

## BLESSED UNREST

In *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming* (342pp, Penguin Books, 2007) Paul Hawken argues that humans are physically one, not only with each other, but with all living things. We *are* nature: all organisms evolved from a single ancestral cell. Every creature that's ever lived has been made up of the same elements as ourselves, and has breathed the same air. 90% of our bodies' cells are bacteria, fungi, yeasts and other microorganisms without which we couldn't live. Between human and sunflower cells, the difference is narrow; between human and primate cells, the difference is "slender as a thread."

To think that we're separate from nature is pure illusion. "We are one tribe with bacteria that live in hot springs, parasitic barnacles, vampire bats and cauliflowers." And we now know that nature itself, once thought static, is in constant flux; evolution occurs much faster than Darwin assumed. Nature is cyclical, and so recycles everything. "What works in nature persists, and it works because it evolved through unceasing invention and experimentation."

And to do that, nature needs maximum diversity, the widest and richest possible field of play. But, for better or worse, humans now guide evolution. We impact the earth as much in 5 minutes as our ancient ancestors did in a year, as much in a year as they did in 100,000. What is most harmful to nature lives in us, and we must cure it.

Our population stands at 6.6 billion; by 2100 resources per person will have dropped by half; millions pour into slums every week; billions live on less than \$2 a day. The

top 200 companies have twice the assets of 80% of the world's people. Most work now requires only "speed, hand-eye coordination, and stamina" – so products are meaningless to producers. We've achieved "civil rights for goods," a "corporatization of the commons" because capital's right to grow is "greater than the rights of people, communities, and cultures." The 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment declares the world to be "on the brink of disaster" – without considering global warming.

In response, as many as 2 million nonprofit organizations worldwide strive to address poverty, global climate change, terrorism, ecological degradation, polarization of income, loss of culture and languages, and much, much more. Hawken calls this movement "humanity's immune response" – "that part of humanity which has assumed the task of protecting and saving itself."

This movement is a collection of small separate pieces, dispersing, not seeking, concentrations of power, with no central leader, yet capable of bringing down regimes. Because it's without an ideology and concentrates on the future, it's largely invisible to the media. It invokes localized needs, processes, concerns and compassion, instead of the will of governments. Diverse groups within it share an understanding of earth's functions and the need for fairness and equity for everyone dependent on its life-giving systems. Hawken sees this movement as fundamental to change, with its most powerful instrument, a free flow of information.

Indigenous cultures form the hub of the movement: at their best they show us a viable future. They and

environmentalists are natural allies: we can't harm the environment without harming people, and vice-versa.

If we're to imagine a future, we need to lengthen our attention span. But how, Harken asks, can anyone with children not imagine a future and do everything possible to assure it's a good one?

“Living within the biological constraints of the earth may be the most civilized activity a person can pursue, because it enables our successors to do the same.”

Hawken leaves us with 114 pages of types of nonprofits dedicated to social and environmental justice, with contact websites. Maybe one's for you.