

The Current Moment

An edited transcript of an interview with Dr. Brian Swimme

Our new story actually reveals to us the fundamental significance of our moment, which is that an era - an entire geological era - is coming to a close in our lifetime.

Scientists divide up life into major eras. The one we are living in is called the Cenozoic. It's the 65 million years since the demise of the dinosaurs. And so, in terms of life at that level, we are at the end of that era.

As the Cenozoic comes to a close, it is important to note that we are actually eliminating the species of our time at a rate of 20,000 a year. Now species always go extinct, but, if there were no humans around today, there would be, maybe, one species going extinct a year. So we have accelerated the rate of extinction thousands of times. Which means that our impact is changing the functioning of the planet.

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And here is the amazing thing: this will be news a million years from now, because these mass extinctions only take place once every 100 million years. We are living in an event that comes along once every 100 million years!

Now from the perspective of the new story, that's the real action on the planet. Already, we can see how this relates to

these questions of who am I and what am I about. Are we part of that destruction? Are we ignorant of it? Or are we actually addressing it? That is the benefit of having a cosmic story.

Now, the notion of extinction is an extremely deep one. It took humans forever to arrive at this. Buddha, Jesus, Confucius...no one in history talked about extinction of species, because it was beyond the reach of human imagination. Until the 19th century. It's a massively important event that we can just barely understand the true significance of. This destruction - even though it is taking place largely outside of our consciousness - is also affecting us at a very deep level. The struggle of embracing our moment is the struggle of embracing the fact that we live in the most destructive moment in 65 million years.

Right in the middle of this destruction is creativity. It's bizarre, but this destruction is simultaneously accompanied by creativity. When the dinosaurs were living their last days here, their extinction enabled the mammals to take off. Mammalian activity exploded with the death of the dinosaurs. So that is our moment too.

We're in the midst of an end time. Things are coming to a close, but it's opening up new possibilities. Our fundamental challenge is to give birth to a new society, a new way of being a human, and a new planet. That's the challenge - to think at the level of creativity that's required by this moment. It's not just a new civilization that we need to give birth to; we're actually giving birth to a new geological era. And it's never been done in human history. It's a level of creativity that the Earth has manifested before - but humans have never been called upon to produce ideas at the level of planetary creativity. That's our moment.

Now the actual name of this era hasn't been given yet. Some people call it the era of information, some people call

it the integral era. It's also been called the age of integral ecology. We don't have the language yet because we're right in the middle of the creativity itself.

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So how do we begin? The critical first step is to understand that our primary community is something that extends beyond the nation state; beyond any culture, beyond any corporation. Our fundamental community is actually the Earth community, as a whole. It's important that we begin to think and feel and assess things at that level.

Now we work in individual lives. There's an intimate relationship we have with our local surroundings. But at the same time we can have an awareness of the relationship of this local community that we share with this larger planetary moment. So simply identifying ourselves at that larger level of awareness is an important first step.

The transformation that we're involved in operates both at the level of the personal and at the level of the social. The fundamental establishments of our society are all undergoing change. For example, until recently, our educational system was designed to produce workers for factories, or workers inside a corporation. Which was appropriate for its time.

But at the present time, we must ask, "What's the form of education that will enhance the life of the planet?" That's the

question that addresses the larger context. And it's easy to state what the orientation should be: We need to develop educational systems that will teach people how to successfully enter into their roles within the Earth community.

What we are talking about is enlarging the level of meaning. It doesn't stop at the level of industrial society. Our challenge is larger than that. Ultimately, we have to ask, "What is our deep role within the entire planet? What are we serving, in terms of the planet?"

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And likewise, we have to address our economic systems. We designed our economies with the total focus on humans - naturally. But we've failed to appreciate that we are one economy amidst many. The birds have an economy, the whales have an economy - there are all these different ways of making a living. And so we have to invent economic activity that is an enhancement of the other economies, not just the human. We have to examine the different institutions in our society, and re-think them through the point of view of the larger planet.

We proceed with an awareness that the system is far too complex for us to actually manage or control. It's way beyond our capacity. Because, remember, it's the system that gave birth to us. So how, then, are we to interact in a way that is fruitful? We can begin by aligning ourselves in terms of the fundamental dynamics of the system itself.

In every component of a system, there is a fundamental mode of presence. There is a mode of authenticity. There is a way in which each component is involved with the inclusion of the entire system. And there's a way in which each fundamental component has a responsibility. This is true of any system on the planet. And so our way forward is to move into these modes, or these qualities, of the system as a whole and to make it personal.