Climate – A New Story

Charles Eisenstein: Climate – A New Story. ISBN: 978-1-62317-248-0. Random House, New York 2018. 320 pages, CHF 24.90.

Deep intuitions of the heart, complemented by thorough research, sound intellectual thinking, and a fine sense for the power of language make this a truly inspiring book. Charles Eisenstein's analysis of the environmental and climate crisis goes deeper than identifying culprits such as industrial agriculture and atmospheric carbon. He penetrates to what he sees as the root cause: the entrenched materialistic mindset of modern western humanity. He characterizes this mindset as one which creates *separation*: the separation of the human being from the world, the separation of the Earth – a living, breathing being comprised of an infinite web of dynamic interrelationships – into finite material resources to be mined and monetized. But by showing how this mentality inevitably leads to the destruction and degradation of our environment, Eisenstein opens a way for us to conceive of a new consciousness characterized by *interbeing*: by the realization that all things are interconnected and worthy of our love and respect, a consciousness capable of bringing healing to our planet. How we meet the mounting social and environmental crises of our time, Eisenstein argues, will depend upon whether we are able to achieve the transition to a consciousness that recognizes the deeper reality of interbeing:

"[…] the consciousness of interbeing is dawning in the dominant civilization. What we do to the Other, we do to ourselves. This will be the defining understanding of the next civilization – if there is a next civilization." (p. 23)

This reminds me of R. Steiner's words about the dawning of the Michael Age in his *Leading Thoughts*: "Hearts are beginning to have thoughts. Enthusiasm no longer stems just from mystical darkness but from thought-borne clarity of soul (8.17.1924)." Eisenstein gave his first book the title *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*, and in this book on climate he contrasts this deeper intuitive knowing with the abstract rational thinking that seeks to separate, objectify, quantify and subjugate all things to its cold logic.

The mindset of separation addresses problems by attacking their apparent causes:

"[…] end crime by deterring the perpetrators […] end drug abuse by banning drugs, stop terrorism by killing the terrorists. But the world is more complicated than that. […] crime, drugs, [and] terrorism […] might be symptoms of a deeper, systemic disharmony. Climate change is the same. It is a symptomatic fever of a deeper disharmony, a disharmony that pervades all aspects of our civilization." (p. 35)

Limiting our response to the climate crisis to a fixation on reducing atmospheric carbon may even cause new problems:

"A forest is a living being of inconceiv-

able complexity. […] Reducing a forest to numbers like biomass and sequestration rates is not so different from reducing them to board feet and dollars." (p. 112)

"The climate narrative globalizes the issue of 'the environment,' demoting local environmental issues to secondary status. If the reason for saving a forest is the CO_2, then one could rationalize its destruction by promising to plant another forest somewhere else. In a global framing, faraway people can make the changes. Not me. Not us. If advocates of fracking or nuclear power can argue plausibly that their technology will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, then by our own logic we [environmentalists] must support those too." (p. 132)

Eisenstein proposes an alternative approach that

"[…] addresses tangible damage in ways that bring tangible results. People cannot see changes in atmospheric concentration of invisible, odorless gases, nor can they be directly aware of distant effects on climate, but they can see (or feel the effects of) denuded hillsides, erosion gullies, smog, toxic waste, contaminated water, and so forth. They can also see the return of songbirds, the rising of water tables, the return of fish and the clearing of air and water pollution where pro-environmental policies are implemented." (p. 137)

Throughout the book Eisenstein again and again emphasizes the importance of direct tangible experience that engages the heart and soul and leads to local action. He agrees that global strategies are necessary, but he is wary of abstract programs that fail to address the specific needs and opportunities of specific localities.

There is probably no area of human activity more central to the healing of the earth than agriculture. It is in directly working with the Earth that the inner disposition of the human soul comes to direct expression in the health of the environment. In his fine chapter on regenerative agriculture, Eisenstein repeatedly makes the point that

"the right practices can be determined only in intimate relationship to the land" (p. 177)

"[…] For a regenerative agriculture system to work, farmers need to relate to land as to a unique individual." (p. 182)

Eisenstein sees the same mindset that has led to the environmental crisis at work in the current political and economic crises (p. 251). His chapter on the economy gives an insightful analysis of our western economic system and offers suggestions that would go a long way toward its improvement.

Toward the end of the book, Eisenstein finally grapples with modern science, the methodological tool of the mindset that has led to the environmental and climate crisis. Among the metaphysical assumptions underlying modern science he includes:

"
- *That anything real can in principle be measured and quantified*
- *That everything that happens does so because it is caused to happen (in the sense of Aristotelian efficient cause)*
- *That the basic building blocks of matter are generic for instance, that any two electrons are identical*