

Cosmologies

Every people has had its own story about the human condition, its own particular pictures of the human position in relation to the universe, its own elaborate cosmology. We are all born into a story, and we all have our own pictures with which we navigate through this story. If we feel at home in our story we might actively co-create it as it unfolds. Or it might be difficult to synthesise all the pictures we carry in our many lives. Continue to run up against walls of pictures and eventually they will seize to retain much meaning. Someone else might have other, brighter pictures to show. Cosmologies also tell different stories about *the end*, what happens when life becomes death or the world ceases to be. We can learn a lot about a cosmology from its story of the end. In this respect there is another interesting aspect about our changing climate: the pictures we might have of an 'end' reveal something about ourselves. The picture of climate change is so powerful we can actually imagine an end to civilisation as we know it (although we might choose not to think of it). And it is becoming increasingly easy to imagine as we receive pictures of evacuated islanders, melting glaciers, and extreme weather events.

It is easy to imagine that this change in our world is happening *to us*. What have we to do with floods in South East Asia or the poleward migration of plants and animals? Climate is, in a very physical way, 'out there' while we are sitting in here (except when it is our own living rooms that are being flooded). The discourse we have inherited in the Western world says that we are individuals who are subject to an external reality (an interesting division of the world, which I am sure we will encounter later in our discussion). One aspect of this picture of a picture is that, collectively, culture exists in and against nature. This is inherent in much of our thought, it permeates the politician's speech, the economist's analysis and the journalist's news. 'In here', in our economies and political systems, we can only do our best to formulate mitigating policies and provide economic incentives to develop 'green' technology. Another division is the national boundaries beyond which we have little hope of reaching anyone. These pictures of pictures ignores the fact that 'being' comes before 'being this or that', that *we are one*, and that divisions, social or geographical, are always abstract before they become real. Global warming, regional and global, is a result of the way we humans organise our lives, changing the use of land, cutting down the forests, using polluting technology, and consuming energy on a planetary scale. We need to move past the pictures of our world as essentially separate if we want to understand our place in it. And understanding is acting.

What is my place in the world? In what kind of cosmology do I live? Using the thirty year time span suggested by the World Meteorological Organisation as a measure of climate change to assess our psychological climate, we might begin to answer these questions. Thirty years is too short an interval to assess developments in climate in the long term, and this preliminary survey will offer nothing but a background against which to understand the present meteorological debate. A thirty year interval has the further advantage of being a time span of which the writer has first hand experience – and it will thus reflect his vantage point. A complete study of the development of our collective lives is, of course, impossible, and these pages offer nothing but an outline of a story in which the reader can fill out the gaps herself.

It is tempting to reproduce the discourse which conceptualises the world in terms of separate spheres of society: our social conditions, politics, economics, scientific advance and our psychological well-being fall under the domain of different specialists with different expertises. This observation may itself provide the background we need to understand our present. *Specialisation* is evident at all levels of society, from medical health to philosophy. This is an expression of societies becoming increasingly complex in our efforts to facilitate economic 'growth', encourage social 'development', and increase scientific 'advance'. (I

put these words in inverted commas because they are pictures of pictures which exert a very strong influence on our world view, and we must therefore treat them with care.) They are interlinked and they all associate with another powerful picture, that of *linearity of time*. We conceptualise the present as resulting from the past in a forward motion, much like an icebreaker ploughing through the frozen sea. From this picture it is only a small step to the picture that everything gets 'better' (or 'worse') with time, and this strong sense of direction is present in much of our current discourse. This picture of time is engrained in much of our thinking and it reaches back in time to the age of the Enlightenment (at least). Here it will provide a background to understanding our 30-year survey. Specialisation in complex society entails increasing fragmentation of our knowledge base, and we depend on experts to interpret our various problems for us.

Specialisation is observable in all of the spheres mentioned above. It is likely to be part of a longer process, but in line with the criterion of our survey we will take a perspective of thirty years. This survey in no way pretends to present a complete picture of the interval described, it is merely an outline of the continuing story in which the current debate on climate change takes place; a background which will hopefully prove useful in our attempt to understand the present climate. It will hence deal with some of the historical pictures in which we often reflect ourselves.