

# Ecology or Catastrophe?

This final map does not pretend to be an ultimate distillation but an attempt to integrate some major themes of the book, for the variety of patterns is irreducible, and the dreams of rival disciplines to become *Thè Great Phallus* originating all other inquiries is a part of our problem. First social science is inevitably moral science. If there is no attention without intention, then the selective focus of our paradigms (see Maps 52–6) have moral consequences and it behoves us to be aware of them. This is not a signal to start trumpeting our moral commitments to freedom and love, since values too strenuously proclaimed fulfill themselves in unanticipated and catastrophic forms. I believe the advocates of value freedom to have been right, at least in their portent of disaster inherent in ideologies. The problem is this: human beings perceive, speak, symbolize and process information in bimodal patterns while moral judgements tend to fasten obsessively on one of two modes. In Map 23, for example, I listed 33 ways in which rival theorists had conceived of the bilateral specialization of the left and right brain hemispheres. Yet few of these divisions have not been subject to murderous factionalism – Puritans versus Catholics, Mind versus Body, Freedom versus Determinism, Arts versus Sciences, Communism versus Individualism. The war of geographical hemispheres is that of brain hemispheres, half-truths duelling to the death.

The kind of moral science I advocate is one discoverable only in the crucible of anxiety (see Map 13), in the ‘incessant movement of contradiction’ (see Map 12) and in the painful awareness that there are always at least two positive values in conflict, so that growth is the resolution of dilemma (see Map 38). Such conflicts as individualism versus cooperation, or in the realm of data atomism versus holism, are the results of our verbal and numerical habits of encoding those differences which constitute information. Nature does not consist of sawn-off segments and extremities, only the language and measurements we use to describe nature has this digital structure. Our delusion that words are things (see Map 39), our continuing incapacity to read the Sphinx’s riddle (see Map 40), threaten us all with destruction. If we break the continuum joining individuality to cooperation, we split the human endowment and turns its broken halves into idols, (Maps 43, 47, 49, 50).

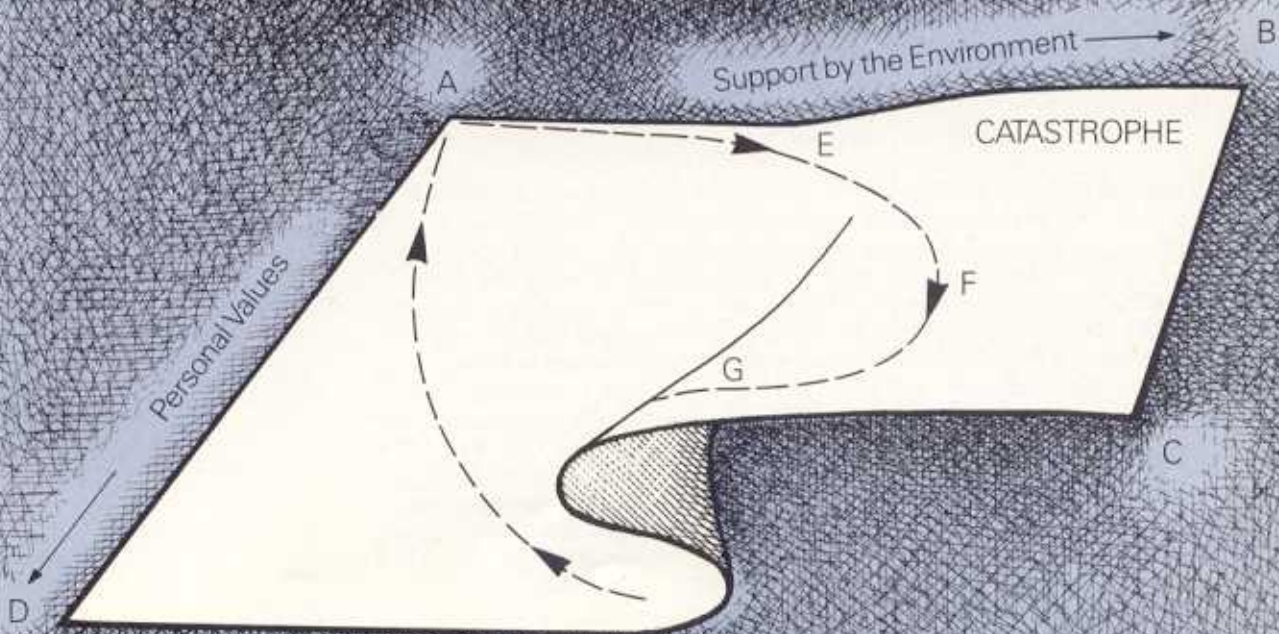
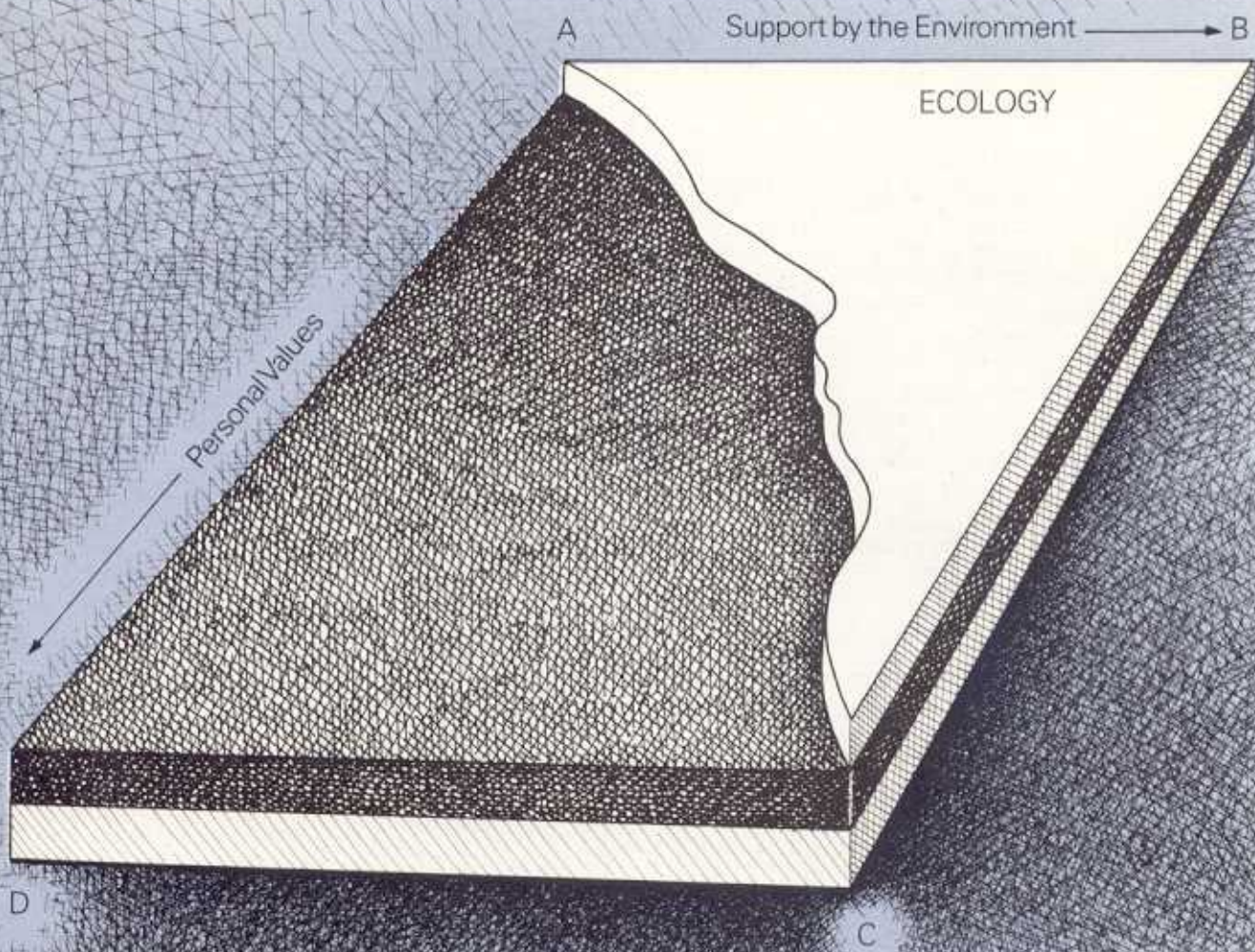
It is necessary, therefore, to reject both the behaviourists insistence on strict, causal determinism (see Maps 6–8) and those humanists, who, heedless of Icarus, treat human freedom as a flight onward and upward (see Map 33). There is no freedom in seeking to conquer the larger life-patterns of ecological connectedness, only self-destruction. Every time we make a ‘tree’ of our conscious purpose (see Maps 4, 55) we must deal with the ecological ‘garden’ or ‘net’ of which that tree is a part. We can push nature but she recoils catastrophically upon us (see Map 56). The answer is not to denigrate freedom but to discover that it lies within the laws of recursive systems (see Maps 45–51). Attempted ‘triumphs of the will’ turn into their opposites, addiction and mania, see (Maps 48, 50) as the tragedies of Oedipus and Agamemnon are endlessly repeated (see Maps 2, 57, 58).

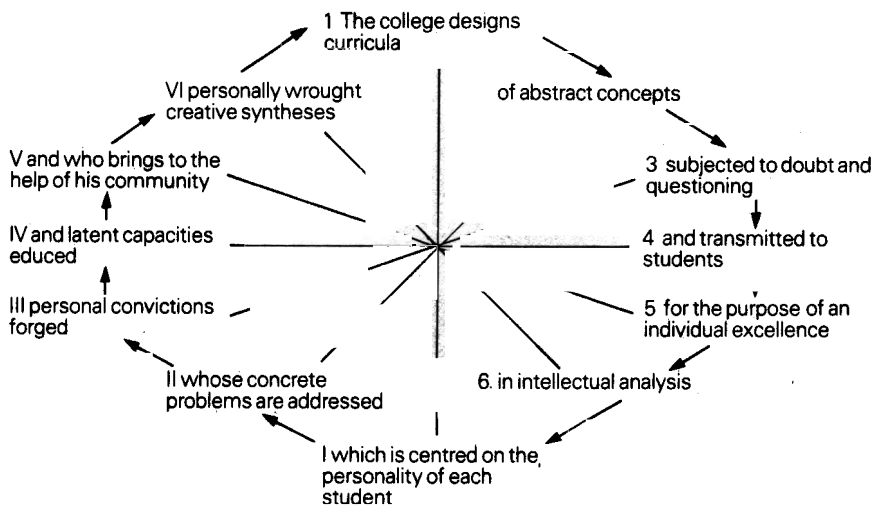
In Map 42, we saw that catastrophe can be avoided by creating an ecological synergy among values. If we take the rival positions espoused by progressive versus formal educators, we can create a cybernetic loop of their polarizations as shown on page 210. The conflicts can be seen by contrasting the words at the opposite ends of the axes. The resolution is achieved by optimizing all elements.

In Map 42, we saw that complementary values taken from both poles of a values continuum can be top-heavy, lop-sided or synergistic, and we can plot these conditions by bending the continua into dual-axis diagrams (see page 211). A glance at these should be enough to remind readers that higher education is balanced precariously between catastrophes. In the early sixties the indictment of

*The human organism has either an ecological, co-evolutionary relationship with its environment or a catastrophic one of attempted conquest and backlash. The ecological relationship (top) shows the person’s profile (left) within the context of his environment (right); he can only succeed in increasing his own personal values A–D by simultaneously nurturing his environment, social and natural, to render it more responsive A–B. Point C represents an optimal ecology of organism–environment which could in particular situations stand for such values as individualism–cooperation, part–wholes, rebellion–loyalty. That complementary values here go up or down a step reminds us that they must be expressed at different levels of logical type to avoid contradiction (Map 40); be dovetailed (Map 43) or imbricated (Map 55), and be cybernetically constraining and containing.*

*But our situation is potentially catastrophic (bottom). For centuries Puritan science embarked on a conquest of the environment, even repressing personal satisfactions to the end of moving from A to E. However, accumulating wealth led inevitably to the consumer society and extended indulgence in personal appetites, as the graph swung from E to F, and people cashed in on environmental manipulation. Soon, however, the pillaged environment and tortured social system may give way beneath the predators and a catastrophic fall in environmental quality occur as society falls into the cusp at point G (Map 56) and a rapid decrease in personal satisfaction and environmental response takes the human race backwards . . .*





'Warren [Warren S. McCulloch, 1898–1969] was speaking very slowly. "I am by nature a warrior and wars don't make sense any more. I am a king, but I'm an anarchist, and in my country there are simply no laws . . . Now the difficulty is that we, who are not single-celled organisms, cannot simply divide and pass on our programs. We have to couple and there is behind this a second requirement." Warren began to weep. "We learn . . . that there's a utility in death because . . . the world goes on changing and we can't keep up with it. If I have any disciples, you can say this of every one of them, they think for themselves.

Very softly Gregory said, "Sure Warren."

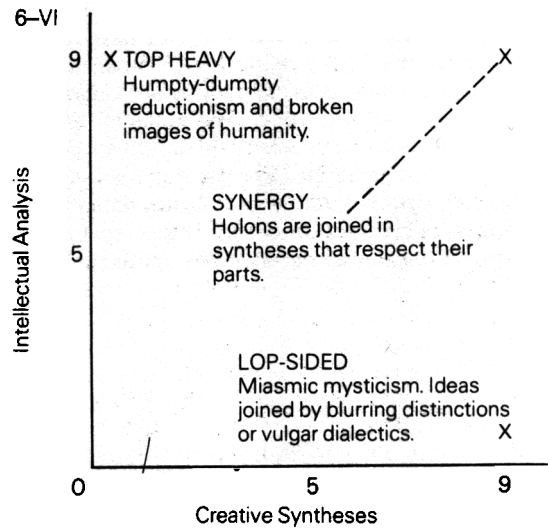
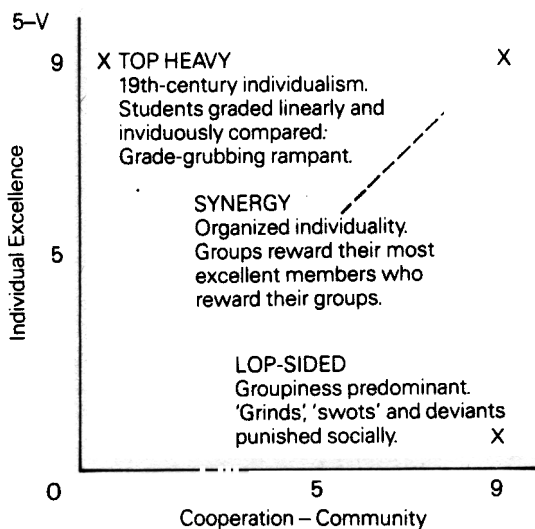
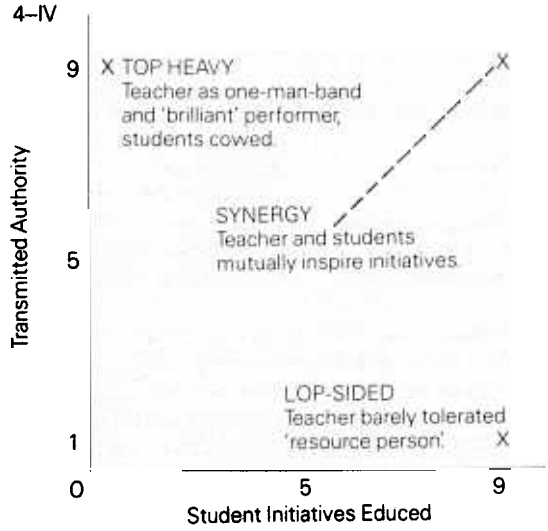
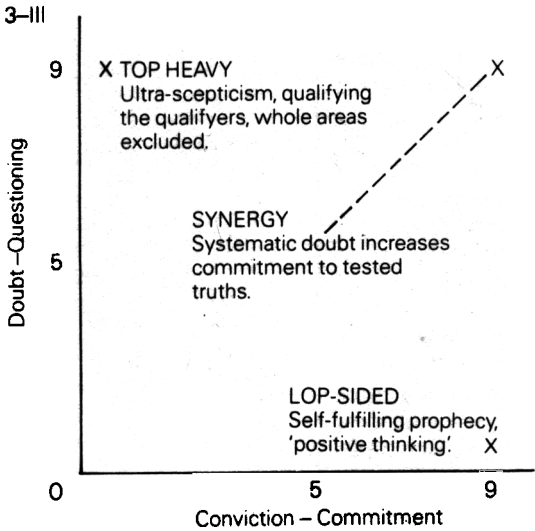
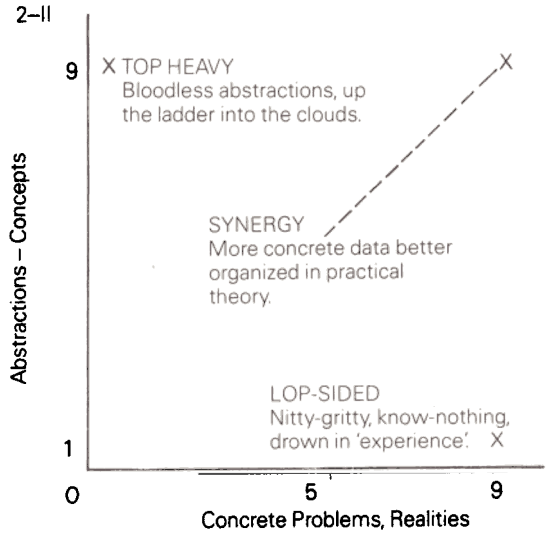
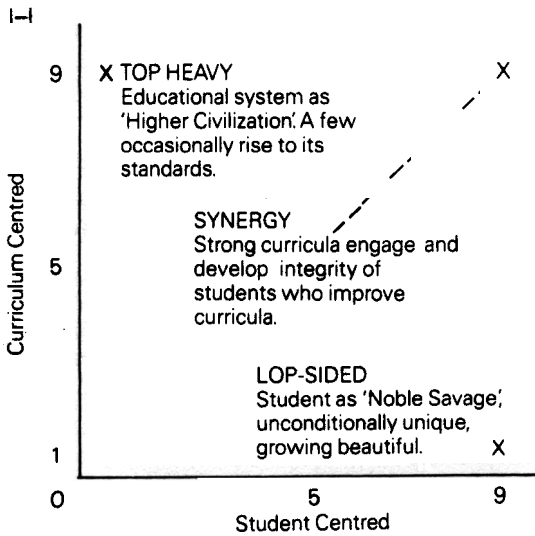
"Freedom from and freedom for". We sat in silence for a long pause. "Coffee?" said Warren.'

From the 'Conference on the Effects of Conscious Purpose on Human Adaptation' July, 1969, convened by Gregory Bateson, quoted by Catherine Bateson in 'Our Own Metaphor'.

traditional college education, especially in the social sciences, was a familiar litany. The system had disappeared up the abstraction ladder and dared not come down, evading real people and their problems, it busily qualified trivia and qualified its qualifiers. By an exaggerated scepticism, it managed to dismiss as meaningless most of the world in which people lived and to define the human conscience as 'unverifiable'; while 'brilliant' lecturers played verbal games, a Silent Generation of students eschewed social responsibilities for grades and personal advancement.

So came the revolt of the sixties, spearheaded in most cases by social science students frustrated by the failures of their disciplines. There were brief moments of creative ferment but when the tear-gas cleared the top-heavy had become the lop-sided. Every swear word was now a search for existential validation. Cults of touchy-feely and instant enlightenment popped up to peddle positive thoughts. It became 'authoritarian' to give a lecture, and academics became 'resource persons' waiting around to be utilized in democratic class-rooms. Many students affected a contrived inarticulateness, 'Like . . . y'know . . . I mean . . .', a style intended to convey feelings too profound for words but which increasingly resembled sheer density.

However the choice is not between the poles at all but between an ecology of 'both . . . and' or the catastrophe of either/or in which the top-heavy are ever subverted by the lop-sided. The map at the beginning of this section compares ecology (top) with catastrophe (bottom). In ecological relationships the values describing the processes are defined inclusively of one another (see Map 35). For example, free individuals find fulfillment in lawful cooperation, while the laws of that cooperative relationship free and individualize the persons involved (see Map 42). Such an ecological pattern can also connect many other complementary endowments. These valued processes 'nest', the one in the context of its complement always at different levels of language or logical type (see Map 40). Another way of conceiving this is as dovetailing values (see Map 43), as imbricating affirmation–negation (see Map 55), or as shifting democratically between figure and ground (see Map 58). In catastrophic relationships values are defined exclusively and independently (see Map 56). Hence ideological disputes arise that pit



'individualism' and 'the Free World' (including Chile) against 'collectivism' and 'coercion'. Each polarized bloc attempts to purify its values, of which Puritanism (see Maps 6–8) is an historical example. This ends in contradiction when the repressed pole erupts (see Map 13). Instead of nesting within their complements catastrophic systems oscillate (see Maps 14, 49) go into runaway (see Maps 22, 48) and suffer schismogenesis (see Maps 48–50) with ever widening bifurcations (see Map 56), as the tragic heroes suffer *peripéteia*, or the opposites of their intentions (see Maps 2, 56–8).

Implicit in these arguments has been a method of reconstituting the meaning the coherence and the psycho-logic of value judgments. For most of this century the heirs of logical atomism first analyzed value systems into verbal pieces and then pronounced each fragmented judgements as without testable meaning. They failed, however, to ask whether their analysis had not destroyed the meaning inherent in the whole, ie in the unbroken continua and patterns *between* the judgements. Consider the hawk-dove moralizing in the Vietnam War, where 'patriotism' and 'loyalty' were pitted against 'treachery' and 'subversion'. Here is how the positivists would have analysed this unseemly clamour:

EVALUATION	DESCRIPTION	PRESCRIPTION
'Loyal, patriot'	= supports the war	(a good thing)
'Conforming militarist'	= supports the war	(a bad thing)
'Dissenting rebel'	= condemns the war	(a good thing)
'Subversive traitor'	= condemns the war	(a bad thing)

Social science, the philosopher concludes, should throw out the exclamations of preference about good or bad things and *describe*.

Admittedly value judgements are used in this unprofitable manner but is there no other way? These maps have shown that judgements of virtue are justifiable if they enhance the patterns joining that value to its complement. For example, loyalty or dissent are correctly evaluated as positive (a good thing) if either act succeeds in enhancing or protecting the *entire continuum* of loyalty-dissent, as well as the larger cybernetic value-system of linked continua. Similarly acts of patriotism or rebellion are correctly judged as virtues where they succeed in protecting or enhancing the capacity of patriots to rebel and rebels to remain patriotic. Judgements of vice, such as militarism or treachery are correctly used where either act leads to *splitting the value continuum* and so breaking the system which joins love of country to the capacity to rebel against it. Subversion or conformity are correctly designated as vices if they destroy the patterns joining loyalty to dissent. Note that the test of vice or virtue is empirical and pragmatic. When value judgements are enacted, they either increase the salience and synergy of the elements in the value system or they split and diminish those elements. We can measure, observe or otherwise estimate such growth or regression.

*'No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine . . . Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde: and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'*

*'Devotions' John Donne*

MAP REFERENCES

Both . . . and, 2, 5, 10, 12–14, 16, 23, 28–30, 35, 47; Continua, 1–3, 10, 22, 26, 30, 34, 43, 51, 58–9; Ecology of mind, 48–50, 55; Moral Science, 5, 11–13, 37–40, 42–3, 46–7, 51; Semantic loops, 38–9, 42–3, 48–9, 51.