CES Monthly Musings
Chronicling the Transition from Economic-Industrial to Ecological-Cultural Societies
(February 2013)

AT A GLANCE

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The Chronicle

Here we begin the “chronicle” portion of this online magazine, the chronicle of what we believe is a global transition from economic-industrial to ecological-cultural societies. In each issue of Musings authors will share their reflections on what they see going on in relation to this transition, both good and bad. We invite our readers to send in their reflections. In general reflections on a particular event should not exceed two paragraphs, though the reflection may contain hyperlinks to more information or a longer reflection. The one or two paragraphs, however, should stand on their own and contain a complete thought.

In this issue of the Musings we have two of our foundational papers describing what we mean by ecozoic. Soon we will publish an issue of our print publication containing a number of articles on “What is ecozoic?” Ecozoic is a term that will not be understood by everyone, so we use two terms that are more easily understandable as rough equivalents of ecozoic. One is “ecological-cultural societies” and the other is “ecological civilization.”

We are invited biased reporting on what is going on, yet we will hold our contributors to objective standards by including reflections both on how humanity is moving toward the
ecozoic and away from it. That humanity is moving toward the ecozoic is our thesis, but it must be defended and tested.

The general idea of the transition from economic-industrial to ecological-cultural societies is this: 1. The industrial revolution is the most important revolution of the modern period, it is has changed everything; 2. Liberal-market economics was developed as an adjunct to industrialization—Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776 contemporaneously with the beginning of the industrial revolution—and has become the primary concern of nations; 3. While economic-industrial development has brought about great achievements, it has now brought humans and nature to an evolutionary wall; and 4. A “Great Turning,” “Great Transition,” or “Great Transformation” is required. Equity requires that a large part of humanity have more, but the overall direction of human societies must be about being more not having more (culture) and becoming coherent with natural processes and developing mutually enhancing relations among humans and the larger community of life (ecology).

Finally a comment on “online magazine”: The American Heritage Dictionary defines “magazine” as “a periodical containing a collection of articles, stories, pictures, or other features,” and a “newsletter” as “a printed report giving news or information of interest to a special group.” By these definitions *CES Monthly Musings* is an online magazine, not an online newsletter.

**Meaning of “Ecozoic” (a CES Foundational Statement)**

Ecozoic is based on two Greek words—*oikos* meaning house, and *zoikos* meaning of animals (*zoikos* is based on the Greek word *zoion* meaning living being).

More simply said, ecozoic is based on *eco* meaning house and *zoic* meaning life. Putting these together, ecozoic means “House of Life.”

Ecozoic shares the same root word as economics and ecology. Based on their root words, economics means the norms or rules of the house, ecology means the logic of the house, and ecozoic means the life of the house.

Ecozoic has additional meaning when used to refer to the Ecozoic Era. Thomas Berry believed and many today believe we are currently in a period of mass extinction and other ecosystem disturbance that is bringing to an end the Cenozoic Era of Earth’s history (which began 65 million years ago after the extinction of the dinosaurs and many other species). What will follow is not clear. If we are to succeed and if nature as we know it is to flourish, then major changes will be needed in the way we live. As Thomas Berry said, “While humans cannot make a blade of grass, there is liable not to be a blade of grass unless it is accepted, protected and fostered by humans.” We will be involved in the future of our planet as never before. What will we make of it?
If we approach our role based on a “use” relationship, we will not succeed. We must open ourselves to intimate presence to, and an integral understanding of, nature. The “Ecozoic Era” represents the promise that Earth’s future will be “time of a mutually enhancing relationship among humans and the larger community of life.”

**The Determining Features of the Ecozoic Era** *(a CES Foundational Paper)*

*By Thomas Berry*

1. Earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.

2. Earth exists and can survive only in its integral functioning. It cannot survive in fragments any more than any organism can survive in fragments. Yet, Earth is not a global sameness. It is a differentiated unity and must be sustained in the integrity and interrelations of its many bioregional modes of expression.

3. Earth is a one-time endowment. It is subject to irreversible damage in the major patterns of its functioning.

4. The human is derivative, Earth is primary. Earth must be the primary concern of every human institution, profession, program and activity. In economics, for instance, the first law of economics must be the preservation of the Earth economy. A rising Gross National Product with a declining Gross Earth Product reveals the absurdity of our present economy. It should be clear, in the medical profession, that we cannot have healthy people on a sick planet.

5. The entire pattern of functioning of Earth is altered in the transition from the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic Era. The major developments of the Cenozoic took place entirely apart from any human intervention. In the Ecozoic, the human will have a comprehensive influence on almost everything that happens. While the human cannot make a blade of grass, there is [liable] not to be a blade of grass unless it is accepted, protected and fostered by the human. Our positive power of creativity in the natural life systems is minimal, while our power of negating is immense.

6. Progress, to be valid, must include the entire Earth in all its component aspects. To designate human plundering of the planet as progress is an unbearable distortion.

7. The Ecozoic can come into existence only though an appreciation of the feminine dimension of Earth, through a liberation of women from the oppressions and the constraints that they have endured in the past, and through the shared responsibility of both women and men for establishing an integral Earth community.

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*Handout from the library of Santa Sabina Conference Center, San Rafael, California, 2004, except that Item 7 is from a similar list presented by Thomas Berry at an annual conference of the Center for Reflection on the Second Law held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.*
8. A new role exists for both science and technology in the Ecozoic period. Science must provide a more integral understanding of the functioning of Earth and how human activity and Earth activity can be mutually enhancing. Our biological sciences especially need to develop a “feel for the organism,” a greater sense of the ultimate subjectivities present in the various living beings of Earth. Our human technologies must become more coherent with the technologies of the natural world.

9. New ethical principles must emerge which recognize the absolute evils of biocide and geocide as well as the other evils concerned more directly with the human.

10. New religious sensitivities are needed that will recognize the sacred dimension of Earth and that will accept the natural world as the primary manifestation of the divine.

11. A new language, an Ecozoic language, is needed. Our language is radically inadequate. A new dictionary should be compiled with new definitions of existing words and an introduction of new words for the new modes of being and functioning that are emerging.

12. Psychologically all the archetypes of the collective unconscious attain a new validity and a new pattern of functioning, especially in our understanding of the symbols of the Tree of Life, the heroic journey, death and rebirth, the mandala and the Great Mother.

13. New developments can be expected in ritual, in all the arts, and in literature. In drama especially, extraordinary opportunities exist in the monumental issues that are being worked out in these times. The conflicts that until now have been situated simply within the human drama are magnified considerably through the larger contours of conflict as these emerge in this stupendous transition from the terminal Cenozoic to the emerging Ecozoic. What we are dealing with is in epic dimensions beyond anything thus far expressed under this term.

14. Mitigation of the present ruinous situation, the recycling of materials, the diminishment of consumption, the healing of damaged ecosystems—all this will be in vain if we do these things to make the present industrial systems acceptable. They must all be done, but in order to build a new order of things.

The Problem with Omnipotence
By Alice Loyd

Recently I heard it again. I heard someone asking, “Why did God let this bad thing happen?” I assume the speaker and most of the listeners were considering the problem of evil in the world, as in “Why do bad things happen to good people?” For me, though, the concern is with the verb, with the word “let.” To let something happen implies power over whether it occurs. And that idea brings up a problem with the concept of omnipotence.
For me, the concept of omnipotence applied to the ground of all being requires characterization. Whenever omnipotence—complete, unlimited, or universal power and authority—is regarded to be a kind of governance that doesn’t match the way things seem to me to be, I feel a dissonance. I’m not questioning the magnitude of this power. The more I open to the mystery of existence, the more I sense that something big is at work. I sense potency beyond my ability to grasp, and in the scriptures of religious traditions I find wording for my sense of awe. What I question is not the presence of power, but whether that power is expressed as force—the overruling of one by another.

Accepting “the natural world as the primary manifestation of the divine” (quoting from the tenth of the fourteen “Determining Features of the Ecozoic Era” of Thomas Berry), we can assume the quality of power present in the universe story will manifest the quality of power held by its source. As I contemplate the unfolding panorama of the natural world, what I glimpse is power dispersed rather than sequestered. I see signs of a large mind at work organizing toward immense goals, beautiful and benign, but I also see myriad minds, freely evolving with opportunity under the discipline of cooperation.

Scientists are better equipped than I am to give examples of how matter operates cooperatively, and I think process theologians describe well the interplay between creator and created. But even without fluency in either of these languages, I’m able to grasp nature’s nature by using my faculties, as I gradually learn better how to employ them. In other words, by observing my surroundings and studying my origins, I perceive both order and creativity, intricately interconnected.

Encountering these patterns of freedom with responsibility in the natural world, I feel far safer than I would feel in a world governed by a supreme being who sometimes made people sick and sometimes made them well. Likewise I feel more secure when I’m in relationships honoring individual autonomy limited by mutual respect. More is required of me in a democracy than in a dictatorship, and as I exercise my capacities to meet the demands of a democracy, I become more complete. I begin to become the person my nature is meant to be.

I’m not intending to gloss over the upheavals of the physical world: tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, and explosions of supernovas. In these events physical force rules, at least for a while. But when nature’s stars burst or nature’s ash falls, destruction leads to rebirth. Everything in nature is on its way to becoming something new. Death is not an enemy except when I cling to an imitation life that lacks the fluidity of living beings. Not one thing in the entire panorama of the universe lasts forever or overwhelms the whole. Nature’s losses all work toward the moment of birth.

I mention one final argument for the essential power of existence as collaboration rather than domination. Once when I was speaking to a Sunday School class at a large city church, a man said, “I don’t think God will allow global warming to get out of hand.” Since then I’ve tried to imagine what God would have to do to restore climate stability without human
cooperation. Which would be more likely as God’s path: altering Earth’s biogeochemical system to better absorb human onslaught, or removing the human threat?

The answer is indicated, I think, by consideration of what is likely to happen if humans continue the present course of greenhouse gas emissions. Eventually Earth will indeed absorb the impact of aggregate human industrial activity—actions freely chosen and freely allowed. The consequence of this use of human autonomy will be removal of most of the community of life as it has existed for millennia, including human life. In other words, climate stability will indeed be restored, but in several million years, and as a new climate with a new kind of Earth community.

For me this example says the authoritative power within the universe does favor a partnership pattern of governance, and, even while being destroyed, the power moves inexorably toward becoming.

I bow in love and wonder.

The Universe is Made of Stories, Not of Atoms
By Mike Bell

I always remember when people asked [Thomas Berry] how they should go about creating a mutually enhancing relationship between humans and Earth, he would say, “Tell them the story.” Since then I’ve always been extremely interested in the concept of story, especially in its cosmological dimensions.

Recently I came across from an article by Rebecca Mead, “The Pictures Particle Follies,” in The New Yorker of January 28, 2013. She was interviewing the film editor and sound designer Walter Murch about “Particle Fever,” a documentary concerning the Large Hadron Collider (L.H.C.) near Geneva, Switzerland, that enabled physicists to discover the Higgs boson particle.

I think Tom would have been delighted with it.
Here’s the excerpt from Rebecca Mead’s article:

Its subatomic product, the Higgs boson, has been called “The God Particle” by one prominent physicist, Leon Lederman. When [Murch] was asked whether his sense of reverence had been increased or diminished by contemplating the L.H.C., Murch paused, “I think of a Muriel Rukeyeser quote, where she says the universe is made of stories, not of atoms,” he said. “The tension is between finding ever more detail about atomic structure, and the story.”

It could be the equivalent of somebody looking at an old film, and realizing that the film came from a projector, and discovering that there is an image in the projector, and that it’s made of molecules of grains of film—and then trying to find the mystery of the story by looking at ever more detailed molecules of film, thinking, “If I finally get to the heart of that, will it tell me where my story comes from? While we know these are two separate universes.”

He took another bite of his sandwich before heading back to the editing room. “It may be that our story, whatever that is—existence—depends on the Higgs boson and atoms but it depends on it the way the film depends on the molecular structure of the celluloid.” He went on, “That just happens to be the medium though which it is manifest, but the story predates the film and, in fact, actually created the film itself.”

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