Understanding Energy and Dropping the Ego

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Energy and the "nature connection"

Two major aspects of our lives are habitually kept separated, to our detriment and confusion. First, let's agree we are often socially concerned, sensitively aware and observant beings, but coping with ubiquitous, mechanized, artificial environments driven by "the market."

Whenever our deep understandings of nature and of our animal presence on the planet are in the forefront, we improve our chances of survival -- or at least we find relaxation in such meditations. Meditation or submission to a greater reality, it is said, requires somehow letting go of the ego.

Realizations can then form, even though this can short-circuit having a quiet mind. Mindfulness means being aware, and not being perpetually caught in an internal dialog or seething mental disturbance. Or, not being a slave voluntarily to excessive, exosomatic (non-human) and ultimately inefficient energy.

Simultaneous to such awareness and realizations, we have detailed familiarity about constantly generating energy via technology. In very recent human history we have succeeded in spreading sophisticated manufactured products (and poisons) around the entire Earth. We have become almost Homo Technicus, so far have we developed from the farmers and nomads that the vast majority of people were just decades ago.

When our ego-less capability and knowledge of technological energy are openly merged as a unified awareness, perhaps we will transcend the current tendency of separating our natural or spiritual side from our spellbinding knowledge of science and technology.

We have developed a "second-nature" way of regarding reality: perceiving our material world as made up of only objects, elements, resources, methods, practices and -- perhaps biggest of all in our minds -- information and data. This fits with the pursuit to pay bills and achieve satiation. Others hope further that wisdom comes from all this, so that peace, justice and sanity will finally prevail. Granted, our huge gains in "learning about things" and scientific insights have illuminated our culture's high-minded concept of modern living: we have come a long way, whether it is truly progress or self-annihilation.

Yet, the times when we have breakthroughs of consciousness and peace of mind come from what may be termed "dropping the ego." This is expressed in many ways by writers, singers and other artists who show us that our feelings of love, patience and glimpsing eternity are what matter. The philosophers who had more time on their hands than today -- to compare a Nietzche to more recent philosophers (including self-improvement pop-psychologists) -- were able to step back from society and regard it objectively and critically. Today some of us studiously or hurriedly find liberation in rejecting Western Civilization's entire system, while others react to the twisting, chaotic system in despair.

Some strive to be as philosophical and impeccably grounded as certain thinkers of over a century ago. But almost everyone is subject to more distractions and at a faster pace. The average person has much less time to ponder universals or to picture an alternative existence in an enlightened society. We have from Freddy Nietzche many pithy

observations, e.g., "Without music, life would be a mistake." Such a statement was from a mind easily going beyond the typical pursuit of material wealth, in favor of sharing ideas and art. But in the subsequent century, besides the precious "Make love, not war," we have more cynical truths, such as "Hell is other people" (Jean-Paul Sartre).

Energy took over

Energy is probably the most central, newly appreciated aspect of modern existence, having taken on a "wondrous" but controlling role. Our daily routines and even survival are connected to huge, complex systems of industrial conversion and distribution. Most of us think it's normal or a right.

• We throw a switch to heat and light our dwellings and workplaces, as well as our cars, for comfort and safety.

• Here in the U.S. the calories in each piece of food, on average, have been obtained by using ten times as many calories from fossil fuels -- not including distributing the food, conveyed on average 1,500 miles from farm to dinner table.

• Wars are increasingly about crude oil access, so that the victors can maximize wealth and maintain consumption of energy and materials from petroleum.

• Whether we are of the 1% and can buy anything (except a stable climate), or are of the lowest per capita energy stratum, we've jumped on the bandwagon of seemingly never-ending exploitation of energy supplies.

• One typical consumer has the equivalent of 100 "energy slaves," consuming energy at an average rate of 10 kW annually. This inconvenient fact is unmentioned publicly, except by a few scattered leaders such as Congressman Roscoe "Peak Oil" Bartlett.

• Miles travelled in U.S. cars are measured in the trillions (almost three last year), but "peak mobility" seems to have peaked forever in 2006 -- about the time global conventional oil extraction peaked.

Not many of us see that the problems generated by both inequitable wealth-division and the unsustainability of relying on non-renewable resources are unsolvable for our present, huge population. Those who ignore this seek above all a clean(er)-energy version of modern living "for all." The technological fix has potential, but only goes so far. If it is not about decentralized use for simple needs and fewer people over time, it's a dream of unlimited energy via Teslian applications in a world somehow rid of corporate greed and cultural materialism. The dream is also based on forgetting that renewable energy sources are mostly limited to producing electricity, which is not as crucial as liquid fuels are for the present infrastructure.

Well-educated technophiles and care-free video-gamers alike act as if they are oblivious to the millennia of primitive survival, not so long ago when humans were just one small part of the web of life. There was no such thing as an energy specialization or "energy economy." Imagining we are above or separate from nature has been a demonstrable failure, considering the fact that 2012 is shaping up to be the hottest year in U.S. history, thanks mostly to global fossil fuels combustion. Obscuring the threat is fossil-fuels industries' trumpeting "jobs," while consumer complicity, militarism and government corruption assist mightily.

This brings us to the issue of energy as force, or, in contrast, primarily as a partner in peaceful nature. The words "energy" and "nature" are almost synonymous, but the relatively recent capability to use energy for massive force has meant nonstop violence of unnatural institutions. In the quest for war, strip mining, ocean dumping, and more, energy is personified as polluting, oppressive and for only profit. Energy is of course not limited to those things, but without a pristine-nature connection for human endeavors, energy is something else: exploited for force such as ramming a logging road through one of the last rain forests. The origin of violent, manmade energy systems is perhaps the systematic use of force by early societies relying on primitive weapons, or even just a fist. Energy is used most heavily today by those believing in the quick, first use of force, even though they claim their actions are always defensive or justified. Some very different folk see energy used best in permaculture and restoring roads to wilderness.

Technological ego versus open mind of nature

The ego is a protective mechanism for our survival, so that we can grasp our own needs at an instant, in order to counter a threat or merely excel for our own self-image socially. Yet, if we keep it switched on, or we get lost in the haze of neon lights, smog, self-gratification, and, maybe having to forage for food from a dumpster, we may lose the chance to find unity with others and the entire universe. To open our minds to the cycle of life is to know there is much more beyond the moment's obligation or fascination. It may take a full stomach and a sense of security to do this very often. But with society set up to control the masses of non-land holders via divide-and-conquer and fear, one is discouraged from realizing that there is no constant threat from people around. In fact, we need them and they help us.

It is hard to stumble upon this independently, especially if one is on mind-control substances (intentionally designed or no) such as multiple pharmaceutical drugs -- for diseases essentially environmental and social in origin. But if we do discover what really constitutes a threat today, we find that healing is vital for social change, and vice versa. Even if drinking the Kool-Aid of conformity, one can sometimes perceive the beauty of nature as bigger than the ego-self: the sudden sight of waves coming ashore, or a hummingbird a few feet away.

What we do not know about the universe is infinite. We can exalt in the vastness of space and time, and see ourselves as puny or infinitesimally small. But we can also experience the universe's mysteries directly, by looking at a bush's flowers in the moonlight, and letting our minds go. If the moon influences the tides and, according to some evidence, a woman's menstrual cycle (humans are mostly bodies of liquid), then what might be the effect of moonlight on plants and trees?

Are we not intimately a part of this? Nietzche hit upon what many of us hit upon independently: "there is no such separation [between nature and humanity]." "Independently" is key: as Freddy also said, "Human beings who do not want to belong to the mass need only to stop, and not be comfortable; follow their conscience, which cries out: 'Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself.'...your educators can be only your liberators..."

The question and the answer over the full possible role of our moon, if reductionist science could reveal it, may not occur to us if our ego is switched on too much of the time. We cannot all be Einsteins or Nietzches, but for our individual peace and understanding of our world, we have to look beyond our human fixations, and see within as well. When we have accomplished this, we can put energy and other material aspects of life in perspective. We can know further that we are connected by energy to everything in the universe. The implications are glorious, and point the way to breakthroughs in human relations. For the "human experiment" can either evolve to handle the Sapiens attribute for compassionate wisdom and pleasure, or persist in manipulating nature and humans for narrow ends. We know which path leads to extinction.

The ego, as a proven construct of our species, should not be attacked vaguely, when we can refer to the technological ego -- the ego that doesn't get a chance to shut off, due to diminishing nature and lack of free individual time.

To truly understand energy is to go beyond or skip or dismantle the "hard path," as Amory Lovins editorialized on fossil and nuclear power decades ago for Friends of the Earth/Earth Island Institute. Simplicity as a virtue and as the default can draw upon the beautifully intricate design of nature, such as full sails energetically propelling a boat, with no pollution or drawdown of strategic oil. When sails are set, without the din of engines, reflection on our place on this beautiful planet can more likely take over the mind. With ego subsiding, the heart can merge with the intellect, and appropriate

technology can flow from wisdom and support it as well.

Author, permaculture teacher and appropriate-tech guru Albert Bates observed recently,
"Besides being made of saltwater ourselves, having emerged from that, we are also stimulated in unknown endocrine ways by the motion of waves. Melville describes a bit of this; that we still are stuck in our cruel animal selves (even crueler in 19th century), but, especially when we are immersed in the fold of nature, we are capable of wonder."

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Further reading:

Americans, with 100 ‘energy servants’ each, share blame for Gulf oil spill by Steve Mosko, Ph.D

NOAA: 2012 may the the hottest year in U.S. history, New York Daily News

Car-addiction peak? Annual Vehicle-Miles Traveled in the United States and Year-over-Year Changes, 1971-2012



