

ADAPT

Only now, at the end of my life, after writing books and essays for half my life, it dawns on me that I have a problem communicating with modern humankind. I see another reality; I don't understand yours. Growing up among indigenous people made me see two realities. One warm and inclusive, the other dangerous and exclusive. For half my life and more I tried seeing your reality. It did not come natural I had to make a great effort. Until finally I gave up trying to adapt to a world that made no sense to me when I had another world that I fit in. But the world you seem to fit in fluently does not let me go. So am back to my childhood when I tried to straddle two realities, adapt to that. The two worlds have grown farther apart; I am not very good adapting any more. The one thing I hold on to now is that I know that we are just another animal, whether we know it or not, we are not the boss.

You who real this —literate, civilized—live in a world where the ground idea you have of yourself is that we, humans, have the power to change the world. Not only have the power, but it is the first thought that is on top of all thoughts: modern humans cannot live without doing what they can to change the world. Their mindset is that progress is forever and any comment or suggestion that progress cannot be forever attacks their “hope.” And without hope they cannot live. Hope to most people seems to be hope that they or someone else will do something to make life better, or at least keep things as they are now.

Human history demonstrates that we do have the power and the will to change absolutely everything. In my life time the face of the planet has changed, we have cut more than half of the tropical rain forests, we have been clever in inventing things that do never go back to what they were made of. And we have created hierarchies over hierarchies among ourselves. The lives of the privileged have been filled with gadgets, gimmicks, and ease. We know ourselves way ahead of the rest of the world that suffers under our roughshod exploitation of their resources. Those of us lucky to have been born in a white skin living in a favored country think we own the world. We live as nobody of any past could have dreamed to live. We are served by a myriad machines, houses with bed- and bathrooms for every person and one or two for guests, we travel the world for adventure and profit. Profit is the key word of this extremely asymmetrical world. The few live entirely separated from and ignorant of the rest of us. And many of us live almost entirely separated from what we used to call Mother Nature. Nature has become background scenery, a place where you go to relax and swim in oceans from white sand beaches, from where you send cards “wish you were here.”

Wherever this idea has taken root it creates new minorities that indeed achieve this new life style, ignoring the ravages to nature and the destruction of the livelihood of large segments of all infected populations. Some humans say things like “those who moan about losing jobs and/or homes are not worth worrying about.” Another explained that the people who lost their jobs (many millions) were spoiled, unworthy to have jobs.

From my point of view this progress, changing the world, has made an awful mess of our planet. We have changed the face of the earth; we have removed mountains, redirected rivers, covered the earth with concrete and asphalt and made too much stuff intended to be thrown away from non-biodegradable plastics. We build buildings that reach the clouds. If we, humans, have proven anything it is that we know how to use power. Force. Blind to the destruction and not a thought for the morrow. And what strikes me more than anything is a deliberate not wanting to know about other ways of living.

A life style based on always better is unthinkable to me. Young people write me, "I can see what you mean about the state of the world, but what can I *do*." Of course I cannot know what you should *do*. I'm fairly certain there is nothing you or I can do. But I have learned that doing nothing is unthinkable in the modern world. The many books I've read and documentaries I've seen tell what is going on carefully, as if this is all in some not too near future, and it always ends with what we can or ought to do. The idea of not doing anything is not even not acceptable; it is unthinkable.

As I read the latest report from scientists who measure climate or the destruction of the biosphere it is only too clear that it is way beyond what any one person, or a group of protesters can do. The Powers are using all the immense power at their disposal to keep things as they are because it is profitable. Immensely profitable. For the past few years, in this recession that is really a depression worse than the one 80 years ago, wealth has been sucked up, the rich have grown very much richer (20%, 30% richer than they were a year or two ago) while the so-called middle class is melting away. The US prided itself a classless society, with only middle class people. Even working class people were called middle class in the last century. The poor and homeless were a problem. Now we all seem to sink in the mud at the bottom.

I think that the idea that we are different and that we can (and therefore must) change the world started more modestly maybe ten thousand years ago when some people invented agriculture. Rather than find food where it happens to grow, we could grow it ourselves, nearby. One thing led to another. Where we made the effort to plant a food crop became something we "owned." The idea of owning was unknown until then. It is a(n) uniquely human idea, it does not exist in nature. Animals will protect their young, perhaps their territory, but they don't own. Offspring grows, territories change boundaries. Humans expanded on the idea of owning: to own their children, own their wives, own a house and other property. And we expanded on the idea of hierarchy: the owner has more power than what or who is owned. Men are more something than women. The more property owned, the more powerful one is. We could own other people. There grew a hierarchy of owners.

And then we invented money. Primitive scratches in bark at first, then pieces of stone, metal, paper. Today money is numbers in enormous computers running on electricity we make. What would happen if the electricity stops flowing? We'll wake up to the truth that money is nothing. A mirage.

What we know of human history is very sketchy and written history is not very good because it is written after the fact. Relying on written history is editing the past to explain the historian's idea of how today ought to be. The State of Texas is rewriting history to promote an imagination about how today ought to be. We are addicted to ought which of course is nought. I suspect that oral history has always been more accurate because people who have no written language have better memories; we who rely on written records never trained our memory. What we do know is that through the centuries there have been civilizations, empires, around a few people who owned great power. And we know that no empire lasted more than a few hundred years because all of them used up the resources close around them, food, minerals, trees, water. Today a few interlocking international corporations own almost all the resources of the planet and therefore own many governments—and using up all the resources this time of the planet..

Change is natural, progress is not. Now nature, the planet, is talking back. A tsunami can destroy a low island. A fire can destroy a forest. But the forest will grow back in time, the island may emerge from the ocean again. The earth will survive our depredations in time. The figures scientists collect and model to imagine a future strongly suggest that the rise in temperature may be more than one or two degrees Centigrade—with each 1° C we lose 10% of the food we grow. A 2°C increase will lose 20% or more. Our human population is still growing. You make the connection. Water is already a problem. The source of all the great rivers of East Asia is the ice and snow of the Himalayas, and as everywhere on earth, ice is melting, disappearing. There is no doubt that the problems that are coming threaten human survival.

Polls show that perhaps more than half of Americans do not “believe” in climate change, or at least that it has anything to do with us. Most of the rest of the world (95.5% of all humans) not only believes but already experiences the changes that are happening for all to see and experience..

What can be done is reduce carbon emission by stopping to burn oil and coal to generate electricity, stopping the destruction of rain forests. That is not happening, and has not happened in the thirty or forty years since we knew what was being done to the planet, our only home. Last year's carbon emission was the greatest in history, and still increasing. Rain forests are still being cut down. The chance that we will stop climate change is nil, zero. The chance that we will slow it down is minimal. *All that is left to do is adapt.*

Adapting to major and likely sudden changes will be local. Adaptation is always local. We destroy the earth globally. Adapting to the changes brought by the extracting and burning of coal and oil will be necessarily local. The global economy is unprepared and unwilling to facilitate local adaptation. So, what is ahead for all humans is an increasingly unfriendly planet, a planet we no longer know and must learn to know from day to day in order to even imagine how to survive, and more than likely ineffective or even antagonistic governments. Not “nice.”

To me, needing to do something to keep our own little world from collapsing is not real. I reluctantly accept that thinking about our demise is as difficult as thinking about our own mortality and that seems to be unthinkable to many people. I can and accept with equanimity that I am not going to live forever. My life has been a series of shocking changes in suddenly different environments that required great efforts to fit into. I learned early to live from day to day, as all ancient people did. I learned to adapt, to be flexible in how I lived, I do not fear, I accept what is and what comes. What else can anyone do?

And strange as that may sound to some people I have hopes. My hope is not maintaining my nice life. I know the interesting and beautiful qualities my species has. We can be cruel, greedy and power hungry. I am appalled at our love for guns, our racial and other prejudices, our shortsightedness in not considering consequences of inventions. But we, humans, have almost unlimited abilities to love, to care, to cherish what is natural.

My hope is that the *alive* qualities will blossom and the destructive will dissolve. If some humans survive it will be the Meek, the simple living aborigines I knew, the poorest of the poor who survive in today's slums without electricity, adequate food, shelter, clean water, waste disposal, but always life, living. To me the chaos of nature is my life. I cherish that it forces me to adapt daily. And when I die that too is natural.

Our need to create order is unnatural. We humans cannot ignore, or fear, the chaos of nature, or try to control it. We can no longer do what is unnatural. There are no straight lines in the real world. One and one is two only in mathematics; in nature one and another makes three or many. When you live on an island you know the horizon is not a straight line but a circle all around where the blue of ocean meets the blue of sky. Our poor ocean where all Life began now getting more acid, fished out, may heal in time. Volcanoes will continue to destroy as well as make new land for a long time yet. And I sincerely hope that whoever and wherever you are you will rediscover the fascinating, beautiful, exciting chaos that is nature untouched by human hand. Nature can be found in a potted plant, a wild rat, a tree that grows in the middle of a city, with a patch of moss on the north side, insects who found a home in a hole, a fungus... Nature is Life is Nature. Life not as "my life time," which is just a tiny thread in an always spreading, changing tapestry, but all Life of this planet, And I cannot believe that we are the only planet in an unimaginably huge universe to have what we call Life. It must be a product or an aspect of all matter/energy in the universe. One day, in a less utterly materialistic civilization, L must be added or fitted into Einstein's $E=MC^2$ — and that, of course, is a whole other story.

Have a good day.