

New Development Paradigm (Bhutan)



The present author’s comments are indicated in **Red Text**. Milt Hetrick

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A. The global search for a new development paradigm

The present **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**-based development model has **focused human behavior on “productivity” and guided us to make choices that supposedly** maximized productivity, increased income and consumption, created prosperity, and made life longer, easier, and more comfortable for those able to exploit its potential.

This opening line of Bhutan’s report on their New Development Paradigm needs further discussion before moving on. The creation of an economic parameter called GDP is one of stories where the phrase “be careful about what you wish for – because you may get it” applies. And what you wish for may not be what you really wanted.

Also we know from experience that given a complex system (such as an economic system), the characteristics of that system you observe become those you are able to mindfully change.

Let’s first set the stage by quickly reflecting on deep time and where we have come from before we look ahead to the future – before we envision a new “development” paradigm.

Based on today’s understanding of the Universe, our solar system, and the evolution of Life on planet Earth, as defined in the physical record (observed by geology, biology, paleontology, archeology, etc.) and ongoing DNA sequencing (microbiology, phylogentic tree of life, etc.), we see the life form called homo sapiens as one of the outermost (newer) branches of a multi-faceted family of living systems. And we humans appear to be among the more complex, possible more adaptable, more capable species, and probably more creative and more conscious living system that has evolved on and currently inhabit this planet. But having eaten from the tree of knowledge, we can no longer live in the simplistic Garden of Eden – where our lives are but the unthinking response to the immediate stimulus around us. Having eaten from the tree, we are now both blessed and condemned to live our lives mindfully – or we will perish. We can no longer live the enchanted and idyllic life of a child ever protected by a loving parent. We can no longer step mindless into the busy street of life before looking both ways. We now travel on the path of individual freedom to make behavioral choices and as adults, we take responsibility for how our choices affect our own well being as well as the well being of those people and other living systems around us.

Our human complexity and range of capability requires additional awareness and consciousness. We can use the energy of our system to do work for the good of all Life or conversely to its detriment – our choice. Our actions can be constructive and of mutual benefit to the interdependent network of Life or our actions can be fatal because we are capable of suicidal, homicidal, genocidal, ecocidal behavior unless we self-impose boundaries on our behavior – limitations to our individual freedoms. Each new generation of homo sapiens must learn. This self-imposition of boundaries has been occurring for as long as we have recorded history of civilizations. We see these attempts to sort out life serving from life destructive behavior in the form of traditions, superstitions, mythology, stories, religions, politics, legal systems, trade agreements, economic systems, ethics, education, etc.

The complex human, recognizing its vulnerability to human destructive behavior has chosen to create various systems that capture lessons learned and embed these lessons in a story, a rule, a law, a way of influencing choice, etc.

e.g. observing the horrible progression of Trichinosis, early cultures made eating any pork a sin – a taboo – a custom – a religious principle. Today the taboo has been refined a bit to “Do not eat pork infected with the larvae of a parasitic worm called *Trichinella spiralis*.” One way to assure pork is safe to eat is to cook/heat the meat to at least 165 F (74 C), and allow the meat to rest for three minutes before carving or consuming.

The question at hand is “Is the homo sapien a sustainable form of life? Can it persist for more than a few hundred thousand or even a million years?” This question is posed in the context of knowing that dinosaurs walked this Earth for nearly 100 million years before being climate change (probably due to the Chicxulub impact 65 million years ago in the Yucatan) caused their extinction.

We also want to examine if “happiness” a real parameter appropriate to use as a measuring stick for a social system? We understand that “happiness” may be linked to endorphins that can generated by the brain in a number of ways – ranging from loving caring behavior to the ingestion of chemicals. We understand that the neurological development of a human infant in utero and during the infant’s first several years determines the formation and number of endorphin receptors. A child that develops its brain under significant stress may undergo neurological development that results in later so called addictive behaviors in its quest for happiness and pleasure. We know that happiness and instant gratification are different emotional responses.

But we do need something to measure the efficacy of our human created systems – such as our economic system. Focusing on the amount of useful work or productivity that is occurring in a social order is one way to get a reading on its health – but perhaps there is more than production – particular when there are some who are born into this world unable to contribute to “work.”

Do we not find the well being of infants and young children (who do not produce and contribute to the GNP) of value? Do we not find the presence of people who are less able to produce (because of physical or mental or emotional limitations) to be considered in the health of a social order. Do we not have any “goals and objectives” for our species – for example the Universe seems to a story of emergence – the creation of something more (complex) from nothing but (existing things) as a result of new relationships and generally an external source of energy.

We see that homo sapiens continue in that tradition – with an awareness of the seemingly unlimited range of behavior humans are capable of, they to their credit has self-imposed boundaries on their acceptable behavior – behavior outside these boundaries is considered to be uncivilized – not conducive to Life – and is tagged as illegal, unlawful, immoral, unethical, uneconomical, blasphemy, untraditional, or just against some rule.

We recognize physical violence when we see it – in a civil society, we typically have universal agreement that physical violence is not in the direction of goodness – is to be prevented – is to be punished if it occurs, in the hope that punishment will become a deterrent (a preventive measure).

We value productivity yet we don’t seem to measure the number of production opportunities that available in a given social order – we do monitor the “unemployment percentage.” How many people in the society are not producing? The unemployment figures of course do not have any real correlation on the number of employment opportunities that are available. Many people, especially those who believe in the Republican ideology assume that those who are unemployed choose to be unemployed. If they just tried harder to find a job, they could. Unfortunately this

myth is nothing more than a displacement issue – sure if a given unemployed person tries harder and writes a better resume, responds better in a job interview, wears better clothing to the interview, develops a better job search network, they may be able to ace out another job seeker – but trying harder to find a job does not create more employment opportunities. If there are 7% fewer job opportunities available than there are people available to be productive, there will be 7% unemployment regardless of how hard a person tries (or doesn't try) to find a job. Cutting off unemployment insurance does not create more job opportunities – particularly if those “savings” are not invested directly in creating more jobs. Rather than look at the “unemployment” it might be better to assess the system in terms of “employment opportunities available” – the EOA – right now it appears to be -7%

However, with this 18th century model having reached its ecological, social, cultural and economic limits, there is growing consensus that the world and human society are now in need of an alternative paradigm that will make the positive and amazing achievements sustainable and guide society towards higher and more meaningful advancements.

This realization comes from the worrying consequences of

- resource depletion, and
- ecosystem degradation that now threaten the survival of countless life forms including our own and
- the diminishing cultural diversity as well as
- the fundamental flaws of our economic (and other human created) systems.

Unconscionable inequities, indebtedness, disempowerment of local communities, political instability and conflict are some of the many other causes that make clear the need for a change of direction.

Society's search for an alternative way of life guided by a common vision was articulated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his address to the high-level meeting on the State of the World Economy and Finance at the UN headquarters on 17 May, 2012:

“The old model is broken. We need to create a new one.... In this time of global challenge, even crisis, business as usual will not do.... It is time to recognise that human capital and natural capital are every bit as important as financial capital. It is time to invest in people.... Clearly we must unite around a shared vision for the future — a vision for equitable human development, a healthy planet, an enduring economic dynamism.”

The UN General Assembly is engaged in identifying a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ...many countries like France, the UK, Japan, Italy, Qatar and others are seriously engaged in similar efforts.

B. What Bhutan can bring to this global endeavour

Bhutan's ...philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) ...considers all problems as being rooted in our refusal to accept the obsolescence of the GDP-based model...Bhutan's path is founded on a clear understanding and acceptance of a higher and reasoned purpose for development that goes beyond the short term economic and material wellbeing of human beings and takes into account the interdependent nature of life on earth. It is guided by the belief that development or societal progress must raise the wellbeing of the human individual not only physically and materially but mentally, emotionally and spiritually as well. Hopefully it is guided also by a sense of purpose, by a sense of the human role in the expanding Universe, by a realization of the unique contribution we humans can make to the whole of Life. Hopefully it will be guided by goals such as promoting the ever evolving collective consciousness. Each living system (species) has its own unique awareness and presence in this world and hence unique contribution to the collective consciousness. When a species goes extinct, we lose their unique perspective. When an individual comes to the end of that life, that take on life also ends – hopefully we have inserted their life into our collective consciousness.

What indicators do we have to show how well we have captured the lives of each and every individual of each and every species?

Anything less is a disservice to future generations.

We must stop using bandaids to repair our broken systems and instead fix our human created system to be in sync with the Real World. For example a transition from finite energy sources is mandatory – now we can see the end – we are past peak oil and peak coal and peak Uranium.

We must transition to inexhaustible energy, NOW.

For every barrel of oil that is extracted, we must place one barrel in an infinite reserve for future generations to use – recycle.

For every ton of coal we extract, we must place one ton of that same known reserve in escrow for future generations – AND use one ton of coal specifically to make the transition to inexhaustible energy and then be carbon taxed on the ton that is being extracted to burn “frivolously” - as we are currently doing today.

Indeed, without such clarity of purpose, many solutions may remain sectoral, short-term, issue-driven, and concerned only with humankind’s physical survival and material conditions. Without that clear vision, the fundamental motivation and impulse driving the current competitive, consumption-oriented model of development—namely untrammelled desire—will continue to condition our thinking and dominate our search for alternatives. Until we are able to tame and control that insatiable greed through the pursuit of such a vision, the best of alternative models we can conceive will only delay what has become inevitable.

adoption ... of the UN resolution on *Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*

...frame a new development paradigm based on Bhutan’s experience of pursuing a holistic, sustainable and inclusive development process aimed at promoting human happiness with a clear set of progress indicators.

C. Redefining development

The fundamental change we need will only come from redefining the very purpose of development as a common vision that goes beyond the compulsion to increase material production and consumption.

The human aspiration for happiness transcends all the dividing contours of society, has the power to unite all of humanity, and generates a deep, abiding sense of harmony and connectedness with nature, with fellow beings, and with ourselves. It is happiness that will curb our consumerist impulses and give to us the capacity to find satisfaction and contentment.

Genuine and true happiness is not of the fleeting and frivolous kind but a sustained state of being. It does not deny basic material needs or the importance of productive economic activity, but rather balances the needs of body and mind. It acknowledges that material conditions like a stable climate, adequate resources, clean air and water, good food and health, decent living conditions, literacy, safe communities, and other dimensions of wellbeing are essential preconditions for human beings to realise their full potential. At the same time, our approach does not see these material states as ends in themselves or as the ultimate purpose of human development, but rather as survival requisites and enabling circumstances for human society to flourish and achieve true happiness.

In addition to or as a contributor to happiness, we might focus on another uniquely human capability – that of extending the consciousness of our planet, our solar system, and hence our galaxy. This is a formidable responsibility – to continue this path of emergence – the creation of something more from nothing but as a result of bring together new relationships of things both real and virtual.

We owe future generations updates to our current human systems – that's how we allow our collective consciousness to evolve – guidelines for sustainable evolution and enhance collective consciousness.

Far from contradicting the vital initiatives under way, Bhutan's proposition will strengthen current efforts to reverse climate change, enhance sustainability, eradicate poverty, and promote inclusiveness and prosperity. In a finite world, the pursuit of these objectives call for reorienting the purpose of development from material production, accumulation and waste to more meaningful ends – such as evolving collective consciousness – that's an entity that can continue to grow even on a finite planet. Without such a vision, even our most well-intentioned efforts will not stem the excessive and inequitable use and exploitation of resources that are exceeding planetary boundaries and have placed mankind on a path of self destruction.

Must we also differentiate between pleasure and happiness – what is true happiness? How does it differ from euphoria? From a momentary high? From an artificially induced sense of pleasure? We know true happiness when we experience it.

Is true happiness the feeling after a good meal? After loving sex? After a hug? After a personal accomplishment? After a collective accomplishment? After knowingly contributing to the growth of another? After Upon holding a Teddy Bear? Seeing a child at play? Seeing a birth? Knowing a loved one is safe? Healing from a physical or mental repair? Listening to music? Taking in the image of visual art?

Without acknowledging human happiness as the goal of development, efforts to achieve sustainability will always require a focus on legislation, regulation and penalties to conserve natural resources, curb pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, prevent waste and starvation, limit excess consumption and other unsustainable practices. Such a restrictive environment will inevitably become more severe and stringent as scarcity increases, and will cause conflicts between and among nations and communities striving to protect their resources.

In sharp contrast to this scenario, a focus on human happiness can help redefine wealth in non-material terms to include, for example, the value of nature, free time, and social supports, and thereby encourage positive changes away from consumption habits towards the true fulfilment of human potential.

Acknowledging human happiness and the concomitant wellbeing of all life forms as the goal of development in effect joins the ecological, societal, economic, governance, human, and psychological dimensions of development. It provides, in short, a comprehensive, integrating, holistic, and interdependent perspective to current endeavours to frame the post-2015 global development agenda. Indeed, we believe that only such a higher view of development can effectively transform humanity's relationship with nature; embrace full-cost accounting and restructure our economies; change our attitudes to food and wealth; promote caring, altruism, inclusiveness, and harmony; and achieve the targets of the emerging Sustainable Development Goals.

D. Is it possible?

What we propose is both necessary and possible. We have never had greater global capacity, understanding, material abundance, and opportunities to achieve human happiness and the wellbeing of all life forms. This capacity includes scientific knowledge, communications & technology, resources, productive potential, and the ability to feed everyone on earth. The new development approach we propose is also inspired by many examples of best practices at multiple scales on which we can build to enhance sustainability, wellbeing, and happiness.

We have also been deeply encouraged by the burgeoning global interest in our own domestic efforts to pursue a GNH path:

- In pursuit of that vision, 80% of our country is now under forest cover and 50% is under environmental protection. We have vowed to remain a net carbon sink in perpetuity, and we are working towards becoming fully

organic in food production.

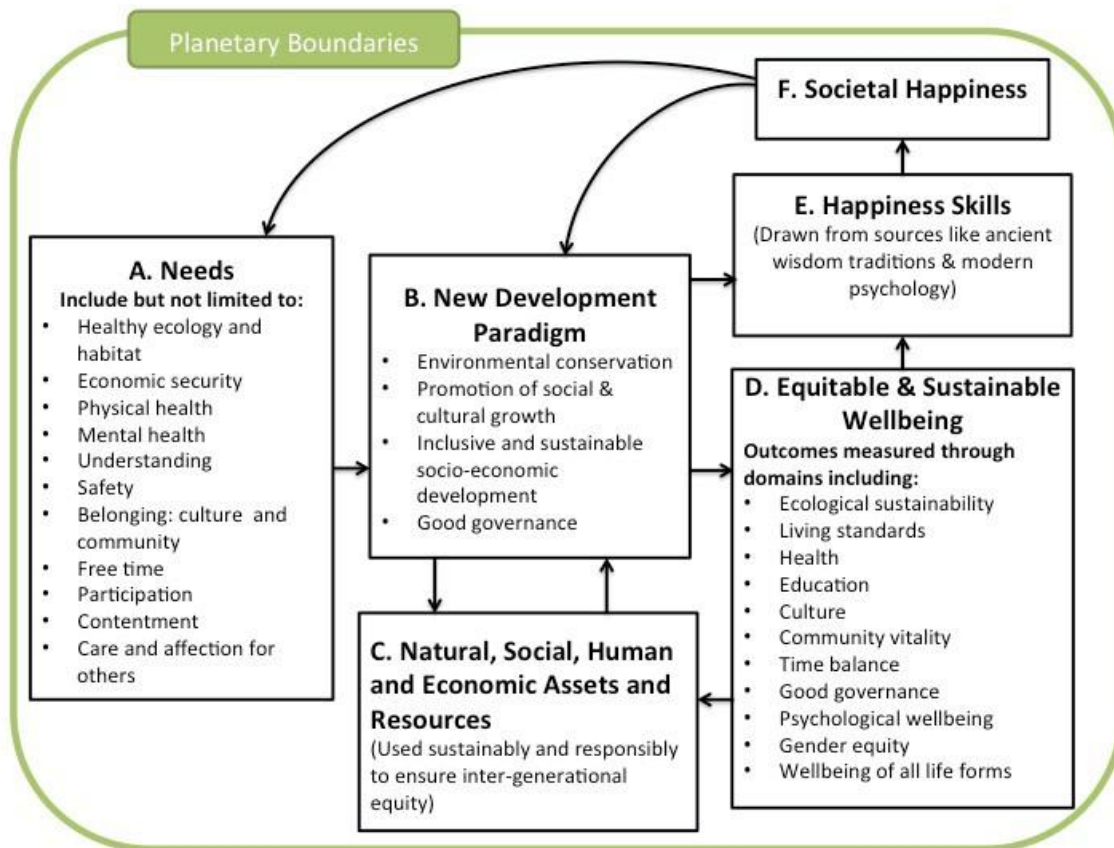
- Protecting nature in such ways has not come at the expense of economic dynamism. We have achieved a 50% reduction in our poverty rate in the last five years alone and many other markers of economic and social progress.
- We now regularly measure progress according to a comprehensive Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index consisting of nine domains and 33 indicators, and we use some variables drawn from these indicators as a screening tool to assess all policies to ensure they meet ecological, societal, cultural, economic, and governance criteria.

The time has never been more opportune to reorient the goal of development towards genuine human happiness and the wellbeing of all life. There is a growing global consensus on the need and urgency for such a holistic new model. We have the knowledge, means, and capacity to chart this new path and nations and communities worldwide are already blazing this path.

E. The new development paradigm

We propose that a new development framework must first identify explicit needs that development must address towards achieving wellbeing and human happiness. It must detail the necessary structures, policies, and regulatory mechanisms to conserve nature, attain inclusive and sustainable economic development, promote social and cultural growth and strengthen good governance. To achieve these goals, the framework will suggest policies for the responsible and sustainable management of natural, human, social, and economic assets.

The new paradigm will envision societal wellbeing as the desired outcome of these structures and policies, and propose these to be assessed and measured according to nine domains ecological sustainability, living standards, health, education, culture, community vitality, time balance, good governance, and psychological wellbeing, each with specific progress indicators. The framework will recognize that certain skills, drawn from sources like ancient wisdom traditions and modern psychology, are needed to transform wellbeing outcomes to the higher state of human happiness. In turn, the degree of societal happiness will determine the evolving needs of development. A basic illustration of the framework is provided below.



... a new path for human society. ...to fulfill humankind's highest aspiration. ...changing the course of human destiny in the most sustainable, equitable and meaningful way will require courage and commitment from every individual, community and nation alike.

A new path that is in the direction of the Universe – that continues the Universe Story of Emergence – of the creation of something more from nothing but - a new path that promotes the continuing evolution of consciousness – the miraculous transition of light to collective consciousness.

But we do need a new paradigm – including new ways to observe our human created social systems – parameters that help us identify and therefore steer our actions and their affects so that we humans are indeed of mutual benefit to the family of Life on Earth – that we humans continue to grow – but not in terms of numbers of size but in terms of awareness and understanding and wisdom and collective consciousness – each of us is given a finite amount of time – even collectively as an ongoing species we have a limited life expectancy based on the history of deep time. Earth has its life expectancy as does the Sun as does the galaxy and the Universe – So it is important to continue to expand our consciousness that we can transcend our notion of time and space and move gracefully into the eternal unknown.

We suggest new indicators in addition to GNH including:

EO Index - “employment opportunities” rather than “unemployment.” The sum of private and public should add up to 100%. Having any unemployment that is not physically or mentally or emotional limited is an indication that the social order is broken.

Collective Consciousness Index - an indication of the educational level of the society. Literacy is a beginning, but just being able to read and write at a specific level is not an adequate measure – we want a parameter that indicates the level of lifelong learning.

Legacy Index - we seem to set the bar too low for individual expectations – shouldn't we expect each and every person who spends time and resources on this planet to knowingly contribute to the evolving consciousness of the living system? We are not put here just to seek pleasure – that is not what Jefferson intended when he wrote the phrase “pursuit of happiness” - we need to discuss what true happiness really is. Each of us must ask – how has my life contributed to the collective consciousness – what have I don't to lessen the suffering, promote the joy, and mentor others along my journey.

Sorry to disappoint, but from what I can see, life is not a game to see who can have the most toys when they die. If fact the ideal situation would be to go out having returned everything you borrowed during your lifetime.

Mutual Benefit Index - how well does our life style, our actions benefit other people AND other forms of Life.

Sustainability Index - this would include how much of the energy from the Sun we are harvesting – (should be more than what we and our family consumes to also provide for the less able).

Recycle Index - a measure of how much of the resources we returned relative to what we borrowed (should be 100%)

Proxy voting - future generations should have a proxy vote. All Stakeholders should have a vote – not just the stockholders. We no longer train young people to be “biologists” but rather train them to represent, be the spokesperson for, vote for and otherwise represent a given species - There are 7 billion people and 2 million documented speices – that should work – when you are born, you are assigned a species. As you become an adult, you may exchange or trade your proxy. Indigenous people often refer to their “spirit animal” This would be that. How would proxy voting work? When someone wants to “develop” the meadow, they would commission an EIS that identifies all the species impacted by this proposed development. All proxies would be contacted and weigh in on how they would be impacted by this proposed development and vote. This will identify those who might benefit as well as those who might be harmed – the rule would be what benefits the most and harms the fewest. Is there a

way to mitigate / move/ reconstitute/ relocate, etc. those whose potential and opportunities might be diminished? Species in danger of becoming extinct have automatic veto power

Stockholder vs. Stakeholder index – if there is money to be made (profit) then all stakeholders should be stockholders – not just the already privileged. Why should you have a greater opportunity to profit just because you are rich and can afford to buy the stock?

Sun Harvesting index - all property “owner” – people who profess to “own” land or surface area should be held accountable for the amount of sunlight they harvest (convert into storable energy) Anyone who covers their land with concrete that does nothing more than transform highly valuable electromagnetic radiation from the Sun (sunlight) into mere low grade heat is to be shunned. If someone builds a home and makes no effort to harvest sunlight with their roof is to be shunned. If an able adult refuses to harvest the energy required for their chosen lifestyle they are to be shunned.

Population Index – does a given system promote sane perpetuation of the species? One a finite planet, that has reached its bearing capacity (which we have from a homo sapien perspective), each individual has an inherent right to replicated oneself – but no more than that. Each couple may morally conceive two children – a larger family is immoral. Any human-created system that promotes a larger family is unethical – even immoral – particularly if it refers to an ancient authority for justification. Species that are endangered are exempt from this index. Species that are vital link in the planets food chain are also exempt.

Zero Tolerance for “Killing” The common sense rule that is required for a sustainable social order is “You end a life only so it becomes a source of energy for a more conscious form of life. **You kill it, you eat it.** It’s that simple. We can no longer tolerate the ending of a life if that living system is going to be used to feed a less conscious system. You don’t end the life of a eukaryote to become the energy for a bacteria or Achaea¹ – that’s not in the direction of evolving collective consciousness.

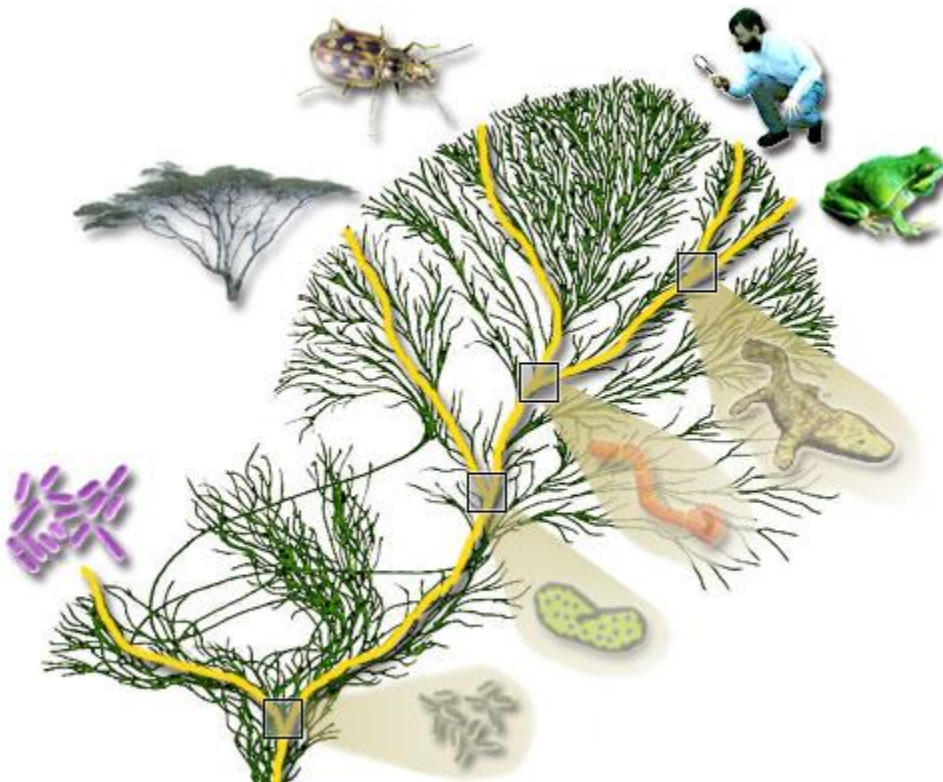


Figure 1: Living organisms sit like leaves at the tips of the branches of the Tree of Life. Their evolutionary history is represented by a series of ancestors which are shared hierarchically by different subsets of the organisms that are alive today.

¹ <http://tolweb.org/tree/learn/concepts/whatisphylogeny.html>

“The notion that **all of life** is genetically connected via a vast phylogenetic tree is one of the most romantic notions to come out of science.”

Ref: <http://tolweb.org/tree/learn/concepts/whatisphylogeny.html>

To equate the concept of a “gene” to an element of wisdom is likewise a humbling realization – that each leaf of the tree is alive today because it is a display of success, a badge of accomplishment, an indication that it has miraculously negotiated the turbulent waters of 3.8 billion years of complexification as our laboratory continues its 25 galactic year around the black hole of the Milky Way galaxy.

As Carl Sagan so colorfully explained, we are made of star stuff – not to be too technical – not to lessen the romantic mood in any way, we are both star stuff (all elements above hydrogen) and big bang stuff (hydrogen)– we are Light in a condensed form on its way to consciousness. We are light transforming itself into consciousness and complexification. We are the latest emergence of light – we are something more from nothing but – and we are in turn creating a new dimension of what is possible – we are creating etherealities – ideas, concepts not yet shared or experienced by others. We are creating social orders – new things as a result of combining humans in ways never before combined – new political/economic/religious/legal/etc, systems. We are beginning to comprehend our interdependence in a way always known to indigenous peoples but not the world of scientists – but now science is catching up and in some cases leaping ahead of the static traditionalists. The dilemma of the Hopi – to document or not to document their stories – to leave them blowing in the wind or to press them onto paper or carve them into stone where they no longer have the freedom to breath and change with the ever blowing winds of change – of time

The organisms that are alive today are but the leaves of this giant tree, and if we could trace their history back down the branches of the Tree of Life, we would encounter their ancestors, which lived thousands or millions or hundreds of millions of years ago (Figure 2).

Biologists estimate that there are about 5 to 100 million species of organisms living on Earth today (of which about 1.9 million have been documented) . Evidence from morphological, biochemical, and gene sequence data suggests indicates that all organisms on Earth are genetically related, and that the genealogical relationships of living things can be represented by a vast evolutionary tree, the **Tree of Life**. The Tree of Life then represents the **phylogeny** of organisms, i. e., the history of organismal lineages as they change through time. It implies that different species arise (**emerge**) from previous forms via descent, and that all organisms, from the smallest microbe to the largest plants and vertebrates, are connected by the passage of genes (**wisdom/lessons learned/success/adapability**) along their [branches of the phylogenetic tree](#) that links all of Life (Figure 1).