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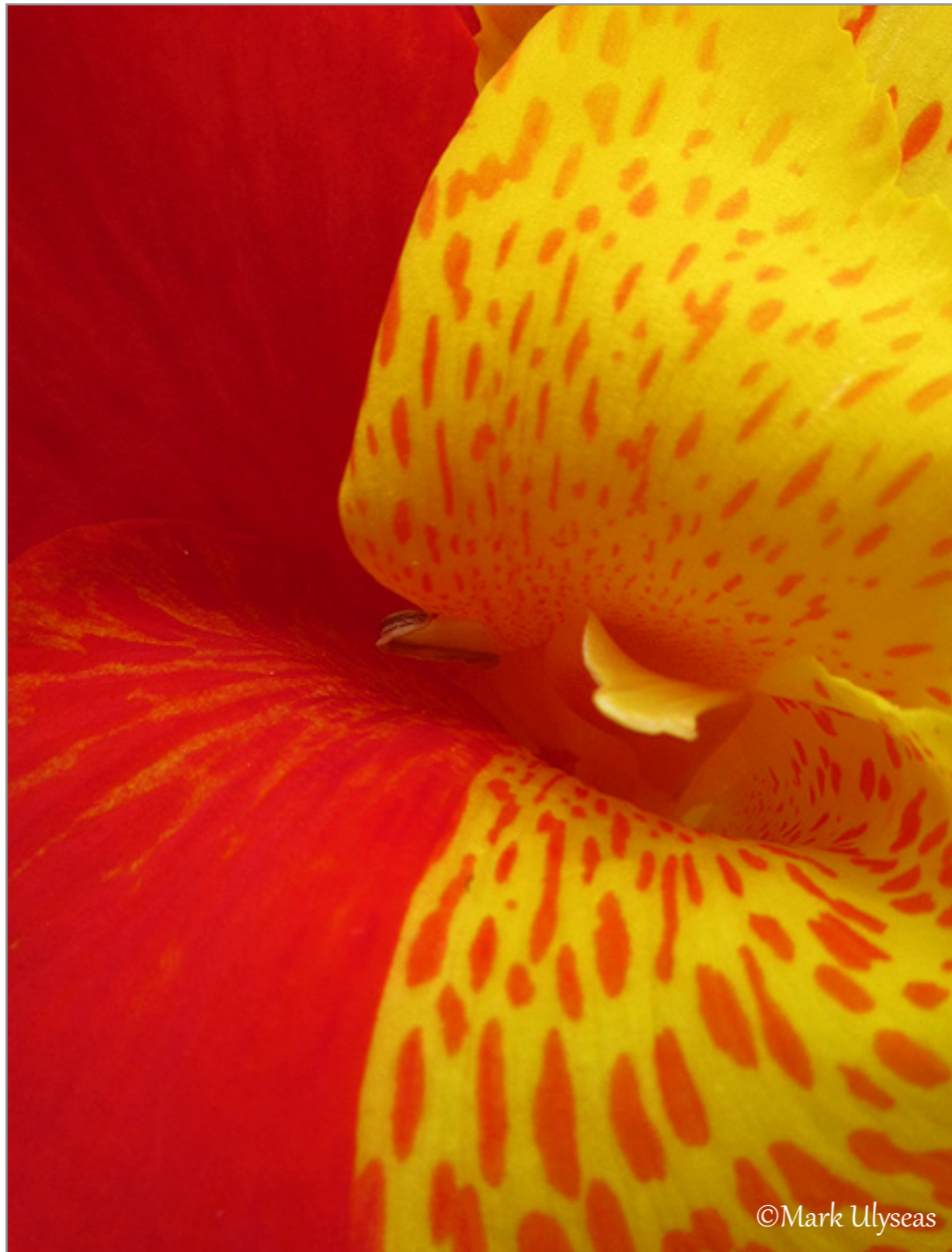


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DR HOWARD RICHARDS
SMALL WINS
Reply to article by Evelin Lindner

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Canna on the banks of the Mekong. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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DR HOWARD RICHARDS

SMALL WINS

reply to

From Humiliation to Dignity:

For a Future of Global Solidarity:

The Coronavirus Pandemic as Opportunity in the Midst of Suffering by Evelin Lindner. ([Download Evelin Lindner PDF](#))

“How must we, humankind, arrange our affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term?”

Introduction

Hopefully, many people will contribute to answering Evelin Lindner’s question. If you are inspired to be one of them, feel free to send your answer to info@chileufu.cl. You will have at least one reader.

My answer might be called “the theory of small wins.” I did not think of the phrase “small wins” by myself. Adopting it, I offer reasons for believing that small wins, which organizations, movements, and individuals can achieve, can lead to arranging our affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term.

Every year Gavin Andersson and I teach a course at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town on Ethics, Macroeconomics and Organization. This year we were joined by Camille Meyer, a conscientious business scholar from Belgium. Our students are mature adults who play leadership roles in the public and non-profit sectors as well as in the private sector. Some were born poor to families that were victims of *apartheid*.

Dr Howard Richards

The French philosopher and historian of science Georges Canguilhem, who was like Evelin a medical doctor, stated that every practicing physician knows that to find causes it is necessary to delve beneath the surface and not just to look at superficial appearances.

Others carry on family traditions of professional success and entrepreneurship. By the time they take our course, which comes last at the end of a two-year Executive MBA programme, the members of a cohort have had many opportunities to share ideas and perspectives. The fifth of six topics they are asked to reflect on in their final paper concerns specifically what you as an individual or as a member of an organization or movement can and should do. A considerable number describe what they personally, or their organizations, can aspire to achieve as “small wins.” Others make the same point using different words. Just as frequently, like the billionaires expecting The Event that Evelin mentions in the article I am replying to, they doubt whether anything they or their organizations can do can prevent inevitable future catastrophes worse than today’s catastrophes. They are optimists more because of an ethical commitment to encourage small wins for constructive change than because they can articulate paths to happy endings.

I would like to take this opportunity to give reasons why achievable “small wins” can add up to making dignified life on this planet possible in the long term. The life experiences that have informed my academic studies and the views I will present below have been, like Gavin’s, and like those of many of our students at Cape Town, about working with people at the bottom level of the economic pyramid as well as about working with people at its middle and upper levels.¹

Every year we find that many, perhaps most, of our students can report on “small wins” they had already been achieving before they enrolled in the EMBA. A student from Zambia, who is now a high-ranking business executive, provides an example. Some years ago, he visited a rural part of Zambia where his ancestors had lived. He found that a priority concern of the people was that they had no school. Consequently, their children lacked opportunities to advance in life. His visit encouraged them to come together to create a school for their children where previously there was none. Over the years they succeeded in constructing and staffing a school that become more than a school. The buildings and their grounds also became a community centre. They provide venues for market days, meetings, ceremonies, worship, and sports. Building their school became an opportunity to strengthen their community bonds. Recently they celebrated the first time one of its graduates enrolled in a university course.

Our student contributed financial support himself and was instrumental in organizing support from the government and from other private donors, notably other members of the Zambia chapter of a service club called the Round Table.

This example, small as it is in the great scheme of things, might perhaps also be classified as one of the middle-sized wins already achieved reported by our students at Cape Town. As I develop my theory, I will try to make it clear that the concept of small wins also refers to innumerable smaller contributions already being made to making life on this planet sustainable in the long term. It refers to innumerable wins that are won by humans who do not have the resources and the contacts of a corporate executive.

Unfortunately, the positive innumerable is still outweighed by the negative innumerable. So far, the small wins are not being achieved on a scale large enough to remove humankind and many other animals, and many plants, from the endangered species list.

Cause and Effect

A doctor first, before writing a prescription, makes a diagnosis determining the cause of the problem. Without knowing the cause, or at least making a good faith effort to do the best human reason can do to determine the cause, it is not responsible to prescribe a cure.

The French philosopher and historian of science Georges Canguilhem, who was like Evelin a medical doctor, stated that every practicing physician knows that to find causes it is necessary to delve beneath the surface and not just to look at superficial appearances.

Canguilhem’s reason for making that statement was that in every day clinical experience many of the patients who seek advice believe that their symptoms mean that they are seriously ill, when in reality they are well. Other patients believe they are well, when in fact they are sick.²

More generally, any intentional action presupposes a belief that the action will produce the result that is intended. For example, when one turns on a light, one believes that flipping the switch will cause the light to go on, even when one realizes that there is a possibility that the light bulb is burnt out, breaking the normal causal and effect nexus, and frustrating one’s intention.

In politics and economics, persuading professional opinion and the general public that one diagnosis of cause and effect is valid science, while a competing diagnosis is pseudo-science, is a high-stakes game played by major movers and shakers.

The Koch brothers, for example, who controlled the largest privately owned business in the United States, together with a network of conservative donors they organized, funded think tanks, university chairs, print media and electronic media. They were hugely successful in persuading governments and voters that neoliberal diagnoses and prescriptions are rational, while left-leaning diagnoses and prescriptions are irrational.³

Now Evelin Lindner, with no funding from the Koch Foundation or anyone else, while devoting herself to caring for her aging father in a small town in Germany, offers a diagnosis and a prescription that are more psychological, and less, or less directly, political and economic.

The diagnosis: “Present-day’s most definitorial systemic humiliation is a world-system that gives priority to profit maximization rather than common good maximization, a state of affairs that sends humiliation into every corner of the world.”

The prescription: “...global care for the common good...”

Before proceeding to sketch a path to making life possible in the long term, answering her question while agreeing with her diagnosis and prescription, I would like to make a point about words, among others the words I am writing on this page in a small town in Chile and the words Evelin wrote on another page in a small town in Germany. My point is that at any given time and place, and in any given situation, we make choices about which words to use. Our choices are actions. A discourse, or language game (*Sprachspiel*),⁴ combines speech acts with physical acts.

For Evelin, advocating a care ethic is not separate from caring for her father. Caring for her father is a small win. There is one less lonely and depressed old man in the world, inclined toward suicide.⁵ This point about humans choosing words, can be extended to say that what they are talking about is often unaffected by what the humans choose to call it. It can be further elaborated in the light of Abraham Maslow’s seminal 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation.”⁶ Maslow’s paper begins as an interpretation and summary of what was then known about human motivation. It turns into a study of human needs. In the notes at the end it defines an ethic, namely: “The ‘good’ or healthy society would then be defined as one that permitted man’s highest purposes to emerge by satisfying all his prepotent basic needs.” (p.20)



Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

But Maslow did not switch from one subject to another. It is not as if he started to write about motivation, and then changed his topic to needs, and then at the end ventured into the field of ethics. Rather, his object of study, what he was trying to understand, stayed the same. What changed was his perspective. He drew on more than one vocabulary, employing words with different histories and origins.

Similarly, when I propose moral and ethical education as a key to finding a path to making life on this planet possible in the long term, I am not leaving behind biology, physics, chemistry, psychology, sociology or history. There is no separate class of phenomena studied by a separate science called “ethics.” I am recommending a perspective. It is a functional and realist perspective. It is shared with biologists like Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, C.H. Waddington, David Sloan Wilson, and — going farther back in time — Charles Darwin,⁷ and shared with many scholars in other disciplines besides biology. The human species is a species that is unable to adapt and survive without cooperating, and it is unable to cooperate without sharing one or another way to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad.

I am recommending *seeing* humankind’s main real-world problems and their solutions as “moral”, or, if you prefer, “ethical”. (I omit a discussion of reasons why some people treat “morals” and “ethics” as synonyms, while others distinguish between the two.) Specifically, the catastrophe Evelin identifies as “a world-system that gives priority to profit maximization rather than common good maximization” can be *seen* as a moral catastrophe that requires a constructive and functional moral solution.

Such a constructive and functional moral solution, as a first approximation and example, might replace Kant’s very influential proposal for putting morality and ethics on a rational foundation: the categorical imperative. Kant called on all humanity to act in such a way that the maxim (i.e. principle) of their action could conceivably become a universal law. The test of whether it can become universal is a logical test. For example — to take the example Kant used most often — it could not be a universal law to fail to pay your debts. If everybody failed to pay their debts, then the word “debt” would have no meaning. A world where there were debts, but nobody ever paid them is inconceivable, a logical impossibility.

I propose as a replacement a rewriting of Kant: Act in such a way, that if everybody acted as you act, then dignified life on this planet would be possible in the long term.

As Karl Marx insightfully viewed capitalist production, production begins when the capitalist enters the market as a buyer, buying labour power in order to use it. If the capitalists do not choose to invest in starting production — which they will not do if they do not expect profits — nothing else happens. Production does not start. The monthly pay check needed to pay the monthly bills does not arrive.

Let me assume now that the rules of the social game set by any given society’s social norms, which it is convenient to refer to as its morals or ethics, have the remarkable causal powers that I, the evolutionary biologists I have cited, and many others, attribute to them. Without such causes, major effects, namely the existence of human beings, their flourishing, their rising to dominate life on this planet, and now the trends which if continued will lead to humankind’s extinction, would never have happened.

Given this assumption, let me try to spell out what it might mean to supersede giving priority to profit maximization, and to nurture instead giving priority to common good maximization.

The simplest way to approach this complicated subject might be to sketch five common errors and misconceptions. What devoting oneself or one’s organization to meeting human needs in harmony with nature does not mean might be more easily understood than what it does mean.

One common misconception is that it serves the interests of the rich to keep the poor poor. The truth is that at this point in history nothing would better serve the interests of the rich than an end to poverty and its inevitable sequels uncontrollable violence, irrational exploitation of nature, disease, and despair.⁸

A related misconception is that when, as regularly happens, global agreements to take action to reverse climate change, are violated and shelved, or reversed (as in the cases of Trump in the USA and Bolsonaro in Brazil) the cause of such effects is the “power” of profit-seeking corporations and of the shareholders who pocket their profits. (Let me explain later why I put “power” in scare quotes.) It would be more accurate to say that at this point in history, monetary self-interest and expectations of monetary gain have become the fuel that drives the system. Accountants speak of ROI, Return on Investment, which is one of the main forms of this driver. Without its fuel the system stops. Nobody is employed. Nothing is produced (except in the many other economies that also exist in the world alongside the dominant system commonly called “the economy”). Nobody eats.

As Karl Marx insightfully viewed capitalist production, production begins when the capitalist enters the market as a buyer, buying labour power in order to use it.⁹ If the capitalists do not choose to invest in starting production — which they will not do if they do not expect profits — nothing else happens. Production does not start. The monthly pay check needed to pay the monthly bills does not arrive.

A fourth misconception is that the poor countries are poor because their productivity is low. This common view seems obviously true if one assumes, as the Washington Consensus assumed, that the way to lead the poor out of poverty is to raise the market value of what they have to sell. The paralyzing mental model behind this view is that the only way out of poverty is to sell your labour-power or to sell something else that you are lucky enough to possess — an accomplishment which is only possible if there are customers able and willing to buy what you have to sell.

Viewed in a larger context, such behaviour by capitalists is the same as everyone else's behaviour when human relationships are uncaring. A single individual can be as selfish as a giant multinational corporation.

Managers of other people's money are not supposed to be selfish personally but are supposed to conform to the rules of a selfish system. They are constrained by liberal ethics to obey the prudent man rule. This means that money managers and corporate executives are required to act as it is assumed the owners of the assets they are managing would act if they were managing their assets themselves. The prudent man is assumed to want more money at less risk. Managers are required to maximize profits and minimize risk, prudently balancing the two. Thus, ethics itself, often hardened into laws enforced by civil liability or criminal punishment, is reframed to serve the default settings of social arrangements that assume and require sacrificing neighbour and nature for a presumed benefit of self. (Today, in the 21st century, everything in this paragraph is being questioned and modified, as stakeholder capitalism gains ground and shareholder capitalism loses ground.¹⁰)

Different authors have tried to capture the essence of what the rules of the game we are playing are doing to us, choosing different words, and identifying different patterns of cause and effect. For Montesquieu¹¹ (1689-1755) and Friedrich von Hayek¹² (1899-1992) and for many others, the classic social arrangements of capitalist modernity are named by the word "Liberty."

For Theodor Adorno, the essence of modernity is captured by the word *Tauschprinzip*¹³. Exchange. Similarly, André Orléan chooses the phrase *séparation marchande*. Separation. Separation identified with deals. The only way I can get what I need from others is to strike deals awakening in them a desire to give it to me.¹⁴ Authors like Adorno and Orléan deserve more attention because they highlight the catastrophic downsides of the same institutions whose upsides are highlighted when they are simplistically identified with liberty or freedom.

A third misconception — here I have an opportunity to explain why I put "power" in scare quotes — is that there exists a power elite which could change the basic rules of the game, and transform them into adaptive and functional rules which would enable all humankind to live dignified lives in harmony with nature now and forever after, if only the power elite would choose to do so. My view is that George Eliot described the true situation better in an evocation of the spirit of the Christmas holidays in published in 1860:

It is obviously false if one expects that existing resources and new resources now in the pipeline of new technologies, can be mobilized in ways that cure today's mental and moral paralysis. Gandhi's quip, "there is enough for everyone's needs but not enough for everyone's greed" is true today in spades.

But old Christmas smiled as he laid this cruel-seeming spell on the outdoor world, for he meant to light up home with new brightness, to deepen all the richness of indoor colour, and give a keener edge of delight to the warm fragrance of food; he meant to prepare a sweet imprisonment that would strengthen the primitive fellowship of kindred, and make the sunshine of familiar human faces as welcome as the hidden day-star. His kindness fell but hardly on the homeless, — fell but hardly on the homes where the hearth was not very warm, and where the food had little fragrance; where the human faces had had no sunshine in them, but rather the leaden, blank-eyed gaze of unexpectant want. But the fine old season meant well; and if he has not learned the secret how to bless men impartially, it is because his father Time, with ever-unrelenting purpose, still hides that secret in his own mighty, slow-beating heart.¹⁵

A fourth misconception is that the poor countries are poor because their productivity is low. This common view seems obviously true if one assumes, as the Washington Consensus assumed, that the way to lead the poor out of poverty is to raise the market value of what they have to sell. The paralyzing mental model behind this view is that the only way out of poverty is to sell your labour-power or to sell something else that you are lucky enough to possess — an accomplishment which is only possible if there are customers able and willing to buy what you have to sell.¹⁶ It is obviously false if one expects that existing resources and new resources now in the pipeline of new technologies¹⁷, can be mobilized in ways that cure today's mental and moral paralysis. Gandhi's quip, "there is enough for everyone's needs but not enough for everyone's greed" is true today in spades.

A fifth misconception is that whatever the problem may be, governments can solve it. More specifically, if one starts assuming that most human problems are solved by markets efficiently allocating resources, one can continue by assuming that any market failures there may be can be corrected by government intervention. But today the sovereignty of nations, whether democratic or not, is crippled by globalization. It is crippled by fiscal competition with each country lowering taxes to attract capital and to prevent capital flight. The state is crippled by unpayable public debts, and by the necessity to stay on good terms with the lenders who refinance short term debt as it comes due. It is crippled by the evasion of taxes by large transnational companies, by tax havens with accounts under secret names. Nobody knows how much their value is or who owns them. In many states corruption and/or violence have virtually dissolved the rule of law, while the rule of law, where it exists, ties the hands of governments with international treaties that cancel national sovereignty in favour of global law in many areas; including intellectual property, foreign investment, credit and debt, and the flow in and out of capital.



Fisherman, Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Already in the 1970s Jürgen Habermas made the case that in late capitalism the market is the primary institution. Governments are secondary; they must adjust to the dictates of markets.¹⁸ More recently, Jeffrey Winters analysed what he called the locational revolution created by the power of wealth to choose which laws to obey by choosing where to locate operations and investments.¹⁹ There is a large literature debating issues raised in the preceding paragraph. Much of it argues that the decline of the power of the state has been exaggerated and emphasizes that who controls state power still matters. Much of it agrees with Amartya Sen²⁰ and others that concepts of public action must expand to include contributions of non-state actors to solving problems that governments were previously thought to be capable of solving.

My conclusion is that achieving global care for the common good requires working with the causal powers that mainly determine the course of history. Those causal powers are located more in the rules of the game than in its players.

Small Wins

By “small wins” I mean:

1. An accomplishment that is possible within the “rules of the game” (also known as social structures) that already exist at a given time and place. Due to global neoliberalism, expressed for example by the rules enforced through the World Trade Organization (WTO), these rules are perhaps more the same throughout the planet than they have been at any previous point in history; nevertheless they vary a great deal from place to place as well as from time to time.
2. An accomplishment that nurtures the growth of more caring rules (aka structures). Our student’s support for building community around a school in rural Zambia would be an example.
3. Thinking of myself, or of a particular reader of these pages, something I, or you, or some organization we belong to, can do.

Structures change when and if people and organizations voluntarily commit to being more responsible and more caring than the laws require them to be. What Sen calls voluntary public action can pave the way for formal legal structures to adjust later to sums of small wins that have already shaped more functional and more adaptive discourses and practices.

There are already many caring people in the world. They engage in discourses and practices that, if they were more widespread, would tip the odds in favour of making dignified life possible in the long term. Thinking about what I can do is a matter of thinking about how I might help shift the balance in favour of the positive innumerable. I have misgivings about using the word “win.” It suggests a more adversarial and less cooperative approach than what I have in mind. I keep using it because it resonates with people I talk to. I am open to suggestions from anybody who might come up with a better word choice.²¹ As a next step, I will say more about what I mean by “rule” and “structure” and about why I think small wins can add up to liberation from the basic rules of the game and the basic social structures that at present hold humankind, and all of life, captive. I adopt the concept of “rule” proposed by Herbert L. A. Hart (1907–1992) who held the chair of Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford.²² For Hart the defining features of rules are three in number:

1. A rule is a kind of behaviour generally practiced in a given society or culture. It follows that if and when our student and his fellow members of the Zambian chapter of the Round Table, generally practice responsible stewardship of the assets they manage, serving the common good, then the rules of the game change, insofar as they are defined by what is customarily done.
2. Violation of a rule gives others a license to criticize, and in some cases to punish. It follows that if and when there is general condemnation, perhaps leading to punishment, of putting profit maximization ahead of common good maximization — as is happening now as pharmaceutical companies are criticized for withholding vaccine against Covid 19 from nations unable to pay for it — the rules are changing. A small win.
3. Rules have an internal aspect. People employ them in their own minds and thoughts to guide their own conduct.

It follows that the moral development of persons, and of the groups they identify with (of their “generalized others”²³), changes the rules, insofar as they are defined by each person’s internal moral compass. The EMBA programme at Cape Town, where students learn to practice mindfulness to become more aware of their own feelings, thoughts and bodies, provides examples. Regarding the concept of “social structure,” I adopt the thinking of Douglas Porpora and Tony Lawson. They will have to speak for themselves regarding exactly what they mean. I can only report on my own takeaways.

Social structures organize material positions constituted by cultural rules.²⁴ The cultural rules of basic structures are typically hardened as laws enforced by the coercive power of the state. The positions are material because they have physical consequences, including separating haves from have-nots. Amartya Sen gave examples in his study of famines. Regarding one famine, if you only read the newspapers or watched TV news, you might have believed that there was a famine because there was a flood. In fact, as in all recent famines, there was food for people with money to pay for it. The flood destroyed the rice seedlings in the fields, leaving poor people who normally eked out a living transplanting rice seedlings with no work, consequently no money, and therefore no food. They starved because they occupied the material position of would-be buyers with no money.²⁵

The concept of social structure is more sociological than anthropological. It fits what Gavin Andersson calls bounded organizations. Its native ground is the modern West. The structures it is mainly about are markets. Following Tony Lawson, the material positions that define structures are themselves defined by the rights and obligations of the persons (or the corporations granted the status of persons by a legal fiction) who are occupying a given position at a given time.²⁶ (It is important to notice that the social structures tend to persist in time, reproducing themselves generation after generation while flesh and blood human beings are born, live and die.) Rights are above all property rights. Duties are few; most problems are “not my problem.”

Structures change when and if people and organizations voluntarily commit to being more responsible and more caring than the laws require them to be. What Sen calls voluntary public action can pave the way for formal legal structures to adjust later to sums of small wins that have already shaped more functional and more adaptive discourses and practices.²⁷

The more adaptive discourses and practices can be revivals of what has worked in the past as well as social innovations created in the present. Here I would like to quote some words from a memo Gavin wrote for a discussion group of the Unbounded Academy:

Against this model [the model of bounded organization HR] we start to see an older pattern, observed through centuries into the ancient past, reasserting itself. Unbounded organization happens across organizations and hierarchies, in collaborative efforts between organizations, in linkages across sectors (business, government and civil society), in neighbourhood initiatives, in learning circles, and spiritual fellowship. Invariably these efforts address the common good: organizing for life and nature.

The older pattern Gavin sees in present trends is often associated with post-colonial thinking and with cognitive justice. He makes the point that arranging humankind's affairs on this planet so that dignified life will be possible in the long term need not be a leap into the unknown. It can be a return to the tried and true, to practices of reciprocity and redistribution that have proven their worth for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years.²⁸ Ancient wisdom is often more in tune with the hard-wired tendencies of the human body than today's risk society with its long working hours, undependable employment, constant stress, and shattered family life.²⁹

Today we can adopt wisdom from the past without having to repeat the past as it really happened. We can mine the past for gems and disregard the tailings. What worked in the past, but subsequently fell into eclipse alongside what Shiv Visvanathan calls the "defeated epistemologies"³⁰ can now be safely and selectively recovered. From Confucius we can learn about music and rites and sincerity without replicating the status of women in China in 500 B.C. From Aristotle we can learn about becoming a good person by forming good habits — as both western traditions and Islamic traditions have — while deleting his views — which were those of his time, class, and place — on slavery. Meanwhile, the earth story provided by natural sciences that are taught in almost every school in the world prepares almost all humankind to hear Greta Thunberg. As Evelin says in her article, now photographs from space show us that we all live together on one fragile blue planet.

The older pattern now reasserting itself, noted is only one source, or one set of sources, of good ideas for making dignified life possible in the long term. Another source is the conversations that have been organized since 2001 through the World Social Forum (WSF) and its affiliates. The WSF was itself organized as an alternative and a counterweight to the World Economic Forum (WEF),³¹ founded by Klaus Schwab, which has been organizing conversations since 1971. And there are many other thinkers thinking hard, coming up with new ideas and reviving old ones, hoping to contribute to systemic transformations that will transform *homo sapiens* into a species with long term viability.

I do not believe that whether dignified life has a long term future depends on the outcome of clashes between incompatible interests, articulated as incompatible starting points leading to incompatible conclusions. To explain the reasons that lead me to this non-belief, it will be convenient to sketch the six stages of the development of moral reasoning that Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) and his colleagues, building on the work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980) identified in the thousands of people they interviewed.³²

The distinction between pre-conventional and conventional can be applied cross-culturally, not because morals are the same everywhere, but because most Chinese children — unlike Kohlberg's original American interviewees — grow up to be normal conventional Chinese. The validity of the concepts of post conventional stages five and six is doubtful. They are perhaps best abandoned and replaced by the observation that in all or most cultures there are mature thoughtful people who reflect on moral issues.

Pre-Conventional (One and Two)

Stage One — Good and bad behaviour are defined by reward and punishment by authority figures, i.e. by self-interest in being rewarded or punished.

Stage Two — Deals. Quid pro quo. You scratch my back and I scratch yours.

Conventional (Three and Four)

Stage Three — The good boy/good girl attitude. The person wants to be regarded by others as a good person.

Stage Four — The social order maintaining orientation. The person identifies with the need to maintain the social order and to defend it.

Post-Conventional (Five and Six)

Stage Five — Scepticism and justification. The existing social order is not automatically or obviously right. Justifications for what it is or should be tend to be found in consent (social contract, elections) and/or in the utilitarian criterion of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Stage Six — Universal ethical principles.

The distinction between pre-conventional and conventional can be applied cross-culturally, not because morals are the same everywhere, but because most Chinese children — unlike Kohlberg's original American interviewees — grow up to be normal conventional Chinese. The validity of the concepts of post conventional stages five and six is doubtful. They are perhaps best abandoned and replaced by the observation that in all or most cultures there are mature thoughtful people who reflect on moral issues.

In retrospect, perhaps the greatest importance of Kohlberg's work is that the concept of a care ethic was first formulated in response to it. When I think of small wins today, I think of small wins for a care ethic. Carol Gilligan first formulated the idea as an objection to Kohlberg's finding that women usually finished their moral development at stage three and did not advance to higher stages.³³

But an ethics of care, while it corrects gender bias, also facilitates another important achievement. As an ethics founded on attending to needs and responding to needs, it corrects libertarian ethics that set individual utility maximization in stone, set the rules of the game of free market economics in stone, and consequently set giving priority to profit maximization over common good maximization in stone.



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La Paz, Chile. Photograph by Mikyoung Cha.

It bypasses 18th century European jurisprudence, not abandoning justice as fairness, but placing it in a less mythical and more realistic context. A care ethic fits well with emphasizing the roles of women in the history and prehistory of the species. It puts coping with the crises of the 21st century in a broader context, opening closed doors and closed minds.

Hoping to open some doors and some minds, I would like to suggest a novel idea: The long term prospects for humankind depend mainly on augmenting the numbers of people at stage three or above, in other words on augmenting the numbers of people displaying normal forms and degrees of good will and rationality.

Where good will and rationality prevail, it may still be possible for people with incompatible mental models to reach consensus on how to deal with an existential crisis like climate change or economic collapse. If they cannot reach consensus they can reach a pragmatic compromise. When, as in Germany in 1932,³⁴ a growing proportion of the population is driven by unreasoning anger and bogus hate narratives to engage in anti-social violent behaviour³⁵, hope dims.

Recent events in Chile, the United States, and South Africa motivate my thinking.

Consider Chile. In October of 2019 a rise in subway fares triggered mass protests. More than 1.2 million people crowded Plaza Baquedano in Santiago, with corresponding numbers protesting throughout the country. As I heard their message in the demonstrations where I was present, they were saying “We can’t live” as George Floyd said “I can’t breathe.” We can’t pay the light bill, or the water bill; we run out of food at the end of the month. A rise in subway fares may be nothing to you, but to us it means we can’t get to work. As one placard read, *Luchar hasta que vale la pena vivir*. Struggle until life is worth living. (My hearing of what their placards and chants were saying might have been influenced by a then recent presentation by a Chilean economist analyzing the incomes and expenses of the poor at our dialogue home. Whether or not “We can’t live” was what they meant to say, it was true. If I had paid more attention to their words, and less to what I knew about their budgets, I would have been more focussed on their demands for dignity.)

The immediate response of the non-poor general public was to agree with the demands of the protesters. Public opinion polls showed overwhelming support for reinventing Chile.

Somewhat similar, although far from identical, accounts could be given of the January 6 insurrection in the United States, and of the July 2021 insurrection in South Africa. In each case it is plausible to assume that the majority of the adult population is made up of normal conventional human beings, who if tested would fall in Kohlberg's categories three or four.

Then came the spoilers. First the professional thieves. They were not poor. They had trucks. They used them to move stolen refrigerators and big screen TVs to their warehouses, as businesses were looted before they were burned to the ground. Then the unprofessional police. They repressed demonstrators with levels of brutality that seasoned observers from the UN found shocking. Violence escalated on both sides; leading to 36 deaths, over 500 businesses destroyed in Valparaíso alone³⁶, over 12,000 injuries and over 28,000 arrests. Wanton violence included destroying stations and tracks of the metro, shutting down the mass transit facility where a rise in fares had triggered the crisis. But it was not violence committed by majorities symbolized by the 1.2 million people who had crowded Plaza Baquedano. In Chile violence is, and hopefully will continue to be, an option of minorities. Among the 28,000 arrested, virtually all had numerous prior arrests.³⁷ A tragic result was polarization. Millions are unable to forgive the violence of (some of) the police. Millions are unable to forgive the violence of (some of) the demonstrators.

Faced with a national crisis, the political right and the political left quickly agreed on a pact for social peace, including a process for writing a new constitution.

Somewhat similar, although far from identical, accounts could be given of the January 6 insurrection in the United States, and of the July 2021 insurrection in South Africa. In each case it is plausible to assume that the majority of the adult population is made up of normal conventional human beings, who if tested would fall in Kohlberg's categories three or four.

Nevertheless, the massive humiliation Evelin describes in her article, and other factors studied by other authors,³⁸ appear to be creating massive shortages of good will and rationality; as climate change is leading to massive wildfires, heat waves, high winds and floods.

I am tempted to add two more "stages" to Kohlberg's six, making a total of eight.³⁹

"Stage" Zero. Defies authority. Angry. Irrational, but often composing or consuming bogus pseudo-rational and pseudo-moral claims or narratives.

"Stage" Minus One. Socialized to participate in organized anti-social violence⁴⁰, or psychopathic due to physical defects of the brain either from birth or due to subsequent accidents.

"Stage" Minus One. Socialized to participate in organized anti-social violence⁴⁰, or psychopathic due to physical defects of the brain either from birth or due to subsequent accidents.

In 2021 humankind's fate is to confront complex existential threats like climate change, handicapped by the complex psychodynamics of growing mass insanity like Trumpism. I am defending the thesis that small wins can add up to global care for the common good. I close listing seven opportunities to achieve small wins.

1. I may be able to achieve a small win wholly within my own control by reconsidering my budget. Do I have any more discretionary surplus to contribute to the common good? Any that should be reprioritized? Surplus of time. Surplus of money? Surplus of something else? This is important because if we are going to advocate sharing surplus we have to practice it.
2. Proposing a similar analysis for the budget of a family or an organization I belong to.
3. For many reasons, the future is calling us to help make people feel secure in the present. To feel the basic trust Erik Erikson ascribes to a healthy newcomer to this world. And to feel appreciated. People are more likely to restructure their thinking to meet stage three standards if they feel that their efforts to be a good person are acknowledged and appreciated by others. Many opportunities to affirm other people are opportunities for many small wins.
4. But our verbal reassurances, and even hugs and kisses, are just bla bla when relating to people have no money in their pockets and no food on their plates. Empty pockets and plates can be experienced as rejection, or as a generalized hypocrisy committed by the generalized other; as lying hatred deserving hate in return. Volunteering to cook or serve community meals may mean attending to glum and embarrassed people who do not look you in the face because they do not want to be charity cases, because they do not want to be there and wish you were not there either. But at least it proves, even to the most resentful, that their worst fantasies about their social status are not true. A small win.
5. We need small wins in university classrooms and in public policy debates too. We must deconstruct the illusion that development defined as economic growth will lead to the populations of the developing world enjoying the same (non-existent) happiness already imagined to be enjoyed by all Europeans and all Americans. Growth will not. Caring will.

A glorious welcome to the world for the new-born at the moment of birth is a small win. When due to drug or alcohol abuse or for some other reason the mother is incompetent, grandma or papa stepping in as a reliable caregiver is a small win, and the more so if grandpa is reliable too. When the mother *is* competent, she needs support, especially if she works, hopefully including support from a devoted father, and ideally including support from outside the household because the household itself is supported by what M.L. King, following the American philosopher Josiah Royce, called a “beloved community.”

6. We must deconstruct the illusion that training more and more people to qualify for employment will result in more employment. Further, it is not possible to pay everybody wages out of wage funds created by the sale of the products their labour contributes to making.⁴¹ More generally, one person’s purchase is another’s sale; total purchases must equal total sales; therefore it is impossible for everyone to win the economic game by selling more than they buy, thus ending up with more cash than debts; therefore in market exchange where making money is the objective, there are losers.⁴² Dignified employment (or more generally dignified livelihoods) for all requires sharing surplus, e.g. profits and rents. John Locke’s principle that a person deserves to be paid the market value of what she or he produces, which was the basis for Smith’s theory of wages and for orthodox wage theory ever since, must be abandoned and replaced by Martin Luther King Jr. s principle that we are one human family living in one world house.⁴³ Job training will not solve the problem. Sharing will.

Getting this point across in a classroom or a public policy debate is a small win. Putting it into practice is a middle-sized win, perhaps a big win.

7. The transition to stage three may fail because of getting off to a bad start in life a decade earlier, because of trauma and neglect in early childhood.⁴⁴ To serve the cause of augmenting the supply of rational people of good will, and for other reasons the love of early childhood caregivers matters. Playing beautiful music for the unborn child still in the womb is a small win. According to a traditional African custom, the pregnant mother composed a song for her yet unborn child, which would become her or his song from birth all through life and would be sung at his or her funeral.⁴⁵ Reviving this kind of custom, the kind that celebrates every life of every person, and strengthening them where they already exist (as in celebrating birthdays), would be a series of small wins. A glorious welcome to the world for the new-born at the moment of birth is a small win. When due to drug or alcohol abuse or for some other reason the mother is incompetent, grandma or papa stepping in as a reliable caregiver is a small win, and the more so if grandpa is reliable too. When the mother *is* competent, she needs support, especially if she works, hopefully including support from a devoted father, and ideally including support from outside the household because the household itself is supported by what M.L. King, following the American philosopher Josiah Royce, called a “beloved community.”⁴⁶

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DR SHANTHIE MARIET D'SOUZA DR BIBHU PRASAD ROUTRAY Afghanistan: Future of Global Terrorism

Abstract

The expectation that the new Taliban caretaker government would deliver on its promises of preventing the Afghan soil for terrorist activities elsewhere is unrealistic. While al Qaeda and a host of global terror organisations would exploit the Taliban's undisrupted tactical nexus with them, groups like the Islamic State would benefit from a vast expansion of ungoverned territory in the Af-Pak region. Global terror would find a boost, impacting the region and beyond in the medium to long term.

Complicity

Successive reports by the United Nations, since 2020, have pointed at the undisrupted ties between the al Qaeda and the Taliban. These reports have suggested, foot soldiers of both not only share bases, safe houses and training facilities, but also have jointly fought the security forces belonging to the erstwhile civilian government. The nexus further unveils a disturbing reality. As the Taliban marched into the Afghan capital on 15 August, among the group's foot soldiers were hundreds of AQ cadres. Similar transgression has happened in each of Afghanistan's provinces, thereby vastly expanding the operational areas of the AQ.

Since signing the [February 2020 treaty](#), the Taliban has merely begun to bring some level of control over the free run the AQ used to enjoy in the Af-Pak region. These include gathering information on the foreign fighters within the AQ fold operating in the region. A registration mechanism put in place now serve as a database of such elements, who have also been advised to lie low and restrict their movements and activities. However, the database remains available exclusively to the Taliban and possibly to the Pakistan military. In any event, these steps do not blunt the AQ's activities in any manner. Moreover, there is little evidence that these curbs imposed by the Taliban on the AQ are either permanent or are being strictly enforced.



Dr Shanthie Mariet D'Souza

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(In)Capacity

The Taliban have largely been successful in painting a picture of a complete domination over Afghanistan. While the short-lived resistance in Panjshir consumed much of the World's attention and its defeat was interpreted as the fall of the last bastion, to suggest that the Taliban today actually control the entire country may be an exaggerated claim. Worse still, the central leadership, deeply divided among themselves, do not even control their own cadres. It is partly understandable as the insurgent group is attempting to transform itself into a governing entity. This process, in all likelihood, would be painstakingly slow. An indication to this effect was provided by the Taliban spokesperson on 24 August, who advised women to stay at home as the Taliban fighters have not been trained in respecting women. By extending the same logic to the realm of the nexus between the Taliban and the AQ, it can be argued that any attempt to push the Taliban regional commanders to break ties with their blood brothers is unlikely to be implemented with sincerity.

Similarly, capacity of the Taliban to control the Islamic State's Khorasan province (IS-K) is questionable. The IS-K, which claimed responsibility for the suicide attack near the Kabul airport on 27 August, shares a curious tie with the Taliban. Factions of the IS-K have clashed with the Taliban. Factions of the same group, which share close proximity with the Pakistani ISI, have lived harmoniously with the Taliban. The UN reports largely paint the IS-K as a weakened group, having been subject of 'successive military setbacks that began in Jowzjan in summer 2018'. However, under a new leader, Shahab al-Mujahir, the group remains extremely potent. More importantly, the IS-K, projecting itself as the only 'pure rejectionist' group, has the potential of attracting the disgruntled cadres from both the Taliban and the AQ. Moreover, the IS-K can further benefit from the intelligence vacuum in Afghanistan, where error-prone TECHINT is the dominant mode of intelligence collection these days.

Nexus

Several senior members of the Taliban cabinet [announced on 7 September](#) have deep ties with the AQ. New Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, the first deputy to Taliban chief Haibatullah Akhundzada and the leader of the group's Miram Shah Shura is a member of the wider AQ leadership, although not included in the Hattin Shura or the AQ's core leadership. As leader of the Haqqani Network (HN), Sirajuddin remains a votary of violence against the US.



Dr Bibhu Prasad Routray

The Taliban incapacity to reign in terror should drive in a message to both China and Pakistan who seem to have occupied a vantage point in Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has restarted its terror campaign in Pakistan. Assurances by the Taliban to China notwithstanding, the Uyghur militants will benefit from the advantages a largely ungoverned Afghanistan would offer.

The HN, which, not long ago, enjoyed a semi-autonomous position within the Taliban-led insurgency, remains, according to the UN, ‘a hub for outreach and cooperation with regional foreign terrorist groups and is the primary liaison between the Taliban and the AQ’. According to some estimates, HN could also be linked to the IS-K and its top leadership.

Khalil al Rahman Haqqani, the minister of refugees, is a brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani and the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani. Khalil, according to the U.S. Treasury Department, has “acted on behalf of” the AQ, having deployed men “to reinforce AQ elements in Paktia Province, Afghanistan.” Another HN leader, Mullah Taj Mir Jawad is now the first deputy of intelligence. As leader of the ‘Kabul Attack Network’, Jawad was in charge of the strategic congregation of fighters from the Taliban, AQ, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union, the Turkistan Islamic Party, and Hizb-I-Islami (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar faction) to conduct attacks in and around Kabul. Noorullah Noori, the minister of borders and tribal affairs, has “fought alongside AQ as a Taliban military general, against the Northern Alliance” and also “hosted AQ commanders.” Mohammad Fazl, the deputy defense minister, has coordinated activities of the Taliban, AQ and the IMU. Mohammad Nabi Omari, the new governor of Khost was a “member of a joint al Qaeda/Taliban” cell in Khost. The list goes on.

The Future

The formation of the Taliban caretaker government is a clear indication of the temporary settlement of the power tussle in favour of the HN and the AQ linked elements within the Taliban. Believed to have been brokered by the Pakistani ISI, the appointments are not only a rebuff to hopes of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, but represent a [reclaim of strategic space](#) by the hardliners, who seemingly had compromised on pursuing a peace process with the erstwhile government headed by Ashraf Ghani. To expect this fragile government to deliver on the promises made in the February 2020 treaty, in all likelihood, would be futile.

The AQ and likeminded global terror movements have celebrated developments in Afghanistan as a victory for the Taliban’s cause and thus, for global radicalism. On the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, AQ chief Ayman al-Zawahiri [resurfaced with a 60-minutes video](#). The CIA and the Mi5 are reportedly worried about the re-availability of the ungoverned space to the terrorists in Afghanistan.

The Taliban incapacity to reign in terror should drive in a message to both China and Pakistan who seem to have occupied a vantage point in Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has restarted its terror campaign in Pakistan. Assurances by the Taliban to China notwithstanding, the Uyghur militants will benefit from the advantages a largely ungoverned Afghanistan would offer.

Russia, Central Asian Republics and Iran are worried about the spillover of terrorism from Afghanistan and drug smuggling. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have opposed the attempts to normalize Taliban’s capture of power and unveiling of an orthodox regime.

The Taliban incapacity to reign in terror should drive in a message to both China and Pakistan who seem to have occupied a vantage point in Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has restarted its terror campaign in Pakistan. Assurances by the Taliban to China notwithstanding, the Uyghur militants will benefit from the advantages a largely ungoverned Afghanistan would offer.

The U.S. plans to counter the future threat of terrorism with ‘over the horizon’ operations. However, their effectiveness is limited. The 20-year war that was concluded abruptly and prematurely is a tale of a failed US strategy to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan. This failure, which has opened up Afghanistan’s territory for a terrorist fanfare, could be a costly affair.

Barring a handful of countries like Pakistan and China, the world at large is still pondering over the modes of engagement with the new Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, this mode of engagement desperately needs to factor in the need to curb the Taliban capacity and proclivity to turn the country into a launchpad for global terrorist activities. The continuing sanctions on the Taliban and the HN need to be maintained till the group gives up its selective approach on appeasing countries like China and Pakistan and severs its linkages with all terror groups including the AQ, LeT and the JeM.

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Katie Costello was born and raised in Hubbard, Ohio, USA. Her greatest passion in life has always been to help animals. She is lucky enough to be a licensed veterinary technician and owner of The Canine Campus Training and Wellness Center where she helps animals through behavior work. A vegetarian since she was 6 years old and a vegan for the last 13 years, she currently has 6 dogs, 6 cats, 8 chickens, 3 roosters 1 very special turkey and 3 farm pigs that are amongst her dearest friends. She is founder of 2 non-profit organizations, K-9's for Compassion (Co-founded with her father), a therapy animal group and The Together 3 Journey, a service dog organization. She has been on the board of many animal organizations throughout her life, including Happy Trails Farm Animal Sanctuary and C.H.A.I.N. (Community Helping Animals In Need) and SVBT (Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians) She enjoys freelance writing about (mostly) animals for different magazines, with her favorite being Live Encounters! <https://thecaninecampustraining.com/>

KATIE COSTELLO

BUREACRACY AND THE PLIGHT OF THE WILD MUSTANG AND BURROS

Text & Photographs

"Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect."

*Chief Seattle,
Leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American Tribes*

.....and yet, even as they connect, we still find ourselves at the top of a food chain making many decisions for many different beings- whether they live or die, if they are allowed to have freedom or even keep their families together. This really shouldn't be a "decision" to be made. We should all strive to make the lives of every being better...no matter the species. We are all interconnected. We are all part of one.

In part one of this story I attempted to lay out an overview of the many complexities of wild mustangs and burros, and the way they are losing their freedoms. This months deep dive will take a look at The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), those who oversee The Wild Mustang and Burros Act of December 15, 1971, signed by President Richard M. Nixon. To understand this act, let's put it into perspective. The Vietnam/American war was still being fought, and Watergate was 6 months in the future. It wouldn't be hard to make a feel good story of saving mustangs.



Katie Costello

Smart political move during a tumultuous time. But how did it go so wrong? The current system is rife with concern and failure for certain. I am truly afraid for the future of these mustangs and burros and all that they have come to mean to the West, to America, and to those who love the magnificent beauty and love story of them.

To understand the laws, the BLM website is pretty self-explanatory. It is full of their data, which is a good thing. They aren't hiding some of the awful things that occur, which allows us to pull from these, and consider how to make things better. You can browse their website for much information, <https://www.blm.gov/whb>, and to understand the entire Wild Mustang and Burros act please see this website. https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/programs_wildhorse_history_doc1.pdf

During the 1950's, "Wild Horse Annie", Velma B. Johnston fought a grassroots campaign, using mostly school children to educate people about the wild horses and burros, and the mistreatment of the mustangs at the time by the "mustangers". Annie was able to get a bill passed to stop the use of motorized vehicles to hunt wild horses and burros on public lands, but she was not able to have congress initiate a program to protect, manage and control horses and burros. This fell short of her goal. It wasn't until the 1971 bill that this occurred, and then subsequently fell apart. You can see the full act here: (And all amendments) https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/programs_wildhorse_history_doc1.pdf

I think it is important to be said that everyone needs to work together. I am not writing this as someone that is against ranching or the BLM: I look at them as a piece to the puzzle in which needs solved. A communion of many different people that come together and actually do what is right for these horses. To help them in a way that is fair to them, and just. We are amazing beings when our minds are put to a task. I would like to see everyone put aside their differences and start working towards a better good. One that benefits and allows wild mustangs to remain wild and free.

Below I will follow the money trail from the Onaqui round up in July of 2021. I do believe patterns will unfold that will be shocking. First, MILLIONS of our taxpayer dollars in America are spent on rounding these mustangs and Burros up. So, there is the extreme stress of the roundup, and then they are taken to holding facilities, with thousands of horses, waiting for adoption, often separated from the families that surrounded them their entire lives. The stress is overwhelming. And long term stress adds to long term medical conditions.



Member of the Onaqui herd. Photograph by Katie Costello while travelling on the famed Pony Express at Tooelle, Utah.



Wild burros in The Manti-La Sal National Forest, Utah.

I think it should be said that there aren't hoards of people out there wanting to adopt wild mustangs. Especially in today's economic society, many don't have the money to properly care for these mustangs, not to mention the fact that these are wild animals; and the information that is out there to help and train and make mustangs a part of your family is few and far between and also another piece to this problem. Much information is out there, but much is one sided and unfair for the wild animals. From the second the horses are removed from the range, their lives are forever changed in a way that is very stressful to them.

Are adopting wild animals out to homes fair? I think it is a piece to consider. I strongly believe that we need to hear from the veterinary behaviorists in whole about this. I would love to see more articles and information out there. I personally love Dr. Sue McDonnell and encourage anyone that is wanting to adopt out a wild mustang to reach out to her for advice and help on how to make this transition the easiest it can be for the mustang or burro. For the BLM adoptions no screening is being done. Certainly there are people out there that are doing what is right, or attempting that. There are yet others adopting these mustangs for the namesake of having a mustang, and treating them as if they are domesticated horses is not fair to them, or to the person that is adopting these animals out.

In July my family visited the Onaqui herd just about 1 week after the roundup that took 435 horses from their home.

The cost according to USASpending.gov, Shayne Sampson, owner of Sampson livestock, received \$105,710 for the roundup and then hauling the mustangs off to the range. <https://govtribe.com/vendors/sampson-shayne-f-sampson-live-stock-6qq57> Please note that Shane is only one person within the chain. I only chose him because this was a roundup I had first hand knowledge of. There are many "Shaynes" in the chain here. You can see the substantial amount of money he stands to make.

And then the Onaqui horses, at 435 head, were taken to Delta, Utah where G and R livestock was awarded 1.4 million dollars to build a new holding facility. <https://opengovus.com/sam-ent/117142048> the money here is crazy. Taxpayer money. And I am pretty sure almost everyone would like a better solution. I am convinced few know where this money is going.



Member of the Onaqui herd. Photograph by Katie Costello while travelling on the famed Pony Express at Tooelle, Utah.



Member of the Onaqui herd. Photograph by Katie Costello while travelling on the famed Pony Express at Tooele, Utah.

Another main company that takes care of the roundups in the west is Cattoor Livestock. <http://www.wildhorseroundups.com/about.html> and some pictures of their roundups. <http://www.wildhorseroundups.com/photos.html> My only challenge here is that there is absolutely nothing that you can do to remove a wild animal from the wild into captivity and make it a place without stress. Incredible stress will come to these animals removed. We can all do better working together.

The BLM has what it calls Appropriate Management Level or AML. This is what they use to determine how many horses can live on the land safely and manageably. It is a very common myth that these horses are removed because they are starving. This is a myth that works, because the last thing that anyone wants is to see them starve. This is a nice scapegoat that allows for roundups to happen, and people to be fed that lie and believe it. This is probably the most commonly said reason for rounding these horses up. However, please know that 80% of the public lands that were set aside for the wild horses and burros is actually going to the welfare ranching done in the west. 80% of cattle and sheep reside on that land. So, this statement is a little misleading at best.

This year alone the BLM has scheduled 18,000 horses to be rounded up. Let that number sink in. How many horses and wild burros are left on the range? (Throughout the country) approximately 86,189 animals. There are 177 herd management areas across 26.9 million acres of public lands.

It is also important to put things into perspective. We need to decide what wild is, and do we ever intervene? On the East Coast of America, for example, are the Assateague Ponies and Chincoteague horses. Management of these animals is important in understanding what happens with them when things go wrong. For Assateague (Maryland side), the herd is owned by the National Park System and there is said to be no intervention. These are truly wild horses. The only time intervention happens is to dart the herd with PZP birth control to control the herd in a way that doesn't require removal from the land that they reside wild on. If there is a severe injury, a herd management veterinarian can euthanize the animal. Now, having said that, on the Assateague side there are horses with problems with their feet, or who are older and have trouble keeping weight on. These are not things that are treated, but those horses are wild. They aren't wormed. They aren't supplementally fed. And problems with feet are things worked through, and thin horses don't equal suffering when you are at a lifestage that causes a lot of calories to simply survive. Personally, Assateague is one of my favorite places in the world, and I love the fact that these horses are truly wild, and almost exclusively left to their own to make decisions for their lives.



Wild burros in The Manti-La Sal National Forest, Utah.

In last months article I spoke with veterinary behaviorist and previous BLM board member Dr. Sue McDonnell. She has also authored an amazing book called “Understanding your Horses behavior”. During our conversation, I had said that I felt that the numbers of what the BLM used to decide how many horses can stay on the land was arbitrary. She said, loosely it really was. It wasn’t science. We need that science in order to get to a real answer.

In the case of Chincoteague, the Virginia side of the island, the herd is managed by the Fire Department of Chincoteague. They do a “salt water roundup” every year as a fund raiser which people flock to. This upsets me to the point that I rarely go to Chincoteague anymore, and never during that week. It upsets me tremendously that they force these horses through the channel and then sell them (there is an option for donating the horses back to the herd)...but it is stressful, and families are separated.

Just to understand the complexities of the above model, let me explain a situation that just occurred this summer between Assateague and Chincoteague. A horse on the Assateague side named Moonshadow and her foal were hit by a car in July. Moonshadow ended up passing away from her injury leaving her foal orphaned. Because he wasn’t old enough to be on his own, the foal (being called Moonbeam currently) was sent to the Chincoteague farm where he could be raised and able to live. It is this sort of give and take and working together that I think can allow for so many different opinions to come together and do something good for the horses of the west as well.

Moonshadow and Moonbeam’s story: <https://www.wmdt.com/2021/07/assateague-island-national-seashore-wild-horse-dies-in-apparent-hit-and-run/> and her foal <https://mdcoastdispatch.com/2021/07/13/injured-foal-relocated-to-assateagues-virginia-side/>

But we all need to come to the table to make that happen. We need to put aside our differences and really have conversations using science based methods and facts versus arbitrary thinking or “all or nothing thinking” that has gotten us to where we are. And to shut down our minds and stop talking because we don’t like a way that things are being done isn’t going to help either.

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Dr. Sue McDonnell was also able to allow me to see a side of ranchers that I probably wouldn’t have seen otherwise. Many of the ranchers can’t stand to see the horses without water and will dig wells for them. We all need to own our little piece of this problem and reach out to the other side to see how we can all make it better. Maybe perfection isn’t where we can start, but better. We can all agree to that.

The money given to the BLM to help solve this problem is overwhelming. For 2020, expenditures totaled \$91.2 million. Off-range holding accounted for \$57.0 million (62%) of expenditures, composed of \$30.0 million for long-term care and \$27.0 million for Short-term care. \$12.3 million (13%) was expended for program support and overhead. Placement into private care through adoptions and sales was \$9. Million (11%), another \$7.0 million (6%) was expended for varied purposes including less than 1 percent for fertility control. In my opinion this is the area that we could focus on that could make an immediate difference. I know that many volunteers are ready and willing to sign up to be part of the darting process of birth control. If the horses aren’t reproducing as quickly, we also don’t have as many to remove from the field. And with all of the numbers being thrown around? \$200 dollars per mare per year is the cost of PZP. Less stress. A big savings to the BLM. A potentially big problem solved. PZP is only one solution, and one that some do not like. From following Assateague’s ability to manage I have been in favor of this method, but understand it has its problems. More than giving ONE solution, I think we need to start somewhere with A solution. Safely done, birth control on the range is going to easily win over removal from the range and the stress and lives destroyed.

And there is hope that we can move past the danger for anyone! Veterinary behaviorists and some scientists have been working on some different methods to help with PZP injections and positive reinforcement where the horses would be willing to walk into an area that they can be scanned, willingly, and given PZP as needed. This would be hands off. And allowing these animals to make their decision. Stress free...keeping people safe. There are options. It only takes working together. One need look no further than Zoo medicine to see how far we can train animals in a positive manner, allowing them to make their own decisions, to have medical procedures done.

Welfare ranchers pay \$1.35 per cow calf pair or 5 head of sheep to the government to roam these public lands that compete with the horses. The ranchers feel that the horses compete for their livestock’s food and water and cause range damage. Range damage is a real thing. For BOTH the rancher’s animals and the wild mustangs and burros.



Members of the Onaqui herd. Photograph by Katie Costello while travelling on the famed Pony Express at Tooelle, Utah.

Upwards of 2 million cattle graze public lands, not to mention millions of sheep compared to a measly 79,568 wild horses. The horses are not the only problem here with the destruction of lands. Currently there are close to 60,000 horses in holding. This is a major problem. Work needs done here to figure out how to lower these numbers and stop them from having to be rounded up in the first place.

However, there are contradicting reports out there about how this all works. This is another area that needs to be uncovered and debated and tried through time to see how it all plays out. More science is needed here. I will delve into this more in the third series next month. I would also argue that the cattle and sheep are competing for the horses' livelihood.

A little-known fact, less than 2% of all beef sold in the US is raised on public lands. If public land grazing ended tomorrow it would have zero impact on the beef industry. The ranchers don't need the public lands, but they do have a claim to them.

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Currently there are close to 60,000 horses in holding. This is a major problem. Work needs done here to figure out how to lower these numbers and stop them from having to be rounded up in the first place.

And please understand, while I am speaking about Onaqui, there are 177 Herd Management Areas. Each with their own issues. Each needing their own help and each being threatened by the ever more looming roundups.

It is also something to be considered that other species that are out of "balance" with what humans feel is adequate end up with a hunting season on their heads. Or, possibly back to slaughter. These are not solutions anyone wants either. It should be noted, that while BLM and all agencies at work here need to step up to the plate and come together in some way, at least at this moment in time the slaughter has stopped.

Six states have already lost their entire wild horse populations: Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. New Mexico only has one area left. I do fear that if solutions do not come soon, we will lose the wild mustang and burros forever.

The BLM website is great for information, one sided maybe, but a part of the puzzle. They do provide details. The accidents that happen, the deaths, the separations, how many are rounded up. There is data on this site that can be pulled to make everyone better.

How can you help the wild mustang? There are 3 organizations (and I welcome anyone to reach out to me as I become better at knowing all of the powers that be!) and there are 3 organizations that as far as I can tell go far above and beyond and keep donations with the mustangs:

The American Wild Horse Campaign (Having a large auction)
The Cloud Foundation
RedBird Trust

Next instalment will be ways to help the problem and who and where to write for action! Thanks for supporting the wile mustangs and burros!

I look forward to wrapping up with the final installment next moth where we look at ways you can help the wild mustang!

Percy Aaron is an ESL teacher at Vientiane College in the Lao PDR and a freelance editor for a number of international organisations. He has had published a number of short stories, edited three books and was editor of *Champa Holidays*, the Lao Airlines in-flight magazine and *Oh!* - a Southeast Asia-centric travel and culture publication. As lead writer for the Lao Business Forum, he was also on the World Bank's panel of editors. Before unleashing his ignorance on his students, he was an entrepreneur, a director with Omega and Swatch in their India operations and an architectural draughtsman. He has answers to most of the world's problems and is the epitome of the 'Argumentative Indian'. He can be contacted at percy.aaron@gmail.com

PERCY AARON

Wat* an Experience!

Despite the battles with hunger, a five-day stay in a monastery turns into a transformative experience.

Itthiwat Suchaianun - Nic for short – considers me his older brother. We hit it off the first time we met in Bangkok two decades ago. An epicure to the core, he took great pleasure in showing me the city's culinary delights, not to be found in any of the over-hyped tourist literature. Later, I dared not transit the Thai capital without spending a few days in his upmarket apartment waiting for him to finish work, before we explored yet another eatery, sometimes on an overcrowded pavement. My house in Vientiane was similarly always open to him.

I usually wake up at dawn for coffee and a blank stare at the trees in my garden. When Nic was visiting, I'd find him up even before me, shawl draped over his shoulders, eyes closed and sitting in a lotus position as immobile as a Buddha statue. It was he, who stirred my interest in meditation. Therefore, when he suggested that we spend a few days in the temple where his brother was a senior monk, I jumped at the opportunity.

So, one midweek, I crossed into Thailand and he picked me up at the border. After lunch in Udon Thani, we set off for at *Wat Tham Sahai Thammachan Nimit*, in Nong Saeng District, some 37 km southwest of Udon. It was mid-August and the monsoons had the surrounding countryside in a lush green. We arrived in the late afternoon and before entering the temple grounds stopped to have a last meal. There would be nothing to eat until breakfast, Nic said.

At the temple, Ajarn (respected teacher) Dang, Nic's younger brother, was waiting for us. The first thing that struck me was the beatific expression on his face and the big smile that covered it when I was introduced as his older brother. After Nic had filled him up on some family news, he took us to a two-storey dormitory, where visiting pilgrims spent the night.

**Buddhist temple or monastery*



Percy Aaron



Wat Saket, Bangkok. © Photograph by Phra Nic.

The large hall on the first floor had dozens of mats and bedrolls stacked in one corner. We unrolled two mats away from the doors, then left the bedding and our bags to stake out our spots even though it was midweek with just two or three other pilgrims. Outside, there were about 5-6 communal toilets and after showering, we changed into white cotton pyjamas and collarless shirts, slipped into flip flops and headed for the meditation hall.

Leaving our slippers outside, we entered a large darkened hall that appeared to be full of statues, spaced equally about 2-3 feet apart. As my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I saw that they were in fact monks in dark brown robes. I nodded at the nearest clean-shaven heads but they didn't even seem aware of my presence. Like a cemetery at midnight, the atmosphere was one of unbelievable stillness. We might have been the only two live beings in the hall.

Nic sat down on a cushion and I next to him. He crossed his legs in a full lotus position and though I tried the same, I managed, at best, a ten-percent lotus. My heels were a distance from my buttocks and my knees level with my shoulders. I hugged my legs to avoid toppling over, then closed my eyes and struggled to be comfortable.

After a few minutes. or was it seconds, my hamstrings started hurting. A gradual pain crept up my lower back. I shifted positions, then shifted again and yet again. I put my palms down on the mat, straightened my back and tilted my head backwards to relieve the pain that had now reached my shoulders.

Somebody seemed aware of my constant shifting because cushions were tucked under both my knees. Eyes closed, I nodded a thank you. When I felt the person move away, I opened my eyes slightly and saw that it hadn't been Nic. He had already turned into stone. The cushions made it so much more comfortable but after another twenty minutes or so, my knees, thighs and back started hurting again. I put my feet flat on the ground and started hugging my knees arching my back to relieve my spine.

As taught in *vipassana*, I tried observing and accepting the pain in my limbs. That only sharpened my awareness of the sorry state of my rusty joints. I arranged and rearranged my knees and my feet again, and again. Soon my silent saviour came back and slipped larger cushions under both elbows.

With cushions under my knees and elbows, it felt like a luxury car. I pushed my knees down and slowly managed a twenty-percent lotus. For about the next ten minutes or so.

Then the skies opened up. The rain lashed down on the dense foliage outside and on a corrugated roof nearby it sounded like the kettledrums of a hundred symphony orchestras gone berserk. The winds howled and the thunder was deafening. Even with my eyes closed, I could see the flashes of lightning. Through all of nature's fury outside, the calm inside was undisturbed. I opened my eyes and gingerly used both hands to stretch each leg, careful not to kick the monk in front. I stole a glance at Nic but he was still in stone. The little voice of capitulation, or common sense, urged me to leave. Eventually, when the circulation came back to my limbs, I got up and left the hall silently. Outside the rain was pounding the wooden stairs, bending the smaller branches and bushes. The flashes of lightning were like strobe lights in a Bangkok bordello. I love the monsoons and stood watching the rain for a long time.

Eventually Nic came out and taking a large umbrella from a nearby stand, we made our way back to the dormitory, our squishy flip flops splattering mud on to our pyjamas. After another shower and change of clothes, I opened my mattress, stretched my legs and massaged my knees. Tired and hungry, I asked about dinner but Nic reminded me that in this wat, the only meal was breakfast at around 7.00 am!

Famished and fatigued, I soon dropped off to sleep. Nic awakened me at about 4.00 am. I thought he was crazy but the others in the dormitory were up already. He explained that we were going to drive to a village about four km away for *taak baat*, the early morning ritual of alms-giving.

When we arrived at the village, we joined the locals in setting up trestle tables on one side of the narrow country road and laying out the food. There were Oreo chocolate biscuits, sponge cakes, dried banana chips, coconut sweets, sticky rice and a variety of other unhealthy snacks. No wonder I thought, monks in Thailand were having major health problems. Nic tasked me with handing out small tetrapaks of Lactasoy.

Soon the monks approached, single file, stopping at each person to collect an offering. I hastily dropped a tetrapak into each monk's aluminium bowl and managed to click a few pictures. When all the monks had their bowls filled, they chanted a prayer and walked away. We got into the car and raced back to the *wat*.



Wat Saket., Bangkok. © Photograph by Phra Nic.

We showered and went to the large refectory, waiting for the monks to come back with the food collected. Soon the hall was full with monks and lay people. As is the custom, many poorer locals were there for a free meal. The monks sat in one section, while the rest of us – the faithful, the free-loaders, Nic and me, occupied the other side of the room. Each of us grabbed an aluminium bowl and tablespoon and then sat on the floor, in two lines facing each other. In the space between, the food was passed along in mid-sized buckets. Nic advised me to fill up as there would be no food till the next morning. I have a small appetite, and despite the warning, took just an orange, a banana, and a boiled egg.

The rest of the day, we spent cleaning the temple grounds, which were in quite a mess after the previous evening's storm. Nic went back to meditate but my knees and back needed more rest. There were no restrictions on pilgrims chatting and when I needed a break from Nic, I read. That night I went to bed earlier than usual, to sleep off the approaching feelings of hunger. Outside, the deluge started again and I was awakened a couple of times by thunder and the incessant rain.

The next day was like the previous day; sweeping pathways and carrying away fallen branches. Every time, I took a reading break, I realised that my attitude wasn't in keeping with the spirit of selflessness, the others were displaying.

By the early evening my stomach started to touch my backbone. I asked Nic for some of the snacks stored in his car but he pleaded with me to resist the urge to eat. Fasting would enhance the wat experience, he said. By about 8.00 pm, the hunger pangs made me feel faint and I decided to go to bed. Then, as in the previous night, the heavy rain started again. It was impossible to sleep with the thunder and the noise of rain pounding the branches outside the window. Lying awake, increased my ravenousness.

Then an idea came to me. I went to the toilet and came back closely observing Nic. I heard the soft snore, then got up and went downstairs to his car. I gently pulled the handle of the backdoor. It didn't open but to the sound of the thunder and heavy rain was now added the screeching of Nic's car alarm. I didn't think twice. Racing upstairs, I slipped into bed and pulled the bed sheet over me.

For a while, all I could hear was the sound of the alarm rending the night. Eventually, I got up shook Nic and told him about the car alarm. He listened for a while and then went downstairs to check. By the time he returned, I had pulled the bed sheet over my head, adding a gentle snore for effect.

The following morning Nic negotiated the narrow road to the village, careful to avoid the slush on both sides. During the *taak baat*, I waited for the opportunity to slip a packet of biscuits into my pyjama pocket but imagined Nic keeping an eagle eye on me. My flip flops, caked in mud, added to my misery.

The intermittent rain of the last two days had left the hilly dirt road slushy and on the way back to the *wat* the tyres lost their grip and the car began sliding backwards. As it came to the edge of the road, fearing it would turn over on my side, I jumped out landing in a ditch. Nic swung the steering wheel around and managed to bring the car to a stop with the front wheels still on the road.

I was less worried about the car sliding down the hillside than missing breakfast. Luckily about a dozen local people came to help us. They put heavy branches, planks and bricks under the rear wheels and with great effort managed to heave the car back on the road.

The monks had heard of what had happened to us and breakfast was delayed. We hurriedly showered, changed into clean whites and went to eat. This time, I was not going to repeat yesterday's mistake. I piled my bowl with sticky rice, a chicken leg, cucumber, morning glory and chocolate biscuits. Over all this I poured some bamboo soup. The ice cream came around and I tossed two scoops over the soup. But the dessert, the soup, the vegetables and the now soggy biscuits made an unpalatable mix. It looked terrible and tasted worse. I retrieved a banana and left the rest.

By the late morning the weather had cleared and Nic and I sat in a clearing soaking up the sun. In the afternoon, his brother took us on a tour of the vast temple grounds. We walked up a narrow path until we came to a tiny solitary shack at the top of a hill. With a panoramic view of surrounding area, we sat on the ground and discussed Buddhist philosophy. Occasionally, we talked yoga and Ajarn Dang folded and twisted his body to explain certain *asanas*. I can swear his bones were made of plasticine. He made some comment and I realised that he had been the one who had slipped the cushions under my knees and elbows the first night at meditation. We were leaving the next morning and he asked me if I would like to spend the last night meditating alone in the hut. I declined the offer but would later regret it immensely.

The next morning, at the *taak baat* we emptied the car of all the remaining food. Later, at breakfast, I had just a ball of sticky rice and a banana knowing that by noon we would be in Udon Thani having a proper meal. After breakfast, we packed and went with Ajarn Dang to pay our respects to the chief abbot and leave a small donation.

That Sunday afternoon, we caught up with other friends in Udon for lunch. I ordered fried pork with basil and steamed lemon fish, two of my favourite dishes. But when the food came, the sight of the meat made me want to puke. I pushed away my plate, all hunger gone.

Back in Vientiane the next evening, I still hadn't eaten anything since breakfast in the wat. Incredibly, almost 36 hours later, I still wasn't hungry.

(A few years later, Nic gave up his business and became a monk. Today, he is known as Phra Nic.)



Wat Saket, Bangkok. © Photograph by Phra Nic.

Donna Mulvenna is the author the eco-memoir, *Wild Roots: Coming Alive in the French Amazon* (Stormbird Press), written from her home in French Guiana where she worked from a platform high in the rainforest canopy; and co-author of the forthcoming book *Shock and Awe: The Global Assault on Wildlife and Where to Find Hope*.

Rob Carney is a Professor of English and Literature at Utah Valley University, as well as a featured writer for [Terrain.org](https://terrain.org) and the author of eight books of poems, including *The Book of Sharks*, which was a finalist for the 2019 Washington State Book Award. Now, with *Accidental Gardens* (Parndana, South Australia: [Stormbird Press](https://stormbirdpress.com) 2020), he is also an author of creative-nonfiction. The 42 flash essays in this collection center on ideas about [place, the environment, politics, and poetics](#). I reached out to him by email to ask about the book, writing, and some of his environmental concerns.



DONNA MULVENNA

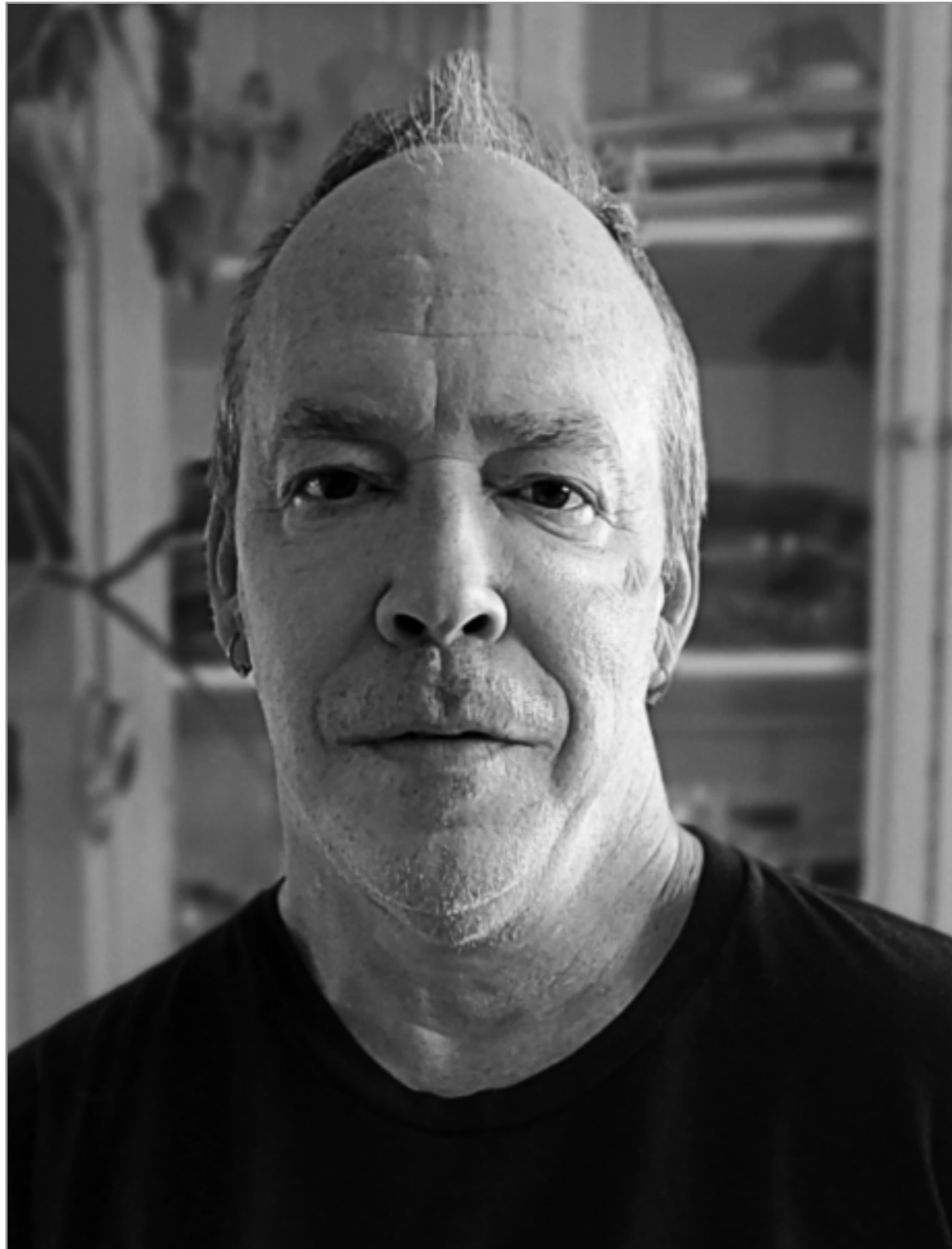
Stories Are a Bridge Between Worlds: An Interview with **Rob Carney**

DONNA MULVENNA: Tell me a bit about yourself. You live in Salt Lake City now, but where are you from originally?

ROB CARNEY: I'm originally from Washington state in the Pacific Northwest. I grew up on the west side of the Cascade Mountains, and which side of the mountains makes a difference. East of the Cascades, in the rain shadow, you've got the Columbia Basin and desert all the way to Spokane, and I did live in Spokane for four years, but really I'm from the rainy side: south of Seattle and a little ways east of Puget Sound: gray and wet, and evergreen trees, and Mt. Rainier owning the sky, and every kind of rain there could ever be, plus a lot of good fog. Sometimes people who weren't from Washington would get this confused look and ask, "Do you ever see the sun here?" and the answer was, "Yes, right as it's setting, and it drops below the overcast." Then a few minutes later, it would be night.

MULVENNA: Where did your love of books and reading and storytelling come from?

CARNEY: I'm glad you asked about that first—about reading and storytelling before writing—because they're not the same thing at all, at least not to me. I'd say it started with Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and also with two non-book places. One was hearing about sports and athletes on TV—yes, there was a heap of yammer-talk, but when the stories and details were good, they were great. And the other was the documentary narration that went along with Jacques Cousteau specials.



Rob Carney

There was a line I heard at a reading once by Bill Heyen, this American poet. I have to paraphrase, but there was a moment in one poem where he said something like “We were shoving frogs in our gas tanks.” How accurate and insane is that? He just cut out the middleman. If we had to stuff actual frogs in as a fuel source, then game over. Instead, we don’t, and so we don’t have to think about how oil is the problem; and plastic too, which is just oil presto-ed into a new form.

MULVENNA: And what about generally; what cultural value do you see in storytelling?

CARNEY: Hopefully lots, or else we’re sunk. Without books and storytelling there’s a void, and it’ll fill up with political noise, and meaningless buying, and reality TV. That’s probably been true across time, that’s the good news; like, Ancient Athens probably faced the same questions. They had their versions of the Cannes Film Festival and Academy Awards. And vice-versa: our own storytelling, twenty-two hundred years later, isn’t hugely different from the recipe Aristotle laid down in *The Poetics*. We’ve got more variety, of course (though then again, that’s hard to know for sure since the library at Alexandria burned down. Maybe the few plays that survived don’t give us the whole picture). What I *am* sure of is this: We’ve got a greater variety of writers. We’re hearing from people that history wouldn’t have let in the game. Even me; I probably would have had to be a shipwright or something, and who knows if I would’ve been any good at it or very satisfied? So yes, I think there’s cultural value and always has been, but there must have been some Ancient Greeks getting told, “Come on, there’s a new play by Sophocles,” but they would have rather just sat on the couch eating baklava.

To me, the question isn’t whether there’s value or not; it’s how do we reach an audience, and when we do, how do we captivate them for the length of time that we’re asking for their attention? One way, I think, is to work in short forms, which is what I’m doing in *Accidental Gardens*. Another is to remember that the facts don’t speak for themselves. Without pacing, without vivid language, without engaging ways of conveying them, the facts just sit there being boring or horrifying until people go numb. Numb people aren’t moved. And if they’re not moved, then there isn’t any change or empathy or action.

MULVENNA: I think so too, and that’s one of the guiding principles of your publisher, Stormbird Press: to focus on books that move people and move them toward environmental action. So, are there any specific environmental writers who you’re drawn to?

CARNEY: Farley Mowat—his book *Never Cry Wolf*—I think is great. I think anyone who shoots wolves or poisons them or wants to ought to be made to read that book, and then read it again. Another one that’s good, and more recent, is *A Wolf Called Romeo*. Nick Jans is the author of that one. And Robinson Jeffers—poems with honesty all the way down to their bones: “Carmel Point,” “The Purse Seine,” and maybe “Vulture” most of all.

CARNEY: (*contd...*) Nobody starts off thinking of vultures as angels and transcendent, but that’s what they become. I mean, Jeffers has to invent a new word, “enskymment,” to describe the feeling. And, of course, the news about our human stupidity all the time: putting animals, the Great Barrier Reef, and everything at risk. That kind of writing is important, and I learn things I’d never know otherwise, like warmer water in the northern oceans is causing the puffins to starve because their food source is silvery eels, and the water needs to be cold or else the number of eels falls to zero. And that’s just one example.

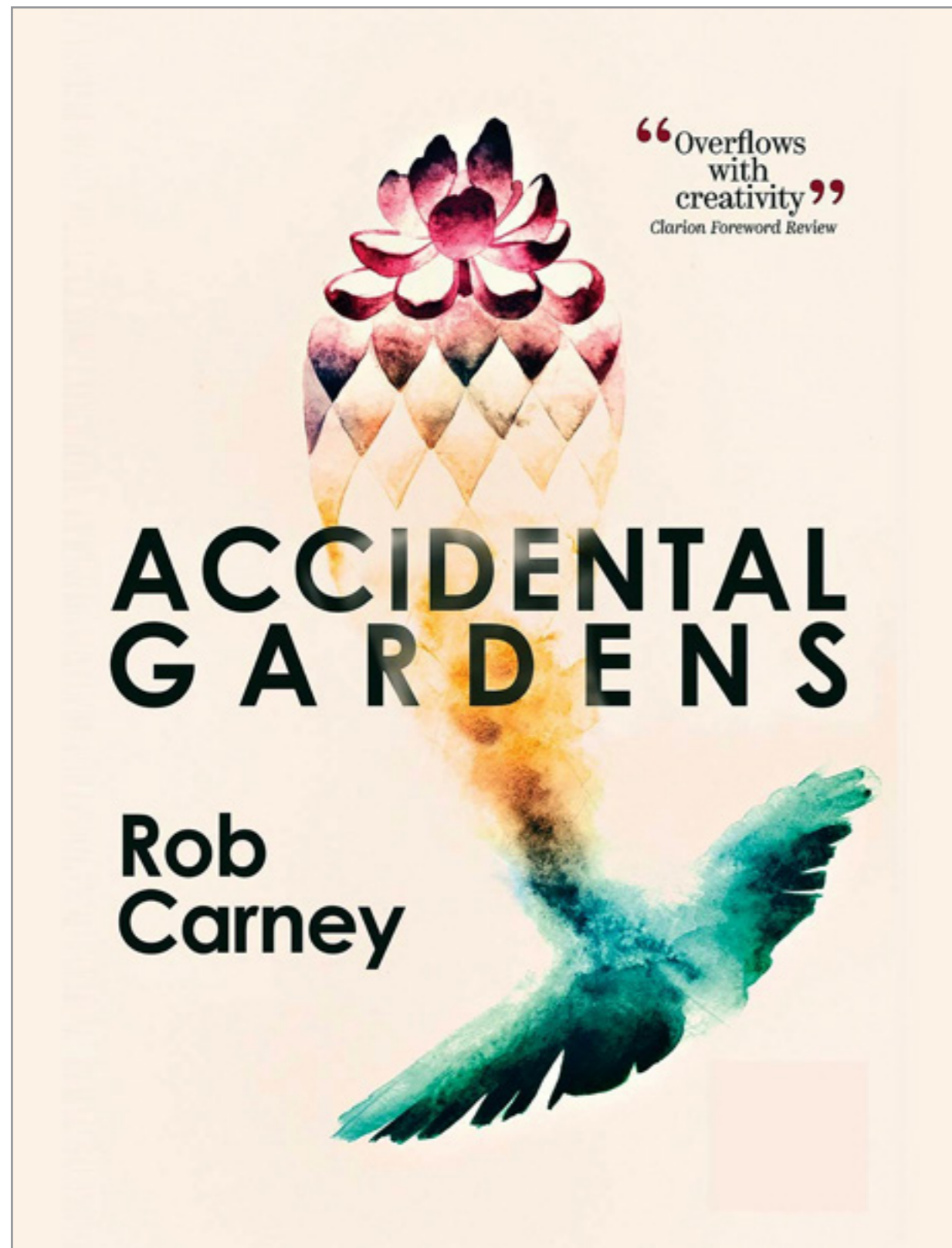
MULVENNA: Is there a particular environmental crisis that concerns you the most?

CARNEY: That’s hard because to choose one might seem like you’re not alarmed about the others just as much. Obviously, the wildfires are apocalyptic and a product of the climate changing, and drought, and no winter die-offs of bark beetles. I don’t have to tell Australia about wildfires and that everything’s causally connected (not “casually”; how weird that those two opposite words are spelled in almost the exact same way).

There was a line I heard at a reading once by Bill Heyen, this American poet. I have to paraphrase, but there was a moment in one poem where he said something like “We were shoving frogs in our gas tanks.” How accurate and insane is that? He just cut out the middleman. If we had to stuff actual frogs in as a fuel source, then game over. Instead, we don’t, and so we don’t have to think about how oil is the problem; and plastic too, which is just oil presto-ed into a new form.

But you asked about which concerns me most, and it’s the oceans and the sharks in them. The ocean is a whole different galaxy, and it’s right here on our planet. So, imagine one day humans actually succeed, and we get to deep space, and we even find life out there. And then we kill it. I think even the stupidest person alive would have to ask, *Why?*

MULVENNA: And how did you become involved in this new book exactly? You’ve mentioned the environment, but that isn’t your only focus, and your other books before *Accidental Gardens* have been poetry collections. There are poems in this one too, but mostly it’s prose, creative non-fiction, so why the jump?



Accidental Gardens by Rob Carney
published by <https://stormbirdpress.com/book/accidental-gardens/>

CARNEY: “Jump” sounds good and like a deliberate choice, but it was really more by accident, and unwillingly. What happened was that Simmons Buntin asked me to. He’s the Editor-in-Chief of *Terrain.org*. I’d won their poetry contest; then later we got to meet and hang out at this massive conference called AWP (Associated Writing Programs). Terrain was hosting an off-site reading in Pioneer Square—that’s one of the cool old neighborhoods in Seattle—specifically in the Yukon Gold Rush Museum, which was better than trying to holler my shark poems over crowd noise in a tavern. After the conference, he wrote and said that I should do a guest blog, but I told him no. I said I didn’t know what that meant or how to write one. He wrote back and said to do it anyway, so I did. And while I was waiting to hear if he liked it, I wrote another and sent him that one too. They weren’t “blogs,” but Simmons said he liked them both and that he’d call it a “literary series” (See what he did there? Crafty. He went from wanting one piece to assigning me an ongoing project).

Well, somehow that word-change clicked for me, taking “blog” out of the equation; plus, *Terrain*’s two focuses are place and *the built and natural environments*, so those were borders I could work along and away from and back to, like I had a map but also wide and wild permission because so many things can be thought of as built environments. I mean, they’re not just homes and cities, right? They’re also ceremonies, and poems, and vinyl LPs. Anyway, Simmons making me do this turned out to be a lucky gift. It’s the work I’ve revised and shaped and collected now into this book.

MULVENNA: So, you didn’t start out planning to write a book called *Accidental Gardens*, but when did that change?

CARNEY: After a couple years of writing “Old Roads, New Stories”—that’s the name of the series—I had, I guess, the ghost of the idea. It seemed like pretty soon I ought to start aiming at something more horizontal instead of having all these pieces in a stack. And then Andy Gottlieb—he’s a writer too, and a friend in the *Terrain* tribe—Andy sent me an email saying something like, “I hope you’re planning to put all these in a book.” And that made the ghost more solid.

Also, I couldn’t help thinking—hopefully not unreasonably—that maybe this could be like cousins with Richard Hugo’s book *The Triggering Town*. What I love about *The Triggering Town* is that it’s not a standard reference kit of rules and terms for writing. It’s not a How-To Manual at all; it’s a collection of narratives, some of them about writing and others about working at the Boeing plant in Renton, Washington; so maybe I can be thought of in that way too, as writing about the environment while also having essays of interest, even use, to people who want to write poems.

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I think the oral tradition is important. I mean, it's fine to be contemplative like the Japanese *haibun* form I'm borrowing from—a prose poem or sort of an interior monologue or travelogue or whatever, building to and then rounding off in a final *haiku*—but I see writing as more public than private, more about social engagement and social change instead of just a way of finding out what I think for my own self, if that makes sense.

CARNEY: (*contd...*) Oh, and the title: I took that from one of the essays. There's a line in "Trigonometry" that made sense to me for the whole book, a line about bears becoming these accidental gardeners. That just seemed to fit, you know, like the book is its own sort of accidental garden.

MULVENNA: Simmons sort of makes that comparison too and mentions Hugo in his introduction to your book, so maybe readers will make that connection. He also says that your essays are like a conversation between you and the reader, and that "what seeds these conversations" is your imagination and the tales you spin from "the real challenges of the day." Is that how you see it too, as a conversation with the reader?

CARNEY: Yes. Or at least I think so. I do imagine them as happening out loud and that there's an audience hearing them and hopefully reacting audibly and visibly, with body language or laughter or some sort of agreeing-type murmur. I think the oral tradition is important. I mean, it's fine to be contemplative like the Japanese *haibun* form I'm borrowing from—a prose poem or sort of an interior monologue or travelogue or whatever, building to and then rounding off in a final *haiku*—but I see writing as more public than private, more about social engagement and social change instead of just a way of finding out what I think for my own self, if that makes sense.

MULVENNA: It does, but as a follow up question: What do you think most characterizes your writing?

CARNEY: Voice. And my friend Jay has always said the same thing. We'd be hanging out somewhere—a lot of times at this diner called Jason's—or it would be me and Jay and our other friend Brian—and Jay would crack up at something I said and tell me, "Man, you need to write that down." I guess what it is, is sometimes I hit on interesting phrases, or some right description, I don't know. But I'd say the most characteristic thing is my voice.

MULVENNA: Any other projects you're working on now? Is there something I should be on the lookout for?

CARNEY: *The Last Tiger Is Somewhere* (Unsolicited Press 2020), a collection of poems by me and my friend Scott Poole, poems in reaction to the news, with a brief intro by me and brief afterword by him. That was new for me, working in collaboration. Plus, I have another new book of poems called *Call and Response* (Black Lawrence Press 2021).

CARNEY: And one other new thing is a children's book. They're not playful stories, though; they're about serious issues for kids, about hurt and loss due to divorce, or a parent dying, or being bullied and excluded. Counselor-talk can't help with those things as much as fables and the right illustrations can. Stories are a bridge between worlds, and they'll keep you company. Stories are the place where the only thing you have to do is to feel.



MARK ULYSEAS

IN THE MOMENT

In the moment, living cheek by jowl, with numerous numbing interactions induces one to lose oneself in a world of eternal stimuli - a castration of the mind that turns one into the personification of 'AI'. And in this nebulous world one exists willingly entangled in an incestuous web, unlike those that prefer to break free from the savage... a savage mesmerised by the allure of social media... to seek the meaning of the Self, its existence in the menagerie of everyday mindlessness.

In this seeking one changes perspectives, partners, clothes, and sometimes even country. This is good for such actions help peel away the layers of self-consciousness that wraps each of us in a self-imagined world.

But this is merely the first step.

Many years ago, on an *isle*, I had met people searching for the Self, eagerly consorting with the unknown or the forbidden in an attempt to reconcile with the all-pervading nothingness that gripped them. Alas, the intentions were right but the direction was directionless.

How could one tell them that 'direction' is not a physical plain, a tangible thing that represents an end in itself... but that it exists in a dimension of one's own making, where truth reigns supreme and love locks the doors to hatred and anger.

The sale of self-help books continues to rise. Perhaps this is a sign that we have taken a wrong turn even though our intentions are right. That we seek to find answers in the words of others, in the minds of others and in the directions of others, whilst, sadly, ignoring the elephant in the room... one's own soul that extrudes a yearning to be acknowledged for its own worth and seeking to be rejuvenated by revelation and not celebration in the physical world.

Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 227 publications (till October 2021). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*; *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/> <https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Ulyseas/e/B01FUUQVBG>



In a few months another year will dawn upon us by a time of our own making...the numbers created by us to regulate our lives, to bring coherence to the ebb and flow of life and death. The futility of this regulation is apparent in the growing numbers that refuse to be governed by a time of our own making.

It is heartening that the number of people attempting to break free from the tangibles of a physical world are growing every year. How wonderful this is for it gives us hope that someday we will all be free of the savage that resides within.

I shall leave you now with these words of André Gide from his book, *Fruits of the Earth* –

“Do you think that at this precise moment you can feel to the uttermost sensation of life in all its power, completeness, and immediacy, unless you forget all that is not life? The habits of your mind hamper you; you live in the past and the future, and you perceive nothing spontaneously. We only exist in the here and now; in this momentariness the whole past perishes before any of the future is born. Moments! You must realize the power of their presence. For each moment of our lives is essentially irreplaceable; you should learn to sink yourself in it utterly.”

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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