

## **How sustainable are we?**

Part of being human is our capacity to transform the natural world around us. We rightly rejoice in our science and technology. But in wider cultural and religious understandings, humans are equally understood as stewards and companions of what we call 'nature'. How we handle the tension between these two roles of intervener and conserver has become a central issue, not only for European civilisation but globally. As human technological powers have gone beyond locally harnessing forces to controlling and redirecting on a large scale, we are increasingly aware of our damage. If all the world's peoples achieved levels consumption of the today's richest industrial nations, key aspects of the planet's systems would not sustain the burden – for example in climate, fresh water, soil and wastes. No longer can we rely simply on our ability to fix ourselves technologically out of problems of our own creating. How to find models to use our powers sustainably has become urgent. Since the 1970's many have questioned the sustainability of our present assumed trajectory of one way growth. This paper critiques four models of human attitude to nature - ownership, worship, partnership, maintenance engineer - and looks for alternatives. To what should 'developed' and 'developing' nations be aspiring, technologically, given the prospects for the state of the planet? An underlying issue concerns our humanness in an unchecked pursuit of technological progress. For example, whenever as humans we begin to see the natural world primarily in terms of resources to be exploited, is something vital lost, which is difficult then to regain, not only in our relating to the natural world, but also in our humanity itself? Are there eventually human limits to technology?