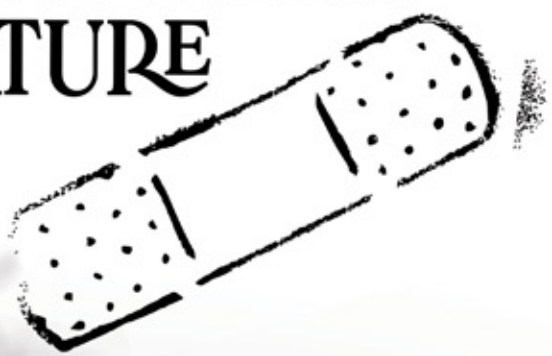




Fixing Descartes' Error RE-ENCHANTING NATURE



“ Maurice Berman in the 1980s introduced the idea of ‘re-enchanting the world’, let us redeem the lost magic and wonder in this universe ...

Khurram Ellahi



The pale blue dot is getting bleak; it is no more blue nor green. A recent study deemed ‘affluence’ as the greatest threat to Planet Earth, which faces an ecological tipping point. This particular study by the World Economic Forum demanded a great reset in the behaviors of human beings, particularly in terms of how they interact with their environment. But the great reset is not only required in our buying behaviors and how we consume natural resources, but rather a philosophical reset of Descartes’ Error.

This particular term was used by Damasio to highlight the error of Descartes by creating an artificial separation between mind and body. The duality divided the world into thinking beings on the one hand and objects on the other, with no intrinsic meaning or value. This philosophical idea of Descartes paved the way for Weber and consequently this whole process turned the environment into meaningless matter.

Due to disenchantment, being cannot experience the immediate world. The environment which was home to wonder, charm, and magic was turned into a utility function: a resource used to enhance productivity and efficiency. Planet Earth, which provided wonder to Keats and Wordsworth was turned into a stern positivist idea to be observed from a distance. Nature became a productive function, rationalization removed the sacred and spiritual from the lives of beings. The environment became a product and beings became alienated.

In less than a century, since disenchantment of the earth was publicized, the consequences presented

themselves. Smog is taking over cities, great work of heritage is lost in carbon smoke from vehicles, we have lost the beautiful day light, and we have routinized the dumping of truckloads of plastic into oceans - oceans that had been host to beings since antiquity. There is a reason why Elon Musk and influencers like Zuckerberg are presenting to us an escape from the real world, calling for an exodus to Mars or simply wearing an Oculus and escaping into augmented/virtual reality while the earth burns to ashes.

Maurice Berman in the 1980s introduced the idea of ‘re-enchanting the world’, let us redeem the lost magic and wonder in this universe. Let us allow beautiful shadows to be visible in the tree, allow spirituality to flow along with the rivers, allow hope to rise as the sun comes out. Furthermore, even from an existential perspective, we had Homer, Keats, Shakespeare, Ghalib who once added such depth to the physical world that it became worth living – pulling us in and captivating our imaginations. Today’s ‘crisis of meaning’ can only be addressed via re-enchantment.

While Project Disenchantment continues to choke the planet, we continue theorizing the use of carbon. Some might argue that prior to disenchantment; Planet Earth had seen various environmental shocks. Those were natural shocks, chosen by the environment. The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change’s (IPCC) sixth assessment report states that current warming is the result of human activity and since the mid-20th century it has been increasing at

an unprecedented rate. July 2020 was the hottest month since records began in 1880. Saving nature is cheap and easy, let us withdraw greedy ideas from the planet earth and re-imagine the generosity which planet earth showed when a feeble primitive man was walking here. This same being has grown strong and wise but has sadly failed to develop a sense of empathy towards nature.

Thus, of utmost importance is to correct the assumptions through which we look at nature. It is high time we rethought curriculums and excluded all Machiavellian ideas that turn human beings into apathetic beings. Marks of recent floods in Pakistan, should leave a mark in

schools, and the stains of causalities should be experienced in our hearts and souls. God gave human beings pain, because God wanted human beings to see everything: I believe the recent floods are a wakeup call to pursue a hard reset in how we look the nature and planet earth.

As highlighted by Iqbal in his poem “The Advice of an old Baloch to his Son”

***“In our world, where once more civilization looses its wild beasts.”
“In one more encounter Spirit and Flesh Meet”***

Postscript: while you read this article, five trucks full of plastic were dumped into the Atlantic.

