

Outside the natural balance: violence versus discovery

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30 August 2008

Culture Change #197 August 30, 2008

The key question for our survival may be "Are we out of balance temporarily?", or "Is balance lost and we have to adjust to a new and tougher ecological reality?"

If extinction of humans is part of a re-balancing act by nature, but many species pull through what seems to be a climate extinction we have caused, this may be the best outcome the planet and even humans can hope for. This is a biocentric and "humane" view of our ecological and evolutionary predicament. Why not love what we have, or by extension what the Earth allows? Many humans, however, are of the attitude, "If I'm not here, and humans aren't here, what do I care if the planet freezes or fries?" This column is rarely read by those humans.

We are faced with resolving today's crisis of nature's being thrown into a new balance or imbalance not so favorable for most animals and plants. We can picture as part of our task identifying how we have taken courses of action that unbalanced or supported the balance that prevailed, such as in human relations. People see such struggle daily and may be forced to suppress it. This can be due to surrounding values aided by disempowerment of people and the creation of poverty, by design of the rulers.

Be that as it may, we may be coming up against a period of self-defense or general violence as the social order is undermined by economic collapse and a free-for-all. May it be brief so people can get back to a balance in their own rediscovered or newly created communities. In so doing we will be knowingly supporting that which sustains for millennia instead of the current one-to-ten-year strategy commonly followed today.

As our great numbers compete for food, fuel and materials, violence increases, but a special period timed with petrocollapse or climate collapse may see extra violence as those who are desperate take extreme measures. Animals we are. Normally we prefer to get along and can be very loyal to one's band or tribe. Some believe tribalism is "backward," but whether it is or not it will return as necessity.

At the same time there is self-discovery and collective consciousness on the rise, as people realize something is wrong. It's happening so fast that it is no longer considered so radical or rare as it was in the 1990s for a savage critique of government that indicts the system. The post-911 politics and military state have served to create a boomerang or pendulum swing, with less and less patience among the populace for the two-party system as well. Many viewpoints are less radical-seeming now than they seemed in the 1990s, such as the need for a paving moratorium or for depaving -- now clearly needed when peak oil and climate extinction raise their heads, and the government offers no leadership.

A related "radical" idea: that the coming November presidential elections in the U.S. are not all that influential or dispositive of fundamental change. Disenfranchised people and frustrated middle-class citizens are going along with it because there's not much alternative at the moment. When the system has had its day, it won't be such a surprise and it won't be terribly missed, such are its failings and crimes. This is an optimistic stance when one hopes that a better world is possible.

Balance can be said to be a state of equilibrium for, in the case of Earth, the full panoply of species enjoying their niches and reproducing. It has been increasingly obvious we don't have this, and we notice as well that socioeconomically there's less balance. Some may view the Bush administration as the problem on its own, instead of realizing it is a representative aspect of modern society. Regardless of our diverse opinion on Bush and the ruling class, people can agree there is less balance today overall and on a number of fronts. In the 1950s if the average person were asked, "Do you think we're out of balance with nature and socially?" the response probably would have been "Huh?" In the 1990s the response would have been "yes" by a solid minority that is becoming the majority now (although this only my sense and not a poll result, so the margin of error is unknown).

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One of Culture Change's volunteer editors is an environmental science professor. He commented on the above with this point:

"Balance" is not how the discipline of ecology conceptualizes ecosystems, the world being a very large one. Nature (ecosystems) are always changing, always subject to stresses. It is when these disturbances are so strong that the resiliency of ecosystems is snapped.

Our 20th anniversary at Culture Change ought to be in celebration of peace. We haven't made it there yet. Maybe the past is relevant:

Our opposition to the two wars on Iraq was not successful in terms of a collaboration with an antiwar movement nor in terms of having our viewpoint become widely known. Personally I can say that I achieved getting on the path to peace (since peace is a path) when I in effect stepped onto the cosmic roller coaster or conveyorbelt through the galaxy. Liberation has been the overall intention and occupation. To join in this experience, it's important to put material things secondary to experiencing life. If we wish to contribute to peace, we stop propping up the system with overwork and consumerism. Local buying only, and boycotting petroleum, help.