

Philosophy, Language, and the Titanic Mind-Set

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There are two questions that come to mind whenever I attempt to engage a university colleague in a discussion about the nature and importance of the cultural and environmental commons. The first is: Why is it so difficult for environmentalists and social reformers to recognize that the commons-oriented lifestyle that is ecologically sustainable is already being practiced in most communities around the world? The second question is: Given the mind-set that most public school teachers and university professors share with the men who designed and steered the Titanic into an iceberg, will they be able to change course when they finally become aware of the catastrophic consequences accompanying global warming? The first question should lead to recognizing that there are grounds for hope of achieving a sustainable future. Given the key elements of the Titanic mind-set, such as the hubris derived from long-held Western cultural myths, the answer to the second question is that it is unlikely that the hegemonic culture of the West will change course in time. This hubris will, in turn, lead to the collapse of other cultures as the ecosystems they depend upon begin to fail at an increasing rate.

The chief connection between the two questions has to do with the historical roots of the Titanic mind-set; particularly how earlier influential Western philosophers and political theorists influenced the distinction that Western universities now make between high and low status knowledge—a distinction that is reproduced by most public school teachers. The high status knowledge was, and continues to be, the basis of the industrial/scientific way of thinking that produced the Titanic as well the majority of today's technologies that are putting us on the collision course of exceeding what the Earth's natural systems can sustain. These early philosophers and political theorists set the intellectual and moral agenda through the language they used, as well as by the silences required by their theories. The combination of their ideas and analogies became the dominant discourses among the West's industrially oriented elites and, for reasons that are difficult to explain, the dominant way of thinking of men and women who possess only a surface knowledge of the writings of these philosophers. And in many instances, the knowledge of the latter group is limited to words and phrases, taken out of historical context, that are used to justify world shaping economic and political policies. Words and phrases such as "freedom," "free-markets," "the invisible hand," "private property," "individualism," "progress," "natural resource," "survival of the fittest" (now replaced by "Darwinian fitness") and so on, can be traced back to the ethnocentric thinking of the West's most influential thinkers. The widespread silences in the thinking of today's public school teachers and university professors about the nature of traditions, the cultural and environmental commons, cultural differences in ways of knowing, and the complexity and importance of intergenerational knowledge (including the many ways in which it is renewed) can also be traced back to the silences and biases that have been part of the largely unrecognized legacy of Western philosophers and political theorists. While the process of how complex systems of thinking passed on in university classes becomes reduced to the guiding metaphors that politicians and members of the public rely upon cannot be fully explained, it is nevertheless important to begin the task of identifying the sources of the biases and silences that now are putting us on a collision course with the environment.

The micro-ecology of words, analogies, and interpretative frameworks that are the basis of today's discourses, always have a history. To be more specific, they have their origins in earlier culturally specific ways of thinking. We may not be able to explain the direct causal connections between the language/thought processes of earlier theorists, but there is one thing of which we can be certain. The conduit view of language promoted in our public schools and universities has conditioned the public, including today's intellectual elites as well as the Christian fundamentalist and NASCAR sub-cultures, to ignore how the thought patterns and values of the past continue to be the basis of how most people think. The conduit view of language sustains one of the myths that impedes the ability of most educators at all levels to recognize that the high-status forms of knowledge will replicate the fate of the Titanic—but on a vastly larger scale. In effect, the conduit view of language reinforces the naïve understanding that language is part of a sender/receiver process of communication. This myth, in turn, is essential to sustaining other myths, including the idea of objective data and information—as though neither have their origins in human observation and interpretation. Other myths that the conduit view of language helps to obscure include the idea of the rational process as free of cultural influence, the autonomous nature of the individual (at least, that is the goal to be attained through education), that machines serve as the best model for understanding organic processes,

While it is impossible to establish a direct causal link between the micro-linguistic ecologies created by philosophers such as Plato and Descartes, who made a virtue of abstract and ethnocentric thinking, and the way their early vocabularies continue to be reproduced in today's Titanic mind-set, it is possible to provide an overview of how the silences and biases of these early theorists continue to marginalize an understanding of the nature and importance of the cultural and environmental commons. Perhaps, marginalize is not the best word here, as what the tradition of Western philosophers and political theorists accomplished was to help perpetuate a prejudice against the forms of knowledge and interdependent face-to-face relationships that exist largely outside of a money economy. Most important is that these prejudices stand in the way of recognizing the diversity of cultural patterns and relationships that hold the promise of a sustainable existence.

The suggestion that the ideas, values, and silences encoded in the language that has come down to us from influential philosophers of the distant past continue to influence how powerful groups think today may imply that I am making an argument for linguistic determinism. This is definitely not the case. As all languages are metaphorical in nature, with the process of analogic thinking being framed by the root metaphors (mythopoetic narratives and powerful evocative experiences that differ from culture to culture), and with image words that encode the key idea or model of thinking derived from the analogy that survived over others, language and the accompanying need for analogic thinking, are always changing. Some change faster than others. A form of linguistic determinism does occur when the language, and the conceptual templates it reproduces, are taken-for-granted. For example, when current thinkers take-for-granted that machines provide the best interpretative framework for understanding the mental/cultural processes of the brain, they are complicit in perpetuating the misconceptions encoded in the language handed down from the past—and in this case, the failure of Newton, Kepler, and the other founders of the scientific revolution to recognize the limitations of reducing all forms of life to what fits a mechanistic explanatory framework.

Complicity in reproducing the misconceptions of the past takes on added importance when we consider the ways in which the industrial/consumer-oriented culture continues to transform the intergenerational knowledge that sustains the cultural and environmental commons

into new exploitable markets. Although the boundaries between the two cultures, the cultural commons and the industrial culture that requires reliance on a money economy, are not absolute, there are fundamental differences in their respective impacts on the self-renewing capacity of natural systems. Participating in both subcultures, including the ways in which they are interdependent, often involves taking-for-granted the values and ideas that are at the core of both cultures—even when these ideas and values are in direct conflict with each other. To make this point in a more concrete manner, most people participate in the intergenerational approaches to the preparation and sharing of a meal, while at other times frequenting the neighborhood fast-food outlet. Thinking about the differences in the experiences--such as in social relationships, development of skills, the adverse impact on the environment, and dependence upon a money economy is seldom given more than superficial attention. In the areas of the creative arts, healing practices, crafts, and so forth, there are similar differences between the largely non-monetized cultural commons and the monetized industrial/consumer dependent culture. Yet, the taken-for-granted state of consciousness results in moving between these two subcultures without an awareness of how one is a source of personal and community empowerment while the other leads to different forms of dependency. The tacit (taken-for-granted) nature of how most individuals experience everyday life is directly connected to the languaging processes of the culture into which they are born. If individuals are not aware that the language they rely upon in everyday activities influences what they will be aware of, what will be taken for granted, and what will exist as the culture's zones of silence, they will be less likely to recognize what is ecologically sustainable, and what is putting them on a collision course with environmental limits.

The commons and enclosure are two words that have their origins in the distant past, and which were and still are absent from the vocabularies of the West's most influential philosophers. While a few people understand the commons as encompassing the features of the natural environment that are shared outside of a money economy, the cultural commons are far more complex and even less understood. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding results in many scientists promoting the idea that science offers the best approach to understanding the nature of the ecological crises, and that their many approaches to environmental restoration provide the best hope for a sustainable future. This way of thinking ignores that science can only provide half-way solutions, and that the revitalization of the cultural commons is equally important to reducing the human impact on natural systems. When we consider the many ways in which the diversity of the world's cultural commons are being integrated into the market economy that operates, with few exceptions, without any sense of environmental or moral limits we can see the problem of lacking the vocabulary necessary for making explicit and thus politically problematic the cultural patterns that are making people more dependent upon consumerism. Enclosure is one of these key words that brings to the level of awareness what other words, such as "exploit," "alienate" "profits," "capitalism," and so forth, attempt to clarify. Because these other words too often are framed by an ideological orientation that assumes that all traditions must be overturned, they fail to clarify either the nature of the world's diverse cultural commons, and how they represent daily practices that have a smaller adverse ecological impact.

Enclosure is a word that should be understood as inseparable from the word commons. Life in the commons is always in danger of being enclosed; that is, being transformed in ways that create dependencies, exclusions, silences, exploitation, and environmentally destructive activities and relationships. Enclosure in more ancient times took the form of status systems, the

privilege and rights of the nobility, armed struggle, and mythopoetic narratives. In its modern form, enclosure is achieved through private and corporate ownership, as well as by approaches to education that promote a form of individualism that lacks the skills and knowledge that are part of the intergenerational knowledge that sustains the cultural commons. Various modern ideologies that carry forward the Enlightenment prejudice toward traditions are also sources of enclosure. The combination of scientific, technological, and corporate interests that view the enclosure of the commons as leading to progress and greater economic opportunities is a more recent development. What is important about the language necessary for making explicit both the complex nature of the commons and the equally complex processes of enclosure is that it is not part of the linguistic heritage (that is, the high-status vocabulary) that can be traced back to the thinking of Western philosophers and political theorists—at least those who are the mainstay of university courses where the possibility of acquiring a more ecologically sustainable language has been enclosed by the linguistic traditions that go back at least to Plato.

In order to establish a comparison between the language and conceptual biases that are part of the heritage of Western thinkers and the language necessary for naming the activities and relationships of the cultural commons it is first necessary to identify different aspects of the cultural commons. It is important to keep in mind that this partial list would be greatly expanded if we take into account of the nearly 6000 thousand languages still spoken today (with close to a third on the verge of extinction) and the knowledge of the local cultural and environmental commons these languages carried forward over countless generations. Naming different aspects of the cultural commons include: the words that identify the many processes and relationships related to the gathering, preparation, and sharing of food; the many words connected with the creative arts and their role in the narrative and ceremonies of the community; the many words connected with the skills, relationships, and patterns of moral reciprocity connected with built environments; the words that illuminate the many forms of mentoring and moral values passed on in these relationships; the words that clarify the nature of intergenerational responsibility—for renewing the wisdom and traditions (such as *habeas corpus* in our culture) in ways that do not diminish the prospects of future generations; the words that establish for members of the commons what constitutes moral responsibility toward the non-human forms of life as well as carry forward the skills and technologies that have a smaller disruptive impact on the self-renewing capacity of the natural systems of the bioregion. In many of the indigenous cultures where survival is dependent upon intergenerational renewal both of the cultural and environmental commons there is also a special vocabulary that names the members of the community that have responsibilities, such as “keepers,” and “elders.” They also possess complex vocabularies for representing sacred practices and places.

The question that arises as the rate of global warming moves from scientific debate to the experiential level of devastating storms and radical changes in habitats is: What are the historical roots in the West of the language and the accompanying patterns of thinking that have contributed to marginalizing an awareness of the importance of the world’s diverse cultural commons to a sustainable future? In order to avoid the impression that the question reflects a romanticized understanding of the cultural and environmental commons, it is important to acknowledge Jared Diamond’s study of how the intergenerational knowledge of many cultures, in failing to take account of the special characteristics of the bioregions they depended upon, ended in collapse. It also needs to be kept in mind that what we regard today as oppressive practices and relationships may also be part of a culture’s commons that are intergenerationally renewed through narratives, ceremonies, and everyday discourse.

The question about the historical roots of marginalization is important for another reason. That is, as we begin to examine the silences and prejudices encoded in the vocabularies used by influential Western philosophers and political theorists it becomes easier to recognize how contemporary academics continue to perpetuate the same silences and prejudices that make it difficult for people to recognize the alternatives to a consumer dependent existence that still exist in communities across America. While it is impossible to prove that Western philosophers directly influenced different characteristics of the Titanic mind-set that is moving us full speed ahead toward ecological collapse, it is nevertheless useful to recognize parallels between the ideas of the West's supposed great thinkers to which generations of university students have been exposed and the widely taken-for-granted patterns of thinking that underlie today's environmentally destructive drive to integrate what remains of the world's diverse cultural and environmental commons into a money, profit-oriented economy.

The silences, assumptions, and prejudices that can be found in some of the West's most influential thinkers and in the Titanic mind-set include the following:

Marginalizing the importance of local context. The Titanic mind-set involves multiple ways in which local contexts are either entirely ignored or viewed as subject to being transformed by the introduction of rationally constructed systems. These systems may take the form of technologies such as dams; the introduction of synthetic chemicals and genetically modified seeds. They may also include political systems such as the recent efforts to introduce a Western style of democracy into tribal and Islamic cultures; economic models of development; rational approaches to problem solving that fail to take account of local knowledge; imposition of Western languages on non-Western cultures; and the acceptance of the loss of local knowledge about the sustainable characteristics of the bioregion.

Privileging abstract systems of representation over oral, face-to-face communication. Both philosophers and today's promoters of the Titanic mind-set value the following characteristics associated with literacy and other systems of abstract representation: rational thought as a culture-free activity of the autonomous individual; critical inquiry that leads to technical problem solving and to overturning cultural traditions; the acceptance of abstract ideas and theories that are assumed to have universal validity; the acceptance that what cannot be digitized and communicated through a computer has no importance; giving highest priority to reducing experience to what can be quantified; viewing oral traditions as inferior to literacy and as the expression of cultural backwardness.

Viewing the individual as an autonomous thinker and source of moral judgments. This Western view of individualism includes: privileging the uniqueness and authority of the individual's perspective on an external world; the individual as the source of rational ideas and values; the idea that ownership of property and reducing the environment to an exploitable resource is an individual's inalienable right; an absolute sense of entitlement to making judgments regardless of whether they are based on credible knowledge; a strong tendency to place the interests of the individual over the interests of the community and the self-renewal characteristics of the environment; a disregard for recognizing and for improving upon the legacy of the cultural commons that sustains daily life—including the civil liberties that are now being threatened by the men and women who share a common ideology that promotes profits over all else.

Change is an inherently progressive force that requires the further enclosure of the cultural commons. The chief characteristics include: an uncritical acceptance of new ideas and technologies--except when they stand in the way of newer ideas and technologies, expert systems as improvement over local knowledge that is seen as too slow to change; an indifference to the importance of the cultural and environmental commons that are being lost through the introduction of market-oriented technologies; a missionary zeal for imposing the Western understanding of progress on other cultures; promoting the Western idea that students' should construct their own knowledge by relying upon the same critical inquiry that also underlies technological innovations that too often fail to take account of the local cultural context—including traditions of self-sufficiency.

Ethnocentrism as a core feature of educational systems based on the assumptions they are more "evolved" than non-Western approaches to education. This feature of the Titanic mind-set and of influential Western philosophers includes the following assumptions: students should be exposed only to the ideas, technologies, values, and achievements of the most developed cultures; the Social Darwinian assumption underlying this prejudice can be seen in how even some students taking anthropology courses often argue that "we cannot go back" as though cultures can be identified as being located on a linear path where development leads from a primitive beginning to different stages in the process of cultural evolution; the combination of ethnocentrism and Social Darwinism that underlies the privileging of abstract knowledge systems over face-to-face intergenerational traditions of knowledge—such as privileging literacy over orality and, now, computer mediated knowledge over mentoring and the wisdom of elders.

What can be monetized is more important than non-monetized activities and relationships. This characteristic of the Titanic mind-set values turning what remains of the cultural and environmental commons into new commodities and new market opportunities; it holds that there are no moral limits on what can be monetized and integrated into the industrial system of production and consumption; it equates progress with gains in consumerism and going further in debt as individuals and as a nation; and it promotes greater dependence upon an industrial/consumer dependent existence by omitting from the educational process a knowledge of the cultural commons that provides alternatives to consumerism.

Not all of the above characteristics are to be rejected. There are circumstances where different ways of understanding individualism, the use of abstract systems of representations—including print, the efforts to achieve progress over previously held traditions and practices, and the use of a money economy, are highly useful. On the other hand, ethnocentrism and the failure to take local contexts into account can never be justified. The chief problem with the characteristics of the Titanic mind-set, to which the history of Western thinkers has contributed, is the lack of balance and thus an awareness of the complexity of the world's diverse cultural and environmental commons. Until recently the awareness of the interdependencies of individuals, cultures, and the sustainable characteristics of ecosystems has been largely absent in the thinking of Western philosophers and political theorists. The silences, prejudices, and culturally uninformed approaches to the nature of knowledge, as well as what leads to progress and the good society, can be partly explained as the philosophers' inability to recognize how the cultural assumptions they took-for-granted influenced what they proposed as overcoming the limitations of their times. As we will see in the following discussion of how philosophers and political theorists influenced what is discussed in today's classrooms, some of these theorists introduced

radical departures in how to think about the source of knowledge, the nature of individualism, the right to private property and to exploiting the environment for profit, and the qualities of those who should govern others, and so forth. Common to all of the radical ideas that were introduced, and which current professors seem largely unaware of, include the ethnocentrism, the silences about the connections between the cultural and environmental commons, and living a sustainable existence—and the silence about how many indigenous cultures had already learned to live within the sustainable limits of their bioregions.

The identification of ideas central to the Titanic mind-set, as well as the possible origins of these ideas, should not lead to the conclusion that the ultimate responsibility for putting our culture on a collision course with the limits of the Earth's natural systems lies with the Western philosophers and political theorists. There are too many other influences on the legacy of Western philosophy handed down over the generations that make it impossible to assign final responsibility. Certainly, the failure of successive generations of modern professors continue to be culpable in reinforcing a mind-set that fails to recognize that the ecological crises reflects the long standing crisis in the Western culture's ethnocentric and anthropocentric way of thinking. Another problem that now needs to be taken into account, and it has to do with how today's political discourse continues to be influenced by the use of slogans borrowed from past philosophers and political theorists. Slogans about the efficacy of "free markets," "democracy," "economic development," "individualism," and "science" as the only self-correcting approach to knowledge, as the late Carl Sagan put it, need to be understood as the age-old problem in the West of context-free thinking. As this pattern of thinking is leading us down a politically and environmentally slippery slope, one would expect that academics at all levels would begin to address it. But like the current misuse of our political language by graduates of schools of journalism, which journalism professors continue to ignore, the problem continues. Labeling market liberals as conservatives must surely confuse people about what is essential to conserve, such as species and habitats and our civil liberties—among others. Even for the more socially justice oriented segment of society, there is a widespread reluctance to acknowledge what needs to be conserved. They prefer to use the political vocabulary of liberalism, and to ignore that the mantra of the scientific/industrial culture is "progress"—which is what has been used to give moral legitimacy to various expressions of liberalism.

Plato's influence on the formation of the Titanic mind-set can actually be documented by comparing the ideas of Leo Strauss with key ideas presented in The Republic. These ideas, which Strauss has passed on to many of the current proponents of President George W. Bush's domestic and foreign policies—along with the idea of relying upon the fundamentalist Christians as a primary base of support, include the following: that a small elite group of thinkers capable of understanding and being guided by universal Truths should be the governing class; that this governing elite should use lies as a political strategy for ensuring that the lower classes perform the function they are best suited for; that the ruling elite is not accountable to the people they govern; and given that only the ruling elite possesses the capacity of discerning the eternal Truths, the other classes should be guided by the myths of religion that will hold in check any idea that the members of the lower class should seek to be self-governing—an illusion that both Plato and Strauss viewed as leading to the tyranny of the unqualified. Strauss's reading of Plato has had a direct influence on the thinking of President George W. Bush, his advisors, and on the thinking of several members of the Supreme Court. While it is possible to see evidence of Plato's ideas being put into practice today, the real responsibility for the disastrous consequences of

trying to implement them must be assigned to Strauss, his many followers in Bush's administration, and in the market-liberal think tanks that are incorrectly labeled as conservative.

The features of Plato's thinking that are less easily judged as having a direct influence on today's world include his arguments that pure reason is the only approach to knowledge, that poetry and narratives undermine the rational process by fostering human emotions and loyalties to local traditions, and that the characteristics of justice transcend place, time, and the diversity of cultures—and thus are not subject to local democracy. Yet it is these aspects of Plato's thinking that are such a prominent characteristic of the Titanic mind-set that is on a collision course with extinction. To restate Plato's core ideas in more contemporary terms, by arguing that knowledge cannot be derived from the constantly changing nature of cultural experience he gives support to the current idea that abstract knowledge is a more reliable guide to living in a culturally diverse world and environmentally changing world. Furthermore, his arguments about what he regarded as the mis-educational nature of poetry and narratives have now become the conventional wisdom of many of today's educational elites who regard oral traditions and thus oral-based cultures as backward and in need of modern development—which is the code phrase for acquiring the ability to rely upon abstract thinking.

Another current way of thinking can be traced back to the importance that Plato gave to the idea that the individual has a psyche—an idea that may have had its origins in the thinking of Socrates. The Homeric mind, which Plato opposed, was shaped through identification with the exemplary figures passed on through the epic narratives. These narratives also served as the storehouse of what was expected of a citizen, of the nature and proper use of technologies, and of the moral imperatives of the group. The Homeric mind did not reinforce the idea that individuals should have their own convictions and be self-guiding through the exercise of rational thought. Plato's introduction of the idea of “sheer thinking” required a redefinition of the self where memory and identification with the exemplary acts of Homeric culture give way to the idea of the autonomy of individual thought (a capacity that only a select few possessed). Rational thought as sheer thinking thus required the idea of an autonomous agent—that is, a knowing subject and the idea of an external world that is separate from the knower. Plato solved this problem by claiming that only the guardians possessed the capacity to “contemplate the realities themselves as they are forever in the same unchanging state.” This idea of unchanging ideas would give way in modern times to the relativity of individual interpretation. However, the idea that there is an inner space where thinking occurs still survives, and is further buttressed by the Judeo-Christian idea of an individual soul that she/he is accountable for.

If the importance of abstract thinking, as well as the separation of the knower from the known, needed to be reinforced after centuries of the Scholastic philosopher's focus on the nature and moral implications of a God-centered world, it was Rene Descartes who came to the rescue. Again, the question arises as to whether Descartes anticipated or was adopted by generations of thinkers who shared the same legacy of thinking that can now be recognized as the Titanic mind-set. He is most often associated with the dualism of mind and matter which we can now recognize as a restatement of an assumption that can be traced back to Plato.

This seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher was adamant in holding that nothing could be learned from the past—including the philosophers who preceded him. He further rejected all cultural knowledge systems that did not fit his mechanistic model of the universe. This was not made explicit in his writings as he, like most recent philosophers, simply ignored the knowledge systems of other cultures. His argument that the fundamental characteristics of a machine, which he extended to both organic and non-organic entities,

excluded a concern with moral values except those found in the religion of his day. This meant that the anthropocentrism that was a core feature of the dominant religion excluded any possibility of a land ethic that would guide people's lives, which had already been achieved by many indigenous cultures such as the Western Apache and the Quechua.

Aside from his certainty of the existence of God, the only other certainty he acknowledged was summed up in his famous phrase "cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am). By rejecting previous knowledge and by positing that a deductive form of rationalism was the only reliable approach to knowledge, Descartes added to the twin misconceptions that the individual is an autonomous thinker (except for the influence of God), and that individuals are universally the same. Descartes anticipated (influenced?) another characteristic of the Titanic mind-set, which is that the deductive approach to rationality yields knowledge that is universally valid. That is, Descartes assumed that if all individuals relied upon the same approach to rationality they would arrive at the same conclusions. It is important to note, however, that his deductive approach differs radically from the experimental approach of modern science.

While Plato's ideas were part of the tradition that Descartes rejected, he nevertheless reinforced many of the ways of thinking that can be found in Plato's theory of Ideas-- and thus what constitutes justice. The shared similarities between Plato and Descartes can also be seen as central to the Titanic mind-set of today. They include the following assumptions and silences: that when individuals the world over share the same approach to the rational process they will arrive at the same conclusions; that human existence, when guided by rational thought, will continue to progress regardless of the degraded condition of the environment; that the mythopoetic narratives that sustain different cultural ways of knowing should be abandoned in favor of the one-true approach to knowledge discovered by Western philosophers. It is interesting to note that E. O. Wilson makes the same argument in Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge (1998) when he claims that the world's religions represent an earlier survival strategy, and should now be replaced by the theory of evolution as the guiding metanarrative—and that scientists should determine which cultural beliefs and practices will meet the test of natural selection. Plato came the closest to recognizing the forms of knowledge that can be identified as part of the cultural commons. While he recognized the knowledge and manual skill of the craftsperson, he also held that it was inferior and thus lacking in wisdom. The silence shared by Plato, Descartes, and the Titanic mind-set also can be seen in how their hubris led them to ignore the idea of self-limitation for the sake of future generations.

Just as few contemporary professors of philosophy are likely to bring to the attention of students the ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism in the thinking of Plato and Descartes, students are likely to encounter the same silences when they are introduced to the core ideas of John Locke. These silences, which are based on cultural prejudices that most classical and contemporary philosophers failed to examine, were given a modern form of legitimation by the ideas of John Locke. Although most of today's politicians and even citizens will not have read and discussed Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, as well as his Two Treatises on Government, they nevertheless take-for-granted a simplified interpretation of several of Locke's key ideas. This is one of the mysteries of the Titanic mind-set; namely, how ideas and assumptions are intergenerationally passed along when people are unaware of their source—and of the historical/political circumstances to which the author was responding.

Locke was writing during a transition from royal absolutism to the Glorious Revolution that established a constitutional monarchy. This period was also characterized by advances in science and a growing awareness of human freedom. What is particularly relevant to

understanding how the ideas of Locke contributed to accelerating the enclosure of the commons, as well as how he further strengthened the idea that traditions (that is, intergenerational knowledge) are irrelevant if not a misleading source of knowledge, are his ideas about the nature and source of private property, the empirical basis of ideas, and a view of language that supported the misconception of language as a sender/receiver form of communication. Identifying the nature of the person, including the rights they possess as individuals, was a primary concern of Locke. In addition to arguing that only individuals have rights (including the right to overturn the government when it becomes too oppressive), he went on to argue that the labor of the individual is the basis of private property. He also held that one of the primary purposes of government is to protect the individual's property. He even articulated what has become a truism of today's market liberals when he wrote that the state "cannot take from any man his property without his consent." The individual's absolute sovereignty in the use and abuse of property is now a keystone belief of the Titanic mind-set.

Locke's other contributions to this mind-set include his argument that the individual's direct experience is the source of ideas—which he divided into simple and complex ideas. His argument that communication is a process of using words to convey one's thoughts to others has contributed to the still-held misconception of the role of language as a sender/receiver process of communication. In effect, this view of language as a conduit further hides the basic reality that language, as a complex mix of historical and current analogic thinking, frames thinking in accordance with the prevailing root metaphors. The conduit view of language leads people, including our elite thinkers, to ignore that words have a history, and that the taken-for-granted root metaphors (interpretative frameworks) frame the process of thinking in culturally specific ways. This misconception about the nature of language must be taken into account when considering why the ethnocentrism that has been such a prominent characteristic of Western philosophers has continued to be such a dominant characteristic of today's university educated politicians and citizens.

Just as the Titanic mind-set gives special standing to individual freedom, the sanctity of private property, and the progressive nature of rational thought, it also gives special standing to key ideas of Adam Smith that have become today's political clichés. As a pale echo of Plato's timeless Ideas, these clichés have also been given the status of timeless and universal truths. Unfortunately, they further marginalize the possibility of recognizing the non-monetized relationships and activities that are central to the world's diverse cultural commons. In short the extrapolations from Smith's writings have been turned into universal truths that continue the tradition of ethnocentric and anthropocentric thinking that goes back to Plato and beyond.

Adam Smith's two major works, The Wealth of Nations and The Theory of Moral Sentiments are complex and, given the nearly half million words it took to lay out his economic theory, is too dense to hold the attention of most readers. Yet a few words and phrases from this lengthy tome have survived in a way that has altered modern consciousness and now serve to justify the process of economic globalization that threatens what remains of the world's cultural and environmental commons. The power of these words and phrases, "free trade," "laissez-faire," "the invisible hand," to "truck, barter, and trade," serve today to give further legitimacy to the ideas that the sanctity of private property, free competition, and the unrelenting pursuit of self-interest contribute to the overall well-being of society. That Smith's economic theory has been taken out of its historical context of how the local economy of Scotland was being limited by the mercantile policies of the king of England is only part of the story of how current misconceptions underlie today's taken-for-granted truths.

While Smith's idea that the prosperity of all is advanced as individuals pursue their individual interests has become a truism for today's market liberal politicians, the selective memory of today's university educated economists and politicians can be seen in how the other half of Smith's theory has been ignored. In The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Smith introduced a more complex view of human nature, one that represents human life as responsive to social needs other than the freedom to pursue wealth at the cost of everything else. For Smith, the innate need of humans that serves as a check on unrestrained competition in the market place is the desire to take the responses of others into account. That is, to be sensitive to the impact of one's behavior on others. What Smith viewed as an innate human characteristic was summed up in the following way:

Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren...She rendered their approbation most flattering and most agreeable to him for their own sake; and their disapprobation most mortifying and most offensive (p. 199).

This insight, as ethnocentric as it is, might have provided a way of recognizing the importance of mutual support and moral reciprocity that are core features of most cultural commons. It would have also provided an awareness that Smith understood the moral limits of the individual's pursuit of self-interest and an unrestrained form of capitalism. Unfortunately, this part of Smith's legacy has been largely overlooked with the result that it has been reduced to a series of slogans that are now used to justify the further exploitation of the cultural and environmental commons.

Not only has Smith's legacy become frozen in the slogans now used to justify economic globalization, it has, at the same time, become the linchpin in the market liberal ideology that is accelerating the rate of environmental degradation. A comparison between the values of the commons that meets Gregory Bateson's definition of a healthy cultural and environmental ecology and the values underlying the reductionist, out-of-context slogans derived from a partial reading of Smith's writings on free markets brings out the following. A sustainable cultural commons, as Bateson understood it, is governed by moral values that exclude the exploitation and marginalization of any of its members. Thus, it is characterized by cooperation, mutually supportive and largely non-monetized relationships and activities, renewing of intergenerational knowledge and skills, mutual trust, mentoring relationships, face-to-face accountability, use of local materials, markets that are local and that meet community needs, an awareness of environmental limits, and the need to conserve proven traditions that will contribute to the well-being of future generations. As many academics have only experienced the false plenitude of the market system, with its ideology of possessive individualism, they are unlikely to recognize the qualities that Bateson associates with the cultural commons that still exist among different groups within the community. The deeply engrained ethnocentrism that was part of their own education will lead most of them to reject the suggestion that there are cultures in the world where the cultural and environmental commons are the dominant feature, with markets being relegated to a particular location and on specific days of the week.

By way of contrast, the daily practices given legitimacy by the slogans derived from Smith's writings are driven by the life-long individual quest for material wealth, competition at all levels of social life, an emphasis on progress that fails to take account of what is being lost or the dangers that lie ahead, the need to expand markets and profits regardless of the adverse

impact on local communities, a view of the environment and other people as exploitable resources, and the continual quest for new technologies that will increase efficiencies and profits. As the deep cultural assumptions that underlie the free-market system of unlimited production, consumption and exploitation are reinforced at all levels of the educational system, as well as by the media, shopping malls, and the ever-present displays of personal wealth, the relationships and values that sustain the local cultural commons recede more into the background of community life. For the youth already addicted to acquiring the latest technology and consumer fad, and the middle age people still attempting to climb higher on the consumer pyramid, the local cultural commons are largely invisible—but often not to the older members of the community who seek the forms of supportive relationships and skill development missing in their years of working within the market-dominated system.

Just as key ideas of Plato, Descartes, Locke, and Smith are part of today's taken-for-granted Titanic mentality, several of John Stuart Mill's ideas have also attained special status as unquestioned truths. And again, like the others, while his ideas were articulated as a response to the circumstances of his time—which was governmental abuse, they have been taken out of context and now stand as universal “Truths” that all cultures should adopt in their march to becoming modern and economically developed. Mill's famous book, *On Liberty* (1859), was an eloquent defense of the importance of free speech and intellectual freedom, as well as a carefully crafted argument against governments that attempt to silence ideas viewed as threatening their power. As he wrote in *On Liberty*, “if all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”

Mill understood that free expression is essential in a world where there are no absolute truths. For him, free expression, critical inquiry, and even misleading ideas are all part of the process of achieving a better understanding. As he put it, the first duty of the thinker “is to follow his intellect to whatever conclusion it may lead.” This dictum, which has been given greater authority by the largely unquestioned assumption that change is inherently progressive in nature, has been translated by today's market and social justice liberals to mean that freedom of speech and critical inquiry should lead to change—with the market liberals equating change with new technologies and markets. That these qualities of mind should also lead to clarifying why different traditions need to be conserved has largely been overlooked—or ridiculed as the expression of a reactionary way of thinking. The way in which Mill's defense of free inquiry has been framed by the assumption that it should lead to change rather than in warranted cases to conserving the intergenerational knowledge (even wisdom) of the community is only one of the reasons that his ideas need to be considered as having the potential of undermining the traditions that sustain the commons. From the perspective of people who understand the cultural and environmental commons as essential to their cultural identity and traditions of relative self-sufficiency (and thus as sites of resistance to the unrelenting spread of market forces) Mill's defense of free speech could also be used to challenge the agenda of the market liberals who seek to replace the commons with consumer goods and services. Unfortunately, the failure of most public school teachers and university professors to be aware of the commons, as well as their largely uninformed prejudices that lead to viewing the conserving of traditions as reactionary in nature, has led to interpreting Mill's defense freedom of inquiry as a the rallying cry for questioning everything, and for living as though history has no influence—as two prominent advocates of educational reform recently put it.

There is another aspect of Mill's legacy that carries forward the ethnocentrism found in the thinking of Plato, Descartes, Locke, and Smith—and that still pervades most contemporary courses in philosophy, economics and political theory. Mill's arguments for freedom of inquiry, like the arguments of the other philosophers discussed here, failed to take account of the many approaches to renewing the knowledge, skills, and patterns of mutual support that can be found in different cultures—including the culture that Mill was embedded in and largely took for granted. His ethnocentrism can also be seen in his argument that the individual is the source of ideas, and that individuals should follow where critical reflection leads—even when critical reflection is based on the wrong assumptions. That is, Mill's defense of freedom of inquiry, which is undeniably important in certain contexts, also leads to representing individuals as autonomous and self-creating. This is a core idea of today's market liberals who understand that individual autonomy is a virtue in that it means that the individual, in lacking the skills and membership in the mutual support systems of the local commons, will be dependent upon consumerism to meet needs that range from food, health care, entertainment, sports, built environments, and group identity.

What Mill did not understand, and what is still not understood by people today who have been indoctrinated by the media and by educators who share the same cultural assumptions that underlie the myth of unending progress, is that the idea of self-creating individuals is part of the West's mythic thinking. The idea of autonomy, at least for individuals who meet the conditions specific to what each philosopher took to be the nature and source of knowledge, was not based on an awareness of how the mythopoetic narratives of cultures are encoded in the interpretative frameworks that influence the processes of analogic thinking, and in the image metaphors that reflect which analogies and their underling root metaphors prevailed over competing analogies. That is, Mill along with the other philosophers did not understand that when individuals are born into a language community their patterns of thinking will be heavily influenced by the assumptions carried forward in the image metaphors (words such as data, freedom, tradition, individualism, and so forth) and by the taken-for-granted interpretative frameworks that are shared by other members. If the reader doubts this claim, then she/he should consider the connections between the mythopoetic narratives in the Book of Genesis and how the language/thought patterns of today's supposedly autonomous individuals reproduced the myths of patriarchy and a human-centered universe that were taken-for-granted for several thousand years.

In addition to Mill's failure to recognize that the languaging systems of the culture that individuals are born into influences their patterns of thinking, body language, and ways of reproducing the material culture, he shared the ignorance of his day about the life forming characteristics of the natural environment. His theory of the individual's need for free inquiry reflected the silences and prejudices of his era. To reproduce those silences and prejudices today, as though they represent unqualified truths about the human condition and possibilities, puts us on a collision course with other cultures that have a tradition of adapting their cultural practices to what can be sustained by the bioregion they depend upon. His ideas, as they are promoted today, also contribute to the sense of hubris that characterizes the Titanic mind-set. What his approach to knowledge demonstrates, and which can be seen in the thinking of Plato and the other philosophers discussed here, is that he was unable to recognize the silences, prejudices, and taken-for-granted assumptions of his era—most of which centered on the inability to recognize the everyday patterns of the culture they lived in and that other cultures had

different approaches to knowledge that should not have been interpreted as existing at a more primitive level of development.

Another characteristic of the Titanic mind-set can be traced back to the thinking of Herbert Spencer who combined key ideas from the writings of Locke and Smith with the emerging theory of evolution—thus, giving his arguments for a laissez-faire economy, and a survival of the fittest social ethic the legitimacy of science. This mid-nineteenth century advocate of the liberal agenda for restricting government in the areas of social welfare and business regulation, actually coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” that Charles Darwin later adopted. Spencer also carried forward the philosophic tradition of ethnocentric and anthropocentric thinking, as well as its silences about the nature and importance of the world’s diverse cultural commons. To his readers, he provided scientific legitimation to a prejudice long held by Western thinkers that cultures represent different stages of development, starting with pagan and illiterate cultures and moving to the most advanced culture that is Christian, literate, and in possession of experimental science and technology. For Spencer the industrial system represented the most advanced expression of social evolution, and it could only retain its adaptive edge by not interfering in the process of natural selection. As he put it, “pervading all nature we must see at work a stern discipline, which is a little cruel that it may be very kind.” To make his point more directly, society benefits as a whole from the elimination of the unfit—those who are not as competitive, who are sick or physically limited, and those who start life with limited opportunities.

Spencer’s ideas have not disappeared from today’s political discourse. And his Social Darwinism has not disappeared from today’s scientific discourse. It is now carried forward by the current efforts of E. O. Wilson, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett, among others, to explain how the cultural memes (which correspond to the genes of organisms) are subject to the same “stern discipline” of natural selection. Spencer’s Social Darwinism also underlies the current policies of market liberals who created the World Trade Organization, and have as the centerpiece of their political agenda the transference of wealth to those who have already succeeded in accumulating power and wealth, the privatizing of poverty and social disadvantages, limiting the role of government to promoting the further expansion of a free-market system, and expanding the role of the military in support of economic globalization.

The integration of classical liberal ideas with the theory of evolution also carried forward the tradition of thinking that can be traced back at least to Plato: that is, the idea that rationally based theory constituted by men who were ignorant of different cultural ways of knowing, as well as ignorant of how the cultural and environmental commons represented alternatives to the environmentally destructive industrial system of production, should be, in the name of progress and development, imposed on the rest of the world. There is no more extreme expression of hubris than this. The Titanic was taken to be a prideful symbol of the correctness of this hubris. It represented the most advanced state of technology, the highest expression of luxury, and the ability of the industrial culture to dominate nature.

In assessing whether the traditions of philosophic thinking have influenced our current inability to address the cultural roots of the ecological crises, it is necessary to point out again that it is impossible to establish direct causal connections. As pointed out earlier, politicians and supposedly educated people continue to use phrases borrowed from the writings of philosophers they have not read in depth—or at all. And their way of thinking carries forward the same prejudice and silences. A deep knowledge of culture, as well as the ways of knowing and forms of ecological citizenship of other cultures, continue to be missing in the education of most

university graduates. This may account for why such a large segment of Americans support the market liberal policies even when the policies undermine their community's traditions of self reliance. This collective myopia may also account for why nearly half of American voters fail to consider that the market liberal agenda of economic colonization is one of the causes for the armed resistance that is now being directed at the West.

The questions raised at the beginning need to be given more careful attention. If our educational institutions, including the trend setting elite universities, continue to reproduce the same silences, prejudices, and culturally uninformed patterns of thinking that can be found in the writings of Plato, Descartes, and the rest of the philosophers discussed here, then there is little likelihood that we will be able to change course in time to avert the collapse of sustainable ecosystems that many in the Third World are currently encountering. The issue is not whether students currently encounter philosophers and political theorists who actually accept the ideas of past philosophers as valid (though there are more than just the example of the followers of Leo Strauss). Rather, it's a matter of being introduced to the Western traditions of thinking by professors who are unaware of the silences and culturally uninformed prejudices that were passed on by their own mentors who were unaware of environmental limits and the ecological importance of the cultural and environmental commons. This process of carrying forward the misconceptions of the past is not a matter of speculation. As pointed out earlier, misconceptions that can be traced back to the Book of Genesis about a patriarchal and anthropocentric world have only recently been challenged. And if we read Richard Rorty, John Dewey (who is being revived as an environmental philosopher even though the evidence points the other way), and if we consider the British tradition of analytic philosophy, we find the same silences and culturally uninformed ways of understanding that are being represented as having universal validity. And if we look at what students are learning in their political theory classes (if they should take one), we will find that they are unlikely to encounter a discussion of how our two most widely used political terms, liberal and conservative, are now used in an Orwellian fashion. Nor are they likely to learn that the use of liberal should take account of two distinct political agendas that are related at the level of deep cultural assumptions; with the market liberals being promoters of the classical liberal idea of free markets and a reduced role for government—and the social justice liberals concerned about issues of equal economic, political, and educational opportunity. Students are also not likely to learn how the current misuse of conservative and conservatism as the label for advocates of free markets and economic globalization, fails to take account of how environmentalists and people working to revitalize the cultural commons as alternatives to a consumer dependent existence are the genuine conservatives. They are also unlikely to learn that this form of community and intergenerationally-centered conservatism was first articulated by Edmund Burke and more recently by Wendell Berry. The failure of universities can be seen in the large percentage of university graduates who are willing to see their traditions of civil liberties, including habeas corpus, disappear in response to the politics of fear and outright demagoguery wrapped in the American flag.

The challenge is in knowing where to begin changing the ecological destructive course that our culture is on—which means, in part, determining where to begin persuading faculty across the disciplines that global warming is occurring and the chemistry of the oceans is changing—and that just these two fundamental changes in the environment that we now take-for-granted are going to increase poverty, civil strife, and perhaps even the prospects of a fascist government that will go to any length to preserve the right of corporations to continue to exploit the environment and to further enclose the diversity of the world's cultural commons. There are

promising proposals for educational reforms that are being discussed in different countries, but unfortunately most faculty are too busy with their individually oriented research and still too captive of the misconceptions acquired in their own graduate studies, to consider whether the content of their courses and research is part of the problem or part of the solution.

Chet Bowers wrote his first book on the connections between education, cultural ways of knowing, and the ecological crisis in 1974. The title of the book was Cultural Literacy for Freedom. Since then he has written over 95 articles and 19 books that examine how language reproduces ways of thinking that were formed before there was an awareness of ecological limits, the connections between emancipatory/transformational ways of thinking and the globalization of the West's industrial culture. In more recent years attention has been given to understanding the educational implications of eco-justice for Third World cultures, the prospects for future generations, and the need to revitalize the world's diverse cultural commons as sites of resistance to economic globalization and further environmental degradation.

Website: **C.A. Bowers** *Writings on Education, Eco-Justice, and Revitalizing the Commons* (<http://cabowers.net/>)

1 Toward a Post-Industrial Consciousness: Understanding the Linguistic Basis of Ecologically Sustainable Educational Reforms By C. A. Bowers 2008 2 Contents: Chapter One Introduction Chapter Two Western Philosophy, Language, and the Titanic Mind-Set that has Put Us on a Collision Course With Environmental Limits Chapter Three The Linguistic Colonization of the Present by Past Thinkers Who Were Unaware of Environmental Issues. Chapter Four How the Linguistic Complicity of George Lakoff Supports the Market Liberalism's Agenda for Enclosing the Cultural and Environmental Commons Chapter Five The Double Bind of Environmentalists Who Identify Themselves as Liberals Chapter Six... Philosophy, language, and the titanic mind-set. *Language & Ecology*, 2(1), 1-16. Google Scholar. Braidotti, R. (2016). Posthuman critical theory. *Feminist philosophy and the philosophy of feminism: Irigaray and the history of western metaphysics*. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1997.tb00172.x> CrossRef Google Scholar. Kant, I. (1948). But the Titanic continued to haunt me. My oceanographic colleagues scoffed at my Titanic dreams and told me I should devote myself to "real" scientific projects. Colleagues are fellow workers in the same field of study. What is the most likely reason the author of *Exploring the Titanic* describes in detail the procedure of towing Argo before finally discovering the Titanic? to highlight the combined efforts used to find the Titanic. Which sentence from *Exploring the Titanic* best indicates the author's enthusiastic tone at the end of the passage? As we came into port, I couldn't believe my eyes. ANGUS was quite like Argo, except that it was an older camera sled that took still photographs instead of video as it was towed over the sea floor.