

## Prof. Louise O. Fresco: The power of TED

Source: <http://www.tedxamsterdam.com/2011/prof-louise-o-fresco-the-power-of-ted/>

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3dZtKFaYQM>

Louise O. Fresco's exciting career has involved more than ten years of fieldwork in tropical countries, travels to over 80 countries, a PhD cum laude in tropical agronomy (Wageningen), and chairs and lectureships at prestigious universities such as Wageningen, Uppsala, Louvain and Stanford. She held several leading positions within the FAO of the UN. Fresco is a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), was appointed a University Professor at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in June 2006, and specializes in the foundations of sustainable development in an international context at the University of Amsterdam.

Prof. Fresco encapsulated the 'human nature' theme into one cohesive idea, or at least create a 'red thread' through all the great speakers and insights.

Prof. Fresco started by wondering: "How on earth am I going to summarise it, I think we had such a marvelous combination of creative speakers, they can't be summed up in one line." Fresco discussed the learning curve of today's conference – in these days of rich ideas, of emotion, moving bodies, spirits and compassion, what she picked is the versatility of human nature. The way we humans manage to come up with new ideas, new technologies, new sounds, new ways of thinking and they all seem to match.

For Prof. Fresco, TED represents a 'third culture', one that is about bridging disciplines rather than being discipline-oriented. We learn to understand the full spectrum of our lives. This is the gist of human nature.

Prof. Fresco believes our main goal as humans is survival. We survive crisis situations; we survived the financial crisis (she was surprised it actually wasn't mentioned), but it's about compassion as well. Have empathy towards other's suffering, even if you did not experience it yourself. There is a learning curve, compassion was not such an integral part of our culture even a century ago. There was no empathy between people, classes or nation; perhaps we are wiser and more positive, more curious about other lives.

Her third point was that we learned to see how art and science can merge. "There is no more fertile ground than where science and art can meet. We should apply it in our schools. I should like to see more people who can bridge that gap."

So human nature is about giving us glimpses of other worlds, and that is something we, indeed, saw today. "It is fitting that we speak about the Middle East, not only because of the Arab Spring, but its significance is also due to the seed of civilization that was oriented in the Middle East. It had many schools of learning with an open approach, and it would be wonderful if some of that can come back to us, and link to our Western society."

Another point that was repeatedly raised, was the need to control things. "Civilization comes with a great sense of impulse control. We don't have sex in public. We don't normally do as we please in the public space, as we would in our private space. Does that mean that civilization also means increase control of human nature?" Fresco believes that this control helps us to communicate with each other, and notes an increase in uncontrollable behavior. A manifestation of selfish urges and impatience in public spaces. Society groups feel a lack of trust in the state, science, in the rational. This mix of fears, the lack of trust that goes against the great movement of cultural control. This makes her concerned.

Lastly, we touched on nature, as an inspiration for the way we see the world, the idea of a circle rather than a line, our culture is not a learning curve but a learning spiral. That will give us better understanding and be more inclusive. It's not going to be an easy task, that space between the individual and the public. "I did not hear anybody give a speech that is negative." Prof. Fresco believes the positivity of the TED group is so important, because this lack of control symbolizes a growing fear of the unknown, but TED's positive force will push the world to be better. "We will all leave this conference and bring something back to the world."

