

The Measure of Things

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We are at the start of a new century. Where is our world going? What have we achieved? Technological progress has given us previously unimaginable wealth. Thanks to scientific knowledge, today we are healthier, we have easier lives and we grow older than our forefathers ever could have dared to dream.

But that's only the tip of the iceberg. Technological potential is only fully unfolding in a few highly developed parts of all of human civilisation. However, former developing countries are catching up too.

More and more people are turning to the convenience that technological progress offers its consumers. More and more people dream of living just as people in rich countries show them they can. Why should anyone stop them?

But will our way of thinking centred around wealth, apparently our most important yardstick, be sustainable in the long-term? What if our resources run out? Can we leave our children a world that is just as rich and diverse as the one we inherited from our forefathers with a clean conscience?

Human civilisation has spread like a fungus across the entire surface of the planet and reached the limits of its expansion. Because of its hunger for natural resources, the globe has shrunk. These days it seems small and fragile.

In its untouched state, nature only exists in protected nature reserves. They are disappearing islands in a carpet of human civilisation that is growing always denser. **Nature's ability to regenerate has been exhausted under the influence of human beings** and her equilibrium has now been disturbed. However, for thousands of years, we humans have been accustomed to spreading and developing further to meet our growing needs.

We know the dangers we are heading towards, but we are barely able to look up from our own desire for wealth and take a good look at the global ecological situation. Where does this dangerous arrogance towards our own resources come from?

The earth created humans as one part of its overall system, one species among many – primus inter pares. Archaic humans lived harmoniously with the other species they shared their environment with, with their food resources and their natural enemies. Four million years ago, our forefathers, highly developed primates, crossed the threshold of consciousness, and with this strategic advantage, they gradually climbed to the top of the food chain.

In ancient pre-history, nature was still the source of all things in the human imagination. Nature was the mother of our earthly gardens and gave birth to the family of deities, personifications of natural phenomena.

There were many different deities, who, either working together or in conflict with each other, ruled all aspects of the workings of the world.⁽¹⁾

It was a mystical world. When human beings looked around, they did not see the mechanical effects of natural laws. They sensed the power of an almighty God in every twig, in every cloud, a God on whom they were dependent and compared to whom they were very small indeed.

Humans had a very close, practical relationship to their gods. They were dependent on their protection and their favour as they dealt with their daily struggle to survive. The merciful gods granted them access to their earthly goods. They rewarded them with the fruits of their garden if they humbly bowed down to the higher order.

It was a mutually beneficial trade, a complex relationship of dependency in which humans continuously had to reposition and prove themselves. They made use of the rights they had been granted with a constant awareness of the higher responsibility that had been placed on their shoulders.

They were guests. The earth was a temporary abode.

As humans developed, they emancipated themselves and broke away from this relationship. Man began to form his image of the world with increasing egocentricity. He sought justification for his claims to ownership and tried to withdraw from the complex web of responsibilities he had towards his family of gods.

With all its earthly and heavenly goods, the world was now to be focussed on only one **single reference point: a new order according to man's design!**

In this new, monotheistic world, man positioned himself as a creation of supernatural, universal power on the same level as the creation of nature. The old interconnected relationship between the earth, nature and human beings, with its variety of horizontal power relations between forces became a hierarchical system, in which power clearly operated from the top down.

God created the heavens and the earth, after that He created living nature. The final pinnacle of His creation was man, in his own likeness.

Instead of the many different, equal levels of connection, with which human beings had to arrange themselves, there was now only one – the connection to their universal creator.

The human being had cut the umbilical cord to his origin, cut the cord to nature.

The new world had been enlightened, there was now only a clear divide between above and below – the creator above things, the world, and the nature that had been entrusted to mankind.

Modern man saw himself as God's image. His Creator had laid the world at his feet.

This fundamental paradigm shift in how human beings imagined the origin of things and the creation of the world has defined our relationship to the environment until today.

We still carry the inheritance of this early shift in positions in human cultural history in us today.

We no longer to feel connected to our world; we stand upon it, above it.

We have forgotten what it feels like to be part of an invisible web of inexplicable “forces of fate”.

We modern humans no longer feel like we are little cogs in the workings of the world, parts in the web of relationships between conflicting forces.

We feel strong, self-confident and independent. We feel we were born with the right to self-determination and self-realisation.

We believe that the world was created for our benefit.

Despite global climate change and the drastic increase in natural catastrophes, we still believe it is our mission to shape the world for our benefit.

The edifice of the world has been built around human beings for too long. It is starting to crumble. It is threatening to collapse.

In the sixteenth century, we were forced to realise that the Earth was not the fixed centre of the universe, but that it was part of a bigger whole, moving along with the other heavenly bodies.

Today we must accept that our species is a part of a bigger whole and must not stand in the way of the movement of the whole.

It is a painful realisation that our false understanding of ourselves, our focus on wealth and our right to self-realisation will not provide us with a way out of the dead end.

The only way is to return to a time when we once felt connected to the flowing forces of nature.

The way out is to renounce the arrogant right to ownership of the larger organism to which we owe our origin and our existence.

Note 1)

In the animistic beliefs of today's primitive peoples and high cultures of the past, right up until Judaism, but also after it (Germanic, Celtic, Greek, Roman culture etc.), there is a complex, polytheistic family of gods, whose protagonists are often equated with natural phenomena.

The line dividing polytheism and monotheism also marks an equally dramatic, long-underestimated break and paradigm shift in human cultural history, the effects of which can still be felt today, just as the dividing line between prokaryotic and eukaryotic cell forms had such huge consequences for evolution (mortality, sexuality, etc.).