

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Respect for planet beginning of wisdom

The following excerpts are from an essay by renowned physicist Freeman Dyson, who died recently in Princeton, where he lived and worked for 60 years at the Institute for Advanced Study. Dyson's essay is even more relevant today than it was when he wrote it 30 years ago.

BY FREEMAN DYSON

Family is older than the human species, work is younger, friendship is about as old as we are. It is friendship that marks us as human.

...
The central conflict in our nature is the conflict between the selfish individual and the group. Nature gave us greed, a robust desire to maximize our personal winnings. Without greed, we would not have survived at the individual level. But Nature also gave us love in its many varieties, love of wife and husband and children to help us survive at the family level, love of friends to help us survive at the tribal level, love of conversation to help us survive at the cultural level, love of people in general to help us survive at the species level, love of nature to help us survive at the planetary level.

Human beings cannot be human without a generous endowment of greed and love.

...
I turn now from the past to the future. The future of human evolution will be radically different from the past. For better or for worse, we shall have the power to steer our own evolution.

...
Respect for the planet is the beginning of wisdom. And the love of our planet carries with it a love of trees. The town of Princeton where I live is full of trees. If you go up to the top of a tower in Princeton in summer, the town is almost invisible. You see then that the inhabitants of Princeton are actually living in a forest. All these bankers and stockbrokers, wealthy enough to choose where they want to live,

chose to live in a forest.

The love of trees is rooted deep in our value-system, planted in us during the hundreds of thousands of years we spent hunting and gathering on a largely forested planet.

The climatic equilibrium of our planet is now threatened by the greenhouse effect of carbon dioxide accumulating in the atmosphere. The carbon dioxide comes partly from burning of coal and oil and partly from destruction of forests. Fortunately, there is a remedy.

The quantity of carbon in the atmosphere is about equal to the quantity in living trees. This means that the problem of the greenhouse is essentially a problem of forest management.

A large-scale international program of reforestation could hold the greenhouse in check, besides producing many other economic and environmental benefits. The cost of growing enough trees to nullify the greenhouse is not prohibitive.

Only the will and the international consensus required to do the job are at present lacking. But we shall probably see the will and the consensus emerge, as soon as the climatic effects of the greenhouse become obvious and severe. When that happens, the whole world will begin planting trees. In China and in Brazil, in Nepal

and in California, people will be planting trees and feeling an old familiar joy as they see the planet turning green. At that point we may say, Mother Nature is using us once again as her tools, using the love of trees which she implanted in us long ago as the means to keep herself alive.

As humanity moves into the future and takes control of its evolution, our first priority must be to preserve our emotional bond to the planet. This bond must be our pulley. If it stays intact, then our species will remain fundamentally sane. If the planet survives, then human complexity will survive too.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



**PHYSICIST FREEMAN
DYSON died last
month at age 96.**