



# Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect

*David W. Orr*

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## **Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect** David W. Orr

In *Earth in Mind*, Orr focuses not on problems in education, but on the problem of education. Much of what has gone wrong with the world, he argues, is the result of inadequate and misdirected education that alienates us from life in the name of human domination; causes students to worry about how to make a living before they know who they are; overemphasizes success and careers; separates feeling from intellect and the practical from the theoretical and deadens the sense of wonder for the created world. The crisis we face, Orr explains, is one of mind, perception, and values. It is, first and foremost, an educational challenge.

## **Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect Details**

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# **From Reader Review Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect for online ebook**

## **Erik Akre says**

When read with a brave and pure heart this book will be found to be beautiful, if for no other reason than it tells the truth--no pulled punches--about the human situation on Earth, and what needs to be done about it. This is some serious wisdom. Time with David W. Orr is time well spent. Let's roll up our sleeves; there's work to be done!

My own inspiration included:

I must stay abreast of environmental issues. I must use my time wisely.

I must teach love for the Earth, at home and at my job as a teacher.

I must mingle ecology and education, thought and practice.

I must keep my mind alive, for the good of my own being and for the good of the planet.

Orr's wisdom has stayed with me, although the fire has cooled. Years later, I was able to approach the idea of eco-education with a heart that Orr lent me in this book a number of years before. Orr is incredibly challenging; he calls for nothing less than an entire overhaul of the human experience and practice in the world. Read him, as I said, with a brave and pure heart.

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## **Liz says**

Helps to set the stage for the concept of education of a different kind and outlines various competencies and potential changes to the current education system.

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## **Alex Shur says**

I don't know what to say except that the world needs to read this; and the tragedy of the world is that most people do not care to. We should do our best at spreading the message though.

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## **Maria Aprile says**

I love Orr's scope of sustainability topics. I read Shiva's "Earth Democracy" in turn with Orr's book for a course in Teaching Sustainability in Education. The books seem to compliment each other. We switched from Orr to Shiva, each week. They pair nicely because as florid as Shiva is in her writing, Orr is total verbatim. I would have fell asleep I think if I tried to read Orr in one sitting. He quiet literally lists his arguments, "Firstly, secondly... seventhly," etc. On the other hand it makes his points very clear.

I thought his last section was my favourite. The concept of biophilia and biophobia are worth a look at. It really opens up the reality of the damage we've done to the planet and ourselves. Again, like Shiva, great starting point of immersion into sustainability topics and definitely worth the read.

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### **Kurt says**

*Earth in Mind* consists of several essays all with the themes of taking care of our environment and the role formal education can and should take in improving the future of humankind.

Three or four of the essays were exceptional. Most of the rest were a little long-winded and overly ambitious or optimistic. There is just no way any but the most simple of the author's recommendations will ever be implemented. I would whole-heartedly support most of his proposals, but it just ain't gonna happen. Hundreds of years of capitalism, "free markets", corporatism, greed as a virtue, and "money or nothing" attitudes have become far too embedded and ingrained into our society to be simply whisked away just for the benefit of our planet's and our posterity's future well being.

Every idea and proposal in this book was well-written and well-thought out. But after seeing how impossible it is to make any kind of significant change (think health care reform, metric system, coin dollars, etc.) I found most of the proposals to be just impossibly ambitious.

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### **Tamra says**

This is an intelligent read, though too thought-provoking for non-ecologists or those aligned with conservative politics. Phrases from book: "The goal of education is not mastery of subject matter but mastery of one's person...knowledge carries with it the responsibility to see that it is used in the world."  
".....the Exxon Valdez oil spill and dozens of other large oil spills like it are not accidents but the logical result of a system that operates on a scale that can only produce catastrophes."  
Properly speaking, there is no ecological crisis. But there is a large and growing political crisis that has ecological and other consequences."

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### **Douglas says**

This is a book of essays by the author about the Earth and how we should or could live with nature and stop trying to conquer her.

In my view, Climate change is the most important question of future generations. With the changes we have made to the earth and our insatiable need to use up natural resources at the fastest rate possible to feed our greed, we have squandered our children's future.

Read This Book. Open your eyes to rising temperatures, loss of habitat for animals and plants that we need for a thriving ecosystem. Rising Oceans that will flood our coastal towns and cities. I could go on but there are shelves of books on environment that tell the story better than I can. This is one of those books.

One interesting thing about 'Earth in Mind' is that it was published on the nineties and has a list of sources from the 60s and before. Many voices have been trying to warn us for centuries but we would not listen. Too busy working our jobs to raise our families and thinking that Somebody out there knew what was going on and was watching out for us and the planet. Meanwhile the rich were raping the planet and stealing money from our pockets so they could make more money with no thought of the future. As if wealth was the goal of existence.

We need to take care of the Earth and take care of each other if we are to survive as a Species.

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### **Victor Alvarez says**

"The crisis we face is first and foremost one of mind, perception and values."

Written in 1994, Orr's vision will hardly be novel or surprising for new readers, however it is contemporary and valid.

Industrialisation and industrial education have challenged our prosperity as well as that of millions of species and Earth itself. Repair more than two hundred years of forest and soil destruction, water and air pollution and biological and climate destabilisation will require a profound cultural change. The author analyses this perspective from a social, educational, economic and ecological view.

This collection of essays seems to play an antagonistic role in trying to inspire hope for a better future while feeding the reader with despair for the involution of American education over the years. In that sense, the author's vision risks resulting in a cynical examination, rhetoric discourse and idealistic resolution. As counterexamples, Prof. Harari's Sapiens does a more grounded and serious analysis of the human condition and Mary Reynolds' Garden Awakening speaks of a revolution in our relationship with the natural environment from the heart -without falling in Orr's impractical intellectual self-complacency-.

Using an elaborated academic style, Orr wastes a good amount of energy -and readers' time- charging against capitalistic windmills, attempting to solve a problem within the context and mindset which caused it in the first place, and only shortly suggesting directions without fully backing up, developing or putting them into practice. As the author implies, conservation biologists generally call out intention without ever "rolling up their sleeves".

Despite the too obvious limitations, the book is ecologically sound, with its best sections revolving around ideas borrowed from colleagues and well-referenced works.

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### **Abby says**

This came out exactly twenty years ago, and I like the way it is both dated and prophetic. In my experience, higher education (in all its bungling glory) has actually responded to many of these criticisms--the need for more interdisciplinary work, the need for applied sciences, and the call for learning institutions to be models of sustainability. A surprising amount of progress has been made, even as some of the disasters Orr predicted have come to pass (EBOLA). In general this guy is extremely fair and intelligent, if repetitive, in assessing the situation and coming up with numbered, bullet point responses. Yes, the number thing drove me crazy.

Notes to self, things to come back to: the chapter on love in science, his recommendations for rural development (much disagreement), the idea of biophilia, observations on sense of place, and at the end, the intriguing but undeveloped idea of tragedy and comedy as two strategies for survival.

This is yet another example in my growing list of evidence that we haven't decided what education is for in this country. Is it for socialization of children? Is it to create a workforce? Is it to create upward mobility (\$\$\$) for your kids? Is it to spur their creativity and inspire critical thinking? Is it to provide them with basic life skills and knowledge (sex ed, driver's ed)? Obviously parents want all of the above for their children, and the question is how much of it should be provided at school as opposed to elsewhere. Orr has some very specific ideas about the agenda schools ought to have, especially for young adults. Honestly, most of his ideas are good.

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## **Clara Fang says**

David Orr's *Earth in Mind* is a series of essays about the human relationship with the natural world. It concerns education because education is where we learn how to relate to the universe. For, he says, "The kind of education we need begins with the recognition that the crisis of global ecology is first and foremost a crisis of values, ideas, perspectives, and knowledge, which makes it a crisis of education, not one in education." David Orr gives a resounding critique of the institutions that in large measure have caused the global ecological crisis:

**Economics.** "Economics from its early beginnings was stamped with the industrial mindset and with those assumptions convenient to industrialization." Today's governments have taken on entirely an agenda set by economics, that of endless progress, consumption, and economic growth. We equate progress with economic growth, but fail to consider the constraints of such an agenda or its costs. We assign prices to materials, labor, and goods, but we do not assign prices to clean water, clean air, forests, animals, and nature. As a result we have destroyed the essential things in order to create goods. Because we failed to train our policy makers and business people in ecology, we have built an economic system that is unbalanced and unsustainable.

**Professionalism.** Our education is defined by the pursuit of narrow disciplines, which have caused what is whole to be fragmented. Professors seeking tenure seek increasing expertise in specializations and do research that have little benefit to the world. Academics for the most part are engaged in a dialogue of their own. They are adverse to take on tackling problems in the real world except as research. They are professionals encouraged to maintain the status quo.

**Abstraction of education.** Education today is mainly a passive activity. Students learn theories, formulas, facts, abstract knowledge not grounded in the context of actual experience. Orr suggests that students should be taught first through their senses, so that they can have an appreciation of their subject matter and come to understand the world in a multidimensional, experiential way. This way they will care about the world before they are taught how to use it and subdue it.

**Globalization.** Orr advocates for a commitment to place. Instead of knowing about the world in an abstract way, we should learn about it by fully inhabiting the places we live. We should learn about a place, love it, care for it, and be engaged in it. Instead of being fixated to the television or internet, we should engage with real places and real people. By learning to value places, we will not only protect the environment but also lead richer lives.

Ultimately Orr's message is one about love. He quotes "we cannot save what we do not love." And education should teach us how to love this world as well as how to manipulate it. Rather than using education as a means of upward mobility, we should think about what we want as a society. "People need, among other things, healthy food, shelter, clothing, good work to do, friends, music, poetry, good books, a vital civic culture, animals, and wildness. But we are increasingly offered fantasy for reality, junk for quality, convenience for self-reliance, consumption for community, and stuff rather than spirit." Orr argues that our ecological crisis is not one that can be solved by technology, but by a change in our values. An entirely different orientation to education is needed to impart values and the knowledge needed to create the good society, one that values balance, fairness, and ecological diversity.

My only criticism of this book is its emphasis on agriculture and regionalism. While having sustainable agriculture would be a huge step towards ecological sustainability, we can't all return to rural living. Orr doesn't acknowledge that cities are some of the most energy efficient places and that cities contain cultural diversity in ways that are not possible in rural society. The demographic trend of the world is towards the formation of large cities, and we might think about how to handle this transition rather than resist it. The lengthy chapters on agriculture in the second half of the book is less relevant for people who are seeking to learn about educational reform. Overall, an eloquent and important rethinking of our priorities as a society.

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## **Ganesh says**

I cannot think of a book that has had a more profound influence on how I live and how I see the world.

I came across *Earth in Mind* seven years ago, when I was doing a great deal of soul searching, trying to figure out what kind of life I wanted to lead, trying to understand our ecological crisis, and struggling to understand why we were doing such great harm to ourselves.

David Orr convinced me that an important part of being an environmentalist is loving and taking pleasure in the natural world, this world that I want to save for myself, my family, my friends, and future generations. As Orr points out, in order to fight for something, you must first love it.

And one cannot love that which one doesn't know. So, even though I had always been an indoor person, this book inspired me to set aside my books, and go for a walk or a hike. I also began to pause before I made decisions to consider what the environmental impact would be.

David Orr argues that the answer to our social and environmental problems isn't simply ensuring that everyone gets a college education. We don't just need more education. We're currently learning the wrong things in school. We need to be passing on values and knowledge that will create a sustainable world. I, for one, graduated from college without the faintest clue how to live sustainably.

By spending nearly the entire school day indoors, educators are sending students the message that time in nature, experiencing it and studying it, is not important. It is vital that our educational system reflect values that will create a more sustainable society. It's essential that we study ecology and agriculture, know where our food comes from and know how to grow it sustainably.

Here is my favorite part of *Earth in Mind*:

"Were we to confront our creaturehood squarely, how would we propose to educate? The answer, I think is

implied in the root of the word education, educe, which means 'to draw out.'

What needs to be drawn out is our affinity for life. That affinity needs opportunities to grow and flourish, it needs to be validated, it needs to be instructed and disciplined, and it needs to be harnessed to the goal of building humane and sustainable societies. Education that builds on our affinity for life would lead to a kind of awakening of possibilities and potentials that lie dormant and unused in the industrial-utilitarian mind.

Therefore the task of education, as Dave Forman stated, is to help us 'open our souls to love this glorious, luxuriant, animated, planet.' The good news is that our own nature will help us in the process if we let it."

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## **Bart Everson says**

We read this book for our eighth annual Fall Faculty Book Club at Xavier University of Louisiana. At our final meeting, we asked our participating faculty to jot down some thoughts. Here is what they wrote.

Though written 20 years ago, this is forcing me to think more critically of *place*, choices and practices, and the connection to other communities. *Responsibility needed.*

*Earth in Mind* profiles the gradual annihilation of the planet caused by no-holds-barred economic progress, reliance on fossil fuels, unrestrained technological advancements, and other harmful forces of modernization whose costs are rarely calculated. It should be required reading for everyone, but especially the power brokers of our global society such as politicians, CEOs, financial analysts, education administrators, and scientific researchers.

*Earth in Mind* is an appropriate name for this collection of essays on the Earth and education. I'm lucky to have received the kind of ecological citizenship training touted by Orr from my family. I believe that it's not too late to make a united, systematic and sustained effort to educate our children to be biophiles and not biophobes so that they will become advocates for our planet and its inhabitants and pass on the love to future generations.

Excellent book! A must-read about the relationship between economy and ecology! Holistic, wholesome, a reminder of our own connection to Nature!

This book provoked me, worried me and confused me at times. It reinforced ideas but it also required me to rethink my ideals and approach to life.

For me, this book was both a practical and promising guide to how I will live and love in this — the sunset of my life. I *loved* this book. As a teacher, it will be on my great books list!



*Earth in Mind* is a great book for inspiring an intentional, genuine focus on environmental issues in higher education. I intended to encourage deeper consideration of the long-term consequences of our lifestyle among my students.

*Earth in Mind* evokes a feel of urgency to spring to action and take care of Mother Earth.

The author builds the case for incorporating the environment to all disciplines. I think this is a good book for all educators.

This book was a great reminder of our responsibility as higher ed faculty to introduce students to the idea of sustainability. If we don't get students to critically think about these issues then who will?

Many thanks to Dr. John P. Clark for recommending this book.

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## **Ryan says**

Books that tell of the sins of mankind against nature are dime a dozen these days, but this book, first published 20 years ago was ahead of most in calling to attention not just the big issues of global warming and resource depletion, but digging deeper to expose the problems inherent in the value system of modern industrial societies. Ostensibly about how we should rethink education from 'K to PhD' due to it's failure to inculcate a sense of responsibility towards nature, the author goes on to explore the root causes of our increasing alienation from the nature that humankind came from and continues to rely on for long term survival.

Indeed it almost seems that everything we have been doing since industrialization have been wrong, pushing us ever further from the land that supports us, into cities and virtual environments, taking away place specific local knowledge of ecology and replacing it with ever more layers of specialized, abstract theoretical knowledge. Our very notions and measurement of progress, like economic growth, specialization, efficiency, productivity etc are all called into question as they have come at a heavy environmental and social cost not adequately accounted for in our market based societies that champion short term growth and discount the future.

Nothing short of a reversal of past trends is needed, from restructuring education to re-ruralization or back to the land movement so as to reacquaint ourselves with life support systems and a more sustainable way and scale of living. Sadly it is all too apparent that nothing close to these steps have been taken since, and I suppose nothing short of calamity or catastrophe would push the majority to even consider what the author so stridently advocates. The last chapter, added ten years post publication, attests to this. The 21st century saw an even more rapid pace of business as usual going in the very direction the author tried to warn against. He does not lament at this, only talking in a philosophical manner about what attitude we should adopt in the face of such disheartening realities.

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## Drew says

By far the best book I've read this year. Having grown up "a country bumpkin loser" in rural America and now a citified "smart person", I can hear Orr's call loud and clear. It's a call for humans to return to their roots--in nature. Our problems won't be solved by more research, more technology, "clever" ideas, and bigger cities. Our culture is not the pinnacle of human achievement. Our country is not the "greatest country in the world" (there is no such thing).

"Americans have been on a binge fueled by fantasies of power, wealth, and mobility. For us, coming home means restoring ecological and human scale to a civilization that has lost its sense of proportion and purpose. It means regenerating roots in particular places and traditions. But if we do not build a worthy home, what are we building? And if we do not prepare our young people to come home, for what destination and for what destiny do we consign them."

Unlike the silly Lee Greenwood proud to be a blah blah blah bullshit, "Real patriotism requires that we weave the competent, patient, and disciplined love of our land into our political life and our political institutions. The laws of ecology and those of thermodynamics, which mostly have to do with limits, must become the foundation for a new politics." As the political writer Vaclav Havel wrote, "Genuine politics...is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community, and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility, expressed through action, to and for the whole, a responsibility...only because it has a metaphysical grounding: that is, it grows out of conscious or subconscious certainty that our death ends nothing, because everything is forever being recorded and evaluated somewhere else, somewhere 'above us', in what I have called the 'the memory of being'..."

A more specific description of Earth in Mind envisioned, Orr says, "A sane civilization that loved more fully and intelligently would have more parks and fewer shopping malls; more small farms and fewer agribusinesses; more prosperous small towns and smaller cities; more solar collectors and fewer strip mines; more bicycle trails and fewer freeways; more trains and fewer cars; more celebration and less hurry; more property owners and fewer millionaires and billionaires; more readers and fewer television watchers; more shopkeepers and fewer multinational corporations; more teachers and fewer lawyers; more wilderness and fewer landfills; more wild animals and fewer pets. Utopia? No! In our present circumstances this is the only realistic course imaginable. We have tried utopia and can longer afford it."

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## Jessenoah says

A must read for teachers and humans of all sorts, but especially teachers and anyone who wonders why they feel like a displaced person, despite a pleasant home and comfortable life. This one is a good kick in the ass. The book takes a critical look at the many myths of education, examines the values we're (not)taught in school, and how that plays out in grow up world. lots of thoughts on placelessness, the perversions that are science, rational thought, and modern existence, and more!

I read this in a hammock under a palapa on the beach in southern mexico while waiting for tides to shift. My favorite quote in the book is from an alcoholic dead beat dad turned trappist monk, namely Thomas Merton, to the effect of "Be anything you like, be madmen, drunks, and bastards of every shape and form, but at all

costs avoid one thing: success" (11).

Then the author goes on to talk about how the world has plenty of "successful" people, and what it needs now are peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of every kind. plus people who live well in their place. i love that one.

Thomas Merton also describes the education system as the "mass production of people literally unfit for anything except to take part in an elaborate and completely artificial charade." good one THomas! (He was later electrocuted in a bathtub while engaging in spiritual tourism in India.) Yes I am a cynical bastard. But I do like to think Thomas would approve of my knack for successlessness.

Another good quote is from gary snyder, who describes the true ecological criminals, who "make unimaginably large sums of money, people impeccably groomed, excellently educated at the best universities-male and female alike-eating fine foods and reading classy literature, while orchestrating the investment and legislation that ruin the world"(17). Ouch! Harsh words, but right on. Gary is my Hero.

The main thing I didn't like in this book was how David Orr goes off on Woody Allen for being a biophobe. i didn't find this line of thought to be very productive. plus i really like woody allen movies. especially annie hall. another downside is that the book is a collection of essays which tend to be repetitive. the first four will do you well.

if anyone wants to read this you can borrow it but be forewarned I do draw stars lines and arrows in the margins.

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