



"The environment," said Billy Hulst, "This issue will focus on environmental concerns."

"That's where I've spent my whole life," I thought. "I hope I can dredge up something."

After considering possibilities, I've decided to render a broad historical sketch of those forces and viewpoints that have led us to our notions of "the environment" as we perceive it today.

For roughly 10,000 years, Paleolithic man lived inseparable from his environment. The hunter-gatherers of the green world made no distinctions between themselves and the natural world. They thought of nature as alive and sacred. They dwelt in the eternal present. Time was cyclical and recurrent, not meted out in linear fashion with a past, present and brighter future. Man of prehistory existed quite satisfactorily and harmoniously with the external world. His rich spiritual and mythic life invested all nature with divinity. Home, for a band or tribe, was where one found himself. He knew no wilderness. Close relations existed between animals, natural forces and man. Human and animal forms easily interchanged in myth and ritual.

Neolithic man altered this world of Eden for all time. With the advent of agriculture, hunters and gatherers gradually forsook wandering and migration and settled. Settlement and site clearing for agriculture made possible the rudiments of the "civilized" world we know today. Tribes became sedentary; possessions and wealth were accumulated, biological products became available for trade and barter, and Internecine wars occurred to acquire desirable agricultural territory or sites of habitation. A psychological line, a fence, had been drawn between civilized man's places of cultivation and habitation and the natural environs - the wilderness.

What had existed as source - the mother earth, unified and sacred - became resource, that which could be tamed, humanized and civilized. A schism developed between man and the rest of nature.

The Levantine Hebrew's notions of God and Man widened the rift between man and nature. Man was made in God's image, distinct from the rest of God's handiwork. He held dominion over all creation. The ramifications and implications of these beliefs should be obvious. The world and all in it was his garden to tinker with as he would.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church viewed wild areas as inherently evil. Dark forces dwelt in glades, woodland and marsh. Witches and sorcery - forces of the Anti-Christ lurked in tarns and deep woods. Gawain, the Green Knight, Lancelot and others fought dark forces in the nether. Monks cut down groves of oak in Europe as a reaction against earlier cult worship. Man as God's agent tamed and bent nature to further God's work.

The Renaissance introduced significant changes in the manner man viewed the world. Galileo, Newton and others found the natural world to be a place governed by scientific principles. The spirit, the emotions, and the mythic qualities were bleached away by scientific principles. Trees, earth, water, sky and man were weighable, quantifiable matter and little else. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, civilized man effectively had completed the separation between himself and the natural environs. Nature existed to be harvested, reformed and ultimately sold. Our modern world facilitated harvest and exploitation with additional technology and an insatiable appetite for consumption.

Perhaps a new consciousness will forestall the path we've travelled. One must hope. The ancient rhythms and cycles still speak to modern man. He's a notoriously poor listener.

John Muir has said: "Going to the mountains is going home... wilderness is a necessity... mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

By Peter Lindsey

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A JOURNAL OF ART AND OPINION PUBLISHED MONTHLY IN ASTORIA (DRESSING ROOM OFFICE) 1100 1/2 BROADWAY, ASTORIA, OREGON 97103

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THE BIG THREE

George Bush referred to the United States as "the last great hope for mankind". However well accepted it seemed to be at the time, some of us had great difficulty in believing his contention whole heartedly. The popularity of Mr. Bush's statement was due to the fact that our political and economic environment, and the methods used for judging them, are largely, if not entirely, based on short term considerations. If humankind has only a couple of hundred years left (and it may), then it would be hard to completely disagree with Mr. Bush. If we are to leave a continuing and healthy legacy, however, it appears clear that George was just plain wrong.

The past 150 years in our country have been marked by very short sighted and ambitious policies and governing. Only recently have we begun to focus our attention on the real problems that face us as a nation, as a people, and as a planet. There is no profit in dealing with these problems, they rub against our deeply entrenched grains. They make us uneasy. They fester over time and become overwhelming. They are simply just easier to ignore in a short-term, cost/benefit, get-re-elected-at-all-cost system such as ours. Even though we now hear of a heightened awareness in societal concerns, an awareness that was not generally present 10 years ago, these concerns still tend to focus on our generation. They are still laden with self-servedness, shortsightedness and compromise. We no longer have the luxury of compromise. We have spent most of our options. If we think beyond ourselves and beyond our life time, it is clear that there are certain things we should be paying very close attention to today. There are at least three mounting problems that we can neglect no longer. Education, the environment and world population are long term time bombs. Education, obviously, is the key issue, as its existence, in the proper phases, will negate the other problems.

Please do not confuse education, in this sense, with instruction. Education has nothing to do with learning how to compress acetylene without an explosion or how to make an atom bomb. That's instruction. A person is well educated when he knows how to act or to behave in difficult situations. When we discuss what long-range consequences could be and what would serve humankind in the long run, we are truly participating in education. Today, few people think about future generations, and this is a consequence of a lack of education. Even "primitive" cultures have no need for the technology that instruction brings to develop collectively their own culture and their own creativity. Instructional teaching tends to make people reason more like machines than as human beings. When a child is stuffed with things to remember, or things to be interrogated about on an exam, there is no time and no incentive to think about anything but proving what he has learned. And unfortunately, what he learns has nothing to do with real life and real problems. We are social beings, and to live in society with the high degree of mind that we have requires education.

In spite of the fact that nearly any ailment you might wish to consider can be directly related to our sheer numbers, there are very few governments or organization that are seriously doing anything about world population. On the flip side, there are many groups, particularly religions, which are doing something about world population. Unfortunately, they are working in a

somewhat different direction. It is easy for anyone to point out a problem such as this and be critical of it but to chart a course for its correction is quite another thing. Education is again the key and a beginning. Until we are serious about stabilizing or reducing world population, there is little point in dealing with any other long term considerations.

In the historical window of humankind, we have, in the blink of an eye, waged serious and profound effects on our planet's natural environment. It has suffered since the agricultural and industrial ages. As soon as people become "developed", they center all of life on themselves - having a good time, a good life, short-term benefits, short-term pleasure - to such an extent that we come to the idiotic conclusion that the only yardstick we have to evaluate anything is money. Its nonsense. Why do we want to quantify everything? There are things that cannot be and will never be quantified. Primitive cultures are in balance with their natural environment partly because they have not generally reached this conclusion. Their rites and religions are based on beliefs, not on reasoning. And beliefs and feelings and enthusiasm and joy and sorrow and terror are all human emotions that cannot be quantified. In a world where our primary goal is to make more money, we are not preparing coming generations for the peaceful management of our planet or the once vast natural legacy that we inherited. Where our natural environment is concerned, we must instill a great sense of continuance and maintain our options indefinitely.

To begin to instill a lasting consciousness of these concerns in the minds and creativity of our children, we are charged with the task of educating. The current system of primary education does not work. Anyone who can broadly claim that it does has not taken a good hard look at the human condition and our social fabric. They are unwoven. And education at home, or the lack thereof, is as much to blame. The average American child spends 4 to 5 hours per day watching television, and does so at the expense of whatever type of good might otherwise evolve from this time at home. Toys and television establish in the minds of children that war and violence are inevitable. They are produced to flatter the primitive side of us, they make no effort to educate or improve human nature.

Education has failed because it has taught us that "normal" behavior is acceptable. It is normal to drain and dry a coastal marsh to build a Costco. We like Costco. Very few people are educated to understand that we are also suppressing life in this area - nurseries for all sorts of creatures that may not exist again. It is also apparently normal to maim, steal, rape, kill, vandalize, or go to jail. We see this on television or in motion pictures. It is presented in a form that is meant to entertain, not educate. Many of us do not have the framework to interpret such things any other way than to be impressed by them and convinced that they are normal and acceptable.

There is a future shining in a baby's eyes. We can ensure it by agreeing that there are mounting problems that must be dealt with. And by agreeing that they must be dealt with now, not when they are critical, as is our nature. And by recognizing that there are certain sacrifices that must be made in order to properly deal with them. The conditions for establishing new ways of thinking will not likely be any better than they are now. The vast majority of us will march along blindly, working towards some typical end. Others, hopefully sufficient in numbers to be effective, will look beyond, way beyond, and teach the rest of us how it's done.

By Ron Logan

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