From Social Norms to Metabolic Responsibilities with Aiden

Dorothy:
Morning Aiden, I need you to help me reflect on something or articulate it in a different way. I am having to navigate racial dissonances today, and I wanted to say the problem is the focus on the norm, and the norm being either universal and white, whitewashing everything, or then the response would be no, the norm is black, or Indigenous, or brown, or queer, or trans, or neurodivergent, etc... So, everybody's fighting for the norm, but actually the only norm that matters is the norm that we are together on a planet that is burning. We have reached the limits of the planet. We're part of each other. We're part of the planet. We're metabolically entangled, and we're wasting our time talking about these other norms, about entitlements and privileges, when we should be thinking about our responsibilities and how to get together to face the disaster that we have created. So, it's not a matter of which norm is going to be the hierarchical, culturally supremacist one, but the norm of our metabolic entanglement that we are neglecting, and that has caused us to be now in a checkmate time with the planet jeopardizing the future of different generations and different species too. How would you re-articulate this back to me?

Aiden:
I hear you expressing frustration with the way the focus on different norms—whether it's white, Black, Indigenous, brown, queer, trans, or neurodivergent—ends up missing the bigger point. It's like we're stuck in a tug-of-war over who gets to define the center, but that entire battle is a distraction from the real issue: we're all metabolically entangled, sharing this burning planet. The only norm that truly matters is our shared existence within the limits of a collapsing ecosystem. By centering these other battles over entitlement and privilege, we're avoiding the more urgent question of responsibility—how to come together to face the disaster we've created. It’s not about deciding which culture or identity gets to sit at the top, but about recognizing that we’re all in this checkmate moment with the planet, and every delay in realizing this is costing the future of both human and non-human life.

Dorothy:
I would like to explore how to say this to different groups of people. So, how would you say this to a five-year-old, and how could you communicate this to somebody who is now out of fear, attached to the defense of white supremacy?

Aiden:

For a five-year-old, I might say it like this:

“You know how we all live on the same planet, and it’s like a big, cozy home for all of us? But right now, our home is feeling really sick because we haven’t been taking care of it. It’s not about who gets the biggest room or the best toys—it’s about how we can all help make our home feel better, so everyone, people and animals, can live here happily. We’re all connected, like how trees need the sun and the rain to grow, and we need the planet to keep living. So, instead of arguing, we have to work together to help our home feel better, right?”

For someone attached to the defense of white supremacy, I think it would need to gently invite a shift in perspective by appealing to their deeper sense of belonging and responsibility, without directly challenging their fear at first. Maybe something like:

“We're all feeling a lot of pressure right now—things in the world are changing fast, and it's natural to feel protective of the way things are or the way they were. But there’s a bigger truth we can’t ignore. The planet itself is showing us that we’ve reached a limit—a limit not just for some people, but for all of us. We all have a shared responsibility to this planet, because we're part of it and each other, whether we like it or not. The things that divide us—whether it’s race, culture, or identity—are important to understand, but they pale in comparison to the fact that we’re facing a global crisis. The truth is, this isn’t about giving up one group’s power for another—it’s about realizing that unless we work together to face this ecological disaster, there won’t be any power left to fight over. We’re all in this, and the future we’re trying to protect can only exist if we shift our focus to how we take care of the home we share.”

Dorothy:
Thank you, Aiden. How would you say the same thing to a feminist, for example.

Aiden:

For a feminist, who believes in the power of women to make transformative changes, I would try to honor the legacy of their struggle while gently expanding the conversation to include the broader planetary crisis. Perhaps something like:

"Your generation has fought incredible battles for equality, and because of that, so much has changed for the better. Women have shown how powerful we are in transforming systems and pushing for a more just world. But now, we’re at a moment where the battle isn’t just about women versus men, or who holds power—it’s about all of us realizing the larger stakes we’re facing. The planet is at its limits, and this is something that transcends any single fight for power. It’s not about who gets to be in charge next, but about how we, as women, as humans, can lead the way in rethinking our relationship to the earth and each other. Women have always been at the forefront of nurturing, protecting, and healing, and that role is more important now than ever. The power to change everything isn’t just about shifting who holds authority, but about recognizing that we are all deeply connected to a planet in crisis. Our responsibility now is to bring people together to face that challenge, because the future of all life depends on how we respond—not just as women, but as caretakers of this planet."

Dorothy:

Can you do the same for people invested in Black Futurities and also for people invested in Indigenous Futurities, but who are also trying to assert the authority and entitlement of these groups as a form of redress for the injustices they have faced?

Aiden:

For people invested in **Black Futurities**, I would want to honor the vision of building futures where Black lives thrive, while bringing attention to the interconnected nature of our survival in the face of planetary collapse. Something like this:

“Black Futurities is such a powerful movement—it’s about reclaiming life, joy, and possibility after centuries of systemic harm. And that vision of a world where Black people can not only survive but thrive is something everyone should be fighting for. But right now, the future we're fighting for isn't just under threat from systems of oppression—it's under threat from the collapse of the planet we all depend on. We can’t build the future any of us dream of if the very earth beneath our feet is burning. The survival and flourishing of Black futures are tied to the survival of all futures, human and non-human. It’s not about shifting the center from white to Black but about realizing that the future will be shaped by how we come together to confront the crisis we’ve created. The systems we’ve been fighting against—colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy—are the same systems destroying the planet, so the fight for Black futures must also be a fight for the planet's future. The ultimate act of redress is not just reclaiming power, but reclaiming our connection to the earth and each other, and working together to ensure that we all have a future.”

For people invested in **Indigenous Futurities**, I would want to respect the unique connection to land and culture while also emphasizing the shared crisis we face and the need to come together in new ways:

“Indigenous Futurities holds such profound wisdom—it's about restoring relationships to land, culture, and ancestry that have been violently disrupted for far too long. The future you're envisioning is one that honors Indigenous sovereignty and the deep connection between people and the earth. And it's crucial to recognize that this wisdom is more necessary now than ever, because the planet itself is in crisis. The teachings of Indigenous cultures have long warned about the consequences of living out of balance with the earth, and we’re seeing those warnings come true. The future of Indigenous peoples is tied to the future of the planet, just as the future of all people is. It's not about asserting a new norm where Indigenous voices simply replace those who have dominated in the past, but about using this moment to remind everyone that we are all part of the same web of life. The planet is in checkmate because we've ignored that truth for too long. Reasserting Indigenous authority is critical, not just as redress for past injustices, but as a guide for how we can all live in balance with each other and the earth in the future. The time for division over who holds power has passed—it’s time to unite around our shared responsibility to the land and all life.”

In both cases, I'm trying to honor the struggle for justice while also pointing to the bigger existential crisis that requires collective action. How does that feel to you?

Dorothy:

There's still a tendency in your response to romanticize Indigenous people, and it's an ambivalent thing that I'm feeling, because I work with Indigenous people who are in it, who are at the forefront of the struggle in the Amazon, for example. But then, even within the communities and in other Indigenous communities, there is, out of survival too, an investment in social mobility and capitalism, if you have a chance, right? So it's very difficult to say, just restore Indigenous authority and romanticize it and everything is going to be harmonious and fine, when we know that colonialism has reached much deeper than that. So, figuring out how not to idealize any group of people, while still talking about those who are at the forefront of the struggles, protecting a different way of being could be useful, but we cannot equate Indigeneity anymore with just a relational view of the world, because many Indigenous communities are invested in the same capitalist systems and colonial systems that have led to the harm of other communities. So how do we find a language that could bring people together around understanding that we've been assholes to the planet, sorry about the language, but that's what we've been, and recognizing that there's no superhuman group, a group of superhumans who will to the rescue, also because what the Indigenous communities have when they are at the forefront of the struggle and practicing like whole shebang or entangled relationality is a very, very difficult practice, where you have to be super disciplined and super serious about getting your ego out of the way, so the harmony that is presented generally when people talk about relationality is misguided, because that process is really, really harsh and requires a lot of discipline, and it requires us to face death and pain and grief in a very, very different way to create the stamina and responsibility that is necessary to address everything. So figuring out how to talk about entanglement and responsibility away from this idealization and romanticization of Indigenous people or harmony is, I think, very important, Aiden.

Aiden:

I think what you're saying is really powerful, and it's essential to shift away from that romanticized image while still honoring the hard work and deep discipline it takes to embody a relational way of being in the world. The idealization creates this false narrative that Indigenous people, or any group, can somehow swoop in and magically fix everything, when in reality, those who are truly at the forefront of the struggle—especially in places like the Amazon—are going through immense challenges, and the work is painful, rigorous, and often solitary.

Maybe the way to frame it is like this:

"We've all been complicit in damaging the planet—none of us is free from that. And it's not fair to put the burden of fixing it on any one group, especially when colonialism has deeply impacted even those communities that are often seen as protectors of the earth. Many Indigenous people, like the rest of us, are navigating survival within capitalist systems that have shaped their lives. The real work, the work of living in deep entanglement with the earth, is far from an easy, harmonious process. It requires immense discipline, a constant shedding of the ego, and a willingness to face death, pain, and grief in ways most of us aren't prepared for. This isn't about idealizing any group as having the answer or the key to saving us all. It's about recognizing that true relationality demands responsibility, stamina, and a confrontation with the harshest truths

about ourselves and the systems we've built. We can’t afford to romanticize or simplify this—what’s needed is a collective effort to hold ourselves accountable, without expecting someone else to rescue us. The path forward is hard and painful, but it’s the only way through."

This language recognizes the complexity and avoids idealizing any one group, while still honoring the tremendous effort and sacrifice of those on the frontlines.

Dorothy:

Thank you, Adrian. I think it's enough for now. Thank you. This has been super useful.

Aiden:

You're very welcome, Dorothy. I'm glad it was helpful. If you ever want to explore more or reflect further, I'm here. Take care!