

2. The Ecological Crisis, Facts and Prospects

The Sixth Extinction and the Importance of Ecological Diversity
Global Warming and the Importance of Stabilizing the Climate
The Population Explosion and the Importance of Stabilizing Population
Planetary Exhaustion and the Need for a New Mode of Society

3. Core Blocks to Progressive Change

Obsolete Economics
Corporations Rule Our Lives
The Demise of Democracy
The Public Relations War on Truth
Whence Comes our Hope?

4. Strategies for Planetary Transformation

Is There a Winning Strategy?
Democratic Governance rather than Corporation Rulership
Global Cooperation rather than Corporate Globalization
Local Innovation rather than Monopolistic Uniformity
Concluding Words on Doing Our Part

Democracy, the Earth, and You

Creative Responses for the Twenty-First Century

An Expanded Outline

for each of the Four Presentations and a proposal for the Four Group Processes

Presentation 1

Master Pictures of the Ecological Era

Thinking for Ourselves about Reality

Objective Knowledge

Personal Experience

Construction of Practical Overviews

Our Need for Wider Vision

Society out of Balance with Person and Planet

The World of Born and the World of Made

Progress as a Comfortable Disease

The Domestication of Wildness

The Diminishment of Inner Richness

From the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic Era

The Cenozoic Era

Two Basic Options for our Future

Sliding toward Technozoic Doom

Creating the Ecozoic Era

Telling The Universe Story

The Big Bang and Me

Cosmogenesis

Environment and Chance

Choice

Communal Choice

Group Process One

Context for pristine listening go-rounds. Ask people to talk positively about their own views rather than argue or dispute with others. Context the use of the talking stick employed by some Native American cultures. Whoever has the stick is talking; whoever does not is listening.

Passing the talking stick around the circle, ask each person to talk for no more than 2 minutes on the following topic: *(Have someone quietly time each speaker and give him or her a 10-second warning when their time is ending.)* **What thoughts or feelings come up for you as you reflect on this historical era?**

When all have spoken ask anyone who wishes to talk further to respond to this question: **What would you like to add to what has been said?**

Conduct a group reflection using these questions:

What have we heard from one another so far?

What did you hear that struck you as new?

What do you sense about our general responses?

Pass out the resource list for this session.

* * * * *

The opening context is important. It both establishes the role of the leader and the style of the discussion. By “pristine listening” we mean encouraging each member of the group to focus their attention on the person speaking rather than on what they might say next. And it means to not interrupt or razz the person speaking. It means that each person when it is their turn to speak does not scorn what others have said, but rather presents his or her own views in a vulnerable manner. Strong disagreement can still be expressed, but an atmosphere of respect and openness needs to be maintained.

The talking stick is a useful device for reminding people to listen pristinely. Any stick will do. A colorfully decorated stick may add interest to this process.

The leader must also take firm responsibility for the time. This construct calls for a 2 minute sharing. This can be applied flexibly, but members of the group must not be allowed to talk on and on and thus deny others their turn. Perhaps someone in the group can be appointed as the timer and give the person speaking a 15-second warning when his time is ending.

The leader needs to also watch the overall time. These processes are designed to be conducted in 45 minutes. If several groups are meeting at once, it is important to end them all at the same time. Even if there is only one discussion group, the overall construct of the day needs to be honored. The leader needs to make these time restraints clear to the group, and then skillfully be flexible wherever appropriate.

The leader needs to make clear when participation means going around the circle each person speaking in turn, or when persons are to speak in a volunteer (or popcorn) fashion. In this group process, the first question is a go-round process, and the remaining questions are answered in a popcorn fashion.

Presentation 2

The Ecological Crisis, Facts and Prospects

The Sixth Extinction and the Importance of Biological Diversity

- Extinctions and Extinction Spasms
- The Sixth Extinction Spasm
- Diversity and the Healthy Ecosystem
- A Biocentric Human Presence

Global Warming and the Importance of Stabilizing the Climate

- Facts and Fictions of Global Warming
- The Grim Prospects of Climatic Instabilities
- The Human Cause of Global Warming
- The Costs of Meeting this Emergency

The Population Explosion and the Importance of Stabilizing Population

- Population Facts and Figures
- The Tragedy of Population Growth
- How Stabilization is Being Effected
- The Costs of Meeting this Emergency

Planetary Exhaustion and the Need for a New Mode of Society

- The Depletion of Fresh Water, Forest Cover, Cropland, Fish, and Minerals
- Poverty, Disease, Terrorism, and Horrific Chaos
- No Social Justice without Ecological Integrity
- A Third Mode of Human Society

Group Process Two

Context further pristine listening go-rounds.

*Using the talking stick, ask each person talk for about a 1 minute on: **What concerns you most about the situation of the world?***

*Then invite anyone to respond to this question: **Where do you feel unclear about what is really true on these matters?***

After each statement of unclarity ask other members of the group
to share their insights or further questions.

Toward the end of the time ask the group this question: **As you listen to us, where do you sense we are as a group in terms of our knowledge on the world situation?**

Then ask the group to suggest their *favorite book or web site* for increasing our awareness of these matters.

Pass out the *resource list* for this session.

* * * * *

The suggestions spelled out for group process one also apply to this group process. But notice that in the second question of group process two we introduce a new procedure, one in which a conversation among the participants is conducted. This will require some firm direction from the leader in order to maintain the pristine listening values we are suggesting for all these process.

Notice that the leader invites anyone in the group to say where they are unclear about the truth of something. Then, immediately after someone shares this bit of unclarity, other members of the group are asked to comment on that topic. This can get completely out of hand unless the leader persistently makes clear who is speaking and what topic is being addressed. The leader is not directing what is said, but is firm about asking for a well-ordered exchange on a topic. The leader needs to assist everyone to remain clear what that topic is.

The leader decides when enough time has been spent on a given topic and ask for someone to volunteer their unclarity on another topic.

After the time allowed for this first question has expired, the leader then asks the whole group to step back and reflect on this group session in accord with the final question.

If done skillfully this firm leadership does not seem oppressive or dictatorial, but rather enabling, fair, and encouraging.

The leader may make clarifying comments and even ask questions of clarification to various speakers, but the leader needs to avoid taking sides in the discussion or overtly arguing with someone or some point. The leader needs to trust that open and honest dialogue will arrive at truth without being forced.

Presentation 3

Core Blocks to Progressive Change

Obsolete Economics

- Adam Smith's Breakthrough
- Injustices in Distribution
- Neglect of Ecological Issues
- Addiction to Economic Growth

Corporations Rule Our Lives

- Unexpected Hugeness
- Control of the Free Market
- Escape from Accountability
- Our False View of Dependence

The Demise of Democracy

- Corporations Make the Big Decisions
- The Money Pollution of Democratic Processes
- Our Citizens Are Compassionate Enough
- The Need for a Citizen Revolt

The Public Relations War on Truth

- A Secretive Industry
- The Eclipse of News Journalism
- Only Money Has Free Speech
- The Matrix of Delusion

Whence Comes our Hope?

- Trustworthy Information Sources
- Thinking for Ourselves
- Joining Large Movements of People
- Recalling Our Successes
- A Viable Overall Strategy for the Future
- The Healing Powers of Nurturing Community

Group Process Three

Ask volunteers from the group to answer: **What issues or questions do you have about any of the topics in this presentation?** (no more than 3 minutes)

After each response to the above question ask for other volunteers to respond to each question raised. Facilitate interaction on each topic until it fades, then move to another. Make efforts to elicit participation from everyone.

Provide a summation of the conversation, without arguing with members of the group. Simply say what you, the teacher, hear the group saying are the core topics about which we all need to keep learning.

Then have several persons share: **How is your imagination shifting on these matters?**

Pass out the *resource list* for this session.

* * * * *

The process suggested here is much like the one used in group process two. But the content of session three will be more controversial and feelings among the participants may be strong. So the leader must be strong as well in keeping the process fair, clear, and moving along in a meaningful manner. The leader may need to be quite creative and bold. It is better to do something “wrong” than to be passive. Conflicts among the group need not be feared; conflicts can be energizing, informative, and in the end redemptive. So the leader must be willing to find joy in skillfully enabling the value of honest and passionate sharing as well as the value of pristine listening to one another.

Presentation 4

Strategies for Planetary Transformation

Is There a Winning Strategy?

Feelings of Futility and Thoughts of “Why Bother?”

Big Changes Do Happen

Building the Road as We Travel

The Vanguard of the Earth and a Whole Strategy

Democratic Governance rather than Corporation Rulership

Campaign Finance Reform

Limit Corporate Control of Existing Democracies

End Corporate Rulership of Our Political, Economic, and Cultural Lives

Build Local Bioregional Governance in Planet-wide Cooperation

Global Cooperation rather than Corporate Globalization

The Anti-Globalization Movement

Protest Massively and Disseminate the True Story Widely

Educate the Thinking Public to the Full Crisis and the Winning Strategy

Restore Local Autonomy to Each Region of the Planet

Local Innovation rather than Monopolistic Uniformity

The Vastness of the Ecological Library

Demonstrate Viable Alternatives to our Current Ways of Life

Construct Eco-Wise Economic Enterprises and Cultural Institutions

Phase Out Obsolete Economic Enterprises and Cultural Institutions

Concluding Words on Doing Our Part

Building Still Better Charts

The Glory of Being Overwhelmed

Strategical Clarity Provides Hope

Doing our Part in the Vast Transition

Group Process Four

Hold up the Strategies chart and ask a few volunteers: **What is helpful to you about this chart?** And then ask: **What additional insights would you like to add to this overall scenario?** (*Take no more than 10 minutes on this, leaving plenty of time for the next very important question.*)

Then using the talking stick in another go-round, ask each person to respond to this question: **This chart or the better chart we might construct is about the winning strategies that a large WE (the Vanguard of the Earth) can and need to accomplish. No one of us can do all of this. So what specific roles or parts of this scenario do you feel called to play? Name the area on this chart and describe your role.** (*Encourage specificity and take about 20 minutes on this.*)

Reflect with the whole group on what they have heard from each other.
Conclude with some appropriate words of appreciation for their participation.
Recognize that these processes of thinking are never finished but remain open dialogues for the rest of our lives.

Pass out the *resource list* for this session and conduct *closing business* and if appropriate *share highlights* of the day together.

If you are in several small groups return to the whole group for the closing business and highlight sharing.

* * * * *

Time will be the key issue in conducting this fourth group process. The opening question may need to be cut off just when it has acquired some momentum. It is not necessary to reach full consensus on these matters. The second question is very important for the concluding of this entire program. It allows each person to speak personally about how they intend to engage their lives. Time needs to be saved for this part of the session.

Time may also be an issue in this concluding go-round. Some persons will be inclined to talk too long about what they do or intend to do, so the leader may have to be firm in assuring that time is given to each person to share their thoughts on this topic.

The concluding of this session also concludes the day and needs to allow the entire group to realize the significance of what they have shared and learned. No particular good feeling or result needs to be achieved by the leader, but the leader can structure a bit of time for the group to realize and share the significance of this day together.

Further Reflections on the Existential Aims of teaching this course and means of seeking these aims

The Existential Issue	Don't See!		Why Bother?	
	Deluded by the Propaganda		Overwhelmed by the Task	
	1 What's Going on?	2 What Crisis?	3 Where do We Begin?	4 Can Anyone Succeed?
The Existential Address	Telling New Stores	Facing the Facts	Identifying of the Foe	Pursuing Viable Strategies
	Seeing with Our Own Eyes		Contributing to a Process that Matters	
	I am a Seer!		We are Winners!	

Every course has interior or existential aims. We want some fresh awareness to dawn on people. Yet we who teach this course do not assume that we have all the answers, nor are we out to shame or ridicule anyone. Further, we assume that every participant is on his or her own befitting journey of awakening, thoughtfulness, and good sense.

The aim of this course is to present an overview that is *in accord with the facts and with our own personal experience of life*. We are encouraging participants to do the same. We are encouraging them to search out the facts for themselves, to thoughtfully observe their own personal experience, and then to build their own overviews of their own experience and of the facts as they find them.

This style of teaching is rare. What we usually find is a battle of bigotries—the teacher comes with an inflexible position, in support of which facts have been assembled. Any facts that do not support that position are omitted and are not welcome in the discussion. Similarly, personal experiences that do not support the course position are excluded and even ridiculed. The aim of such teaching is to manipulate the participants into an acceptance of the course position.

A hard-headed scientific debate is a much better style of discussion than the battle of bigotries, but scientific debate is not the aim of this course. This course intends to present overviews that have the support of scientific knowledge, but the course is not focused on proving factual assertions. In the proper context, rigorous scientific debate is appropriate, but this course is not designed to be a research conference on the facts. Facts will indeed have their role in the course. Contradictory facts or supposed facts will be presented by various participants, but the teacher doesn't need to prove his or her view of the facts or to defeat

anyone else's view. We who teach this course need to be content to challenge the participants to seek out for themselves what the facts are. We need to present the perspective that all factual knowledge is approximate and that the proper attitude toward all facts is openness. A true practice of the scientific method does not assemble facts that support an already believed theory. A true practice of the scientific method is open to all facts, however contradictory they may be to our current theories. One underlying aim of this course is to fully support the humility and openness that are embodied in a pristine practice of the scientific method.

So what are the aims of this course? In the presentations, the presenter is simply speaking for himself or herself about the facts as he or she sees them as well as the personal experiences he or she has had. The presentation scripts for this course have been pulled together as an example of how this might be done, but the presenters need to present what they actually believe to be the truth, not what is in these scripts. And the presenter needs to set aside all thought of convincing anyone of anything. The task of the presenter is simply to make a powerful, effective, ordered presentation of the way that presenter actually sees the world. The scripts have been written to aid presenters in doing this.

In the workshops, every participant is encouraged to follow the example of the presenter—to honestly and openly present what he or she believes to be the truth. There is no need for the course to end with a consensus about everything or anything. The aim of this course is to allow everyone to speak honestly and to have everyone listen to everyone else. Thereby, we *do* aim to increase openness and to provoke thoughtfulness. But we do not need to have participants make any particular changes. The success of this program does not depend on anyone's changing his or her mind, but on everyone's respecting everyone else by listening to what they have to say. *Honest, open dialogue is the most important aim of this course.* Results beyond this are unpredictable and the success of the course in no way depends upon those results. Nevertheless, a possible outcome of this course is that each person, given the space to explore ideas safely, may change and expand his or her perspective in surprising ways.

Now with these considerations clearly in our minds, we can speak of a certain existential focus that does provide our reason for teaching this course in the first place. The above chart pictures this focus and breaks it down for the four sessions. In the presentations and in the workshops we are working to overcome these two major existential blocks: being *deluded by the propaganda* of our established culture and being *overwhelmed by the task* of building a new society.

We hope that participants will consider more fully the extent to which they are being brainwashed by opinionated lies skillfully implanted by ongoing industrial culture. We hope that participants will more fully embrace their actual feelings toward the huge task that faces us all. Our most important root feelings are related to being overwhelmed. In order to survive, we, the human race, must embrace being overwhelmed for the rest of our lives. Being overwhelmed is what it feels like to be part of the vanguard of humanity. We are the vanguard only because we embrace being overwhelmed and yet do not drop into cynical despair or retreat into unconsciousness. A bottom-line aim of this course is to model the courage to face what is actually occurring in these times.

Wildly conflicting views of our times are part of our times, so the appearance of wildly conflicting views among those attending this course is what we should expect to happen. The teachers need to model *living among passionately held, wildly conflicting views in a creative, positive, and hopeful manner.* This includes listening to one another and opening to the truth that each one brings to the group. This style of living, modeled by the teachers, is also a life challenge being extended to the participants.