

ASK A DIFFERENT QUESTION



To participate in the co-creation of a new world,  
ask a different question, form another hypothesis.

*People see and hear the things they pay attention to, and they pay attention to the things they know and love. Because our guide had lived all his life with those animals and loved them, his attention was naturally drawn to them.*

*Compassionate Universe: The Power of the Individual to Heal the Environment*  
Eknath Easwaran

*A leader dedicated to transformation change does not become faint-hearted in the midst of breakdown or resignation. The more we divorce ourselves from the land and the animals, the more separated from ourselves and the basic truths of our lives we become. It is impossible to deny the correlation, in our modern world, between how increasingly out of touch we are from our food sources and our ability to ignore and even abuse the health of the planet that supports us. Not only does it lead to personal and environmental health problems, it may well be the cause of much societal dysfunction. When we lose all perspective on our responsibility to the future, we lose touch with age-old wisdom, with the lessons drawn from a close connection with nature.*

*Horse and the Mystical Path: The Celtic Way of Expanding The Human Soul*  
Adele von Rust McCormick, PhD,  
Marlena Deborah McCormick, PhD  
Thomas E. McCormick, MD

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*Beyond this thick fog of conditioning lies a universe ruled not by competition and division but by symbiosis and cooperation, a universe built on interrelationships. The science of ecology teaches us that everything in the universe is connected.*

*We cannot separate ourselves from the consequences of even the least of our actions: whatever we do here comes back there. This is the law of the unity of life.... if you act in a way that violates the unity of life – polluting the atmosphere, wasting precious resources, ignoring the needs of others – you will find your health, your peace of mind, and your happiness destroyed. We are not separate fragments. Like the songbird, and all the other animals and plants that are part of the rain forest, we depend on each other and on the environment.*

*Compassionate Universe: The Power of the Individual to Heal the Environment*

Ekknath Easwaran

*The most important thing we do as consultants is inquiry. We try to read the situations; we do organizational analysis and diagnosis. It all starts with inquiry. The key point is that the way we know is fateful. The questions we ask, things that we choose to focus on, the topics we choose determine what we might find. What we find becomes the data and the story out of which we dialogue about and envision the future. And so the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask. Inquiry is intervention.*

*Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: The First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change*

David L. Cooperrider

Ekknath Easwaran teaches us in this article that we in our western civilization may have been in the wrong inquiry based on erroneous assumptions. We may want to abandon profit for profit's sake as our main daily inquiry. We may want to dip back into seeking inquiry into the pools of our deeper identity—those that remind us of our inner connectivity with all life. Ekknath Easwaran helps us see that we may want to be in inquiry about our relationship with the animals, the environment and our giving practices. He lets us know that collectively we bear the responsibility for industries, fields, careers and professionals that we esteem and grant prestige. We, in our valuation of them, are accountable in part for their faulty premises at the expense of our universal community. Attention to accountability, a new inquiry and a new hypothesis can turn our global future around. “We have an alternative: a different hypothesis of who we are and how we fit into the universe,” Ekknath Easwaran tells us.

**CHAPTER THREE/SCIENCE WITHOUT HUMANITY  
THE HYPOTHESIS**

*The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way.*

*William Blake*

**THE INSTRUMENT OF OBSERVATION**

In comprehending the universe, according to the Gita, our primary instrument of observation is the mind. More than telescopes and microscopes—more even than our eyes and ears—our mind, gathering data through the senses and developing an interpretation of them, plays the central role in deciding what our universe looks like.

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This is a rather abstract idea, so let me illustrate with a little story from my childhood. When I was growing up, the scouting movement had just come to India, and my friends and I all joined. We were much like Boy Scouts everywhere, I suppose—except that we wore green turbans in place of caps, and our expeditions took us to the tropical rain forest a few miles from our village.

For these expeditions, our scoutmaster would hire a certain local forester to be our guide. He was a great favorite with us. Although he had never learned to read or write, this man had spent his entire life in the forest and knew its every path and stream and watering hole. What fascinated us most about him was his intimate knowledge of the animals that lived there. He would talk for hours about deer and elephants as if they were members of his own family.

On one of these trips, when we had followed him about a mile into the forest, we stopped at the edge of a stream. He whispered to us, “Now listen carefully, with all your concentration. Don’t be deceived by the rustling of leaves and the murmur of the brook. Something is coming this way. Can you hear?” We all strained our ears without result. After a few moments he told us, “A herd of deer is heading toward this very spot.”

We laughed, but he went on to describe how many deer there were, how fast they were coming, and from which direction. Ten minutes later they appeared, cautiously making their way past us, exactly as he had described them.

Then he said, “Do you hear anyone drinking water?” We listened harder this time, but we still couldn’t pick up a thing. “Just past those trees over there,” he said, “about twenty wild elephants are drinking water and playing.” Still not quite convinced, we followed him into a clearing. A few hundred yards away we saw a sight I shall never forget: in a large watering hole, several families of elephants were drinking water, washing, spraying, and playing like children. Fascinated, we all sat down and watched for a long time.

Finally, as the sun was beginning to set, our guide turned to us with a grin and said he had one more thing to show us—something that would top all his other feats. “Just listen to this. I can imitate the mating call of the tiger! One call, and all the tigers in the forest will be here in a minute.” At that point we felt we had seen enough of his abilities. The scoutmaster, who was probably remembering that he would have to face our parents back in the village, said, “I think it’s time for us to be starting back. The boys are getting hungry . . .”

Why couldn’t we hear the deer or the elephants? We were all young and in good health, and there was nothing wrong with our ears. Surely those sounds had registered on our eardrums; yet we had heard nothing.

According to the Gita, the lack was not in the capacity of our ears but in our minds. People see and hear the things they pay attention to, and they pay attention to the things they know and love. Because our guide had lived all his life with those animals and loved them, his attention was naturally drawn to them. Amid the thousands of sounds that surrounded us—the birds calling, the wind blowing, the cicadas chirping, the monkeys chattering, the leaves and branches falling—he could hear the sound of a deer’s delicate hoof picking its way through the underbrush, or the strange hollow sound of an elephant’s trunk sucking up water.

As I continued to follow the Gita’s suggestions and acquired a little more conscious control over my thinking, I began to suspect that most of the industrial era’s problems arise because of where we are fixing our attention. For us, trying to see

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compassion in the world around us is as difficult as it was for me to hear the sound of the deer. Somehow, we have become so attuned to the sound and sight of profit that we can spot it anywhere, but we find it hard to recognize things like cooperation or compassion—even when they are awakening in our own hearts.

The trouble lies in our mental habits. The mind, our instrument of observation, is deeply influenced by the compulsive habits and addictions that characterize so much of modern life. Comparing the mind to a camera, you could say that these habits skew the focus, alter the depth of field, and in general do all they can to make us see not what is really there but what the mind wants us to see. And what it wants us to see is the profit or momentary gratification it is interested in, whether it is a pastry or a sports car, a promotion or a dividend. When our attention is glued to these things, we see only the fragmented, turbulent surface of life, not the vast, interconnected web of relationships supporting that surface.

A profit-seeking mind rarely misses an opportunity for profit or convenience, but it misses opportunities for cooperation and communication by the millions. To such a mind, a forest is not a home for deer and elephants—it is real estate. In the words of William Blake, “The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way.”

When we are absorbed in the pursuit of profit, we live in the narrow world of the bottom line. In that world, our only neighbors are buyers and sellers, our only concerns property, profit, and possessions. Yet all around us is a world teeming with people, animals, organisms, and elements—a deeply interconnected environment that responds to all we do to it. The world seems hostile and lifeless, and we seem insignificant in it, because, like the elephant, we look at it through such tiny eyes. Through those small eyes, shrunken by the desire for profit and personal gratification, we appear just as insignificant as all the green things—and all the other human beings, animals, fish, birds, and insects—that stand in the way.

Around the world, rain forests like the one near my village are host to roughly half the earth’s plant, insect, and animal species. Through sixty-five million years of uninterrupted evolution, untouched by the climatic changes of the ice ages, rain forests have developed a complex system of interrelationships in which each species depends on the existence and activities of many others. In these relationships between animals and environment, animals and plants, animals and other animals, biologists have found abundant evidence of nature’s thrift and compassion.

Everywhere, she exhibits the timing and delicate understanding of an artist, using endless creativity to provide a home and food for every creature, no matter how big or small. In the rain forest, as everywhere in nature, researchers have found that competition—“the law of the jungle”—is not nearly so important as the countless processes by which nature avoids competition. Here is the ecologist Paul Colinvaux:

*Whenever we find rather similar animals living together in the wild, we do not think of competition by tooth and claw, we ask ourselves, instead, how competition is avoided. When we find many animals apparently sharing a food supply, we do not talk of struggles for survival; we watch to see by what trick the animals manage to be peaceful in their coexistence.*

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And even among the trees and flowers, notes plant physiologist Frits Went, cooperation is the keynote:

*There is no violent struggle between plants, no warlike mutual killing, but a harmonious development on a share-and-share basis. The cooperative principle is stronger than the competitive one. . . . The forest giants among the trees do not kill the small fry under them. They hold back their development, and they prevent further germination. In a mountain forest in Java it was observed that the small trees living in the shade of the forest giants had not grown after 40 years, but they were still alive.*

We have also learned a great deal about nature's innate thriftiness from the rain forest. Its richness and diversity are not due to the quality of its topsoil, which is usually quite poor, but to the extraordinary interaction of millions of different species, as they recycle water, nutrients, and minerals, and ensure that every resource is preserved and reused endlessly.

Finally, the forests have provided us with tantalizing glimpses of nature's compassion; one of my favorites is an observation by the researcher Jean-Pierre Hallet. Hallet was studying elephants in the Belgian Congo when he noticed an elephant that had lost its trunk, probably through some injury. Hallet was intrigued by the animal's svelte, well-fed appearance—without a trunk, an elephant has no tool for foraging. He followed the elephant and his herd into the forest. When the group finally settled down to browse for food, the mystery was solved: as the trunkless elephant stood by, the rest of the herd industriously tore off leaves and twigs for him. One at a time they brought bundles of food, playfully competing for the right to feed him. Not one of the elephants ate until their trunkless companion had eaten his fill.

Though we seldom realize it, we too are part of the tropical rain forest. Even if we live thousands of miles from the nearest tropical zone, our lives are connected to the rain forest by many invisible links.

One of those links is the vital role that tropical plants play in modern medicine; a fourth of all our medicines are derived from them. Indeed, for thousands of years forests have been recognized as a great resource for healing. A significant story is told about one of the greatest figures in the history of medicine, the physician Jivaka, who is said to have served as the Buddha's personal physician. Before graduating from the ancient Indian equivalent of Harvard Medical School, Jivaka and his classmates were given a final examination. Each was handed a basket and sent into the forest to bring back any herbs or plants that had no medicinal use. All the other interns brought back armfuls of flowers and leaves, but Jivaka returned empty-handed. When he came before his surprised teacher, he explained: "We may not know it yet, but there is a use for every tree, herb, plant, and flower in the forest."

Twenty-five hundred years later, we still know little about the mysterious, promising world of the rain forest—but what we do know is astonishing. After testing less than one tenth of the species present, biologists have found that at least fourteen hundred tropical plant species contain substances active against cancer; and they suspect that rain forests may contain many plants with the potential to treat still-unconquered diseases, like AIDS.

Undoubtedly, many more generations of scientists could spend their lives exploring the rain forests and we would still know only a fraction. Edward O. Wilson, the noted Harvard biologist, estimates that it would require 25,000 researchers just to document the unknown species. Yet it is no longer certain that those generations—the scientists and doctors our children will grow up to be—will have that chance.

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When I returned by train to my village many years after leaving for college, I passed through the area my fellow Scouts and I used to explore. I kept looking for the old, familiar landmarks—the spot where the forester lived; the stretch of forest where the elephants bathed and all those birds, insects, and flowers flourished. They were all gone. In their place stood miles and miles of factories, slums of all kinds, and the urban sprawl that has become synonymous with the word “progress.”

This is a tragedy which has become commonplace in tropical countries around the globe. Each day, the world loses more than seventy-six thousand acres of tropical rain forest—that is over twenty-seven million acres each year. Much of the cleared land is used to raise cattle for beef or to support short-term agriculture, both of which quickly exhaust the already-poor soil. Ranchers and farmers then move on to cut and burn more acreage. With each acre, they burn not only trees but the myriad species of insects, birds, plants, and animals that have lived and evolved on that spot for sixty-five million years. As these species disappear into extinction, so do many of the indigenous peoples who have made their modest, harmonious homes in these tropical forests.

For a long time we have assumed that such problems were the responsibility of other governments and other people, but now ecologists tell us that wherever we live, they are our problems. Atmospheric scientists suspect that the loss of so much rain forest will dramatically disrupt the world’s weather patterns. Already, in my native state of Kerala, some of the monsoon rains that made my state so prosperous are falling into the sea—probably because of weather changes caused by deforestation. And in our own hemisphere, a small but poignant indicator of our link with the rain forests has recently appeared as scientists have discovered that the population of songbirds on the East Coast of the United States has begun to decrease. One of the suspected reasons: these warblers, orioles, and other songbirds need the Central and South American rain forests as a winter home, and much of it has disappeared.

But worst of all, at least as far as human beings are concerned, is the fact that the burning of tropical rain forests is responsible for about twenty percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon dioxide is chief among the gases that create the “green-house effect,” the dangerous buildup of heat-trapping gases in the Earth’s atmosphere. Due to the burning of fossil fuels and rain forest, the greenhouse effect may raise the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere by between three and nine degrees Fahrenheit over the next sixty years.

That may not seem like much, but the effects on our environment—the environment our children will live in sixty years from now—could be devastating. It could turn our richest farmland into desert. By melting the polar ice caps, it could raise the world’s sea level and flood whole cities. And such a rise in the earth’s temperature could decimate or destroy our own forests, which could not survive such a rapid temperature change.

So we are part of the rain forest—but not just because its destruction affects us. The way we live also affects its survival: a great deal of the destruction in Central and South America is due to clear-cutting by wealthy landowners and multinational corporations eager to cash in on the developed world’s appetite for beef; in Southeast Asia, there is money to be made exporting timber to Japan; in the Caribbean, forests are being decimated to create tourist centers. To a great extent, it is the appetites and addictions of industrial society which are destroying one of our greatest evolutionary resources.

Yet, in the Gita’s compassionate perspective, the problem is not us, but the conditioning which has limited our instrument of observation. When we are in the grip of an addiction—to profit, to convenience, to our cars—we see only what

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contributes to resolving our immediate problem: how to make more money, how to produce more energy, how to save a little time. This conditioning restricts our vision to the object of our desire, be it a hamburger or a trip to the mall or a quarterly profit, while the long-range consequences are ignored, left for another day, another nation, another generation to cope with. We may dimly perceive the broader implications, but under the pressure of time and competition, we don't have a chance to think them out.

Beyond this thick fog of conditioning lies a universe ruled not by competition and division but by symbiosis and cooperation, a universe built on interrelationships. The science of ecology teaches us that everything in the universe is connected. We cannot separate ourselves from the consequences of even the least of our actions: whatever we do here comes back there. This is the law of the unity of life. Like gravity or any other law of nature, you cannot break it; you can only break yourself against it. If you throw a bottle in the air, it will return to earth and break. Similarly, if you act in a way that violates the unity of life—polluting the atmosphere, wasting precious resources, ignoring the needs of others—you will find your health, your peace of mind, and your happiness destroyed. We are not separate fragments. Like the songbird, and all the other animals and plants that are part of the rain forest, we depend on each other and on the environment.

“In ecology, as in economics,” wrote Barry Commoner in the early seventies, . . . “every gain is won at some cost. . . . Because the global ecosystem is a connected whole, in which nothing can be gained or lost and which is not subject to over-all improvement, anything extracted from it by human effort must be replaced. Payment of this price cannot be avoided; it can only be delayed. The present environmental crisis is a warning that we have delayed nearly too long.”

A statement like this reminds me of those signs you see on the freeway: “Go back. You're going the wrong way.” Biologists and ecologists like Dr. Commoner have played an important part in examining the dangers of our present way of life and posting such warning signs. Our industrial way of life, they tell us, has made our Mother Earth sick; the global warming is a terrible fever that will ravage her health if we do not change our ways of driving, buying, eating, and living.

During the next few decades, I believe, scientists will be instrumental in showing us the connections between our daily lives and the environment, in helping us find noninvasive, nonpolluting alternative energy sources, and in exploring and defending the world's great resources, such as the tropical forests. We need good science more than ever. As John Eddy of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research puts it “We've got to get the planet into intensive care, [and] start to monitor its vital signs.”

Many young scientists are eager to work on such projects, yet they find it difficult to obtain the financial and institutional support they need to carry on their work. Instead, a great deal of this precious support goes to projects that at best do nothing to serve humanity or the rest of life, and at worst have the potential to destroy our world even before the greenhouse effect can touch us.

Around the world, roughly a quarter of all research and development funds goes to the science of war.

***SCIENCE WITHOUT HUMANITY***

Where are we going with our science and our business, our politics and our economic theories? What do we really want to accomplish, and why? How will our innovations affect life as a whole? These questions should be posted not only on the

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doors to our boardrooms and laboratories but on the doors to our minds and hearts. Wernher von Braun said, "If you know the laws of space and obey them, space will treat you kindly." So it is with the law of the unity of life. We have invested much time and energy exploring the physical laws of nature and inventing ingenious applications of them, but we have taken little time to consider in what direction those applications will take us. This long-term perspective is the vital foundation our science and business lack today. Without an ever-alert conscience steering us toward constructive, positive research and sounding an alarm each time we waver in our respect for life as a whole, we are in grave danger of being swept off our feet by forces we only dimly perceive.

The Manhattan Project is a sobering example of the very best of science serving the motivations that drive men to war, with unimaginably destructive consequences. Errors like this do not occur because science is destructive or scientists are evil, but because we have limited our investigations to just half the things we need for health and peace: we study how to remake the world, but not how to remake ourselves. The result is what Gandhi calls science without humanity.

Let me make it clear that the science I am referring to is not just what is done in laboratories by people in white coats. It is the responsibility of each one of us. In the first place, it is we, with our votes and our purchases, who decide which projects are funded and which are not, which corporations are successful and which are not. If we wanted to, we could tell the Pentagon, as some young people have suggested: "We think you presently have quite enough destructive technology. If you want more, have a bake sale."

But second, and even more important, we are all technicians. Technology shapes our lives in a thousand subtle ways, and we in turn affect our world with the machines technology gives us. Today the average person in the developed world owns dozens of machines that consume energy, emit gases, discharge effluents, and release chemical wastes the likes of which nature has never seen.

You might think of the average household as a microlaboratory; together with millions of other scientists in similar microlaboratories, we are conducting a large-scale experiment on ourselves and our world. The hypothesis? By the constant and universal application of technology, we can improve the quality of our lives; by producing and consuming more and more things, we can find inner fulfillment.

It is a tribute to the energy and drive of modern society that so many people are working around the clock to test this hypothesis. Unfortunately, as the data come in, there are indications that the hypothesis is faulty. We have never had more cars and machines to "save time," but we have also never had to spend two to three hours a day commuting in a car filled with toxic fumes. We have never before had such excellent medical equipment, but neither have we had such pollution to endanger our health. We have never before had nuclear power. We have never before had nuclear accidents.

What do we really want to accomplish with our technology and business, and why? How will our innovations affect life as a whole? If we were careful to ask these questions every time we embarked on a project, we would find that we always have a choice between two kinds of science. I read recently of a vivid example of these two sciences, personified in two scientists: each talented and capable, but each leaving us a vastly different legacy.

The first is Thomas Midgley, who in 1930 was asked by the Frigidaire division of General Motors to find something to replace the toxic ammonia being used in refrigerators. Midgley came up with one of commercial science's biggest success stories: chlorofluorocarbons, now commonly known as CFCs.



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Midgley's chemical compound was welcomed as a miracle. Soon similar substances were being used widely in industry as aerosol propellants and refrigerants. I understand that today, three fourths of the food consumed in this country is cooled by chlorofluorocarbons. We depend on them for air-conditioning, as solvents in the electronics industry, as an ingredient in fumigants and pesticides, and in the ubiquitous plastic foams we use for insulation, cushions, egg cartons, fast food containers, and padded dashboards in cars.

By 1973, in the United States alone, eight hundred and fifty million pounds of CFCs were being produced annually. That was the year when a second scientist, Sherwood Rowland, began investigating how CFCs behave in the atmosphere. Until then, little was known about the effects of CFCs. By June of 1974, Rowland, along with Mario Molina of Berkeley, had published a paper in Nature magazine. They had made a momentous discovery, but, as Rowland says, "There was no moment when I yelled 'Eureka!' I just came home one night and told my wife, 'The work is going very well, but it looks like the end of the world.' "

By now, what they had discovered is common knowledge. CFCs are extremely hardy substances—some compounds remain in the lower atmosphere for seventy-five to one hundred and twenty years. Slowly, as more and more are released, they drift upward ten to twenty miles above the earth, where they break down under ultraviolet radiation and release chlorine atoms, each of which can destroy up to a hundred thousand ozone molecules before it eventually falls back to earth. The most dramatic demonstration of the damage CFCs have done is the huge hole in the ozone layer—roughly the size of the continental United States—that has begun to appear each fall above the Antarctic.

This phenomenon may seem rather distant, but its effects are not. Because our ecosystem depends so much on cooperation and interdependence, a change like this, even high above the earth, has the capacity to wreak havoc with all of life—to become, in Tennyson's phrase, "the little rift within the lute that by and by will make the music mute, and ever widening slowly silence all."

The ozone layer, produced by the interaction of sunlight and oxygen molecules, shields us from a great deal of the sun's ultraviolet radiation—radiation that, if not blocked, can do terrible damage to life on earth. Skin cancer is the most immediate and obvious hazard to human beings, but excessive ultraviolet radiation can also lead to cataracts and, as some researchers have speculated, may cause severe damage to the body's immune system.

But these are only the immediate threats, and humans are not the only living creatures to be affected. All forms of life depend on the delicate balance of light and radiation provided by the ozone layer. Over thousands of centuries, the earth's ecosystem has evolved a network of interactions and adaptive mechanisms perfectly suited to this balance. A sudden change, such as a dramatic rise in ultraviolet radiation, might endanger the entire system. If we do not act quickly to curb the use of CFCs, it is hard to predict or even imagine the effect on our agriculture, or on the marine food chain, or on the billions of acres of forest that stabilize our climate.

So we see two scientists, Midgley and Rowland, both excellent at what they do and both sincerely following their profession. I do not doubt that the late Mr. Midgley believed he was making a positive contribution to the world. Yet the success of Midgley's research has helped make the earth a much more dangerous place, while Rowland's success has alerted us to that danger and given us a chance to save the earth for our children.

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Although we are rarely aware of it, we have a choice: will we invent new chemicals designed solely to produce a profit—under the pressure of competition with other countries, manufacturers, or scientists, and barely considering their possible side effects—or will we do research that respects the organic processes of nature and contributes to life as a whole? Will we apply our genius to developing X-ray laser missile “defenses” or to defending the immune systems of the world’s children? Until we train our minds to be relatively free from addiction to profit, power, and individual self-gratification, we will always waver as we do today: one moment contributing things and ideas of value, the next doing irreparable harm to ourselves and others.

Let me repeat: I am not speaking only to those who pursue science as a profession. We all bear responsibility for the accomplishments of science, since we all support it—financially, with our purchases and taxes, and in our mental habits, where we depend on technology for profit, prestige, and convenience. We are the ones who are responsible for deforestation, global warming, and depletion of the ozone layer, but if we do not make the necessary changes, it will be our children and grandchildren who face the consequences.

The atmospheric scientist Michael Oppenheimer puts it with the frankness I have come to appreciate in Americans: “We’re flying blind into a highly uncertain future. These changes are going to affect every human being and every ecosystem on the face of the earth, and we only have a glimmer of what these changes will be. The atmosphere is supposed to do two things for us: maintain a constant chemical climate of oxygen, nitrogen and water vapor, and help maintain the radiation balance—for example, by keeping out excess ultraviolet. The unthinkable is that we’re distorting this atmospheric balance. We’re shifting the chemical balance so that we have more poisons in the atmosphere—ozone and acid rain on ground level—while we’re also changing the thermal climate of the earth through the greenhouse effect and—get this—simultaneously causing destruction of our primary filter of ultraviolet light. It’s incredible. Talk about the national-debt crisis—we’re piling up debts in the atmosphere, and the piper will want to be paid.

***AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS***

When we begin to study a phenomenon, we do not actually know what we are studying. In order to learn more about it, we formulate an hypothesis. It is important to keep in mind, however, that until we thoroughly test our hypothesis, and compare the results of our experiments with its predictions, we are not on solid ground. Of course, where there are gaps in our knowledge we must have an hypothesis, but we must also test that hypothesis—rigorously and with an uncompromising regard for the truth. Where the hypothesis is inaccurate, we must do more research.

The hypothesis of industrial civilization was that by acquiring and consuming more things we would become happy, fulfilled, and healthy. Every day this seems less likely. As I look back, I wonder how I could ever have been taken in by the belief that each of us is a separate speck in a universe of insignificant, competing fragments. There is so little to recommend this view; yet I, like almost everyone else influenced by industrial conditioning, had unquestioningly based my life on it. Now it is clear to me that this assumption, which has been presented with authority as the truth, the fruit of centuries of scientific investigation, is only an hypothesis.

We have an alternative: a different hypothesis of who we are and how we fit into the universe. This different image of the human being and the world, which I shall present in the second and third sections of this book, does not contradict the findings of science. It simply asks that we carry our investigations further, into the deeper sources of our actions. Up to

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now, we have learned well how to serve our addiction to profit, but we have not learned how to serve our long-range health and well-being. We have not learned who we are or why we are here. We have unnecessarily limited our science—and ourselves.

The hypothesis of a compassionate universe is not new, nor is the investigation I am proposing. It has been suggested before, at many times, in many places, and by many great and eloquent voices. What is different now is our unprecedented opportunity to test it in every aspect of life. Indeed, as the only creatures on earth who have the power—and, it sometimes seems, the inclination—to bring life on this planet to an end, it is our responsibility to test the hypothesis as it has never been tested before. The choice is ours. It can only be made by each of us, one at a time, one day at a time, but the results will shape the lives of our children and our children's children for centuries to come. Our choice, I hope, will ensure that those centuries will come in peace and harmony and those children will flourish.



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