

Culture

In the past, the evolutions of the basic tenets of culture were determined by the natural environment. In the hot wet tropics, industrious behavior was counter-productive. Complexity decomposed long before its usefulness justified the effort. In the hot dry tropics, austerity was a necessity of survival. Much was durable, but there wasn't much. In the temperate regions, the moderate temperatures enabled heavy physical labor, decomposition was slower, and industriousness became profitable. In the far north, a sense of greater responsibility was necessary to get ready for winter and teamwork became unavoidable. Even the teamwork of man and dog was necessary for survival. As the human species spread across the planet, a wide variety of elaborate cultures evolved to meet the challenges of a multitude of different environments.

As the population density of humanity increased, local environments with the right combinations of topography, climate, resources, and energy developed from the intersection of trails, to the regular meeting places of material and cultural exchange. As our knowledge of the tools of harvest and storage increased, larger and larger concentrations of people became stationary in places with the most opportune sources of energy and resources where they began to create their own environment, eventually evolving into cities. As cities grew to their current size, hundreds of concentrations of millions of people gradually lost access to direct knowledge of the sources of their sustenance. The developing complexities of commerce and industry began to allow members of the community to live their lives in completely man-made environments, with little or no direct involvement in or knowledge of the sources of their food, shelter, transportation, and entertainment, the ways to enable and sustain them, and the consequences of doing so. In parts of some of the largest inner cities, the majority of children and an ever increasing number of adults can't even connect milk with a cow, a loaf of bread to a field of grain, or hot water with a gas well, an oil well, or a coal mine. Lacking the knowledge of the sources and consequences of their food, shelter, tools, and toys, they tend to make decisions in their daily lives that are not conducive to the survival of the human community.

As the industriousness that developed in the temperate regions allows the population to increase, and the complexity of machinery allows faster and longer travel and communication, many different cultures with their different perspectives of what's necessary for survival increasingly intermingle. The multitude of cultures that evolved in the vast complexity and variety of the natural world are rapidly being displaced by the uniform culture of cities and suburbia. Sustained by fossil energy, interacting through commerce and travel, merging though sex, protected from global war by the nuclear umbrella, and immersed in the World Wide Web, these many cultures are gradually compressing, homogenizing, and coalescing into a complex global culture. As the communication afforded by books, radio, telephone, television, and cyberspace envelopes the earth, the number of different languages in common

use, which dropped precipitously in the 20th Century, has stabilized, and English has emerged as the transcendent language of a transcendent global culture. A new age of humanity is evolving.

Access to knowledge is increasing exponentially, but so is access to misinformation, fiction, frivolous pursuits, and idle chatter. Currently, electronic communication is consuming a vast amount of human time and energy, and most of it is accomplishing nothing. We're lost in a world of dreams. Our new found access to information offers us the potential for lasting peace and prosperity if we can somehow regain the thirst for knowledge and the will to work that we've lost in this age of complexity and complacency, but will we wake up before our face hits the floor?