

Evolutionary Activism

by Tom Atlee

Our global crises call for a new kind of activist movement that can reach through issues and candidates to address big-picture transformation. Our world needs activists who realize the serious limitations of both adversarial militancy and negotiated compromise, and who seek a more potent third way. Our times cry out for new forms of coherent, inspired, committed activism as deep and powerful as those that gave birth to democracy, socialism, feminism, and the nonviolent liberation of India from Britain and of African Americans from second-class citizenship.

Among the options available for new forms of social change activism is one grounded in the most fundamental change process of all—evolution.

Evolutionary activists are inspired by the Great Story of evolution. Evolutionary activists seek strategic and moral guidance from the dynamics of evolution. Evolutionary activists intend not only to help alter the social DNA that shapes civilization, but to enable society itself to consciously evolve.

As evolutionary activists we see ourselves as catalysts, not warriors—channels for the creative power of the universe, not mere iconoclasts. We use leading-edge approaches to conversation, inquiry, and story to help people discover more inclusive perspectives, motivations, and connections. Our greatest successes are not victories, but signs of whole-system shift towards what serves life and increases the consciousness of culture as it evolves.

Evolutionary activism promotes conscious action and the evolution of social systems, stories, and technologies based on fundamental realities like:

- interconnectedness, kinship, and the shared nature of life
- co-creativity and co-evolution
- wholeness, which shows up in evolution as *inclusive fit*—the ways diverse entities, from organisms to ideas, engage together to produce outcomes that include and serve them all as well as the larger life in which they are embedded.

We might articulate our fundamental activist inquiry and challenge as: “What can we call forth so that diverse entities—people, groups, corporations, countries, perspectives—interact in ways that serve the well-being of the larger life they are part of as well as their own life-energy and self-interest?”

As evolutionary activists, we know that conditions constantly change, so our evolutionary activist inquiry never ceases. As we pursue it, we call forth new social systems; new cultural stories; new practices and institutions; new forms and levels of consciousness; new technologies. Our committed pursuit of this inquiry helps drive the ongoing conscious co-evolution of these systems, stories, technologies, and so on—thereby driving the conscious evolution of humanity itself.

As evolutionary activists we know that our work, at its most fundamental level, is evolution becoming conscious of itself here on Earth. We see this as a profound responsibility and calling, and it brings deep meaning to everything we do.

We have many targets and strategies in our work shifting the collective DNA of our civilization. Among them are these:

CONSCIOUSNESS: As evolutionary activists we promote people’s awareness of interconnectedness using a wide range of approaches including non-dual spirituality, systems thinking, complexity science, ecological awareness. Awareness of our own place and role in larger systems leads to consciousness of big integrity—attending to our alignment with reality as it really is, in all its fullness. We attend to dissonance—dissent, pain, disruption, problems, etc.—as alerting us to misalignments and/or to something new wanting to emerge. We learn to value dissonance and use it creatively and wisely, rather than suppressing, ignoring, or merely resolving it. We also work to expand collective consciousness, collective intelligence, and collective wisdom in groups, communities, organizations and whole societies. We know that the more human consciousness can embrace the wholeness of the life we are involved in, the more naturally and effectively we can collectively respond to our changing circumstances, and find meaning and peace in it all.

CULTURE: At the heart of culture are cultural stories and the assumptions and values that shape

them. So we tell, encourage, and operate from cultural stories that embody ecological and evolutionary realities like these: We are all relatives within evolution's Great Story, empowered by the Creative Power of the Universe. We are all participants, all co-creators of our future, all involved in the next stages of evolution, and we can engage in that adventure more consciously. We can use dissonance creatively, value diversity, support a culture of dialogue, live into new forms of politics, governance, economics, and lifestyles. We can shift our culture's center of gravity from consumption and competition to co-creativity, appreciation, meaning, and joy. We know that the more our cultural stories and institutions help us live in meaningful relationship with the larger life that embraces us, the more adaptable and enjoyable our collective and individual lives will be.

POLITICS and GOVERNANCE: As evolutionary activists we see majoritarian adversarial democracy as a developmental stage in how societies organize their collective affairs. We now have ways—such as randomly selected, well-informed and facilitated citizen deliberative councils—to tap the wisdom and energy of the whole on behalf of the whole. We can plug these into our systems to bring community wisdom to citizenship and official policy-making. In our evolutionary perspective, diversity and dissonance become resources more than problems. Debate informs, but does not dominate, our mutual, collaborative efforts to co-create a better future for all. In catalyzing all this, we focus on positive possibilities, capacity-building and enabling self-organization more than debating issues, promoting candidates, or pushing agendas. We believe that the more effectively political and governance systems can tap the co-creative intelligence of We the People, the more aligned policies, programs, and budgets will be to the changing realities of our times.

ECONOMICS: We know that the market is a powerful tool for economic self-organization and evolution. However, for it to work its magic without destroying the world, the price of any product and service needs to include the social and ecological costs involved in its production, use and disposal. We call this “full-cost accounting” and promote it in the whole economic system, as well. Measures of economic success need to include not just money spent (GDP) but the well-being of people and human and natural communities, *and* their social and ecological capital. Such well-

being and capital are enhanced by cooperatives and community influence over corporate behavior (e.g., through corporate charters and oversight, shareholder activism, and socially conscious investment). We promote “feedback loops” like this to help the economy grow in healthy ways, self-correct and encourage individuals and corporations to behave in ways that serve both themselves and the larger systems they are part of. We also promote *local* economies to further tighten the feedback loops and increase community resilience in times of stress (since economic, social, environmental and resource crises can break distant supply chains). The more aligned economic activity becomes to the changing realities in and around it, the more able it is to evolve and thrive.

TECHNOLOGY: Technology is humanity's way of extending our capacity to act and create effects within, among, and around us. The industrial era has specialized in technologies that enable us to predict and control our environment. More recent technologies have enabled our collective intelligence, especially in dealing with complexity—again aimed at increasing our ability to solve problems and make people and nature do what we want them to. As evolutionary activists we promote emerging technologies informed by natural patterns (e.g., biomimicry and permaculture) and/or aligned to the needs of natural systems (e.g., permaculture and the Natural Step). These tools help us be in “right relationship” to nature, respecting its needs, appreciating its aliveness, and valuing its gifts rather than regarding it simply as raw material or background for our activities. We promote collaborative technologies, including social technologies that help us connect with, communicate with, interact with, and work with each other. We know that the more technology helps diverse entities interact in ways that serve both them and the larger life they are part of, the more sustainable *and* evolvable they will be.

EDUCATION: As evolutionary activists we realize that all the above realms are and will be evolving. Thus we need to be able to learn together in co-creative ways, in pace with all this change. Both formal education and informal interactivities (like YouTube, blogs and Twitter) can serve this need. We engage ourselves in—and promote—learning communities of practice.

For more information,
visit evolutionaryactivism.com