

The New Natural Selection

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We are living out a myth that has many similarities with that of Oedipus. We can see that we live in a sickened state of life. The realm deepens in its pathology each day, and yet we do not quite know what to do. We thrash about, but it seems only to make matters worse. Evils proliferate, needless suffering is on the increase, worse scenarios threaten beyond the horizon, and we ourselves agonize in the central role of the drama. It is not one thing that is wrong; it is everything. It is not a single situation that depresses us; it is the wide choice of disasters, cruelties, and poisons, the whole selfish disregard for all that is good. We stagger into the future tragically aware of our responsibility in all this as Americans, as Westerners, even as humans, but we remain so profoundly ignorant of what we might do to bring health to the whole.

Our central crime is precisely our failure to evolve into our larger role as earthlings. We have performed so mightily in our role as Americans, we have succeeded in our role as scientific Westerners. Even as humans—in the role of subduing, conquering, and controlling the environment—we have accomplished wonders. But we have failed as yet to evolve further into our role as human earthlings, and this lies behind our present pathological impasse. Our deep-seated arrogance toward the non-human components of the earth community has crippled evolutionary advance. The nuclear impasse stems from our delusion that territorial and ideological disputes qualify as issues for which the four billion year process of life can be sacrificed. The commercial-industrial impasse results from our delusion that consumer demands are reason enough to ruin any habitat, any community of life, even the very conditions from which life emerges and evolves on this planet. The sickness of the present situation will continue to escalate with ever more cruelty and suffering until we learn the fuller dimensions of our role within evolution's unfoldment. Oedipus could not move toward health until he discovered that he had unknowingly been violating his mother. We are only now realizing that we have been violating Mother Earth for centuries. The