Of What Story or Stories Are We A Part?
Simplifying the Problem by Complexifying It.

Raymond Benton, Jr., Ph.D., Professor Emeritus • March 18, 2016
Her Title Invites...

• A discussion of Climate Change
  – Real or imagined
• A discussion of Capitalism
• The tone of her film invites corporate bashing
Her Title Invites...

• A discussion of Climate Change
  – Real or imagined
• A discussion of Capitalism
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• I want to talk about the story/stories about which she speaks.
• What if the real problem is a story, one we’ve been telling ourselves for 400 years?
• The earth is not alive, to be feared and revered.
• The Earth is a machine and we are its masters.
Kasich in Palatine last week

• When asked a question about climate change he responded,

  We are here to manage the environment, not to worship it.

• Manage the economy, manage the environment, believe in efficiency: we can have the energy we need.
Alasdair C. MacIntyre
*After Virtue* (1984)

I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”
A Tale of Three Stories & Three Metaphors
The First Two Stories & Metaphors

**Medieval**

- The theology of medieval speculation colored the interpretation of common affairs.

**Modern**

- Today 18th century physics colors the interpretation of common affairs.
# The First Two Stories & Metaphors

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The First Two Stories & Metaphors

• How the world is conceived, how it is perceived, how it is interpreted has implications regarding how people should and how they do conduct the affairs of life.

• Take the extractive industries
  – That is, after all, what Klein is concerned with – extracting coal, oil, gold ...
A Living Being

• The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother served as a constraint.

• One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body.
A Machine

- Erwin Schrödinger, *Nature and the Greeks*

A comprehensive historical account of the twentieth-century scientific world picture
A Machine

Francis Bacon 1561 – 1626
René Descartes 1596 – 1650
Thomas Hobbes 1588 – 1679
Issac Newton 1642 – 1726
Adam Smith 1723 – 1790
Immanuel Kant 1724 – 1804
William James 1842 – 1910
Francis Bacon  
(1561-1626)

- The legitimate goal of science is the endowment of human life with new inventions and riches
- As a bell-ringer …
- The trumpeter who summons others to church …
- It was, if you will, a very ugly time.
- Ambitions: Personal vs. National vs. Species
Rene Descartes  
(1596-1650)

• I have described the Earth and the whole visible universe *as if* it were a machine, having regard only to the shape and movement of its parts.

*Discourse on Method*
Thomas Hobbes
(1588-1679)

• Look out the window and what you see is one great machine, each part of it comprised of another but smaller machine.
Isaac Newton  
(1642-1726)

• Pictured the scientific machine-universe

• His scientific machine-universe determined, or colored, the social, political, and religious as well as the strictly scientific things of the age.
Adam Smith  
(1723-1790)

- Extended the mechanistic interpretation into the sphere of moral, social, and economic relations.

- It is obvious and intentional in his *History of Astronomy* but it shows up in the *Moral Sentiments* as well as in the *Wealth of Nations*. 
Robert Townsend
(1739-1816)

• Goats and dogs gave rise to a naturalistic interpretation of human behavior.

• A behavior motivated by the need to eat and the desire for sex.

• The poor laws in England (the Speenhamland system) got in the way.
Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo

(1766-1834)                      (1772-1823)
Kant
(1724-1804)

• “In regard of the BEAUTIFUL but lifeless objects in nature ...”

  1886, pp. 258–60
  (capitalization is in the original)

• Beautiful but without life, lifeless.
From life and society as alive →
To everything modeled on the Machine

• The living entity is replaced by the machine as the organizing metaphor.

• That the machine is the dominant metaphor, sometimes by choice, more often by habit, there can be no doubt.
From life and society is alive →
To everything is modeled on the Machine

• The living entity is replaced by the machine as the organizing metaphor.

• That the **machine** is the dominant metaphor, sometimes by choice, more often by habit, there can be no doubt.

• **Could it be matter of perspective?**
... DIFFERENTLY

Inspiring the same wonder as a peacock’s tail, this humanlike mask helps the Western Australian peacock spider attract females. The male uses its brightly patterned abdominal flap (made of scales and hair) to court a mate.
... DIFFERENTLY

The rainbow eucalyptus grows in tropical climates, and different colors emerge as layers of bark peel off in the humidity. The bright green hue appears first, then darkens over time into blues and reds. Surprisingly, the tree's pulp is used to make white paper.
Peter D. Ouspensky
(1878-1947)

What if ... "Were we to observe, from the inside, one cubic centimeter of the human body, knowing nothing of the existence of the entire body and of man himself, then the phenomena going on in this little cube of flesh would seem like elemental phenomena in inanimate nature."
Aldo Leopold
(1887-1948)

“Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest,”
(originally written in the 1920s but never published until 1979)

*Environmental Ethics* (Summer 1979): 131–41.
... the concept of meaning, in all its varieties, is the dominant philosophical concept of our time ... 

Susanne Langer
*Philosophical Sketches* (1962)
But meanings can only be “stored” in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent.

Clifford Geertz

*The Interpretation of Culture* (p. 127).
• in a cross,
• in a cross,

• in a crescent,
• in a cross,

• in a crescent,

• in a feathered serpent.
And to get directly to my point now, the cross can be

- a Latin Cross,
And to get directly to the point now, the cross can be

• a Latin Cross,

• a Maltese Cross,
And to get directly to the point now, the cross can be

- a Latin Cross,
- a Maltese Cross,

- or a Marshallian Cross.
C.S. Lewis, from *Is Theology Poetry?*

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.
Substituting Words ...

I believe in **economics** as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.
Economics, rather than being paired with Newtonian physics, as is so often and...fervently done, deserved to be ranked alongside Christianity as one of the great spiritual forces.

The Third Story and Metaphor

• What will be the new story that creates moods and motivations?

• Will the new metaphor be a new, yet old, metaphor? Will it be one of a living being? Will it make a difference?
An Economics for the Anthropocene

- Janice Harvey, Chapter 11, “A New Ethos, a New Discourse, a New Economy”

- Peter Brown, Chapter 2, “Ethics for Economics in the Anthropocene”
This project is grander and more complex than any of us imagine. And I suspect it will get uglier before it gets better.
Let me now switch metaphors to one with which most of you will be familiar, the product life cycle. I want to do this in order to recast my comments.
Product Life Cycle Curve

- Introduction
- Growth
- Maturity
- Decline

SALES vs TIME
What lies behind it?

The Diffusion of Innovation
(something a bunch of anthropologists came up with)
One product supplants the other.
What if rather than products these were civilizations?
It would look the same

One ending

Another emerging

Those that hang on to the past: the laggards.

Those that embrace the future: the early adopters
Periods of Transition are Never Clam
AGAIN:

Who will be our Descartes or Newton? What will the new story be? What will the organizing metaphor be?
Toynbee’s A Study of History

Diagram showing the historical development of various civilizations:
- Egyptian
- Aegean
- Hellenic
- Syrian
- Orthodox Christian
- Islamic
- Western

Time scale: 3000 BC to 2000 AD.