

Dan Leahy's Book Outline:

Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World by Tyson Yunkaporta, HarperOne (2020)

Introduction.

This book really made me think. I've taken some notes from some of its chapters, but not all of them. I think it's really important to read the book in its full context which is full of symbols, stories, yarns and interactions. - Dan

The Porcupine, the Paleo-Mind, and the Grand Design

Higher Intelligence is Already Here. Beings of higher intelligence are already here, always have been. They just haven't used their intelligence to destroy anything yet. Maybe they will if they tire of the incompetence of domesticated humans (2).

Move with the Land. Severed not only from the land but from the sheer genius that comes from belonging in symbiotic relation to it... If you don't move with the land, the land will move you (2)

Complexity of Creation ... a relatively recent demand that simplicity and order be imposed upon the complexity of creation, a demand sprouting from an ancient seed of narcissism that has flourished due to a new imbalance in human societies (3). The Sumerians started it. The Romans perfected it. The Anglosphere inherited it. The world is now mired in it. - "infecting complex patterns with artificial simplicity, exercising a civilizing control over what some see as chaos."

The Law of the Land. "it was our ways, not our things." (7) - "I know who I am, where I belong and what I call myself, and it is enough."(8) "I'm examining global systems from an Indigenous Knowledge perspective (13). There is little true engagement with Indigenous Knowledge... It's always about the what and never about the how. I want to reverse that phenomena. (17)

Albino Boy

The Custodial Species. All species sat down for a yarn to decide which one would be the custodial species for all of creation. Emu made a mess demanding to be boss over everyone. The Kangaroo, the Echidna and the Serpent took hold of the Emu. "Containing the excesses of malignant narcissists is a team effort." (27) "All Law-breaking comes from that first evil thought, that original sin of placing yourself above the land or above other people." (28)

The Rules of Engagement. Stone knives. Wounds inflicted as mutual. No grudges. At the end, no longer opponents. "Perhaps the transferable wisdom here is simply that most young men need something a little meatier than mindfulness workshops to curtail the terrifying narcissism that overtakes them from the moment their ball drops." (30)

The Sentience of Stones. The Greek mistake, “dead matter.” “Theories of dead matter and empty space meant that Western science came late to discover of what they now call ‘dark matter,’ finding that those areas of ‘dead and empty’ space actually contain most of the matter in the universe.” (32)

An Indigenous Person: “is a member of a community retaining memories of life lived sustainably on a land base, as part of that land base.” (36). Indigenous Knowledge “is any application of those memories as living knowledge to improve present and future circumstances.” (36)

First Law

First Law. “Nothing is created or destroyed; it just moves and changes, and this is the First Law. Creation is in a constant state of motion, and we must move with it as the custodial species or we will damage the system and doom ourselves.... This applies to economic and social systems as well as natural ones. They all follow the same laws.” (39)

Objectivity. It is an illusion of omniscience. “No matter how hard you may try to separate yourself from reality, there are always observer effects as the reality shifts in relation to your viewpoint. Scientists call this the uncertainty principle.” (41)

Second Law. First Peoples’ Non-linear time and Second People’s linear time. “Perhaps the desire to create closed systems and keep time going in a straight line is the reason for Second Peoples’ obsession with creating fences and walls, borders, great divides and great barriers. In reality we do not inhabit closed systems...” (46). The Second Law of Thermodynamics is a “true law. It’s just the wrong law to apply to beings living in open, interconnected systems.” (48). “It is a curse.” (49)

Civilization and Cities. (49-52). Civilization is NOT a culture that produces knowledge, technology, law and arts. Any community can do that. “Civilizations build cities.” Growth is the engine of the city. “As growth continues exponentially, so do the masses of people missing out. There is no equilibrium to be found here.” (51)

Forever Limited

Demotic. “Like all things that last, it must be a group effort aligned with patterns of creation discerned from living within a specific landscape.” (61). Cultural innovations occur through the demotic – “the practices and forms that evolve through the daily lives and interactions of people and place in an organic sequence of adaptation.”(62).

Sustainable Systems. “For those seeking sustainability practices from Indigenous cultures, it is important to focus on both ancient and contemporary knowledge of a demotic origin, rather than individual inventions or amendments. (63)

Civilized Systems. - “every civilized system demands growth based on destruction of the land. The political spectrum itself is an illusion, suggesting that the only forms of social

organization are liberalism, fascism, or socialism..... Civilizations over the last few millennia have done unspeakable damage to the systems necessary for existence, but this is nothing compared to what has happened in the last century..." (67)

Transitional Societies. We need to "begin creating cultures and societies of transition, to lessen the impacts of this calamity on our communities and potentially avoid postapocalyptic stress altogether. We need to start working with the land rather than against it." (71)

Lines in the Sand

Four Protocols: Diversify, Connect, Interact and Adapt. (85-86)

- 1. Diversify** "is not about tolerating difference or treating others equally or without prejudice. The diversification principle compels you to maintain your individual differences.... This prevents you from clustering into narcissistic flash mobs." You must seek out and interact with agents and systems dissimilar to you, keeping your system open and therefore sustainable.
- 2. Connectedness.** Forming pairs with other pairs, creating or expanding networks and connecting to other networks and agents. (86)
- 3. Interaction.** "Is the principle that provides the energy and spirit of communication to power the system. This principle facilitates the flow of living knowledge." Transfer it, don't store it. (86)
- 4. Adaptation.** "You must allow yourself to be transformed through your interactions with other agents and the knowledge that passes through you from them." (86)

Of Spirit and Spirits

Four Parts of Your Spirit. Big spirit, Ancestral spirit, Living spirit and Shadow spirit. Big spirit (gut instinct) is your higher self and goes back to sky camp when you die. But sky country always reflects earth country so there is another spirit, ancestral spirit, which goes back to a place in the land. Your living spirit animates your body flowing through you from the land around you and Shadow spirit makes you want things you don't need and think you are better than other people. (95-96).

Advanced and Fair

Progress. The monolithic grand narrative. It is grounded in the myth of primitivism – that life before the industrial era was brief, brutish, savage and simple. The stereotypical caveman persists in our hearts and minds. This story is a powerful weapon in the hands of malignant narcissists. (111).

The Power of Story. If you want to take control of your life or work toward some kinds of sustainable change in the world, you need to harness the power of story. (112).

Yarning. Is a structured cultural activity for knowledge production, inquiry and transmission. Its protocols are active listening, mutual respect and building on what others have said rather than openly contradicting them or debating their ideas. The primary mode of communication is narrative – the sharing of anecdotes, stories and experiences from the lived reality of the participants. (114-115)

Romancing the Stone Age

Deep Engagement. Maybe the question is how do we recapture learning. Learning ends around the age of eight “when the highly focused attention of play and learning is schooled out of the child (136). “ ... the reclaiming of Indigenous ritual and cultural activities as exercises in concentration...may be just what is needed to grow and repair the minds required to create complex solutions for sustainability issues.” (136). “Deep engagement encompassing mind, body, heart, and spirit has been replaced by a dogged ethic of commitment to labor and enthusiastic compliance with discipline imposed by authority. (138)

Displaced Apostrophes

Storing Data. “The only sustainable way to store data long term is within relationships – deep connections between generations of people in custodial relation to a sentient landscape, all grounded in a vibrant oral tradition.” (148)

Different Ways of Thinking. Kinship-mind, story-mind, dreaming mind, ancestor mind and pattern mind.

Kinship-mind is about relationships and connectedness. There are no isolated variables. An observer is integrated within a sentient system that is observing itself. **Story-mind** is about the role of narrative in memory and knowledge transmission, the most powerful tool for memorization and it includes yarning as a method of knowledge production. **Dreaming-mind** is about using metaphors to work with knowledge. Metaphors connect the physical and non-physical worlds. **Ancestor-mind** is about deep engagement connecting with a timeless state of mind. **Pattern-mind** is about seeing entire systems, trends and patterns within them and making predictions and solutions to complex problems. (149-152).

High and Low Context Cultures. High context cultures demand dialogue and complex agreements. Low-context cultures rely more on extensive verbal communication and explicit detailed instructions between individuals with relatively little shared understanding. The main contributing factor is child rearing practices, such as extended families vs. two primary caregivers, etc. (154)

Duck Hunting is Everybody’s Business

Violence. It is part of creation and distributed evenly among all agents in sustainable systems to minimize the damage it can do and it is best to keep violence in the public eye. Creation started with a big bang, not a big hug. The damage of violence is minimized when it is

distributed throughout a system rather than concentrated into the hands of a few powerful people and their minions (199)

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