

Chaos¹

Modern Man (humankind) is afraid of what we call chaos. Nature in all its wild and wonderful variety scares us. Chaos to us is a horror.

Not long ago I was asked how many chickens we have. I have no idea, and would not know how to count them; they are wild. Turns out, there is a law. All animals must have names or numbers, the two cats that choose to live around here—strictly outside animals, not allowed inside—are supposed to have little identity chips put under their skin. Each pet has to have a permanent number identity implanted somewhere. I shudder to think of a time, not that far in the future, when every human baby gets an identity chip implanted somewhere. Someone then can know where any human is at any moment of the day, what he or she is doing. Please, forget the whole idea! Monstrous. But I would not be a bit surprised if there are people who dream of doing exactly that. The idea of being a number is not human (or animal, for that matter). Reality is, and always has been, unpredictable, constantly in flux, and way beyond human control. What makes life, living, an exciting adventure is that we cannot know what is going to happen—to me, to the weather, to this island—tomorrow, or in the next hour.

We cannot see nature, life itself, as a whole any more. We have been so conditioned to see things, details, pieces, that we can no longer see a forest for the trees. Modern humans see danger in every life form that is big, has teeth, can run faster than we can on foot, is poisonous, or is tiny and invisible but brings us diseases. Yes, all those life forms exist and have existed from the beginning. Such is life. Life eats life: the second Law of Life — the first Law must be the impulse, instinct, necessity of reproduction, making more of the same. But an ecology is where all these mores relate to all other mores, and so a nice floating balance is achieved. That means death is part of life. Life is not possible without death. We cannot live without eating, and what we must eat is other life. That is true for all beings. We cannot see that any more.

But eating life is an entirely different thing from killing life for spite or rage or disagreement. Every child learns and understands easily enough that we cannot kill more than we can eat, because if we do, there is nothing to eat tomorrow.

We pretend all those Laws of Nature do not apply to humans. We think we can control all other life forms, the planet, the ecology; select and perfect the few life forms that we require to survive, destroy everything else. Haven't we learned by now that it does not work that way? The power that we have acquired to destroy can perhaps destroy the ecology, but that will starve us to extinction. We cannot live without the chaos of nature, of what I like to think of as the Wild. The Wild is where all the fabulous varieties come from, where evolution happens: all life forms (ALL) change constantly, growing, evolving, in close relationship with, and constantly adapting to, all other changing life forms and weather, and rain, wind, rocks. In the chaos it is not the points that are important, but the lines between the points. Not what we see as separate things, plants, flowers, leaves, but the constantly shifting relationships between all these "things." We think we cannot contain the wonders of the whole and so must focus on pieces, the smaller the better. Then

¹ 1 chaos |'keɪ'ʊs| |'keɪ'ʊs|

noun complete disorder and confusion : *snow caused chaos in the region.* • Physics behavior so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in conditions. • the formless matter supposed to have existed before the creation of the universe. • (**Chaos**) Greek Mythology the first created being, from which came the primeval deities Gaia, Tartarus, Erebus, and Nyx. ORIGIN late 15th cent. (denoting a gaping void or chasm, later formless primordial matter): via French and Latin from Greek *khaos* 'vast chasm, void.'

we name and measure and put in a category of our making. By the time we have done that the points have probably already moved or were dissolved in lines we didn't know existed. There is an orchid plant that now lives happily in the bark of a tree and makes a bunch of beautiful red flowers about four times a year. It is ten feet from my eyes as I look up from the computer screen. Each time I look at a new clump I see it grown thinner or thicker. Hey, the whole plant seems to have moved back a little, facing a slightly different direction. And I discovered last week that there is a whole new plant birthing from the same root, further up the tree. That may mean that the plant that I first tied to that tree five years ago is ready to step off stage and give its offspring a chance to woo me.

For the first two hundred thousand years of our existence as a species we knew that we were part of the chaos. We were inside it, and as every other creature we too knew that living means adapting to what there is. What there is of food, shelter, danger... We, humans, are very good at adapting, that is one of our specialties. We are not as fast as many other beings, not as strong, we cannot smell as well as dogs, we cannot see as eagles see. But we can adapt to snow and ice, to deserts, to jungles, to islands. We can survive on a variety of diets, all meat (but *all* of it, not just muscle meat), or survive on all vegetables if we choose wisely, Evidently we learned to choose wisely enough, because we survived in our wild variety of what we look like and how we survived this long. Humans can survive at altitudes where the atmosphere is thin and cold, and we can survive on the equator. Not many species can do that.

And, in order to survive in all these very different environments we learned to live with and from whatever we found. We made protection and shelter from fur and snow in the arctic, or no clothes and bamboo huts in jungles. We made houses of mud, brick, wood, leaves, sticks whatever was to be found where we lived. We knew our immediate environments so intimately that we recognized the shape of a leaf to know there was an edible root underneath in the ground. We knew what fruit could be eaten when. We knew where to find enough protein to make us healthy, from grubs to mammoths. But first of all we learned not to kill more than we needed because if we did we would starve tomorrow, or next year when we came back in this region on our nomad wanderings.

Then, perhaps ten thousand years ago, somehow some of us got the idea that we could do better by owning the plants that gave us the luscious fruit, the grain, own the animals that gave us the protein we needed. We *tamed* life forms that could be tamed, domesticated. Then of course we tamed ourselves and soon unlearned what all other life forms learned: to live from and with What Is.

We knew better and still think that. Yes, we invented explosives, lots of what we call energy, vastly increased our number. Some of us live as kings could not have dreamt to live, while a lot more than half of all humans are hungry, having to live in a new kind of poverty that never existed on this planet.

Getting this far removed from who we were, we are destroying the planet. eradicating, extinguishing a thousand species of plants and animals each week. Thoughtlessly destroying the rich varieties that keeps ecologies healthy.

The land where I live with a small part of my family is a mini-ecology. Much of it is wild. We are in the tropics, much sun, much rain, and here not much soil (still lava rock, not old enough to have broken apart). Not many people lived here before the housing bubble of a few years back, the road was a dirt road with big potholes. We have electricity on one side of the land, but not on the other. Telephone. No other modern facilities. No piped water, no street lights, sidewalks, sewers, mail delivery, movies or doctors nearby. It used to be "country." The first house my son built was solid enough but not "code," and without a code approved house one cannot get electricity here. My son got two solar pan-

els long before that was easily available, and all the stuff that is needed to provide some light and a water pump for the rainwater we collect from the roof and store in a tank near the house. For cooking and a small refrigerator there was propane, which had to be bought regularly. The family planted tropical fruit trees, breadfruit trees, taro plants. My son even dug out a pond (no plastic, no concrete, just rock). There were wild chickens around, and of course they were here as well. We probably threw some leftovers on the ground, the chickens got used to us and we to them. They were not only pleasant to have around, but useful because they eat centipedes, scorpions, and other poisonous elements in this little ecology. We rarely find their eggs because they hide them in the bushes. We have no chicken coops, no fenced in places for them to live. These chickens fly (long distances, in fact) and sleep in trees. At some point in time—not sure what started it—we began to buy chicken food called *scratch*. Imported from mainland America, a mixture of hard corn and grains. At one time, I remember, it cost less than \$10 for a 50 pound bag; now double that. I have always had a need to nurture and so it became my job to feed them. These roles become rituals very quickly. Twice a day, at six thirty, or earlier—when-ever it is light, and the chickens have come down from their trees—I go out and feed them a fairly standard amount of feed, and again between three and four in the afternoon. What we feed them is almost certainly less than half of what they need to survive, it is a kind of bonus. I learned to spread the food as widely as possible. Chickens eat walking, they peck and move a few paces. The farther I could throw the scratch the better because they do not get into each other's way. Later someone gave us some ducks "because you have a pond." The ducks have a different beak and prefer to scoop up from a little heap of grain. Feeding became more complicated because if I started to give the ducks a little heap of scratch, the chickens came to that first, Chickens go where the last throw lands. So, I learned to first spread the food as widely as possible, then sneak in a handful of grains in a heap for three ducks, then quickly again spread another handfull to lead the chickens away from the ducks. It became even more complicated when three black ducks chose to come here. They do not get along with the previous ducks (Muscovy) nor with chickens. But, it also soon became obvious that the number of chickens increased as we were feeding them good scratch. With more chickens in the same ecology they found less to eat between meals and relied more and more on the food we had to buy. The chickens learned to live as we humans do today. Humans buy almost all food in super markets (many miles away), and most of what we buy comes from all over the world, and is "manufactured." My feeding the fowl became a disturbance of the ecology. I reduced the daily feedings. Now, nine months later, we have fewer chickens, they are more evenly spread in three "tribes" and the balance of our mini-ecology seems more normal.

What that has brought home to me is that a world designed by humans quickly runs aground. Anything we do that interferes with the ecology of which we are an integral part destroys the ecology. Twists the ecology to an unsustainable mess.

Isn't that what is becoming more and more obvious on a planetary scale? The world we created according to our needs, wants, greed, is breaking down. There almost certainly are far too many humans on the planet to live as Americans think we must live. Americans, even more than other western people, use five times in one year what the planet can produce in that time. Isn't it utterly obvious that we cannot go on doing this? Here, on six acres, we cannot continue to feed over a hundred chickens and six or more ducks, and ten cats, and fish, and...

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In my childhood I learned a sentence, a concept, that has worked for me all my life: "*in case of doubt do nothing*." I cannot remember who first told me. It sounds like something Confucius could have said; I have no idea who said it first. But it works.

The only thing we can do now to survive the impossible manmade mess we have made of the planet, our only home. (Yes, there are sentences I repeat and repeat in all my writ-

ings). We cannot "build" a better planet, as IBM proposes to do. We cannot design "sustainable" gardens. That is simply another way to control what is not our job to control. Our talent as adapting, not controlling.

I want to sit back and do nothing. Let the planetary ecology work out what needs to be done. My gradually reducing the amounts I feed the animals will probably stop altogether, the chickens will have to find food where they find it. I think it is more than likely that I shall have to learn to do the same thing: find food where i find it in my own environment, and not in a store 10 miles from here. I may have to learn to live without electricity, without a refrigerator to keep food more or less good for weeks at a time. We did just that on this island a hundred years ago, and there were four times as many people living on this island than there are now. They were healthy and strong and alive, living from what could be found right here. Nothing imported.

Now of course our seas around the island have almost no fish left. Some of the fish most treasured is so poisoned with mercury that doctors advise us not to eat 'ahi (yellow fin tuna) any more. Much of what soil there was has been poisoned by the generous dosing with various chemicals when big companies grew acres and acres of sugar cane. We cannot live without cars any more, there is almost no public transportation on this island. The island is big, distances are considerable, but all roads have become inadequate for the many enormous cars people thought necessary a few years ago.

And yet, fixing would be bandaids.

We must learn again to listen to Nature, the live world around us, rather than to big corporations that promise to build a better planet. Man must get over his hubris, the arrogance we have made our hallmark: we know best.

No. We do *not* know what is best. Repeat: We do NOT know what is best, not for the planet not for us.

In my long life I have known many societies of people. Fascinating and educational to see and experience that different people in different environments evolved different life styles, different ways of relating and living with each other in slightly different harmonies. People are quite able to figure out how to live with each other and with life around them by themselves. They don't need a plan, a blue print, a system of government, to find a balance between their needs and the resources available in their particular environment. That is what rich means. The wealth of being reasonably healthy, having enough to eat of the right kind of food, but not too much and not bad food. Having enough shelter but not too elaborate. Yes, work, activity, but also time to sing and dance and sit around a little fire in the evening, telling stories. All over the world people who live simply, within their means, not elaborate or exorbitant, smile and have a joyfulness we no longer know.

We are stressed almost to the breaking point. In our rage we kill each other, and ourselves. One percent (one in a hundred) of all Americans get 21% (one fifth) of all the income of this country. The ninety-nine must do with the other four fifth. Four percent of the world's population makes 25% (one quarter) of all the poisons we humans spew into the atmosphere to cause global warming, climate change. Those kinds of extreme imbalances seriously affect the planetary ecology. In short, *our manmade world cannot be.*

Of course, the one percent is now fighting the ninety-nine percent to keep their wealth. They buy politicians, they have the bigger guns , and so they are destroying the planet more vehemently. Does the one percent survive more, or better, than the rest of us? Can the super rich survive without the rest of us?

No. Of course not.