

Paul Raskin

Journey to Earthland: The Great Transition to Planetary Civilization

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Paul Raskin's latest book, *Journey to Earthland*, is a visionary book, meant for 'tomorrow's travellers' who are interested in finding answers to the essential questions 'Who are we?' and 'How shall we live in the future?'. Raskin provides fascinating insights into the barriers we face in the present great transition, and he suggests a well-argued vision for the future which he calls the 'Earthland'. As a systems thinker, Raskin adopts a holistic perspective and discusses the different parts of our system such as economy, politics, culture and environment in relation to a universal vision for sustainability. Uncertainty about our future becomes bearable, or at any rate lessened, after reading Raskin's scenes from the Earthland in 2084 (the centennial of George Orwell's 1984), which are characterised by social democratic global governance, solidarity and diversity.

The book consists of three major parts. The first part briefly outlines the phases of human history and acknowledges the multiple dimensions of social change, as processes conditioned by local factors and specificities. The phases include the Stone Age, early civilisation, the Modern Era and the Planetary Phase. The planetary phase is a continuation of the modern era that is inspired by modernity and concepts like progress, democracy, reason and individual rights, as well as by innovations in science and technology. The planetary phase is nevertheless challenged by the modern era's old-fashioned institutions and 'zombie ideologies', such as consumerism, 'territorial chauvinism' and a myopic political order that is ill equipped dealing with systematic and transnational problems such as climate change and population displacement. The second part of the book develops proposals and policy suggestions for changes that are needed in all aspects of society in order to enter the planetary phase. By interrogating contemporary solutions, such as the UN post-2015 agenda and sustainable development goals, Raskin argues for a policy reform that can incorporate fundamental changes both in human consciousness (the 'normative realm') and in the outer 'institutional realm'. While ecocentrism, solidarity and wellbeing constitute the normative side, justice and sustainability are the core values of the institutional arena. A vast spectrum of cultural and political reforms are needed to cultivate non-capitalist economies and a society based on a sharing economy, community based living and democratic global governance. Reminding us of the values of the degrowth movement of today, Raskin also argues that the global citizen movement is what could make this transition possible. The third part of the book explores possible scenarios of the civilised future and outlines the opportunities and challenges of proposed solutions such as commonwealth, one world with many places and the principle of constrained pluralism. The idea of constrained pluralism relies on three principles: irreducibility, subsidiarity and heterogeneity. Irreducibility affirms the need for global scale – one world – in areas that require global responsibility such as climate, ecosystems, education and heritage preservation. Raskin nevertheless acknowledges the potential barriers to this principle, such as struggles over what should be considered 'irreducibly global' and 'between contending camps advocating for either a more tight-knit world state or a decentralized federation'.

Reading this book from a social movements perspective, I was positively surprised by its extensive discussion on the agency of change in the transition. Raskin provides strong intellectual arguments on the need for global citizenship, and he hopes that the cosmopolitan roots of the modern era will grow stronger in the planetary phase, on the basis of shared risks and our common fate. Transboundary identity and global 'collectivity' are conditions for the agents of change in the planetary phase. Raskin recognises the importance of collective action and solidarity to counteract the dominant market forces and elite. He calls for a global citizens' movement (GCM) to channel the public's discontent with incompatible political leaders and institutions for action. In collaboration with progressive governments and NGOs, Raskin hopes that a GCM would alter political cultures in various places including the United Nations. In line with his idea of 'one world', Raskin expects the UN to be the coordinating authority after it has been reformed and revitalised as a result of the global movement.

I suspect that a discussion on citizenship could usefully recognise the inclusion of non-humans and rights of nature in the envisioned scenarios for the Earthland. Concepts like ecological citizenship might be more suitable for expanding the scope of the *demos* in Planetary civilisation from humans to all living beings on the planet. This would require a value shift from anthropocentric thinking to a holistic view that honours the Earth as a living being and acknowledges intrinsic values that are inherent to nature, independent of human judgement. In this context, Raskin fails to explore the 'Earth' in Earthland, and he provides only a limited discussion on spirituality and environment which is mostly centred on Western religions and worldviews.

Nonetheless, *Journey to Earthland*, makes an inspiring addition to the literature on transitions, visionary and future scenarios with its sceptical, thought-provoking but positive attitude. A great quote to finalise this review is from the book: 'Even if we can be pessimistic about the probabilities, we can, like Lewis Mumford, still be optimistic about the possibilities'.

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