

How can we again become the Master of our Soul and the Captain of our Fate?

A short reflection on Learning to Think in the Anthropocene
Contribution to the Colloquium of the Learning Development Institute
to be held in

Villanova, PA, USA, 25 to 29 July 2018

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Learning to Think in the Anthropocene

For these few notes on Learning to Think in the Anthropocene I have chosen to touch very briefly on learning and spend more time on thinking and reflecting.

Most definitions of learning bring in the aspect of learning being related to change. We often note that most people are eager to change, they may even long for change, but they do not want to engage fully in change. Engaging fully means that you will have to confront your life and the depths of who you are, and think about what it means to be human. Change means making a shift in consciousness, causing that one has to think differently and thus has to accept a different level of responsibility. For many of us, however, staying with the old patterns is considered easier. It looks as if we are preparing ourselves for tomorrow, but thereby assuming that tomorrow will just be like today and like yesterday. As a result we are badly, or not at all, prepared for what may happen. In fact we are thus living in a situation of apathy.

Because they can self-reflect humans are the only known species that can be held responsible for their decisions. Nevertheless, so many humans do so little self-reflecting, even many of the most intellectually sophisticated people lack in self-reflecting. We seem able to do impressive and challenging research, we learn many different languages, we make beautiful music but we do not often enough contemplate our existence in a sustained way. We live just like highly intelligent animals, smart and practical in our attempts to realize our private goals, but as a species we are neither very wise nor self-reflective. Homo sapiens, in general, is capable of ruining our habitat and driving ourselves and many fellow species into extinction.

It is hard to explain how we, as human animals, continue to destruct the rest of the 'creation'. Apparently many of us are not aware or do not want to be aware of the current reality. Being aware of this reality will mean recognizing that we are dealing with complex and wicked problems, with problems that are hard, or sometimes impossible to solve, or that, when solved, may create other problems. They do not live with the challenges that a complex world poses. We have a tendency to be against something, we sign a petition or make a donation and feel good because we have done something.

This lack of acting on change is something that we see in the life of individuals, but also nowadays see in many movements such as Move On. One is against something and looks for support, but we are stuck at that point: there is not much of a further thought. A leftist organization may almost always defend the

left and may fail to recognize that not all is perfect. There's a need to go a bit further and to recognize that many situations are complex. There's often not a real will for change. We think and believe, as most of us seem to do, that we can more or less continue in the same way as we do now. It is safe to tweak an action or a plan, but it asks much more to critically review a situation and to come up with changes that are the results of critical thinking. These are developments that can be dangerous and destructive.

We are actively engaged in the process of destroying not a civilization in some part of the world, but a global civilization, possibly ending in a Waste Land, as T.S. Eliot almost a century ago described in his most famous poem "The Waste Land". Its main subject is the degraded mess that Eliot considered modern culture and which was mostly the result of the first World War that had ravaged Europe. The four speakers in one of the sections of the poem are frantically trying to find an audience, but they only find themselves surrounded by dead people and hopelessly frustrating outside circumstances such as wars.

Can we say that this is our current situation? May we already have created a waste land? Are there still speakers trying to find an audience and if so, what should be the words that get the attention of the audience? Are words enough? Are we already too late and on our way to destroy a global civilization?

Cultures are created and destroyed. Civilizations do not just happen. They are built with compassion and determination, and are destroyed by what we may call a form of ecstasy i.e., beyond reason and control (Kingsley, 2010). In the past we have seen civilizations being built such as the Chinese, the Greek and the Mayan empires and we have seen them being destroyed and new civilizations have been built. But does a destroyed global civilization have a chance to be "resurrected or rebuilt"?

We are living in an epoch that has developments that can be dangerous and destructive, but there are also positive things happening.

We are currently gradually becoming aware of the delusion that we can with clever enough technological solutions avoid the consequences of what we do to our planet and to our (global) civilization/culture. We are learning that we are not separate from Nature, and that this bond consists of a fullness and wholeness that we currently risk at our peril.

Humans and the planet are now linking human forces and natural forces. One of the human forces that's essential in this "pact" is communication. We are different from wise animals as we can effectively communicate. As Homo sapiens we do have highly developed communication skills. The four speakers in Eliot's poem did not have a problem to communicate. They were in search of an audience. We are different from them in that we are not only trying to find an audience, but also trying to find effective and affective "words" that will, together with actions help us to let go our old ideas of progress and growth. Only by letting them die, will we be able to invest in a future that is not based on retrospect and reaction. Only then can we develop a global awareness and consciousness (Scranton, 2015).

Our current situation is now breaking down as a result of the unconsciousness that is not only promoted by those who take most national and international decisions and by the business community we seem happy to support, but also by our current education and learning/schooling systems where grades and diplomas have overtaken craftsmanship, creativity and consciousness, and where wisdom is in short supply. We ourselves, are often acting unconsciously. We live in a world of shadows, in a world where consciousness is collectively repressed.

Consciousness is, I think, the highest form of mental activity and is only present in humans. Consciousness creates and has created our world. Consciousness gives us the power to decide where we go in life, what choices we make and what paths we take. It encourages us to learn to think in the Anthropocene. Consciousness offers us the opportunity to truly be the master of our soul and face the challenges of the Anthropocene and become captains of our fate.

References:

Eliot, T.S. (1922). *The Waste Land*. New York: Bony and Liveright

Kingsley, P. (2010). *A story waiting to pierce you*. New York: The Golden Sufi Center

Scranton, W. (2015). *Learning to die in the Anthropocene*. Las Vegas: City lights Publisher

Suggested Discussion points

How can we awake people so that they become profoundly aware of global issues in the Anthropocene and are prepared to engage.

If we agree that consciousness creates our world, how do we create awareness of the fact that our current situation is breaking down and that unconsciousness is essentially encouraged.

Are we, indeed, frantically trying to find an audience, just like the four speakers in the Waste Land, and how can we be (more) successful?