

“Is it just me”, asked the frog, “or is the water getting warmer”.

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No, little frog, I am afraid it is not just you, nor any other amphibian, or invertebrate, or mammal, or sea creature, or rain forest, or open savannah, or orchid, or eucalypt, it is getting warmer, and all are under immediate and direct threat, – or, more seriously, under indirect and more gradual threat, easily ignored because it is gradual. The latter is more serious because one minute to midnight appears to provide ignorant and dangerous latitude for non-action or change of direction by humans. Many of those at the top of the food chain remain lulled into false security, while others sullenly refuse to see and measure what is now in plain sight.

Little frog, you may have a particular dislike for the French who love to add you to their list of fine dining opportunities, but it is not really them you have to worry about. In a bizarre manner they are interested in your continuity! It is the rest of humanity you need to worry about, for not caring one iota for your species, the rest of us could not care tuppence if our accumulative actions are the real reason why you and your species are in permanent decline.

Let me turn my attention to that species – we humans, at the top of the food chain, the species who have lent their name to the latest epoch – the Anthropocene and its off shoot - the Pyrocene. The period we are now living through, is the period in which for the very first time one species – we humans, hold the fate of all other species in our hands.

Some humans realise, while many still fail to recognise, that changed circumstance dictate that we have now reached a tipping point in our evolutionary history. Fail to evolve and we fail to survive. The 21st century could well prove to be the nadir of human history, not its



technological triumph. Humans love to speak of the tipping points in nature, moments when change becomes irreversible, and consequences spew out over previously immune territory – like the effect on ocean and coastal communities as polar ice caps significantly melt. The human tipping point is forced upon us by the reality that we exist in short time frames, while the planet exists in vast eons of time. Our influence and impact has made the planet succumb to our time frames. Ecological change that used to take eons, is now happening quite rapidly, especially since the advent of the industrial revolution. Despite this, the planet will survive, its future is not at stake, it will change and evolve as it always has. The question is, will we humans change course within a time frame that will protect our future, or like Lemmings, will we continue a path that leads to our own collapse. History is not on our side, as Jared Diamond has chronicled in his seminal work *Collapse*.

Our tipping point has been reached through our own actions. We are not victims of some unseen force. Until a few decades ago we could build our social structures, our economic structures, even our intimate family structures as we always have, in a competitive tribal view of the world. This is the way it has always been. Belonging to a tribe lies deep within our DNA. Being cast from the tribe meant certain death. Medieval Europe in which Barons ruled and peasants served, even though unjust and grossly unequal, was in a strange way successful tribalism for in it each benefitted from the other. All could be expected to fight on behalf of the tribe in its conflict with other tribes. What was good for the tribe was good for me. Indeed, I could benefit from the diminishment of another tribe. In the last two centuries tribalism has reinvented itself on the international scene as aggressive nationalism. Having evolved to believe our wellbeing and security is deeply rooted in tribal allegiance and advantage, 20th century nationalisms have spawned dreadful violence injustice and inequality. Through colonisation, war, economic slavery of others, including children, the raping of scarce resources and environmental vandalism, humanity has left the planet in a perilous position.

So, what is this evolutionary tipping point? To survive we must abandon overt and covert tribalism and accept planetary citizenship. No nation, or group of people, can any longer claim the right to choose advantage for themselves that harms the planet's balance and long-term sustainability, and escape the consequences.

For Christians that should not be hard to comprehend or embrace. While it is essentially what we have always believed, it is clearly not what we have practiced. We have been, and are, as tribal as any secular community.

When true to ourselves, male and female, we Christians believe we are 'adam' – of the earth. It is not our role to conquer and subdue, but to be sentient servants, ones who know how to behave appropriately within a balanced and stable ecological cycle of which we are necessarily part. For millennia, human continuity was fragile, conquering and subduing was necessary to survive the onslaughts humans have always experienced. The aetiological creation story in Genesis 1:27 reflects this reality. For the survival of future generations, forces alien to humanity had to be overcome. Not anymore, our very success is the reason for the threat we now face. Through the rapid explosion of our population together with our resource dependent prosperity, we have inflicted fragility on the whole planet.

We have been provided with a rhythm, a sabbath rhythm of rest and renewal which we have largely or totally ignored. We Christians also believe we are, because of what others are. In our belief system there is no space for thinking individually. We are community beings embraced in our common humanity and redeemed in our common Christ likeness. Our identity is shaped by our place in the body. I am the total of all the lives that have intersected with my own.

So, this tipping point for humanity should not come as a surprise to Christians, it is the evolutionary change that Christ wrought in and for us, but which we have failed to embrace. The more so post the enlightenment, when the illusion of individual human rights, and freedom

from restriction, became a tantalising Eldorado. In fact it is the exultation of the individual that has led to a dysfunctional pandemic marked by alienation and a mental health crisis. The real Eldorado is hiding in plain sight, it is rediscovered through embracing the limitations that all life-giving relationships demand. To live harmoniously with others, with the natural order, indeed with oneself, is to discover again one's appropriate place. To exceed that place, as humanity has done qualitatively and quantitatively, is to court fission and the release of destructive, violent energy.

It is ironic that this last year's covid pandemic has led us falteringly down the path of shared, responsible behaviour nationally, even internationally. A path that in other circumstances might be described as socialistic. We have learned that if we insist on exercising rights we assume to reside in individuals or nations, then we exacerbate an already deadly problem. We have needed to set aside the right to do as we please and conform to behaviour that has been shown to be in the best interest of one another. Further, we have discovered we are as strong as our weakest link. If one Australian State failed, then all other States were shut down. If one individual or group of individuals behaved irresponsibly, then potentially thousands of others suffered. We have come also to realise that in a global pandemic, assisting the weakest and least resourced nations is vital. No country on the planet will be safe from the pandemic until all countries on the planet are safe from the pandemic.

The other side of the equation may have come as a surprise to many. Namely that the economy, the gold standard of human success or failure, in a neo-liberal capitalist world, has prospered when practices that are at heart socialistic are adopted when crisis prevails.

So, what are the implications for humans everywhere of this great tipping point in human evolution as it relates to social, economic, and intimate personal practice in response to the environmental crisis.

1. The Individual

We must embrace practices that might otherwise be called socialistic. We must all act for good that is common. In a world in which challenges are global, good that is not common cannot be sustained. In a neo-liberal world good or wealth generated by an individual is believed to trickle down to serve good that is common. That has proved to be an illusion. In the world we have now entered good that is common will trickle up, if we allow it and are open to it. We know that what we hold in common is infinitely more significant than any wealth we may possess as an individual.

It is no longer possible for individuals to seriously proffer the excuse 'we did not know'. Within our own circumstance and according to ability, all of us must adopt a carbon neutral position at home, work, and play. Not just in 2050, but this year. We must all research the best possible way to source sustainable products, use less plastic, sort our waste into easily recyclable units and above all only use renewable energy. We must all act and plan with the future in mind, not least with the future of the planet's children in mind. Well within the next decade all of us should be driving an electric vehicle, preferably powered with energy from our own solar system. Within the next ten years all of us should be connected to a mini grid. Mini grids will become ubiquitous in neighbourhoods where renewable energy is shared from neighbouring properties. Pressure must be put on government instrumentalities for adequate investment to be made in the grid to make it 21st century fit for purpose. That household generators of electricity are now being threatened with the possibility of paying, rather than being paid for energy exported to the grid, makes it abundantly clear that the grid is no longer fit for purpose.

All of us should strategize towards zero waste. Almost everything should be recyclable.

2. Economies

And now for a very big call. Because of its underlying assumptions, unredeemed, neo-liberal capitalism will destroy the planet this century unless it is reformed. Neo-liberal capitalism assumes that privatising is necessarily good, and that wealth trickles down. It assumes good practice minimises or eliminates cost and maximises profit. It assumes that regulation should be avoided, and that deregulation will necessarily guarantee an appropriate balance between supply and demand. It assumes that through supply and demand, the market levels off equitably.

None of this is true.

This can be best illustrated by the refusal of neo-liberal politicians to count environmental cost in the cost of production. It is reasonable to assume that if damage is done as the result of an action, reparation should be made. The damage done in the harvesting of fossil fuels through the release of greenhouse gases needs no further proof or argument. It is reasonable to include that cost in tabulating the cost of production. Neo-liberal politics refuses to do so and calls such accounting a tax. It is not a tax. A tax is the imposition of a levy which is external to the costs involved in a particular enterprise – like the GST. Expecting open-cut miners to restore the land, or coal fired power stations to pay for the release of CO₂ is no more, but no less, than expecting them to pay for all the elements implicit in their production.

Industries and companies that make money out of planet destroying business models will fight ferociously to maintain their right to stay in business. Political leaders who are wedded to neo-liberal economics will support them. No business should be allowed, let alone championed, when its business model is predicated on negative outcomes for the planet. The planet will survive without us, we will not survive without a healthy, richly

diverse, planet. The year of covid has taught us that economies cannot only survive, but flourish when the emphasis is placed on social health and cohesion rather than consumerism. What covid has also taught us is that people in caring industries are grossly under-valued and under paid while those in many professional industries, particularly at the highest level, are grossly overpaid.

Neo-liberal capitalism has led us into a flawed and dangerous position where those whose income is derived from assets increase their wealth even in periods of crisis, while those whose income is derived from salaries stagnate and share less of the world's wealth. Those with assets enjoy more power and lobby to secure the relative superiority of their assets, those on wages have less or no power. Those on wages are susceptible to promises from the wealthy and powerful. The gaudy wrapping paper is attractive, even when those promises, or policies, make inequality worse. If evidence is required for this statement look no further than Trump's America.

The market should not be unregulated, or minimally regulated, as if potential profit is the only worthy driver. It is clear the 'market' is artificially manipulated by those who 'short-sell' and those who bet on currency and other values.

Neo-liberal economics assumes that all that can be, should be privately owned and minimally held in public hands. It is doubtful if many natural assets should any longer be held in private hands with the right to exploit at will. The exploitation of forests should be severely limited. The over selling of water on the Murray Darling has been a disaster. Water, gas and coal extraction licences should be curtailed, not simply for environmental reasons, nor simply to protect underground water, nor just to protect indigenous rights, nor just to protect the livelihood of farmers, but because there is now a more economic and technologically superior path to proceed.

3. Politics

There may never have been a time, at least in the memory of those alive today, when politics has been more tribal, more self-serving, less interested in good policy, less committed to long term reformative strategy, more interested in sectional or party power, more committed to serving sectional interests. This is very bad news for the future of the planet, the reality being that encouraging steps towards a sustainable future have come to fruition, not because of politics, but despite politics.

It is particularly galling, in the circumstances we now find ourselves, that the Australian Prime Minister publicly frames his stance on the impending threat of global warming in terms of what is in Australia's best interests, as if these interests can be any different to the globe's best interests. Like the covid pandemic, global warming is a planetary issue from which the plight of everyone is equally threatened and in which every person is equally responsible. It is outrageous that Australia is held captive to the internal party wrangling of the dominant political tribe, even when a considerable majority of the general population wish for more decisive action.

The tipping point that humanity has now reached means that countries that wish to call themselves democratic must abandon private funding of political parties. The political process must be funded from the public purse, pro rata, only in this way can self-serving interest be endemically eradicated from the political system, and good policy become again the aim of the political enterprise.

So, little frog, I am afraid you are very much up against it. The tribe at the top of the food chain still believe they can exploit everything without consequence.

I would like however to finish with a couple of pieces of good news.



First, the younger generation at the top of the food change are much more interested in your future, partly because they have the wisdom to know that their future is tied to yours, and indeed every other species. They will not easily be told to 'go back to school'. They know there is little point in an education if the world they are to inherit is severely diminished. They are bringing many of their parents and grandparents along with them and the mood everywhere from industry to farmers, insurers to bankers, educators to publishers is for us to get you out of the heating water that laps around you.

Second, it is dawning on the slow minded people at the top of the food chain that exploitation and consumerism is a feature of human irresponsible adolescence. That circumstance is forcing humanity to grow up and as we grow up, we learn there is a better, more satisfying, less alienating, less violent way forward. This has of course always been the Christian view, what we might call the soul of humanity is infinitely more important than the trinkets with which we like to distract ourselves.

If we must choose, we must choose citizenry of the planet not citizenry based on nation, ethnicity, or religion, and for those who identify as Christian, in this movement we will rediscover the mission for which we were born and in which we will rediscover our delight.