

CES Monthly Musings

*Chronicling the Transition from Economic-Industrial
To Ecological-Cultural Societies*

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**CENTER FOR
ECOZOIC SOCIETIES**
Seeking Well-Being in All Life Communities

AT A GLANCE

- [Thoughts on Reading *Radical Hope* by Jonathan Lear, by Alice Loyd](#)
- [We Cannot Act Effectively in the World Without an Adequate Understanding of the Nature of the World, by Herman Greene](#)
- [The Lurking Inconsistency, by Herman Daly](#)
- [*The Chronicle*](#)
 - a. [The Sacred and Sustaining Values, by Herman Greene](#)
- [Become a Member](#)

Thoughts on Reading *Radical Hope* by Jonathan Lear

By Alice Loyd

Those of us past denial about the planet's condition and the future of the industrial economic model tend to be well-informed about the ecological, economic and social possibilities. We've read James Howard Kunstler's *The Long Emergency* (Grove/Atlantic 2005), Paul Gilding's *The Great Disruption* (Bloomsbury Press 2008) or one of the fine books on this topic by John Michael Greer.¹ We understand there will be suffering as our growth-based market system meets resource depletion; as climate change brings on crop failures, sea rise and resultant population migrations; and as governments stagger under new burdens for which they are ill-prepared. Most of us expect severe decline to come in our lifetimes, perhaps abruptly, bringing fewer physical comforts for the currently comfortable, and a terrible stripping away of necessities for the already poor.

¹Three of these by Greer are *The Long Descent: A User's Guide to the End of the Industrial Age* (New Society Publishers 2008); *The EcoTechnic Future: Envisioning a Post-Peak World* (New Society Publishers 2009); and *The Wealth of Nature: Economics As If Survival Mattered* (New Society Publishers 2011).

Until I read Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Harvard University Press 2006), however, I hadn't given much thought to the moral impact on individuals during cultural collapse—to the disorientation of character that may result when the culture within which a human character was formed abruptly dissolves. Humans become human through the influence of their human milieu. What is the outcome when the milieu of formation ceases to exist?

I've always lived in ways that gave me distance from the culture in which I'm positioned. I was brought up in a pocket of Victorian-era morals and fundamentalist religious beliefs. I thought I yearned to be culturally normal, but once grown, I found mainstream values unsatisfactory. It's hard for me to see myself as a creature of this society, but I would guess its influence is invisible rather than non-existent. Its collapse is sure to alter my world beyond my shadowy imaginings. How will my values hold up? How will my neighbors cope with the changes? What will be the impact of world upheaval on the inner lives of the generations in place to experience it?

In *Radical Hope* author Lear considers a particular example, Chief Plenty Coups and the Crow Indian tribe of the northern and central American Great Plains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His theme is four words uttered by Chief Plenty Coups, told to a white man shortly before the Chief's death: "*After this nothing happened.*" The last great chief of the Crow nation had talked freely about his own childhood and about the struggles that had brought him and his people onto a reservation, but as the recorder noted in an afterword, Plenty Coups refused to speak of his long life after the hunting and warring era ended. In excuse, the chief stated, "You know that part of my life as well as I do."

After this nothing happened is Lear's aperture for understanding what it means when a civilization ends. The Crow way of life had been based on the warfare required by their nomad existence among Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfeet and Arapaho enemies. When the U.S. Army became an enemy of the entire Indian population, the Crow alone made peace with those whom they saw as the inevitable victors. Guided by tribal insights drawn from their traditions, they accepted their only survival possibility and agreed to confine their occupancy to one area of their once vast territory.

The verdict of Plenty Coups 40 years later was that, while the accommodation was the right move and had assured that the most precious of their lands remained undisturbed, such peace as subsequent years brought them was without events to which they could assign meaning. They continued to perform the necessary functions that sustain life, and many of these might to an outsider appear the same as before. Through Crow eyes, these actions, though vital, attained no significance. Lear's interpretation is that actions to which no cultural meaning can be assigned cannot be considered happenings.

The Traditional Crow Culture

The book, describing each major category of behavior within the tribe's world view, relates in detail the common happenings during the period of the traditionally functioning Crow nation. To protect their moving territory against the other Indian groups vying to unseat them, they evolved an identifying ethic based on courage in warfare: "counting coups."² Their culture's criterion for worth was courage in battles with other tribes and in hunting buffalo. Deeds of courage included stealing horses from another tribe without getting caught, injured, or noticed; killing a buffalo in a dangerous situation; in a fight, reaching out with a stick (a "coup stick") to touch an armed enemy and then putting the stick away before picking up one's weapon; and, when the battle got close to the camp or territory of the Crow tribe, "planting one's coup stick" in the ground, which meant "I will fight to the death to keep any non-Crow from getting past me."

When warriors returned from a battle or a hunt, they told their deeds of courage, and if others agreed on the merit, the warrior was awarded a feather to be worn in a headdress. The telling and rewarding for the deeds was called "counting coups." These honorable deeds formed the framework for the work of the women and the play of the children as well. Preparing a meal meant support for present and future warriors and their families. Child's play meant to emulate warrior conduct for boys, and for girls it meant to provide encouragement and strategic support. Each was learning the language and style of their future adult roles.

The Accommodation to Whites

It is easy to note that once traditional life ended, new roles would be required, and there would be a sense of loss to contend with as well as physical discomfort, disease and dissolution of routine. Lear reads a great deal more than these consequences into the experience, though, as he studies Plenty Coups' words. He says that Crow life had been kept intact through winning in battle—with all aspects of daily life geared to that outcome. Once winning in battle ceased to be possible, the motives supporting daily life ceased to exist.

Their accommodation to whites was an ending quite different from any for which they were prepared. Throughout the 100 years of their wandering history, what they had feared was being killed as individuals or incorporated into other tribes—either being the end of the Crow

²**coup** (koo), *n.* *pl.* coups (kooz): 1. A brilliantly executed stratagem; a triumph. 2. a. A coup d'état. b. A sudden appropriation of leadership or power; a takeover: *a boardroom coup*. 3. Among certain Native American peoples, a feat of bravery performed in battle, especially the touching of an enemy's body without causing injury.

Idiom: count coup: Among certain Native American peoples, to ceremoniously recount one's exploits in battle.

identity. Lear stresses that when all other tribes had been subdued by the Crows in league with the U.S. cavalry, their Crow identity ended nevertheless, because no longer could they win in battle because no longer did fighting mean preserving their way of life. Stealing the enemies' horses no longer was laudable conduct, because there was no enemy so easily located and no use for the horses once they were stolen.

Women's lives, too, were robbed of accustomed significance. Whereas earlier a woman cooked to make her family strong enough to fight and to support those who fought, meals now were emptied of that meaning, even when food, even familiar food, could be found. To eat now was an act entirely different from eating purposefully within clear Crow boundaries protected by Crow courage. Agnes Yellowtail Deernose reported, "Destruction of the buffalo and the shift to a reservation left young men and women in a state of social limbo." Pretty Shield, after relating a poignant event in family life, said, "I am trying to live a life I do not understand." (p. 60-61) Lear comments there was no larger framework of significance into which life could fit, saying, "The problem is what happens to the subject when the possibility of living according to (the subject's) associated ideals collapses." (p. 44)

Lear writes about the earlier period, "It required a steadfast commitment stretching over much of one's life to organize one's life in relation to those ideals. And it required a certain success in doing so. That is, being a Crow subject required more than inhabiting a social role, being excellent in that role, and even identifying oneself in those terms. It required all these things, but in addition it required a lifelong commitment to shaping oneself to be this kind of person." (p. 43)

When the culture that shaped the ideals collapses, a moment comes that Yeats could have been describing when he wrote, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

After That Nothing Happened

Readers are directed to realize that something other than depression is meant by the words, "After that nothing happened." Lear takes care to show that Plenty Coups' conduct was not that of a depressed individual. He, insisting that his people learn the white man's ways, without idealizing them, entered energetically into the settled life of a farmer and villager. "The white man," he said, "is someone who fools nobody but himself. . . .With all his wonderful powers, the white man is not wise. He is smart, but not wise." His appraisal of his tribe was equally challenging. He admonished them by saying, "Stop mourning the old days, they are gone with the buffalo. Go to your sweat lodges and cleanse your bodies . . . then clean out your dirty lodges and go to work!" (p.139)

Off the reservation Plenty Coups maintained his role as statesman for his people. He stood with dignity beside U.S. leaders, representing the position that the Crow had partnered in the successful pacification of the U.S. West. "Their undefeated status remains a source of pride among the Crow. Plenty Coups was received at the highest levels of the U.S. government in Washington—as were other Crow chiefs—and treated with respect." (p. 137)

While never describing the circumstances in which our own civilization might fail, Lear's interest clearly comes from seeing parallels with Crow history, and the title of the book communicates very well what he seeks to find. In this history of the demise of a recently intact American civilization, he seeks to find a basis and strategy for maintaining hope in the face of the collapse of ours. His conclusion is that at the point when Crow culture might be expected to be lost entirely, an essential core was preserved amid the rubble. In the case of the Crow, he traces survival to an enduring ideal of excellence, which Plenty Coups brought into view through the symbol of the chickadee.

Hope in the Symbol of the Chickadee

The chickadee had been a theme in Crow culture since before his own lifetime, but it became a particularly important wisdom teacher when Plenty Coups saw it in a dream during a vision quest that took place when he was eight or nine years old, before the whites had come. The dream was recognized at that time by tribal elders as a valid prophecy of their future, but the events to which it pointed were far beyond their range of vision. Here is a much-abbreviated version of this portion of the dream:

At first great herds of buffalo were spreading wide, blackening the plains with their numbers. Then all the buffalo were gone, completely vanished. Next came bulls and cows and calves past counting, but they lay down, not as the buffalo, and hardly any two were alike in size and color. Then the dreamer was shown an old man sitting under a particular tree. "That man is yourself," he was told, and there followed a tremendous storm that knocked down all the trees in the forest except that one.

"Listen Plenty-Coups," said a voice. "In that tree is the lodge of the Chickadee. He is least in strength, but strongest of mind among his kind. He is willing to work for wisdom. The Chickadee-person is a good listener . . . (he) never misses a chance to learn from others."

The Crow elders used dreams cooperatively, sending young men out on vision quests and in ceremony, later seeking together their proper interpretation. In this case, the wisest of the elders offered an understanding of Plenty Coups' vision. By the end of the dream, he said, "The tribes who have fought the white man have all been beaten, wiped out. By listening as the Chickadee listens we may escape this and keep our lands." Guided by this dream, the tribe decided to ally with the white man against their traditional enemies and thus weather the oncoming storm.

Lear says the dream gave the tribe "imaginative tools with which to endure a conceptual onslaught." (p. 78) What holding onto their lands would come to mean was totally outside their ability to conceive at the time of the dream. It came to mean 2 million rather than 35 million acres, and those were parceled out to individual owners and sometimes sold to white farmers. But the tribe was able to set the conditions under which the allotment took place, retain all mineral rights, and defeat the attempt to sell off "unused" land to white settlers. At the end of his life, Plenty Coups could say with pride that "this course was the only one which might save

our beautiful country for us. When I think back my heart sings because we acted as we did. It was the only way open to us.” (p. 143)

According to Lear’s understanding, the chickadee’s virtue is good judgment based on information gathered by listening to others. When Plenty Crow as an individual or the Crow as a community acted from that virtue, however, the outcome was not assured. Lear comments, “This is not the paradigm risk of death on the battlefield, to be sure. It was a greater risk: that one . . . was unwittingly doing something shameful, not fine, that one’s strategy would not ultimately work.” (p. 146)

More than surrender of acreage and loss of nomadic life was involved in societal collapse for the Crow, since during the period 1870 to 1940 the U.S. government enforced a deliberate strategy to break down traditional tribal values. Children were sent away to be re-socialized. Certain religious practices were outlawed. Yet Plenty Coups was consistent in drawing on traditional Crow resources “to formulate an *ego-ideal of radical hope*. This ideal gave the Crow a basis of hope at a time when it was systematically unclear what one could hope for.” (p. 141, italics Lear’s.)

Previously Lear had stated, “The Crow were not able magically to turn the tide of history. The onslaught of the white man was a force that no Indian tribe could resist. That outcome is just as the dream predicted. The question is whether the hopefulness manifest in the dream facilitated a courageous response to the new challenges the Crow would face. To the extent that the dream was confirmed—that the Crow did survive and did hold onto their land—what role did that hope play in securing this outcome?” His conclusion is that the role was considerable. (p. 136) “Plenty Coups was able to take a valued and honored spiritual force and put it to creative use in facing up to new challenges. . . Plenty Coups offered the Crow a traditional way of going forward.” (p. 154)

Radical Hope—Our Wisdom

As you might expect, reading *Radical Hope* has prompted me to look for moral underpinnings of our own civilization that might outlast it. The topic is not whether we can be hopeful about the degree of chaos we’ll have to face. As I understand it, the question is this: If, when the industrial era should dissolve, we should find ourselves without recognizable ways of living because all familiar patterns of life have disappeared with it, what then might be the source of hope from which a new way of living might be constructed?

In other words, do members of our industrialized Western civilization hold internalized ethical ideals capable of carrying communities through monumental and even calamitous change?

Considering the social, economic and ecological conditions that we are already experiencing, I think conversation about this topic is appropriate. Going forward, I would feel

safer if together we identified familiar, enduring and effective symbols capable of guiding our civilization through its demise.

Perhaps readers of the *Musings* would like to contribute their thoughts.

We Cannot Act Effectively in the World Without an Adequate Understanding of the Nature of the World¹

By Herman Greene

How we understand the nature of the world is our philosophy whether we use the term philosophy or not. We cannot act effectively in the world without an adequate understanding of the nature of the world. Our present situation calls for wisdom, insight, intimacy, solidarity and creativity as we give form to a new age. None of these are, however, possible if we do not understand the nature of the world.

The modern period, while opening up new vistas of understanding and much progress in human affairs, has introduced many distortions in our understanding of the world. Descartes is considered the originator of modern philosophy in the West. His “Cartesian dualism” divided mind from matter. Other ontological dualisms of the modern period include fact and value, primary qualities and secondary qualities, science and the humanities, the religious and the secular, humans and nature, objective and subjective, and civilized and uncivilized. These dualisms have become natural for the modern mind, but they are not natural to nature, not even our human nature.

Much can be written about how contemporary philosophy has accommodated itself to the un-natural distortions of the modern worldview. The philosopher E. Maynard Adams in “The Mission of Philosophy Today,”² describes how, in the modern period, scientific naturalism, based on sensory empiricism, materialism and efficient causation, seeped into and came to dominate the cultural mind. He wrote that this is attributable to the great success of science:

Empirical science provided the factual knowledge that was fruitful in making things and in the manipulation and control of the material environment. In time, the great success of empirical science in providing the knowledge base for mastery of nature, the making of useful things, and the production of wealth led to the discrediting of all other kinds of knowledge claims.³

¹This article is excerpted from Herman Greene, [“Process Ecozoics.”](#)

²E. Maynard Adams, “The Mission of Philosophy Today,” *Metaphilosophy* 31, no. 4 (July 2000): 349-64,

³*Ibid.*, 354-55.

Further, the presuppositions of science undermined the humanistic dimensions of society and led to skepticism, subjectivism, relativism and even nihilism in the cultural sphere.

Science . . . eliminated, normative, value, and meaning concepts, the fundamental categories of the humanities and humanistic thought in general, from its descriptive/explanatory conceptual system because they cannot be funded with meaning by sensory experience, and so statements containing them [could] not be confirmed or falsified by scientific methods of inquiry. Thus, according to the presuppositions of modern science, there are no normative laws, values, inherent structures of meaning, ends, or teleological causality in nature—only existential and factual structures and elemental and antecedent causes that engage them. One cannot accept modern science’s descriptive/explanatory account of something as the truth about it without accepting its presuppositions about the basic structure of the world. Yet the presuppositions of science are inconsistent with the presuppositions of most religious beliefs and humanistic thought in general.⁴

Adams wrote of a “cultural mind” based on a widely shared set of assumptions and beliefs. He believed it is the province of philosophy to discover and critique the presuppositions of experience, thought, and action in the cultural mind. Further, philosophy needs to “[excavate] the inherent commitments about the categorial structures of various subject matters and the world as a whole that are hidden in these presuppositions, and to develop an account of how the culture is grounded in and maps[,or is not grounded in and does not map,] the basic structure of the world.”⁵

According to Adams, however, philosophy must itself be reformed before it can undertake this task:

Before philosophy can perform its wider cultural mission, it must put its own house in order, for it has been caught up in the dominant ways of thought in the culture and has tried to accommodate itself to the prevailing scientific paradigm of knowledge. Although much of what is taken for granted in our efforts to know and to cope with reality is no doubt subject to empirical confirmation or correction, the most fundamental assumptions and beliefs that constitute the mind of the culture are not. They pertain to the categorial features and structures of experience and thought as well as to the basic constitutive features and structures of whatever the subject matter of our experience and thought may be, including a comprehensive view of the world. *We do not discover these features and structures of things by an empirical investigation of them in the way in which we discover contingent features and structures; rather, the way we empirically investigate and think about any subject matter presupposes commitments about its categorial features and structures. These presuppositions govern the outcome of*

⁴Ibid., 353-54.

⁵Ibid., 357.

empirical investigations rather than being the products of such investigations. This is not to say that our empirical findings may not generate problems that call into question our categorial commitments, but these problems are of a different order from the logical problems among empirical beliefs that force revisions to keep them faithful to reality.⁶

Adams undertook to reform philosophy. His method concerned the analysis of “the categorial structure of any given subject matter by considering the grammar of the language we use in reporting and describing it and what it makes sense to say and does not make sense to say about it.”⁷ He felt that “all experiences, all mental states and acts, are semantically constituted; that is, there are inherent structures of meaning with a semantic content and a logical form. This is as true of our affective, somatic (bodily) and conative (will or purpose) experiences, as of our sensory experiences of physical things.”⁸ And if this was true about our human experience, then it must also be true about the universe.

His paper “Rethinking the Idea of God”⁹ included a section on “Rethinking Nature.” Following his method, he observed that the scientific naturalism that had diminished the understanding of the human had also diminished nature; and, as Teilhard de Chardin did¹⁰, and also as Whitehead did in a different way,¹¹ Adams rethought nature in terms of the human phenomenon. He wrote,

[Scientific naturalism] left us with a view of nature, the primary subject matter of science, as factually structured through and through, without any interiority, without a semantic or normative dimension. Everything was considered in principle subject to our manipulation and control, the only limit being our power, which could be increased through advances in science and technology. . . .

⁶Ibid., 356, italics added. This paragraph was not included in the paper “Process Ecozoics.”

⁷Adams, “Mission of Philosophy Today,” 357.

⁸Ibid., 358.

⁹E. Maynard Adams, “Rethinking the Idea of God,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXXIX (2001): 313-329; available online at <http://emadams.unc.edu/Rethinking-the-Idea-of-God> (accessed October 31, 2011).

¹⁰Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, Sarah Appleton-Weber, trans. (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

¹¹Whitehead accepted the Descartes subjectivist bias under which “those subjects enjoying conscious experience provide the primary data for philosophy.” Rather than this leading to dualism, as it did with Descartes, Whitehead developed the reformed subjectivist principle under which the subjectivity we humans experience became an element of all of nature. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality (Corrected Edition)*. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, eds. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 159.

It seems that if we accept the modern scientific view of nature, we must accept the human phenomenon as supernatural, either emerging out of the natural realm but categorially quite different or else the product of special creation by some supernatural power. In science, we recognize the emergence of certain properties. For instance, water has properties not possessed by the elements that constitute it. But the elements and their organization explain water and its properties. However, there is no accounting for categorial structures. We cannot explain subject matter with normative and inherent meaning structures in terms of subject matter with only factual structures. If a categorially enriched subject matter should appear in a context with only existential and factual structures, its appearance would be a total mystery. In fact, there would be two mysteries: the new categorial structures and their appearance at the time and place in which they came into being. This has led some to think in terms of special creation. But that generates the mystery of a transcendent creative power with its categorial structure. That amounts to explaining a mystery by embedding it in a larger mystery created for the purpose. The intellectual quest drives us toward the reduction of mystery, not the multiplication or enlargement of it.

The most plausible course seems to be to rethink nature in such a way that we can account for the appearance of the categorially rich biological and human realms as developments in or fulfillment of preexisting nature. In other words, the fact that biological and human phenomena appear on this planet in a “natural” environment tells us something about the “natural” environment, for it must be such that it brings forth the biological and the full array of human phenomena. . . . Hence, we seem compelled to reintroduce humanistic categories into the descriptive/explanatory language of science in its account of nature. If so, we have a new humanistic view of nature and less mystery. Of course the categorial structures of factuality, normativity, semantic intentionality, and causality (whether naturalistic in the modern sense or teleological) remain givens without explanation, for there is no logical room for an explanation of such basic features of the world.¹²

We cannot act effectively in the world without an adequate understanding of the nature of the world.

¹²Ibid.

The Lurking Inconsistency¹

By Herman Daly

Ecological economics of course has roots in ecology and biology as well as in economics. Most of ecological economists' and steady-state economists' time has been well-spent correcting economics in the light of biology and ecology. And there is still more to do in this direction. However, we should be careful to avoid importing some deep metaphysical biases frequent in biology, along with its scientific truths.

According to biologists the existence of any species is an accident, and its continued survival is always subject to cancellation by the all-powerful process of random mutation and natural selection as it occurs anywhere in the interdependent ecosystem. This blind process, over long time periods, is held to explain not only the evolution of all living things from a presumed common ancestor, but also, in some versions, the "spontaneous generation" of the common ancestor itself from the "primordial chemical soup." For human beings in particular, random mutation and natural selection are thought to determine not only such characteristics as eye color and height, but also intelligence, consciousness, morality, and capacity for rational thought. Neo-Darwinism has been extrapolated from a good explanation of many facts to the universal explanation of everything.

Powerful though it certainly is, the Neo-Darwinist theory cannot explain consciousness and purpose. Even in the realm of materialism it faces some serious glitches. I refer to the problem of how it happens that many interdependent parts of a complex organ, each of which has no independent survival value, can both occur and be retained until the whole organ is assembled into a complete functioning unit, which only then can contribute to survival and thus be selected. Also there is the anomaly of altruism. Kin selection does not explain Mother Theresa or Oscar Schindler, and in any case is now disputed among biologists. But let me leave all that for future debate. My point for now is that biologists/ecologists who teach a materialist Neo-Darwinist worldview to sophomores on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and then devote their Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays to pleading with Congress and the public to enact policies to save this or that endangered species are in the tight grip of a serious inconsistency.

Naturally the public asks the biologists what purpose would be served by saving certain threatened species. Since many leading biologists, as scientific materialists, claim not

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<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/%28ISSN%291523-1739>

to believe in purpose (either in the sense of cosmic *telos*, or mere individual preferences that are independently causative in the physical world) this is not an easy question for them to answer. They tell us about biodiversity, and ecosystem stability and resilience, and about a presumed instinct of biophilia that we (who systematically drive other species to extinction) are nevertheless alleged to possess, encoded in our genes. But the biologists cannot affirm any of these descriptive concepts as an abiding purpose, or an objective value, because doing so would contradict the fundamental assumption of their science. For example, biophilia could be appealed to as a virtue, a persuasive value rather than a wishfully imagined part of the deterministic genetic code. But that would be to admit purpose. Instead, biologists try to find some overlooked mechanistic cause that will make us do what we believe we ought to do, but can't logically advocate without acknowledging the reality of purpose. Absent purpose and value, the biologists' appeals to Congress and the public for conservation are both logically and emotionally feeble.

Others have called attention to this problem in the past. The term "lurking inconsistency", as well as its meaning, is taken from Alfred North Whitehead (*Science and the Modern World*,² 1925, p.76) who expressed it in the following passage that repays careful reading:

A scientific realism, based on mechanism, is conjoined with an unwavering belief in the world of men and of the higher animals as being composed of self-determining organisms. This radical inconsistency at the basis of modern thought accounts for much that is half-hearted and wavering in our civilization... ..It enfeebles [thought], by reason of the inconsistency lurking in the background... ..For instance, the enterprises produced by the individualistic energy of the European peoples presuppose physical actions directed to final causes. But the science which is employed in their development is based on a philosophy which asserts that physical causation is supreme, and which disjoins the physical cause from the final end. It is not popular to dwell on the absolute contradiction here involved.

In other words, our scientific understanding of nature is based on mechanism, on material and efficient causation with no room for final cause, for teleology or purpose. Yet we ourselves, and higher animals in general, directly experience purpose, and, within limits, act in a self-determining manner. If we are part of nature then so is purpose; if purpose is not part of nature then neither, in at least one significant way, are we. Elsewhere Whitehead put the contradiction more pointedly: "Scientists animated by the purpose of proving that they are purposeless constitute an interesting subject for study." Biologist Charles Birch, a keen student of Whitehead, has restated the lurking inconsistency in his insightful *book On*

²*Science and the Modern World*:
http://www.cambridge.org/gb/knowledge/isbn/item6461182/?site_locale=en_GB

*Purpose*³: “[Purpose] has become the central problem for contemporary thought because of the mismatch in modernism between how we think of ourselves and how we think and act in relation to the rest of the world.” Clearly, not all biologists are guilty of the lurking inconsistency.

The directly experienced reality of purpose or final cause must, in the view of materialism, be an “epiphenomenon” — an illusion which itself was selected because of the reproductive advantage that it chanced to confer on those under its spell. It is odd that the illusion of purpose should be thought to confer a selective advantage in the real biophysical world, while purpose itself is held to be a non-causative epiphenomenon — but that is the Neo-Darwinist’s problem, not mine. The policy implication of the materialist dogma that purpose is not causative is *laissez faire* beyond the most libertarian economist’s wildest model. The only “policy” consistent with this view is, “let it happen as it will anyway.” Is it too much to ask the Neo-Darwinist to speculate about the possibility that the survival value of Neo-Darwinism itself has become negative for the species that really believes it as a metaphysical worldview? Does not this lurking inconsistency have lethal consequences for policy of any kind?

Teleology has its limits, of course, and from the Enlightenment onward it is evident that materialism has constituted an enormously powerful research paradigm for biology. The temptation to elevate a successful research paradigm to the level of a metaphysical worldview is perhaps irresistible. But materialism too has its limits. To deny the reality of our most immediately direct and universal experience (that of purpose) because it doesn’t fit the presuppositions of methodological materialism, is profoundly anti-empirical. To then refuse to recognize the devastating logical and moral consequences that result from the denial of purpose is anti-rational. For those of us who consider science a rational and empirical enterprise, this is extremely troubling. That people already unembarrassed by the fact that their major intellectual purpose is to deny the reality of purpose should now want to concern themselves deeply with the relative valuation of accidental pieces of their purposeless world is incoherence compounded.

One cannot rescue Neo-Darwinism from the domain of purposeless and randomness by pointing to the role of natural selection. Selection may sound purposeful, but in the accepted theory of natural selection chance dominates. Random mutation provides the menu from which natural selection “chooses” by the criterion of the odds of surviving and reproducing in a randomly changing environment (consisting of randomly changing geophysical conditions, and other species that are also randomly evolving). It is a metaphysics of chance all the way down.

³*On Purpose*: http://www.amazon.com/On-Purpose-Charles-Birch/dp/0868403717/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1368056004&sr=8-1&keywords=Charles+birch+on+purpose

The relevance of the lurking inconsistency to conservation biology and steady-state economics should be evident — conservation and sustainable scale are, after all, purposes that are ruled out in a world governed only by chance.

If purpose does not exist then it is hard to imagine how we could experience the lure of value. To have a purpose means to serve an end, and value is imputed to whatever furthers attainment of that end. Alternatively, if there is objective value then surely the attainment of value should become a purpose. Neo-Darwinist biologists and ecologists, who deny the reality of purpose, owe it to the rest of us to remain silent about valuation — and conservation as well. If they simply cannot remain silent, then they must rethink their deterministic materialism. Distinguished philosopher Thomas Nagel has offered to help them in his recent book *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinist Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly Wrong*.⁴ But his “help” requires more recantation than the naturalists can bear, and, even though Nagel is a fellow atheist, he has been excommunicated from the Church of Neo-Darwinism for heresy.

Economists, unlike many biologists, do not usually go to the extreme of denying the existence of purpose. They recognize purpose in attenuated form under the rubric of individual preferences and do not generally consider them to be illusory. However, preferences are thought to be purely subjective, so that one person’s preferences are as good as another’s. Unlike public facts, private preferences cannot be right or wrong — there is, by assumption, no objective standard of value by which preferences can be judged. Nevertheless, according to economists, individual preferences are the ultimate standard of value. Witness economists’ attempts to value species by asking consumers how much they would be willing to pay to save a threatened species, or how much they would accept in compensation for the species’ disappearance. The fact that the two methods of this “contingent valuation” give different answers only adds comic relief to the underlying tragedy, which is the reduction of value to taste weighted by income.

Economics too suffers from the lurking inconsistency, but not to the extent that biology does. Purpose has not been excluded, just reduced to the level of tastes. But even an unexamined and unworthy purpose, such as unconstrained aggregate satisfaction of uninstructed private tastes weighted by income — GDP growth forever— will dominate in the absence of purpose. So, in the public policy forum, economists with their attenuated, subjective concept of purpose (which at least is thought to be causative) will dominate the Neo-Darwinist ecologists who are still crippled by the self-inflicted purpose of proving that they are purposeless. Consequently GDP growth will continue to dominate conservation.

⁴*Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinist Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly Wrong*:
<http://www.us.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/LifeSciences/HistoryPhilosophyofBiology/?view=usa&ci=9780199919758>

Whitehead's observation that "it is not popular to dwell on the absolute contradiction here involved," remains true 85 years later. This willful neglect has allowed the lurking inconsistency to metastasize into the marrow of modernity. The Enlightenment, with its rejection of teleology, certainly illuminated some hidden recesses of superstition in the so-called Dark Ages. But the angle of its cold light has also cast a deep shadow forward into the modern world, obscuring the reality of purpose. To conserve Creation we will first have to reclaim purpose from that darkness. I say Creation with a capital "C" advisedly, and not in denial of the facts of evolution. Rather, if we think that our world, our lives, and our conscious, self-reflective thinking are just a random happenstance of matter in motion — a temporary statistical fluke of multiplying infinitesimal probabilities by an infinite number of trials — then it is hard to see why we should make any sacrifice to maintain the capacity of the earth to support life, or from where we would get the inspiration to do so. This is the lurking inconsistency's bottom-line consequence for conservation biology and steady-state economics. Our problem is not just faulty economics or biology; it is deep underlying metaphysical and philosophical contradiction.

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The Chronicle (April 2013)

Our readers are invited to present their own reports of what they are paying attention to in the transition from economic-industrial ecological-cultural societies.

Herman Greene – The Sacred and Sustaining Values

Alice Loyd's article in this issue made me think of sustaining values that would take us through difficult periods of transition related to the "end" of industrial civilization. I put end in quotes, because I don't foresee an end of industry, meaning hard work, or industry, meaning mass—though perhaps not massive—production of goods, in any circumstances. What will end will be some of the things we have come to take for granted in the modern period: relatively stable climate, relatively bountiful wild nature, accelerating economic growth, abundant extractive, nonrenewable resources, open land and occupied land to be colonized, and the ability to control through domination and protect vast accumulations of wealth. On a more personal level what may not be taken for granted is abundant food, protected spaces, liquid fuels, well-functioning public spaces, utilities and infrastructure, and public health.

We know that all of this could be terrible, but we don't know if it will be terrible. The general theme of this publication is that we are moving from an economic-industrial age to an

ecological-cultural age, and that could be a good thing. It would, however, involve change. As with Plenty Coups, a change of necessity, not, at first, change of one's own choosing.

Sometimes people will say, that we have to give people hope. Can you give someone hope? We know we can in part, and we know great leaders have transmitted hope. When they did so, however, it was in difficult times when the outcome was uncertain and what brought hope was a vision of a future and a re-calling of sustaining values.

Carolyn Toben in *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*,¹ drawing on Thomas Berry words, reminds us:

“The sense of the sacred is the heart of it all. . . .The sacred is that which evokes wonder, the natural world is that mysterious presence we refer to as the Divine. . . . Understanding and appreciation are activated within us which take us to the world of the sacred. That is what we have forgotten; that is what you are remembering. Only a sense of the sacred can save us. It has been said that, ‘we will only save what we love,’ I [, Thomas Berry,] add, ‘and we will only love that which we regard as sacred.’”

There is a serenity and power that comes to us when we hold the Earth and all of its beings as sacred. When we do so, we are not alone. We share a sense of communion/unity with all, and we feel the presence of some power that transcends us and is acting with us.

Religious, spiritual and other values-based organizations regularly call on the sense of the sacred as a source of power and direction. Here are two beautiful statements of sustaining values that may guide us through this transition.

[Our Commitment to Accelerate the Great Transition](#)

[Water, from a Commercial Commodity to a Sacred Gift](#)

¹Carolyn Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* (Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press 2012).

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