



Our Planet

We, us, they, them ... collective pronouns, but collecting up who?

Our, your ... possessive determiners, but determining what?

How do these parts of speech define the world we see? How do

these simple, one-syllable words, sprinkled ubiquitously throughout our speech, control how the world's seven billion people interact with one another? How do the *I* and *me* of *we* and *us* bring harmony or disharmony among people? In the human quest for peace, security, and happiness, how do these simple self-identifiers exert such profound power over human beings— to unite and divide them by ilk, for and against each other?

We share this planet; we share its beauty and its mystery. We share the collective experience of physical life, of human existence—living out the seasons of nature and the seasons of our lives, from our crying opening act to our gasping curtain fall at play's end. We are the human astronauts of Spaceship Earth, and—by Native American reckoning—Mother Earth's children. We have more in common than not, and an equal stake in what happens on and to our planet.

One can envision the first Old Stone Age humans in the Middle of the Paleolithic period (about 200,000 years ago) huddling together for warmth and protection under night skies, after a long day of eking out survival. Looking up with fascination at the stars hung in the immensity of space, they feel small and dwarfed as they fall into reverential contemplation. The next day as

the sun lifts above the horizon, they shield their eyes to its life-giving rays—inspired by its return, which substantiates the continuation of life as they knew it. Life was simple but hard, so many uncertainties, so many perils, so many fluctuations destabilizing the environment they depended upon. The sun, with its predictability, was a silent voice of assurance that life was still theirs. A life they owed in some way to the vagaries of natural forces and intersecting circumstances over which they had little control. To the degree they could master these things, bend them to their will, manage them to predictable and expected results, the more certainty they had for life to continue.

Bringing in more of life has been the driving force of all life forms. Coming into some kind of “arrangement” with the *powers*, to ensure life, enrich life, expand life, maintain life is the fundamental innate driving force in nature. Whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, life is ever combining, dividing, contracting, expanding, transforming itself to do one thing: LIVE. To do so, life of all kind sets out moment by moment to arrange itself within its environment in the most advantageous way to obtain the essential elements it needs to survive. By either active or passive “management” every variation of life, whether cosmic, floral, or faunal makes external and internal arrangements to extract life-sustaining essentials necessary for survival.

The question of how life came to be is the province of human inquiry. Who am I and how did I get here is not a cat or dog issue, is not a rose or geranium concern. But it is an overarching question for human beings. For if survival requires taking from the environment, taking what we need ... if we are takers, then the question is when does our taking inappropriately deprive another life form who must also follow the law of life and TAKE. If life’s abundance, if the Earth’s fecundity, if the cosmos’ bounty is not unlimited—at least in the sense of availability—in

the sense of required arrangement, by what law of life do we follow in our taking? If there are limited resources for taking, then it follows there must be a concomitant law balancing the *Law of Taking*. If what is taken from life needs replenishing, then the necessary natural law balancing the taking is giving. So the second fundamental law of life concerning survival is the *Law of Giving*.

One could surmise that Stone Age humans spent less time reflecting on the meaning of life than we do. Self-consciousness would seem to have some relationship to human brain development. Yet, modern-day research on the limbic system of the brain, especially the role of the amygdala (the primitive, prevenient brain of humanoids before the cerebrum), has evidenced a more sophisticated survival/recognition system than previously presumed. This so-called *lizard, reptilian* brain not only responds to emotion initiated by the cerebrum's prefrontal cortex, but can, in fact, independently discern threat based on proximity of distance much faster than even the cerebrum can respond. This suggests awareness naturally arising outside of complex, analytical-based thought and action. From where then does awareness originate? Studies on consciousness and various mystical traditions suggest that awareness exceeds the limits of brain function. All the same, I'd bet antecedent hominids, *Homo erectus*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, and Archaic *Homo sapiens* were more concerned about being eaten by a sabertooth cat than contemplating their navels.

The sabertooth cat and *modern* *Homo sapiens* (50,000 years ago ...) were competing species, having to "arrange" themselves and "manage" their environment to take what they needed. By necessity, they had the Law of Taking down, but the Law of Giving? Language, philosophy, and theologian dogma were not cat and prehistoric man's point of reference to figure

out we, us, they, them or our, your. That came later. Their we and us identification didn't factor in the big picture the Law of Giving represents. Mother Earth produced life (flesh, vegetable, mineral, elemental) and they took life for more life. That was the short and long of it. It was feast or famine, according to the availability of water, mineral licks, wild vegetation and fruit, migrating herds, and migrating tribes—depending on which spoke of the species wheel you were.

There was giving, of course, in a de facto sense, becoming another species' dinner or falling prey to old age and returning composted to the *Mother* (dotage was surely the exception to how one usually checked out). If you weren't eaten, you more than likely fell victim to the elements, disease, accident, or the occasional dispute over the choicest edibles. Giving was more the case of the alpha being sated and relinquishing the carcass or foraged goodies. The dominant over the meek is the flip side of the Law of Giving, where Mother Nature is concerned. *She* gives freely, but the strong survive and the weak perish. Her giving is for the taking and the alpha's take first. Nature it would seem prefers bullies.

How far we've come toward being an enlightened species is fodder for debate. But if life, existence depends on the proper balance of the two laws: the Law of Taking and the Law of Giving, then it stands to reason that how well we get that right determines how near or far we are to enlightened consciousness. Belief does not exist in a vacuum absent from these laws. Life, itself, is the true adjudicator of our spiritual "correctness." We're either on board with how things ARE or with how we WANT them.

Native Americans of most if not all tribes and nations named themselves (in their own languages) what essentially translates as the people, *human beings*. Albeit, a seemingly self-

effacing moniker, native peoples were invoking the ideal Homo sapiens. They were “setting the bar high” for what constituted the ideal person—he or she that followed the *original instructions* (from the *Creator*, the *Great Mystery*) by which proper giving and taking would perpetuate life for all. They were saying that the sacrificing of life (taking) needed to be balanced by the replenishing of life (giving). They were not complicating things with politics, economics, small government, large government, state rights, civil rights, women rights, minority rights, gun rights, the right to life ... None of these were part of their world view. They didn’t divide life by rights; they enjoined it into the *web of life*—the wholeness of life, in which all parts were considered integral and necessary. They were calling for *walking the Red Road*, *walking in beauty*, being one with the great law that superseded man-made laws: *The Law of Balance*.

Balance to primitive hominids meant satisfying their basic, immediate needs and drives: food, clothing, shelter, safety, pleasure. When a need or want arose, when a drive took over, they reacted to fulfill it. They hunted, foraged, or scavenged for it; enjoyed it, and paused till the next urge gripped them. As they became more adept at arranging themselves in their environment—blending their efforts at procurement with climatic realities, with seasonal habits of animals and vegetation—they became better skilled at “managing” their world and universe. That plus the controlled use of fire, gave them more “control” over their plane of action.

These forerunners of modern man “discovered” the benefits of fire in the Lower Paleolithic period (2.7 million to 200,000 years ago). Counterintuitive as it may sound, the knowledge of fire goes back at least 790,000 years. The archaeological site of Gesher Benot Ya’aqov in Israel coughed up this evidence through recovered charred wood and seeds. However this leap in consciousness occurred, fire use was definitely a game changer, raising the stakes for

other species fighting against human encroachment. With tools, fire, and weapons, humans now had a winning hand for ascendancy over other life forms. Homo Sapiens could out-*take* them because of greater enviro-flexibility, but could they out-*give* them.

The wild creatures of Mother Earth, took only what they needed for survival, arranging themselves, managing their surroundings within their limited range of influence and limited capacity to hoard. Without profit systems commodifying resources for sale, they regenerated the planet with their lives and deaths. Such was the way of the natural world. The Law of Balance was not conceptual but literal. Walking in beauty is not simply cognizance of visual resplendence; it is reverential joyousness at the perfection of the web of life. To the human beings, it is feeling their roots within the intricate latticing of the whole of life, in which each species is connected causally and energetically to each other. Unlike man, animals fell naturally into line with the *Laws of Taking and Giving*, their self-consciousness embedded in *id* or innate/instinctive mind. Unlike William Ernest Henley's lines, *I am master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul*. (*Invictus*, 1875), our wild relations were fait accompli of nature's insistent call to integration.

From suggested abiogenesis (biological life arising from inorganic matter), Homo sapiens have risen above all other species. Chafing against the limitations of habitat, climate, environment, and predation, they have applied primitive brain (hippocampus/amygdala/) survival responses with prefrontal cortex (cerebrum/cerebellum) cognitive fluidity, to invent and innovate their way to self-reliance—going beyond predetermination to self-destiny.

But have we fooled ourselves into arrogant disregard of our place in the natural world, in the web of life? Have we proceeded with utter contempt for the reciprocal nature of life? Have

we replaced innate sense with intellectual hubris? Have we conquered our fear of the dark, our timidity at the unknown to not fear the perils of our own making? Do we assume our power over “lesser” species suggests power over nature—that we can overpower the Law of Balance by which existence is possible? Do we think that our *super star* status as movers and shapers makes us bigger than life, itself; that our cognitive prowess has put us beyond the touch of cause and effect?

In *Invictus*, Henley poeticizes eloquently on rising above life’s circumstances, being unconquerable to supposed fate: *It matters not how strait the gate / How charged with punishments the scroll ...* But he is not describing being out of step with the nature of reality that circumscribes life. He is invoking the truth that we are, ultimately, beings of spirit and flesh, and that spirit is unconquerable and undaunted by trials and tribulations. This is the *real* power by which Homo sapiens have made their mark on this earth plane.

If we are now confused by our run through the archaeological ages on the difference between conquering our own inner-inadequacies of spirit and conquering the earth and other *tribes*—human and animal—it is understandable. On the surface, it would seem that nature has been engaged in a long war of divide and conquer with itself, where survival of the fittest is the rule of law. But that view misses the point that formed the bedrock of *First American* (Native American) peoples’ spirituality. Tribe after tribe proclaims that their original instructions exhort them to be good stewards of the earth.

Mother Nature’s fruitfulness gives rise to new life. Like all mothers, her womb provides the necessary conditions where-by Mother Earth’s inorganic provisions bring forth organic life. This collaboration, when not personified in poetry and mythology, could appear to be harsh and

uncompromising, with no quarter given to the weak. And even within the vegetable kingdom there is parasitism (mistletoe, e.g.) and predation (Venus Flytrap, e.g.). In the case of *Madam Flytrap*, “harvesting” nutrients is literally entrapping and eating animal prey (insects/arachnids). You might say a kind of reverse vegetarianism. Devoid of nutrient-capturing abilities in nitrogen and phosphorus-poor environments, she has “adapted.”

When and how life began on earth (scientific conjecture says 3.7 billion years ago), it is evident that there is an ascendancy ladder among life forms, running from the simplest organisms to the most complex—with those at the top similarly positioned on the food chain. Arguments notwithstanding supporting choice over necessity, *Homo sapiens* have evolved as omnivorous hunters and gatherers. Running the gamut from non-cellular life (viruses) to cellular life (Bacteria, Archaea, Eukarya, Protista, Fungi, Plantae, Animalia) something is always gobbling up something else. Under Mother Nature’s gorgeous raiment of lushness and perfumery, there is an undercurrent of struggle taking place.

Native people of the Americas have long reconciled this natural pitting of species against species with the interjection of prayer and permission when sacrificing other life forms for their continuation. *Homo sapiens*, with their greater capacity to step out of the shadow of instinct and act at their own volition, are better suited to be conscious stewards of the earth. Our greater habitat and environment versatility gives us the upper hand over the other species in managing the circumstances of survival. According to native folks, this “superior” position does not make the human beings superior, but rather invested with the sacred duty of caring for the land and resources of Mother Earth. The human beings proclaim that self-dominion over human *taking* and *giving* is the true “dominion” by which we should define our relationship with *all our*

relations, i.e., the sum of all other life forms—animate or inanimate. This, rather than *speciesism* (assumed human superiority leading to animal exploitation), is the natural order of things. This is our sacred place in the web of life.

Modern *Homo sapiens* have faced the rigors of survival and self-perpetuation, mastering their fate in a manner so aptly rendered metaphorically in Elias Tobias' *Captain of my Ship*:
Facing a violent, stormy sea ... / We'll fight monsters along the way ... / As we chart the virgin sea. / Course decisions are up to me / And it feels good to think I'm free. / However I know I'm not the master. / Someone else controls my destiny. / There's a plan already set for me, / And discovering it is my reality.

And therein lies the rub: destiny vs. self-determination. *I am the captain of my ship, / Facing a violent, stormy sea. / Who and what I am in life / I believe is my responsibility.* (Aug. 8, 2008)

On this planet, we have a destiny—part ourselves to say and part some greater Spirit-Reality that moves through the whole of life to say for us. This Great Mystery is like a great endless sea of vibrancy, and potentiality. It dwells outside of us in form and sensation; it dwells inside of us as a spark of ultimate reality. We are reflections in the mirror of Creation reflecting back its image and likeness. How clear we reflect it is how authentically we reproduce it in our lives, in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our states, in our nations, in our world.

Life, existence is not reducible to man-made inventions of mind and imagination. It is always greater, truer, fuller, more complete than our expressions of it in religion, philosophy, science, and other institutions. These are windows into reality, but not Reality. They codify individual and collective flights of mystical inquiry, of prophetic transmission, of divine

revelation, of experimentation and observation, which we pass on to posterity. The ultimate ascendancy of all life forms is beyond time, space, and matter.

On this *spaceship earth*, as we move through outer space forward into the future, we simultaneously move through inner space, backward into the genesis of our being. We continue the process of self-discovery begun at the outset of our first appearance on the earth. And even now, with all our knowledge of the stars and cosmos, we still gawk with utter fascination when peering at the immensity of the night sky.

In some ways, our lives are more predictable now. Through our inventiveness and resourcefulness, we have conquered enough of the unknown to have a certain semblance of orderly routine. But still we realize the tenuous thread by which we cling to this earth plane. We have little immunity to catastrophic natural disasters, and we tremble at the thought of nuclear holocaust. We fear each other and look upon one another with suspicion. What we can control we do, and what we can't we seek a remedy for. Our experience as a competing species has taught us that existence on Mother Earth is transitory and insubstantial, and thus we meet the experience of life militantly. Else we end up another being's dinner—literally or symbolically.

We mobilize ourselves for the worse, and when it comes, we meet it with resolve and fortitude:

In the fell clutch of circumstance / I have not winced nor cried aloud. / Under the bludgeonings of chance / My head is bloody, but unbowed ... (Invictus).

Within the undercurrent of outer-life struggle is nature's awareness filling up the interstitial spaces between the endless grains of living beings comprising the web of life. It is a delicate balance that Mother Nature seeks, requiring death for there to be life. Death is the inevitable outcome of all our struggle to live. Death is the *spider in the web*. We are one

heterogeneous, multifarious being in the act of outgrowing the fictional characters we've assumed for this time, space, and matter dimension. The spider is Mother Nature's regenerative personification, devouring our evanescent identities to replenish the earth and release us to divine propagation.

In a "solid" *dream* we find ourselves alone in the individuality that makes us distinct from other dreamers, yet, in reality, *we* are an interdependent aggregate of pure consciousness. You might say we're the collective genotype of one divine "organism" expressing its phenotypic characteristics as characters in a cosmic play. "All the world's a stage" declares Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, positing the seven stages of a man's life: infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon, and second childhood, ("sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything") (II.vii.138–139). It's a crowded stage, with diverse players of differing views and priorities, which often—sometimes dramatically—obliterate our recognition of underlying sameness. Divided by creed, culture, race, religion, and philosophy, we have trust issues that seem sometimes insurmountable. Yet, as mentioned before, we are equal stakeholders in what happens to and on this our planet.

By virtue of our uniqueness among other species, even those whose opposable thumbs evince phenotypic proximity to us, we are nature's choice for conscious stewardship. Instinctive stewardship is Mother Nature's apron strings tying *non-human relations* to the predestiny of balanced coexistence—their managing and arranging activated by inflows and outflows of seasonal and climatic tides, of basic drives that wax and wane on cosmic forces and biological clocks ticking down. Instinctive nature is the activity of Spider devouring and liberating sentient

life from its temples of flesh. But the scale of dissolution falls within the tolerances of Mother Earth's need to regenerate.

Stepping out from under Mother's shadow has moved *Homo sapiens* beyond the causal chain circumscribing earthly existence to encompass the cosmic whole, and finally the *sacred way* (as the human beings refer to it) of transcendent creation—where Creator and created meet. There, in that super-ethereality, the dream of life and life embrace, *sacred mind* informs sublunary minds—bestowing them with “guided” free-will, and the unintentional propensity for egotism.

Human experientiality, that is, self-luminosity, has taken us to the borders of consciousness where intellect and spirit/soul meet, where the human beings grokked their original instructions. It has pushed us into great advances in science and technology and into supernal realizations of our divine nature. But somewhere in this stretching for ultimate reality, the earth-centric spirituality of land-based, traditional people has become obscured by doctrinarisms that assume power is control and control is truth, and truth is wisdom.

But wisdom couldn't ignore Mother Earth and her children. It wouldn't presume a disconnection between the web of life on the earth plane and the web of life in the superconsciousness ambience of Divine Reality, where *Gichtschi Manitto* (*Nanticoke* – Great Spirit) dwells. No, wisdom couldn't ignore Mother Earth's pleas for balance to be restored. It wouldn't downplay habitat destruction and environmental degradation in our wild places and cities. It couldn't pretend away poverty and impoverishment of the spirit, and turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to hunger and homelessness.

Genuine wisdom couldn't call pollution the price of progress, and the crumbling of schools and bridges incidental to "real" concerns. It couldn't ignore the fundamental interdependency of all life, from the bacteria in the soil to the hydrogen in the atmosphere. No, authentic wisdom would never attempt to infuse greed, selfishness, and self-interest into the Law of Balance where all the dots connect back to the Laws of Giving and Taking.

How have we gotten there then in our politics, in our religious practices, in our individual philosophies and ideologies? How have we entered into this so-called "culture war?" It's not that it doesn't exist; it's just that *culture* has been substituted for *doctrine*. It is a doctrinal war fought over preeminence of creed, alleging a greater intimacy with the will and favor of Creator, or with whatever or whomever one considers the source of their truth. It is the unfortunate evolution of Homo sapiens, advancing from those prehistoric days of primitive fear and competition for survival. We've out-competed all other species and taken free-will to the extreme of competing now with our own selves and our own gods, bending "divine will and providence" to our specific advantage, lest we be out-competed.

The proof of this is how we've placed "divine will" above the Law of Giving, and the Law of Balance. It's all about the Law of Taking now. And this brings us to those collective pronouns and possessive determiners, once again. When I, you say we, us, they, them, our, your, their, what do we mean? Context is everything, right? According to the dictionary, context is "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed." (New Oxford American Dictionary 3rd edition. Oxford University Press, Inc. 2010).

Can we say, therefore, “boundaries,” more specifically self-identification boundaries? “We” could mean family members, neighborhood, church, mosque, temple, state, country or any subgroup in between. Thus, with just the utterance of one of these little words, we can include or exclude any number of persons from our consideration. In fact, we can separate ourselves or a select group of individuals from all the other approximately seven billion human beings in the world.

Now, 50,000 years ago, when our ancestors were running around with the sabertooth cat, the Law of Balance undoubtedly worked itself out through their lives automatically. They took (life—in birth) and gave (life—in death). I, we, mine, our were pretty much relegated to their own clan of takers. The big picture of balance and reciprocity, of oneness and integration was yet to arrive in their lives. Prayer (calling out) was immediate, rather than premeditated. The strong dictated how things were and the weak followed. Abundance determined generosity and quid pro quo compassion.

These earlier humans, in all probability, had only a skeleton of organization, primitive tools and weapons to master their environment, and only a rudimentary awareness of divine providence. But since life, itself, is a manifestation of sacred intelligence, they had through intuition spirituality dwelling within them. Over time, as Homo sapiens shared intuitive experiences, compared and memorized them for posterity, they saw patterns of interaction with the natural world suggesting that all life and all beings were related. They contemplated on these connections and began to move their consciousness between visible and invisible worlds. Creator was the embodiment of their sacred communications with the Great Mystery. Through these communications the web of life was revealed.

The human beings have capsulized the web of life in the phrase, *All my relations*. We're all related to the whole of life—animate and inanimate. Whatever classification system one uses to categorize life with a capital L, we are all related to each category, each form, each expression. And each kind, each one of each kind is sentient, because they are all imbued with sacred intelligence. The rocks, for example, hold memories of place and time, ergo the Rock People. What is being revealed in All my relations is that I, you, we, they are one, big, collective US. We are the path, the ones we've been waiting for. We predate all conceptual inventions to explain life and self, because we are the web of life, endowed with sacred intelligence and the sacred geometry of Mother Earth.

Before language, philosophy, and theologian dogma, there was the web of life, the wholeness of life in which all living parts are integral and necessary. Living this truth, being this truth is walking in beauty, walking in the Law of Balance—balancing our taking with our giving ... the Red Road the human beings were instructed to follow.

The sabertooth cat is gone—extinct by the Law of Balance. The mammoth is gone—extinct by the Law of Balance. Perhaps, there is a message in that. Thus far, we are still here, but might we out-compete ourselves into extinction? How we treat each other, how we treat the earth might be a clarion call we need to heed.

This is our planet, our home: to share, to hold sacred and keep well.

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