

# What do health, hope and despair have to do with finding solutions to the Anthropocene and metacrisis?

Synopsis of Part 2 of the Holos Earth Project Conversations with Daniel Christian Wahl (DCW) accompanying [this recording](#) in preparation for the webinar on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 6pm BST

Marcus Link, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023

This session with DCW is about regeneration and health as an ethos; regeneration and health are positioned as questions not of right action on the global stage but of right attention and of right participation in the places and local contexts that sustain our lives. It is about living the questions, not about knowing the answers, quite simply because there are no answers and solutions that can be designed outside of the context which can then be brought to the context; and we cannot know the context without participating with the right kind of attention to it.

This section of the Holos Earth Project team's conversation with DCW begins with the notion of the metacrisis, the many interconnected crises facing humankind globally. What is typical of the metacrisis perspective is that solutions are sought on the global stage and take the technological industrialised approach to human existence as a basic tenet and starting point. An example of this is the greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions conversation which is one of the dominant themes and which accounts for heated arguments about the virtue of offsetting, sequestering, removing GHGs across all sectors of the economy.

Regeneration is a term used frequently to describe apparent solutions to this metacrisis and we move into the world of food and farming as one of the arenas in which human systems and the natural world meet.

DCW says that regeneration can only be found in the cultures that we're already in the middle of when we are able to see that the life and the health that we are looking for is already there in the middle of it: we are here by virtue of such life and health and regenerative capacity in the face of our doing.

Participation requires us first to pay attention to our own impact in the places that support life. This requires us to bring our full embodied self to our participation. We cannot rely on a formula, the reassurance that something worked somewhere else or even here before. Most of all, we need to bring our capacity to feel to a place. To feel hopeful but even more importantly to feel the hard feelings: to grieve, to feel despair, to be devastated, to recognise that the chances are slim but that from real grief new beginnings may grow of their own accord if we do the work.

Referring to the work of Joanna Macey, DCW sees the only appropriate response to the metacrisis as not in hope or despair, but in grief. Furthermore, by referring to the work of James Lovelock, especially Gaia Theory, he sharpens our senses for just

how serious the crisis is for humankind: by the end of the 21st century, maybe only 500,000 of us will make it.

Yet, hope too has its place: we need to be hopeful not that the largest number of us makes it into the future, but that those who make it have the right kind of capacity. In fact, those who will make it will make it because of their capacity. Capacity is the single most important focus of DCW's discursive reflections. Why is this so?

Living systems are characterised by asymmetry and chemical disequilibrium. Their health cannot be broken down to an ingredient or a steady state or even a perfect state of a system or of one of its constituent parts. There is no global, uniform abstract, one-size-fits-all state or solution for health, sustainability or regeneration that applies everywhere, in the same way. It is not a matter of problem/solution pairs. It is not a matter of fixing the system and then getting on with life. Rather, health is a dynamic, evolutionary, and regenerative capacity of a system. Participation towards capacity is exactly what this is, and we don't have to wait to participate. We are as ready as we are going to be, and we will never be better prepared.

Systems come together in places and the only appropriate focus of human engagement with such systems is place. We are fundamentally of nature, participants in nature, and emergent properties of nature. But we are these things always mediated through places.

The rules of a living system and of its health are dynamic and they are made by the places which support our lives. Our concern therefore needs to be with the places that support our lives. DCW refers to them as bioregions. Another commentator we refer to in the talk, Ethan Soloviev, refers to them as lifesheds.

DCW's phrase *regenerative cultures* is a plural which is not compatible with the notion of an ecological civilisation as a global phenomenon. Regenerative cultures are place-sourced and place-based participatory phenomena. Their places are inevitably complex, dynamic, and fundamentally unpredictable and uncontrollable systems. But they are also existentially tied to human agency: places precisely are where humans have agency.

Places have physical boundaries which define how the various subsystems come together. Most importantly though, from a human perspective, a place is defined by the appropriate scale for feedback loops to be meaningful to human agency and capacity.

DCW suggest that our only aim and chance, therefore, can be for appropriate participation in places. Appropriate participation in place has at least the following characteristics:

Participation leads to an unavoidable interference with Nature which is either degenerative or regenerative, which is why we need to bring continuous awareness to the dynamic participatory nature of our roles in this: participation requires us to develop the capacity in place to do it again, or to tweak it, or to transform it when it needs transforming.

Such capacity development requires a high-level of diversity which includes diversity of ideas and disagreement within place-based community. It is then the living of the questions of place together in diversity which builds such regenerative capacity and thus system health.

The only real path ahead of us requires of us that we grieve. Doing the work of grief, holds the possibility of making a difference not despite our imperfections but through our imperfections right here and now, and not tomorrow. A magic can happen when we sit deeply with the grief that we come to understand that we can let go of our self-importance, recognising that we don't matter that much and that we don't have to take ourselves too seriously. Then, we might just find a way of being and living together through what's coming our way and somehow, through our sitting together, we will learn what we're meant to do and that whoever comes through what is coming will come through it with a narrative strong enough to give hope. Such a narrative might be as simple as realising that we are actually capable of being in service of life and find a new relationship to place, to life, and to this mystery.

### **References:**

- Lovelock, James Gaia Theory
- Macey, Joanna various works
- Meadows, Dennis various
- Norberg-Hodge, Helena Ancient Futures
- Savory, Alan Holistic Management
- Soloviev, Ethan Four Levels of Regenerative Agriculture and Paradigms of Agriculture

This is an incomplete list provided as a stimulus for you to integrate into your personal research.