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One way to look at the problem we all cope with, who are we and why?, and what can we do about it?, is to examine the two societies we live in and the contradictions that result. Thomas Berry has written a piece called Contemplation and World Order which, it seems to me, provides an entry into how to think about the problem.

The two societies are the spiritual-religious and the secular-scientific. The first of these is more or less frozen into a mode of thinking about humanity and the world in a redemption paradigm. Despite a superficial acknowledgement of evolutionary origins, western religion continues to see the human as a creature not of the world but as requiring salvation out of the world. The human is an exile seeking the pleasure of the Divine so as to win admission into another and a better world.

The secular-scientific society has sought for and found an explanation for the cosmic-earth-human process in which all things have a genetic relationship with each other, and that discovery is seen as the most significant intellectual achievement of the last 2500 years. In the 19th century the sequence from simpler to more complex forms of life was discovered. This led to an understanding of the physical evolution of the earth which led to an understanding of the evolution of entire galactic systems.

Two orthodoxies confront each other, the scientific claiming that the universe, the world, lifesystems, the human, emerge through evolutionary methods brought about by random processes. Religion, stunned by such a view, retreats deep into traditional ways of experiencing the universe. Human affairs caught up in a contradiction and in a vortex of ill-directed activity threatens self destruction.

Yet the secular-scientific discovery, flawed by a failure to perceive the spiritual dimensions, holds the basic hope for a viable future for the human community and for the planet. The scientific origin story is being taught throughout the world to all children involved in formal education. Lacking a spiritual dimension, it is distorted, but once the evolutionary origin of the numinous-spiritual is joined to the physical, then the human community has a foundation on which to build. For then we can have a world wide integrating myth of the contemporary human, who previously found an identity separate from the earth but now finds it to be intimately and directly in every particular an earth phenomenon. Consciousness is properly seen to be earth-consciousness and reflection to be an earth-quality so that in the final result the earth takes charge of its own development through its evolved agent, the human.

And so there emerges, at least Thomas Berry sees emerging, the basis for dealing with the problem of world order, and contemplation is seen as critical to understanding how to go about it. The first thing to note is that we are dealing with the journey of the planet, not with the human journey, the journey from primordial energy toward the highest fulfillment, however that journey must proceed. The human life system is integral with the total set of life systems; world order is truly world order and not simply human order; the human has a functional role of primary importance but submits to the dominance of the whole.

The second thing to note is that the goal of contemplation is subjective communion with the world, subjective communion with the totality of things and with each particular thing;

communion with the trees and flowers, birds and animals, wind and sea, stars, sun and moon. In all things is self, subjectivity, center. The human sinks deep into the subjectivity of being, of interior communion. Nothing can be itself without being in communion with everything else nor can anything be the other without first acquiring a capacity for interior presence to itself. All things gravitate toward each other.

Based on this principle, the nations of the world and the people must establish a new paradigm of relationships. Subjective communion needs to be presented in a compelling cosmic-historical context that arises not out of a religious belief but out of the dynamics of reality itself. To understand this both intellectually and emotionally is the basic work of contemplation.

Historical transformations are in prospect if what we have said has any validity. Major transformations do not occur by way of slow step-by-step developments in a gradual ordered process, but rather in a sequence of crisis moments and even extensive disorder. This is especially true in times of paradigm shifts. And the indicated paradigm shift is one of astonishing magnitude, one to match the danger to be escaped. On the one hand the end of life itself seems eminently possible. On the other hand there is a glimmer of hope that the species may come to an awareness of the common earthliness of all things, all creatures, as well as an understanding of human consciousness as the evolved faculty required to steer the earth's development according to new ordering principles.

What is needed is a willing entry into a period of groping toward the new even when the new cannot be fully understood. Such is the function of contemplation. We are in a period of groping similar to that of a musician whose mind is haunted by an unheard melody who knows he will recognize it when it appears. We do not know what type of order is now possible for us, its shape or even its governing principles. It is a demonic as well as a divine moment. A sense of total realism is needed to penetrate into the significance of the moment and to guide the transformation. My own (Thomas') feeling is that there is called for a complete change away from the Redemption paradigm to a new Creation paradigm, provided by an adapted version of the new cosmological myth springing out of the scientific view of the origin of the universe and the forces controlling its unfolding reality.

October 13, 1982 - Murray Bookchin. This eminent scholar is the foremost critic of hierarchies. He is also an ecologist of deep conviction who has written extensively on the subject.
5:30 p.m.