

2018-19 Chronicle 5 The Ecozoic Era

Taking It Up a Level

I have a favourite cartoon. The Grim Reaper has knocked on the door of an apartment. A man opens the door, sees the reaper, and has a terrified look on his face. The reaper is handing him a note. He says, “Now don’t freak out. This is just a ‘save the date’ notice.”

I often think of this cartoon when I turn on the news each day and see more and more natural disasters. Scientists are telling us that we have entered the new Anthropocene Era. Its dominant characteristic is climate change which contributes to many of the disasters.

We know that we are all adding to this situation. We must do things to change our lifestyles. We get it. But what we are doing often seems useless unless the folks the next level up are doing their part. I’m talking about those who are running the systems—the politicians, scientists, business and corporate leaders. If they aren’t we are just “saving the date”.

Fortunately there are many people around the world who are developing different ways of seeing the world and giving it meaning. In the next several chronicles I will explore the insights of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry and their concept of an Ecozoic Era. It is a good introduction to working at the next level up. Here are the basics.

What is The Ecozoic Era?

The term Ecozoic Era was introduced by Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist, and Thomas Berry, a cultural historian. It appears in the last chapter of their 1992 book, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*.

The term “Eco-“ is derived from the Greek word “oikos.” It means “house, household, or home. The word “zoic” is from the Greek word “zoikos” meaning pertaining to living beings. Thus Ecozoic era is defined as the era of the home of living beings.

Unlike the term Anthropocene which is a geological term, the Ecozoic is a relational term. It deals with how humans must relate to this new Anthropocene world that is emerging. In its simplest form the Ecozoic is Berry and Swimme’s vision of a *mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth*.

In January 2006 I had a conversation with Thomas Berry and I asked him about the significance of the Ecozoic worldview. He told me he had written something about it that I might find helpful.

“In the 20th Century the glory of the human became the desolation of the Earth. The desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human.

Henceforth all human activities—future institutions, professions, programs and activities must be judged primarily on the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human Earth relationship.”

“The glory of the human and the desolation of Earth” refer primarily to the systems and technologies that have enabled humans to rule over Earth and its ecosystems.

Swimme and Berry focus on a number of systems but it seems that the economic system is the one that is doing much of the damage.

“To glory in a Gross Domestic Product with an irreversible declining Gross Earth Product is absurdity. So long as our patterns of consumption overwhelm the upper reaches of Earth’s sustainable production we will drive the Earth community further into ruin.”

The power of the economic system enables it to influence and dominate the political, scientific, and most all other systems.

In terms of modern technology, as I noted in Chronicle 2 (Guess Who’s Driving The Bus?) We humans have taken over the evolution process. It is we humans not the living Earth itself that will determine what Earth’s future and what our future will be. I find that a scary thought.

So how do we go up a level and change the thinking of those who are controlling the systems. In several of the upcoming chronicles I will make some suggestions. But for starters the Ecozoic requires relational thinking. How do we relate to Earth, to other species and to one another? As many have noted, this requires systems thinking.

We don’t start from the parts and move to the whole. We start from the whole—the mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth—and move down to the parts. The whole is more than the individual parts. (As Fritjof Capra has noted, sugar is made up of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen. Which one contains the sweetness?).

Going up a level and developing a mutually enhancing relationship between ourselves, other species and Earth is quite a challenge. Most people are committed to the existing systems that are causing the problems. Changing minds is not easy. As one person involved in this kind of challenge has noted, *“We can teach you many things but we can’t make you understand.”*

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