

Earth takes care of us, not we of it

This is one of those quotes that leap out of the page at you - recognition that it is an idea that takes us out of our, into a more ecological space. It is taken from Lyn Margulis' book *The Symbiotic Planet*, and the whole quote is even more confronting. "To me, the human move to take responsibility for the living Earth is laughable . - the rhetoric of the powerless. The planet takes care of us, not we of it."

It takes only a moment to digest this quote to see how a non-anthropocentric paradigm can alter one's 'normalised' view of this subject. The illusion of our separateness from nature has hidden from us the intense and complex interrelatedness of our relationship to the planet. Western philosophy and metaphysics have long regarded the 'self' as standing apart from the rest of the natural world, whereas on deeper inspection we come up with a quite different picture.

When talking about reality, it is reasonably accepted to say that we each construct our own version of it and of the universe. The default position is to identify what we see visually with the 'real' world, but the real world for a blind or deaf person is immediately recognised as different. Even for sighted people their supposed

'real' world is qualified by their history and culture. Our 'self' does not stand isolated, but like it or not, stands absolutely dependent on, and participating with, our sacred surrounds. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had a name for this - *le Milieu Divin*.

The human is a highly evolved emergence of the evolving planet. We embody within us systems of communication, delivery, defence, nutrition, culminating in the phenomenon of what we call consciousness and intelligent mind. Quite apart from this we are embedded in an evolving set of systems set in motion nearly 14 billion years ago that monitor, control, react, balance, protect our planet and its life. We call these Earth's Living Systems or sometimes Eco-system Services. The emerging spiritual metaphor for this is 'Gaia.'

All our spiritual teachers encourage some kind of meditation or mindfulness as a means to personal fulfilment. The mystics remind us continually of our unity

with everything and everybody. Eastern thinking reminds us of our identification with the deity, which implies deity as the system which encompasses all systems, because systems do not come from nowhere. All systems have a relationship to previous systems. This is the essence of evolutionary thought, and is in contrast to the reductionist thinking we are used to where we tend to study systems (things) in isolation.

This kind of thinking is relatively new, and might be described as the science of cybernetics or systems theory. Recent prophets of this are/were Fritjof Capra and Gregory Bateson. Typically Bateson reminds us that no ecological

system is completely closed, and consciousness is not a closed system either. Nor can we manipulate it easily. As Earth's systems malfunction around us we can expect our relationship to Earth to undergo change as well, because our systems are so interrelated. Possibly this is one of the sources of our 'response to the cry of the Earth', because we are part of Earth. We become part of the feedback mechanism which is a part of larger systems. In the words of Australian ecologist John Seed: "I am the rainforest protecting itself." We need to

cooperate with Earth's living systems if we are to allow Earth to take care of us properly. Human affairs need to reflect Earth's systems. In the language of Thomas Berry, human jurisprudence must reflect Earth jurisprudence and ultimately the Great Jurisprudence which has produced our universe and keeps it in a dynamic balance.

In the prophetic theological language of Meister Eckhart: "I have often said that God is creating the entire universe fully and totally in this present now. Everything God created six thousand years ago - and even previous to that - as he made the world, God creates now all at once."

We are being invited into an expanded relationship with Earth and Universe; to see ourselves not just in the context of a separated self, but in terms of a holistic net of relationships that holds us in a sacred embrace.

Maybe next time we use the phrase 'care of the Earth' it may give us pause for thought. Trevor Parton

