IS PETER HARPER A NAÏVE MATERIALIST?

I have been strongly involved in Climate Change (CC) debates, and have become mildly notorious for urging a radically ‘technocentric’ approach.

On account of this, it is sometimes assumed I am an old-fashioned materialist of the ‘scientistic’ school celebrated by theorists such as Richard Dawkins; or ‘technocentric’ in that I think all problems can be solved by technology. It is assumed I am unfamiliar with the literature and the culture of the non-scientific, even anti-scientific world; of the arts; of humanistic philosophy; and of metaphysical perspectives. It is also assumed I have had little involvement in the ‘lifestyle wing’ of the environmental movement. None of this is the case, and what follows adumbrates some of my experiences and interests in these directions.

I was brought up in a household where spiritual and occult interests were routine, and was exposed to the work of Blavatsky, Besant, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and J.G. Bennett

I was a member of the Theosophical Society from 1960-65.

Along with scientific subjects, I also have A levels in Art and Music.

I have remained an active musician, composer and arranger.

I have performed on, and written for, the stage, notably dramatic treatments of sustainability themes, such as a courtroom drama with a cow in the dock, and an extended dialogue between two Dad’s Army characters.

I perform a one-man show with suitable hats, representing divergent views on energy supply

I undertook training in Transcendental Meditation

In 1970 I organised a week-long conference on *Threats and Promises of Science*, with a then-unfashionable emphasis on the threats

At this conference I announced my resignation from a PhD and a ‘career in science’ in order to pursue urgent environmental causes, which I have maintained

I have personally encountered, and sometimes worked with, many well-known advocates of holistic and systems thinking, including E.F. Schumacher, Theodore Roszak, Margaret Mead, David Suzuki, Ivan Illich, Amory Lovins, Stewart Brand, C.H. Waddington, J.K.Galbraith, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Teddy Goldsmith, Jonathon Porritt, Richard Mabey, Dennis Meadows, Mike Berners-Lee, Satish Kumar, Rob Hopkins, Brian Goodwin, David Holmgren, Victor Papanek, Rupert Sheldrake, David Orr, Crispin Tickell, Herbert Girardet, Colin Tudge and so on.

I was familiar with the work of Rumi, Goethe, Ruskin, Owen, Morris, Jung, Cobbett, Kropotkin, Rene Guenon, Lewis Mumford, Frances Yates, Aldous Huxley, Rudolf Steiner, Herbert Marcuse, Ram Dass, Steven Gaskin, Clough Williams-Ellis, John Michell, Wendell Berry, Teilhard de Chardin, Christopher Alexander, Ursula LeGuin, Leopold Kohr, Murray Bookchin, Roger Scruton, E.P.Thompson, Michael Oakeshott, Tim Jackson, Arne Naess, Jared Diamond, Ted Trainer among others.

I am a Fellow of the Findhorn Foundation, founded and operated on ‘New Age’ principles

I am a member of the Scientific and Medical Network, dedicated to exploring the interaction of science and spirituality

In 1972 I coined the term ‘Alternative Technology’ to describe simpler and more sustainable patterns of innovation and technical development

I worked at the Centre for Alternative Technology for thirty years, as Head of Biology, later Head of Research and innovation.

I spent several years as a professional horticulturist, and produced *The Natural Garden Book* in 1994

I designed and directed the major landscape features of the CAT site

I ran courses in organic gardening, composting, waterless toilets and Gaia Theory

I ran workshops on collecting and preparing wild foods, and on wild plants. I retain a special interest in the potential of acorns

I pioneered novel interdisciplinary protocols for compost research, emphasising the human experience

I investigated many ‘Cinderella’ topics, significant but ignored as off-limits in mainstream research, including dowsing, the use of rock flours, urine as a fertiliser, the ‘memory of water’, and lunar influences on plants

I ran my own home as a long-term participant-observation project, the ‘Lifestyle Lab’. I weighed and recorded all waste production for two years.

I started a local car club running on reclaimed biodiesel, eventually with 30 participating households

I ran workshops on ‘Sacred Landscapes’ at the Wales Dance Camps 1986-2000, discovering and restoring a holy well.

I curated an art exhibition based on organisms found in compost heaps, and wrote the catalogue

I taught intermittently at Schumacher College, known for its holistic education

I am a Distinguished Fellow of the Schumacher Institute, dedicated to systems approaches to contemporary problems

There could be pages more. I strongly believe the physical universe we observe is only a partial aspect of a profounder reality. Nevertheless, the physical must be accorded its due; it cannot be simply ignored or set aside. Despite my long immersion in anti-materialist traditions, I have come to the conclusion that physical problems need physical solutions, and that we should pay more attention to appropriate timing and sequencing.

My views cannot be dismissed as the result of ignorance.