ECONEWS

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CIVILIZATION'S JOURNEY

Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

These are the questions that the artist Paul Gaugin wrote in the corner of one of his paintings when he was living in Tahiti in 1897, and they've been asked by thinking people for as long as we've been thinking – especially today, when there's a solid case to be made from the ecological evidence that our civilization is in big trouble.

Where do we come from? Yes, we are part of nature, with 3.5 billion of years of biological evolution in our genes. But that's not the whole story. The hydrogen atoms in our bodies were formed at the very start of the Universe.

Touch your body. Pinch your skin. The hydrogen atoms in those hydrocarbons are 13.7 billion years old. If there is life elsewhere in the Universe among the trillions of trillions of stars it will include similar hydrogen atoms.

For reasons we do not yet understand, atoms self-organize to form molecules, molecules self-organize to form organisms, and organisms have evolved to form all creation on Earth. Why does it happen? Physicists say it's a purposeless random process. Religious people say, "God did it." To many, it's a big unanswered question.

What are we? Are we purely material, as most scientists say, at least while wearing their lab-coats? Is consciousness just a side effect of the brain? Are thoughts of soul and spirit mere comfort-ideas, created by the lonely self? I taught parapsychology at evening class many years ago, and I studied the paranormal literature extensively. Recently, I read *Twin Telepathy* by Guy Lyon Playfair, and the evidence that a third of identical twins are reliably and consistently telepathic is extremely persuasive.

Such telepathy may be rare – but so are rainbows. As a phenomenon of the Universe we need to understand it, not dismiss it. There are mothers who know that they sometimes have a telepathic link to their children. Back in 1963, Francis Crick told Rupert Sheldrake that there were only two major unsolved problems in biology - consciousness and developmental biology. They remain unsolved today.

If telepathy is real – and the evidence is compelling – consciousness cannot be mere brain-stuff. Is it a fifth dimension that permeates everything? Are animals conscious? Of course they are. Are plants? It would seem so. Are atoms? That's an interesting question. Is consciousness associated with the self-organizing nature of the Universe that causes particles to form atoms, atoms to form molecules, right on up to us, serving as the agency for intention?

Quantum physicists know that it's impossible to separate the objective reality they observe from the consciousness that observes it. When honest, they are completely bemused as to how it all happens, even if quantum math works perfectly.

Where are we going? That's the critical question, because we may be about to experience a massive economic collapse due to an excess of unregulated greed, and because the cost to nature and our future will be so enormous if we don't stop treating nature, the oceans and the atmosphere like a garbage dump for our selfish behavior.

Many environmentalists and ecologists have been well schooled scientifically, and accept the materialist interpretation of the Universe. Their belief that it's a material world need not lessen their love of life and their passion to protect it, but it may inform their vision of the future.

Where are we going? For all conscious reality, which may include all existence, the future is determined by intentions held in consciousness. If your vision of the future is negative, you may have pre-decided that our civilization is going to collapse, making it more likely to do so. If it is positive, you probably still believe that we can self-organize to overcome our challenges and achieve our goals, just as previous generations campaigned to end slavery, form labour unions, win the vote for women, defeat fascism, and win civil rights for all.

History tells us that whenever a civilization ceases to have a clear and positive vision of the future, it is on the road to collapse. Sometimes the collapse is triggered by climate change, bringing extended drought; sometimes by farming ignorance that leads to soil erosion; sometimes by an excess of the good life that dulls the impulse for innovation and exploration.

Where are we going? I envision a future in which we end all warfare, make poverty history, live in harmony with Nature, develop true democracy, and in which all humans experience fulfillment, a widening of empathy and a deepening of consciousness.

It is out of crisis that new ideas and new hopes arise. Our journey since we ceased being hunter-gatherers is only ten thousand years old; we only started thinking scientifically 400 years old; we embraced full-franchise democracy less than a hundred years old. Our Sun does not begin its decline into a black dwarf for a thousand million years.

Our present confrontation with nature and the limits of growth is a sign that we have reached our childhood's end. It is telling us to grow up, and stop treating the planet like a childhood sandbox. From now on, we will need to act together as planetary adults. Our first real adult journey as planetary civilization may be about to begin.

- *Guy Dauncey*