

The Control Illusion

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Focus on “being in control” is an illusion that feeds the ego at the cost of well-being and effectiveness. Although it is a big jump, it seems this illusion is seminal in the psyche of the Human species and permeates current attempts by those with authority to resolve the big issues facing our world today.

In my late-seventies I took advantage of more time to contemplate and explore my life journey thus far. What had shaped my character, to what degree had I played it safe, and in other instances successfully engaged with new ventures? This curiosity had me become more conscious at both an individual and communal level and allowed a new connection and an at-oneness with the world around me.

Then, a year ago my wife Maggie and I decided that we would sell our home which we had lived in for 25 years and downsize to a smaller residence which would be easier to manage as we grew, God willing, into our eighties and nineties. In no way did we envisage this as a winding down but rather, a whole new exciting phase in our life together.

What followed was probably the most stressful, unhappy experience of our lives. We had found a buyer and a seller for our wonderful 25-year home within six weeks and were full of pride and confidence that we would soon be settled in. One year later we are back in our old house, lost the new house we wanted, lost several thousand pounds, and felt naive, stupid, angry and sad.

What did we learn?

Jiddu Krishnamurti and David Bohm in their extraordinary dialogue, “The Ending of Time”¹ asked the question, “Did Humanity take a ‘Wrong Turn’ a long, long time ago?” Although they did not come up with a definitive answer, they posited that in the moment our ancestors became conscious and self-aware, and that they were separate from the world and from each other and things in terms of a

dualistic division, the need to control, dominate and self-survive became the way forward.

Over time, in Governance, Politics, Science, Education, Media, Meteorology, Religion, Health, International Relations, and Agriculture, the prevailing human point of view increasingly sought to seek power, control and separation as the sensible way to go.

From one aspect, this trait of the Human Race enabled it to become the dominant species on the planet, now extending into the Solar System and beyond. It has inspired insatiable curiosity, experimentation and risk-taking that has led to truly awesome achievements in all the above fields with one glaring exception -- the increasing fractious, divisive and self-defeating manner in which Human Beings engage with each other and the world we inhabit.

There is a paradox of increasing accomplishments in the many fields of human endeavor mentioned above on the one hand and on the other hand, inability or unwillingness to truly collaborate with others. Could it be possible that within this paradox lies the inevitable demise of the Human race and becoming the victim of our own 'success'?

Are the global issues of Climate Change, Pandemics, Terrorism, Inequality, Racism, and international disputes regards trade, sovereignty, borders, blurring of the line between truth and lies all early clues that the Krishnamurti/Bohm idea of Humanity's 'wrong turn' has put us on an irreversible track of self-destruction? It seems that one of Einstein's most quoted declarations remains as valid as his many scientific theories: "The problems facing the world today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them." It begs the question, is it possible that the Human race could affect a "Right Turn" rather than continue in its "Wrong Turn"?

Reflecting on our experience of a 'disastrous' house move it became clear that our main engagement was to gain and maintain control of the process. At the time this seemed to be the responsible way to engage and at a certain level this has a validity. However, we now see that seeking control as the senior context was an illusion driven by our need for self-survival, ego, and a dualistic (them and us) engagement which blocked and hindered a collaborative innovation (all together) that could have allowed breakthrough and transformative outcomes.

Like many of the great facets and qualities of the Human species, the ability to control, create and be conscious occur in a paradox. As ways of engaging with a challenge they are essential, but when they become survival-driven they are devastating and self-defeating.

In our house move, building relationships and being responsible was at the same time helpful and positive in keeping possibilities on the table. But it also was our way of controlling the process and blind-sided us from recognizing the warning signals that all was not what we thought it to be. Several times people warned us about possible issues, and we refused to consider and investigate these for fear of breaking and damaging the relationships we had built. Also, our building relationships with one party led to another feeling excluded and not valued, and thereby stopped them from alerting us to the danger signals they saw which turned out to be legitimate. Our ego stopped us from considering that the relationships we had built were not as robust and inclusive with all parties as we thought.

Arthur Koestler, in his book “The Ghost in the Machine”², shares with Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle the view that the mind of a person is not an independent, non-material entity, temporarily inhabiting and governing the body. Heralding the idea of Bohm & Krishnamurti’s “Wrong Turn” fifty years later, Koestler concluded that the human race, owing to some “faults/defects” during evolution, may be marching to its early end.

Koestler also offered the idea of the Holon to illuminate the dichotomy between parts and wholes and to account for both the self-assertive and integrative tendencies of an organism. Holons exist simultaneously as self-contained wholes in relation to their sub-ordinate parts, and as dependent parts when considered from the inverse direction. They are self-reliant units that possess a degree of independence and can handle contingencies without asking higher authorities for instructions, i.e., they have a degree of autonomy. They are also simultaneously subject to control from one or more of these higher authorities. The first property ensures that holons are stable forms that are able to withstand disturbances, while the latter property signifies that they are intermediate forms, providing a context for the proper functionality for the larger whole.

Koestler defined a holarchy as a hierarchy of self-regulating holons that function first as autonomous wholes in supra-ordination to their parts, secondly as dependent parts in sub-ordination to controls on higher levels, and thirdly in coordination with their local environment. Simply said, “I recognize and accept that I am dependent on and an integral part of a bigger whole and at the same time I am 100% responsible for my own behavior, thinking, engagement, experience and being.”

In his inaugural speech President Kennedy urged his “Fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you – Ask what you can do for your country.” He then continued by addressing his international audience: “My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

This is not a sentiment one hears in today’s political utterances and a long way from “America first” and “make America great again.” Brexit, Scottish independence, and many other border disputes across the planet are often justified by regaining sovereignty and self-determination.

Astronauts from all countries reported that their most inspiring experience (referred to as the “Overview Effect”³) was witnessing the majesty and vulnerability of the singularity of our Planet Earth floating in space with no artificial man-made lines visible, which they knew continued to spawn wars, death and division in the quest to survive through gaining control and the upper hand.

So much for the philosophical insights and perspectives on the nature of the Human mind. What relevance might they have for the world we live in and experience today? I don’t have answers but rather suggest questions and practices that may help to make sense of the “world sense making” we are bombarded with today, by the media, on-line communication networks, and the marketing from all forms of authoritarian bodies be they political, commercial, religious, educational or cultural.

Practices

- When you find yourself engaged in a debate, argument, dialogue ask yourself what bigger context or framework, which if you embraced it,

would allow you to consider and listen to the different parts and aspects of the topic under discussion.

- When you are expressing your opinion on something are you willing to express how this opinion is entirely shaped by your own particular experiences rather than present it as the truth?
- Notice the selective nature of what you read and listen to is filtered by what you already believe.
- When you are doing your genuine best at being responsible and living up to your beliefs, take a moment to reflect whether you are falling into control and win/avoid losing behavior.

Questions

- When you are listening to someone or somebody making sense of something, how often do you do your own research versus a quick acceptance or rejection of their sense-making?
- Is talk about sovereignty and rights more about control and ego than equality and fairness?
- Is racism your problem or someone else's?
- Who owns the planet as a whole versus only their part?
- Are the current topics of Climate Change, Racism, Territorial & Trade Disputes, Immigration, Pandemics, Energy Sourcing more shaped by the parties and authorities gaining control, power and survival versus planet-wide transformative solutions?

As for me, in my remaining years, I have embarked on a dialogue with my four grandchildren. We agreed to learn from each other on an equal playing field. For too long, the educational paradigm has been too biased in 'old to young', those who know and have more experience over those who have less knowledge and experience. Many of the protagonists for tackling today's issues justify it by saying it's on behalf of the next generation. A reasonable sentiment, however, is to also focus and ask that on helping the next generation to solve these and other issues that are not yet even on the horizon, to avoid bringing the same level of thinking that created them.

¹ **The Ending of Time**, J. Krishnamurti & David Bohm, 1985, ISBN-13: 9780060647964

² Koestler, Arthur (1967). **The Ghost in the Machine** (1990 reprint ed.). Penguin Group. ISBN 0-14-019192-5.

³ White, Frank, **The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution**, 2014, ISBN-13: 978-1624102622