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Reflection on Journey to Earthland

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In my view, *Journey to Earthland* is one of the most important documents of our time. I have immense admiration for Paul Raskin and his seminal work over so many decades. Yes, as he writes, “the race for the soul of Earthland is on” (66)!¹ Is a global citizens movement possible? If so, can it “take shape at the requisite speed, scale and coherence?” And can it be global enough?

For the past forty years, I have been living globally, at home on all continents, to nurture a global “dignity family.” In other words, I am working day and night to nurture precisely the very solidarity of a global citizens movement that Paul describes: “This augmented solidarity is the correlative in consciousness of the interdependence in the external world. The Planetary Phase, in mingling the destinies of all, has stretched esprit de corps across space and time to embrace the whole human family, living and unborn, and beyond” (77).

Do we, as humankind, understand how dire our situation is, and how radical our responses must be? There is “dewy-eyed sanguinity” and stoic optimism on one side, and “world-weary cynicism” on the other side (110-111), while what is needed, is largely missing: a due and measured sense of alarm. It is as if people in a burning house or on a sinking ship discuss their feelings, while failing to act.

Do we, as humankind, have the means to act? Did our ancestors see pictures of our Blue Planet from the perspective of an astronaut? Were our forebears able to see, as we do, how we humans are *one single* family living on *one tiny* planet? Did our grandparents have access to as comprehensive a knowledge base as we have about the universe and our place in it? They did

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not. The image of the Blue Planet is revolutionary. It anchors humankind in the universe in ways no generation before was able to experience. For the first time, humankind can now act on and manifest the fact that we are one family. All the necessary information is amply available, more than ever before. A small window of opportunity is open for humankind at the current juncture in human history, for a few years to come perhaps, an opportunity to create a decent future for coming generations, rather than leave a ramshackle world to them.

I very much appreciate Paul's discussion of constrained pluralism and unity in diversity. Many people I meet around the world believe that the relationship between unity and diversity is zero-sum and that if one wants more unity, one has to sacrifice diversity, and vice versa. They therefore think in dualities: "cosmopolitanism versus communalism, statism versus anarchism, and top-down versus bottom-up" (84). There seem to be very high mental hurdles that keep people from grasping that unity in diversity is not a zero-sum game, but that both unity and diversity can be increased together, and that the benefits are immeasurable (see, for instance, Jean Baker Miller's work on zest in relationships and mutual growth as an outcome of waging good conflict).² The two prongs of unity and diversity, global responsibility and regional autonomy, are both essential and complementary.

For making unity in diversity work, it is not enough, however, to transcend dualities. What is needed, in addition, is to embrace processual thinking, to go from clinging to fixities to moving in flux. The tension between "Many" and "One" must be balanced by all involved in a never-ending process; it can never be "cemented" once and for all in the way past systems tried to. This means that appropriate societal systems need to be created, and dignifying communication skills learned, which allow for fluid adaptations of this balance, without violence. It means moving away from a world that clings to illusions of fixity, where violent protests are launched whenever the balance is felt wanting. In short, maintaining unity in diversity is a never-ending balancing act that requires a high degree of cognitive sophistication, interpersonal sagacity, and dignifying communication skills.

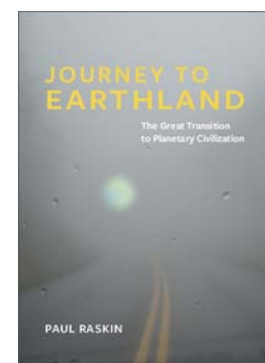
However, among the challenges we face in achieving this balance are two "blind spots" that I have observed even among the most progressives all around the world regarding the affective and institutional dimensions of global citizenship.

The affective dimension speaks to the cultural solidarity that Paul Raskin rightly sees as the glue that holds

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together the movement towards a new Earthland and to the reshaping of the secular story to include the deeper moral and spiritual aspirations of humans and what it is to be human. As I observe it, not only the academic community lacks what might be called emotional-relational literacy. To say it in a caricature, the traditional professor/director was a man who had a female secretary who did all the relationship building work for him: she apologized to those he had insulted, and she even bought his flowers for his wife's birthday. By saying so, I do not wish to blame the professor/director or the secretary in this story, since this was "the way it was." However, in today's world, in which cooperation is essential, it becomes dangerous to maintain this habitus. Cooperation requires trusting relationships as the very foundation for any voluntary inclination of people to rely on each other and work together. After living globally for the past forty years, I observe, unfortunately, that the work of creating trusting human-to-human connections largely fails to be done: it is still seen as an inconsequential "female" task that is "miraculously" self-executing, and the need to engage in it intentionally is simply ignored. What happens instead is that a "male" script of throwing one's weight around turns society into a scary battlefield where mistrust becomes the "smartest" strategy of survival. And this happens in a situation, where, if we wish to nurture a global citizens movement, people from different backgrounds will have to come together, and relationship-building work will need to be carried out much more deliberately than thus far. No technical innovation, no ever so "professional" approach can achieve this. Notions such as "family," "friend," "colleague," or "stranger" will have to be brought together into a new sense of being part of a global dignity family.

Currently, there is a worrying trend that weakens even further the relational literacy available in populations. Young mothers now sit in front of their crying babies with their cell phones, not knowing what to do with their baby. Brigitte Volz, a consultant in early childhood development in Germany, has observed that, because of this, parents no longer are able to attune to their offspring's signals. Society as a whole will need to understand its responsibility to create a context that enables parents to give their children an adequate start into life. What is urgently needed in educational settings is the highest level of attention to creating resilient connections, rather than merely delivering instructions.

New relational neuroscience shows that the human brain and physiology functions best when people are embedded in webs of caring relationships. Isolation and

exclusion activate the same neural pathways as physical pain. There are long-term physical and mental health benefits that flow from feeling loved and life-long mental damages from being neglected. While damage in otherwise healthy adults may be healed, in children, it can become structural. The brains of neglected children are smaller than those of loved children, since brain cells grow and cerebral circuits develop in response to an infant's interaction with their main caregivers. Nature and nurture are entangled; the genes for brain function, including intelligence, may not even become functional if a baby is neglected during the first two years of life. In cases where brains have not developed properly due to neglect in the first two years of life, youths may later be incapable of responding to the incentives and punishments that otherwise guide society away from crime, and they may become persistent offenders. Growth-fostering relationships are needed instead. What becomes important, if a society wishes to sustain social-psychological health among its members, is a focus on the quality of relationships, rather than the idolization of mathematics and quantities.

My second point concerns the institutional dimensions of global citizenship, in particular, global economic arrangements. In my view, even if present-day economic arrangements were to work perfectly well in a Newtonian machine model, they do not work for human beings. In my book *A Dignity Economy*, I analyze the social and psychological damage caused by the priority that the current world system gives to "market pricing," instead of to "communal sharing," to use Alan Page Fiske's terminology.³ Chapter headings in my book include "When abuse becomes a means of 'getting things done,'" "When fear becomes overwhelming and debilitating," "When false choices crowd out important choices," or "When our souls are injured by the Homo economicus model."

To conclude my two points, I observe two blind spots among even the most progressive people around the world—first, regarding emotional-relational intelligence, and second, with respect to the salience of global constitutive rules, and how they constrain what happens locally.⁴ No Great Transition will be possible if whole generations are too incapacitated, socially, cognitively, and psychologically, to even embark on it. No Great Transition will be possible if we do not learn to nurture a whole new quality of relationships among each other. While a new quality of relationships can be nurtured in small groups for a certain period of time, as we do in our global dignity movement, it cannot flourish at the necessary scale in a world with global economic constitutive rules that incentivize the opposite. Margaret

Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, is reported to have explained the aims of the Washington Consensus by saying that “economics is the method: the object is to change the soul.” By now, “greed” has transmuted from a vice to a virtue, giving a new “modern” justification to traditional masculine role descriptions of domination and disdain for “female” nurturing, it has created a “generation me” of “excellent sheep,” who are in danger of creating a psychologically and cognitively stunted next generation, unable to develop the relational wisdom that is needed now.⁵ All of this stands in the way of a Great Transition.

Endnotes

1. All in-text page numbers refer to *Journey to Earthland*.
2. Jean Baker Miller, “What Do We Mean by Relationships?” (working paper no. 22, Work in Progress series, Stone Center Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley, MA, 1986).
3. Evelin Lindner, *A Dignity Economy: Creating An Economy Which Serves Human Dignity and Preserves Our Planet* (Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, 2002); Alan Fiske, *Structures of Social Life: The Four Elementary Forms of Human Relations — Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, and Market Pricing* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
4. On “constitutive rules,” see, for instance, Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 25, no. 1 (September 1971): 3–51; Charles Taylor, “To Follow a Rule...,” in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993), 45–60; John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
5. Jean Twenge, Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, revised (New York: Atria, 2014); William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014).

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