Our Teachers in Nature, by Elisabet Sahtouris

Looking at living systems over time, I came to understand that they all go through a cycle that's very like our psychological maturation cycles. We start with a unity, we're undifferentiated, we come into the world new. And then individuation happens. We have many experiences. We branch out in many directions. And humanity, as it diversified and had more and more people, created more and more conflict. Exactly as the early Earth differentiated into bacteria and then they developed different lifestyles and they became competitive. They invented technologies in order to carry out their hostilities. They created enormous problems including global hunger and global pollution. And they had to solve those eventually by negotiating differences, moving on around the cycle, and working out cooperative schemes that ultimately led the ancient bacteria that ruled for the first half of Earth's life to form a new kind of cell as a community of different lifestyle bacteria working together. That's the nucleated cell that we're made of, that all these trees are made of, that all the beings in the waters are made of. Everything we see around us is made of this wonderful big cooperative cell.

Now humanity is going through the biggest event since the time that bacteria formed the nucleated cell because we're now trying to form the body of humanity around the globe. Seeing that other species matured out of a youthful competitive phase into a mature cooperative phase means everything to us now. The Darwinian story only goes to the adolescent part where there's hostile competition. You take all you can get. You fight your enemy. You try to out-do him or try to bump him off and that's what makes you survive.

But that's not what sustainability is all about. Sustainability happens when species learn to feed each other instead of fight each other. You get mature ecosystems such as rainforests and prairies where you have far more cooperation than you have hostile competition. You can still have friendly competition, but that's very different. So I see humanity doing exactly this right now. We of the western culture who divorced ourselves from nature saying â€œWe're separate. That's nature out there. Let's see how we can exploit it to our purposes.â€• Interestingly, we're the species who invented the concept of _entropy_ and we're the one who creates it, who deteriorates eco-systems while the other species are building them up. So we have a great deal to learn from nature and by recognizing that our conscious experience _is_ of other beings, _is_ of teachers in nature that we can learn from and gain hope from. If bacteria could do it without benefit of brain, can't we [do it] as humans with big brains?

--Elisabet Sahtouris, in After Darwin

[http://www.ratical.org/LifeWeb/Articles/AfterDarwin.html]

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