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The Unity of the Human Race: Our Precarious Future

By [Peter DeWitt](#) on August 25, 2019, 6:50 AM



Today's guest blog is written by Michael Fullan, an international expert on leadership and school systems.

Humanity is at a tipping point. On one end, we have the ability to flourish, and on the other end, we have denouement. Why do I say that? The empirical findings of leading "evolutionary biologists," especially Edward O. Wilson, (2014), David Sloan Wilson, 2019, and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, 2018, and our own and others work in the "humanities."

It is too close to call. And given the mammoth nature of the task—the unity of the human race—I am going to take a liberal estimate that we have about the rest of this century (if that) to resolve this matter. Right now, given inertia and lack of capacity to act collectively, the odds favor extinction of the human race and the planet, as we know them.

The argument is complex but not difficult to amass and understand.

Human beings do not have a special place in the universe; they "lucked out" due to evolutionary developments that ended up favoring us (with big brains and capacity therein).

Humans are not intrinsically good. Each of us is conflicted; sometimes selfish, other times committing to others and the common good (only sociopaths—one to four percent or so of the population—are oblivious to good). I do believe that we are tipped to be good but only when certain conditions prevail.

We are social beings (born to connect): "the inherited propensities to communicate, recognize, evaluate, bond, cooperate, compete, and from all these, the deep warm pleasure of belonging to our own special group" (Edward, O. Wilson, p. 75). BUT, this can just as easily take the form of "tribalism"—my group good, all others bad or irrelevant. The growing divisiveness of race and other groups in current populist governments is the most prominent case in point.

David Sloan Wilson states: "Modern evolutionary theory tells us that goodness *can* evolve, but only when special conditions are met. That's why we must become wise managers of evolutionary processes. Otherwise, evolution takes us where we don't want to go" (p. 13-14). I am an optimist but not a passive one. Humans have to cause the "special conditions" to accrue.

"This means that an evolving population is not just a population of individuals but also a population of *groups*. If individuals vary in their propensity for good and evil, then this variation will exist at two levels: variation among individuals within groups, and variation among groups within the entire population" (David Sloan Wilson, p. 77).

Damasio claims that so far evolution "has guided non-consciously and non-deliberately, without prior design, the selection of biological structures and mechanisms capable of not only maintaining but also advancing the evolution of the species" (p. 26). But our evolutionary luck may be changing as Damasio observes: "To expect *spontaneous* homeostatic harmony from large and cacophonous human collectives is to expect the unlikely: (p. 219, italics in original. We are at a point of dynamism that we can no longer easily control the destructive forces extant.

Humans have now reached the point of sophistication that they can intervene in biological evolution (clones, AI, extending life). Further, these interventions likely have unknown evolutionary consequences because evolution by definition includes unpredictable combinations resulting from hidden and unique ingredients that fuse in myriad of situations.

While humans are born to connect to other humans, we do not have the same affection for mother nature and the universe (except for a few
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While humans are born to connect to other humans, we do not have the same affection for mother nature and the universe (except for a few of us and for many native populations). Nature to most of us are not "living things" in the same way other humans are. This fact alone and our neglect of the nonhuman but living universe could be the end of us. Humans have arrogantly and naively become self-appointed Godlike rulers of the universe. "We have become the mind of the planet and perhaps our corner of the galaxy as well. We can do with Earth what we please. We chatter constantly about destroying it—by nuclear war, climate change...(Edward O. Wilson, p 176).

Who is going to save us? In theory, one candidate is religion, which Edward O. Wilson rejects categorically: "The great religions are ... impediments to the grasp of reality needed to solve most social problems in the real world. Their exquisitely human flaw is tribalism. The instinctual force of tribalism [where the needs of leaders drive the choices] in the genesis of religiosity is far stronger than yearning for spirituality" (p. 150). Tribalism, in short, makes people do bad things or at least not commit to good things for humanity as a whole.

Who else can save us? Those in our world of education. Think of it this way ...

David Sloan Wilson's solution is to combine the strengths of the small group with the necessity to connect more widely, i.e., not to remain isolated or self-centered: *Small groups are a fundamental unit of human social organization.* ... If you're not surrounded by nurturing others who know you by your actions, then it will be difficult to thrive as an individual" (p.114). Further, "we must consciously seek to create small groups that benefit individuals as well as society as a whole" (p. 14). These are learning propositions with societal evolution at the center.

The ultimate challenge is how to combine small-group closeness, and commitment to survival, with the flourishing of the universe for all of us. This has massive implications that include the elimination of inequity within and across cultures. The one force in society that seems especially well positioned (but not yet so employed) to help is education. Yes, we need to have political action in relation to technology, climate change, investment in education, and so forth. But most of all, we desperately need a new kind of education—one that mobilizes us to learn about the world as we change it for the better. Such transformation is not just for a few but for the vast majority. Our precarious future is a system problem; it requires a system solution that involves us all.

This takes us to: **Part Two: Most Examples of Deep Learning Are Not Deep Enough.**

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