

EcoLogic

-the green hornet

Getting back to Basics: The Human Purpose (if ever there was one)

As we muddle through a big downturn in the economy and as we also might contemplate the 'green' issue, maybe we should reach deep, deep, deep into ourselves and take stock of who and what we are as a culture and as a species. I think that it could be successfully argued that, above all, we are producers and consumers. That's certainly true in the U.S. and other industrialized countries, but it's rapidly gaining foothold with the rest of the world as well.

This view of the human race has probably been true ever since we could consider ourselves as civilized, but it certainly has been more of a defining characteristic in the past sixty years or so. In the far distant olden days, we probably bartered and traded more out of necessity and it seems the barters and trades we engage in now are increasingly more of a discretionary nature.

We make stuff; we sell stuff and we buy stuff. We use stuff and we throw stuff away. Economic systems facilitate the origination and the flow of stuff and capitalism seems to do it the best. Capitalism is currently under severe scrutiny, not because of environmental concerns but because the system has hiccupped. Physically, it doesn't appear that anything has changed; there's no shortage of anything and no pandemic of anything. We still seem to have the same capabilities to make stuff and do all the things that we used to do with it before this financial thing hit; it just looks like the direction of our potential efforts has been derailed – we've lost confidence in the system, people have stopped doing things. From an environmental standpoint, I suppose you could read a silver lining into that, which is what I want to talk about.

It's hard to think that anything good could be attached to this global financial issue. This mess is translating into people losing their jobs because of a vicious cycle of decreasing demand for goods and decreasing demand for workers. Hopefully we've got enough integrity built into the systems to prevent more extreme conditions. But the bottom line is this; there is less energy being consumed with the downturn in this human goods-producing activity.

In many, if not all, respects, human activity is antithetical to the environmental movement. It seems that any and all forms of human activity produces waste and the more of us there are and the more things we produce, the more waste there is. It's almost as if there is a death struggle of humans against the planet and if we kill the planet, we win and if the planet kills us or we kill ourselves, then the planet wins; you probably noticed that we lose in either case. I think we can recognize that we, as a species, are very clever and very prolific; but there is no measured approach to the human journey, our populations grow exponentially and unfortunately, we are subject to major, often self-induced, catastrophic disruptions - plague, famine, pestilence, war etc., [see four horsemen of the apocalypse] - that tend to somewhat restrain that exponential growth.

Well, hopefully we can come to terms with our condition and we can reach some sort of accord or détente with the planet and we can co-exist in harmony. This economic predicament does seem to have put our priorities into perspective and the environment seems to have been set aside for the moment. It seems that most attention is given to trying to do what is necessary to alleviate the negative short term potential of the economic problem. In fact, this recent gathering of the G20 in Washington was kind of heartwarming; leaders from all over the world came together with a common purpose.

But fundamentally, is the perpetuation of the species the human objective? And if consumerism is killing the planet, that we depend on for our survival, and the lack of it is stressing our civilization, what do we do? If we somehow figure a way out of this ordeal and construct a system that doesn't measure human progress by things made, just what the heck are we supposed to do with all of our spare time? Oy – my

head hurts. Oh well I guess we'd better keep recycling until we can think this through. In fact I read at treehugger.com where someone actually 'dissed' recycling – can you imagine that? - But more about that later . . .