

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES 22

ADAPTING TO ANTHROPOCENTRIC CHANGE

We humans are accustomed to adapting to change. It is part of life. But, though we know that change will affect us personally, we tend to see the things we must adapt to as something outside of us.

Adapting to the Anthropocene is very different. The only way we can do it is to realize that we are part of nature—earthlings—and we are being changed along with the rest of nature.

Granted that because of our human intelligence we have more options than other species. But if we want to adapt we must get rid of the dualism—us in here, nature out there. To put it another way, Earth is our Greater Self. We are inside Earth adapting to the changes that are taking place within us and around us. Our spirituality, our inner landscape, is part of our “outer landscape. Our human consciousness is the Earth and Universe reflecting upon itself.

Because the Anthropocene is new and different from our predecessor’s world it is difficult to get a handle on it. But the concept that we are part of Earth and not separate from Earth has a long history. The “*anima mundi*”, the Earth Soul that connects all living things goes back for centuries. It is apparent in Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism and many other religions and philosophies. I think we can learn from them

. Here are some of my favourite texts that illustrate the point I have been making. The first is from Marcus Aurelius, Stoic Philosopher and Roman Emperor, 2nd Century.

Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul; and observe how all things have reference to one perception, the perception of this one living being; and how all things act with one movement, and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things which exist; observe too the continuous spinning of the thread and the contexture of the web.

Going back further to the 4th Century B.C. Here is Plato’s observation in his Timmaeus.

Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related."

The following is a real favourite because it combines the intellectual with the emotional. It is a translation of a poem by Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, and is attributed to the Chuang Tzu, fourth century B.C. Taoist philosopher.

THE JOY OF FISHES

Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu
Were Crossing Hoa River
By the Dam

Chuang Tzu said:
'See how free
The fishes leap and dart
That is their happiness.'

Hui replied:
'Since you are not a fish
How do you know
What makes fishes happy?'

Chuang said:
"Since you are not I
How can you possibly know
That I do not know
What makes fishes happy?'

Hui argued:
'If I, not being you,
Cannot know what you know
It follows that you
Not being a fish
Cannot know what they know.'

Chuang said
'Wait a minute!
Let us get back
To the original question.
What you asked me was
*"How do you know
What makes fishes happy?"*
From the terms of your questions
You evidently know I know
What makes fishes happy.

"I Know the joy of fishes

In the river
Through my own joy, as I go walking
Along the same river."

There is no way we can adapt to the Anthropocene unless we see ourselves as part of the change that is occurring to Earth. Our consciousness is the Universe reflecting upon itself and our inner life—our spirituality is—a manifestation of our inner spirit of Earth itself.

In the more modern world our failure to see ourselves as part of nature is a major cause of many of our problems. It is hard to find this spelled out more clearly than in the words of Albert Einstein.

"A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Enough said.

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