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The Machine in Our Heads

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Introduction

The environmental crisis consists of the deterioration and outright destruction of micro and macro ecosystems worldwide, entailing the elimination of countless numbers of wild creatures from the air, land, and sea, with many species being pushed to the brink of extinction, and into extinction. People who passively allow this to happen, not to mention those who actively promote it for economic or other reasons, are already a good distance down the road to insanity. Most people do not see, understand, or care very much about this catastrophe of the planet because they are overwhelmingly preoccupied with grave psychological problems. The environmental crisis is rooted in the psychological crisis of the modern individual. This makes the search for an eco-psychology crucial; we must understand better what terrible thing is happening to the modern human mind, why it is happening, and what can be done about it.

Deep Thinking

The solution to the global environmental crisis we face today depends far less on the dissemination of new information than it does on the re-emergence into consciousness of old ideas. Primitive ideas or tribal ideas, kinship, solidarity, community, direct democracy, diversity, harmony with nature provide the framework or foundation of any rational or sane society. Today, these primal ideas, gifts of our ancestral heritage, are blocked from entering consciousness. The vast majority of modern people cannot see the basic truths that our ancient ancestors knew and that we must know again, about living within the balance of nature. We are lost in endless political debates, scientific research, and compromises because what is self-evident to the primitive mind has been forgotten.

For hundreds of thousands of years, until the beginning of civilization about 10,000 years ago, humans lived in tribal societies, which produced tribal consciousness a set of workable ideas or guiding principles concerning living together successfully on a diverse and healthy planet. The invasion of civilization into one tribal locale after another, around the globe, has been so swift and deadly that we may speak of the trauma of civilization. Because tribal peoples were unprepared and unable to deal with the onslaught of civilization, tribal consciousness was driven underground, becoming something forbidden and dangerous. Conquered peoples became afraid to think and act according to the old ways, on pain of death. There is much fear that lies at the origin of civilization.

Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny that is to say, the development of the individual is an abbreviated repetition of the development of the species. In childhood,

a modern person travels an enormous distance between stone-age primitive creature and responsible contemporary citizen. When confronted with the awesome power of civilization whose first representatives are parents, teachers, priests (and, later on, police officers, legislators and bosses) the child faces, psychologically, the same situation as its tribal ancestors, namely, conform to the dictates of civilization or die. The helplessness of childhood makes the threat of bodily harm or loss of love, which is used by the parents and others to enforce civilized morality and civilized education, a traumatic experience. The developing little person becomes afraid to express its own tribal nature. There is much fear that lies at the bottom of becoming a civilized adult.

When the child becomes aware of ideas and impulses that oppose the dictates of civilization, s/he experiences anxiety, which is the signal for danger. It is not the insights and urges themselves that the child fears, but rather the reaction to them on the part of those in charge. Since the child cannot escape from those who control its life, s/he runs away from dangerous thoughts and feelings. In other words, the child institutes repression of its primitive self. Tribal ideas are now isolated, cut off from awareness, and unable to properly influence the future course of events.

The trauma or inescapable terror of civilization is responsible for the derangement of reason. That inner dialogue in the human mind that is the hallmark of self-consciousness has ceased, because the depth-dimension of reflective thought, which is the primitive mind, has been silenced. Modern people no longer hear their own primal voice, and without interaction between new ideas and old ideas, the demands of the individual and the demands of the tribe (and species), there is no deep thinking. On the contrary, when reason is cut off at the roots, it becomes shallow, unable to determine what is of true value in life.

The passage of tribal ideas from the oldest and deepest layer of the mind into individual consciousness is part of the natural, normal functioning of the human mind. Deep thinking is not the result of education; it is innate, our birthright as *Homo sapiens*. What civilization has done is to disrupt the free flow of ideas in the human mind by shutting down the primitive mind through traumatic socialization. In such a situation, cut off from the time-tested and proven ideas of prehistory, reason becomes one-dimensional, and is unable to solve the problems of modern life. No amount of new information can replace tribal wisdom, which provides the foundation for any good and decent life.

None of what has been said here denies the concept of progress, but it means that genuine progress is the outcome of deep mental dialogue in which new ideas are accepted or rejected by reference to that great complex of old ideas that have been perfected and passed down from one generation to the next generation over many millennia. In other words, genuine progress builds on basic truth.

This is not idealization of primitive culture, but conscious recognition of its solid, intelligent achievements. Because civilization repudiates primitive, basic truth, we have no frame of reference for a good and decent life. What we call progress in the modern world is the aimless and reckless rampage of lost individuals. When one is lost, it is necessary to go back to the place where one had one's bearings, and start anew from there.

The False Self

We have internalized our masters, which is a well-known psychological response to trauma. When faced with overwhelming terror, the human mind splits, with part of itself modeling itself after the oppressor. This is an act of appeasement: "Look," the mind says in effect, "I am like you, so do not harm me." As a result of the civilizing process, together with this psychological defense mechanism known as "identification with the aggressor", we now hear the alien voices of the various representatives of civilization in our heads. Because of these alien ego-identifications we no longer hear our own tribal/primal voice. In order for deep thinking to commence again in the human mind, it is necessary to break down these internal authorities, overcome the resistances, that prevent tribal ideas from coming to consciousness. The modern problem is not simply that we do not listen to primal ideas, but rather that primal ideas are unable to come to consciousness at all, because of the internal counterforces, or ego-alien identifications, that contradict and overpower them.

These ego-alien identifications, built up over the course of a lifetime, cohere and form a distinct, circumscribed personality, or false self, that represents and enforces the rules and regulations of civilization. This false self is observable in the frozen facial expressions, stereotypic gestures, and unexamined behavioral patterns of the general public. This false self determines much of our everyday lives, so that we are seldom the origin of our actions. We lapse into the false self at the first sign of danger, under stress, or simply because it is the path of least resistance. In this unthinking mode of social role playing, we internally reproduce our own oppression.

Trauma is a necessary part of civilizing someone, because a natural, maturing individual will not otherwise accept the ideals of civilization. These ideals — hierarchy, property, the State, for example — are so contrary to our tribal nature that they must be forcibly thrust into the human mind. This causes the mind to rupture, to divide its territory that is, to surrender a part of itself to the invading enemy. For this reason, the false self is never really integrated into the human

mind, but instead occupies the mind, as a foreign body, standing apart from and above normal/healthy mental life.

The Original Self

Beneath the false self, there still lives the original identity of the person. This original self is older than, and other than, the foreign personality that has been imposed upon it. This original self or primitive ego is the person one was in childhood before the mind was ruptured by the trauma of civilization and the person one still is at the core of one's personal identity. This original self is closely connected to the oldest layer of the psyche. It is an individually differentiated portion of the primitive mind the first, personal organization of the primitive mind. As such, it has direct access to primal wisdom, an internally directed perceptivity, that permits the entry into consciousness, as well as the passage into activity, of tribal ideas.

In civilization, this original self is caught in the middle of a war between the status quo false self and the uprising of the tribal self. Even when an individual succeeds in holding its own personal identity, refusing to slip into the false self, the primal voice may remain unheard, smothered by the false self. As a distinct, circumscribed personality, the false self achieves a counter-will of its own that is always operational in the sick mind, at least in terms of repressing tribal ideas. Tribal ideas threaten civilization, so they cannot pass through the censorship of the false self, which functions specifically to ward off all serious challenges to civilization.

Furthermore, the false self tends to become more autonomous and extensive, owing to improved forms of social control and manipulation of consciousness in the modern world advertising, for example. Once the mind is broken, the false self, backed by the relentless power of civilization, takes over our lives. The original or primary self has become autistic, or severely withdrawn from active engagement with social reality. However, there remains some awareness, at least sometimes, of our primary identity beneath the false self, and so there is hope for lifting the repressions set down most effectively in childhood on primitive mental processes.

The True Self

Through identification, which is a normal psychological basis of personality development, the original identity of the person is stretched into something more and greater, on its path to the true self. This process of identification becomes

pathological only when the continuity of the personality is not preserved, i.e. when there is a splitting in two of the mind, giving rise to a new psychic structure, a false self. This rupture of the mind is unfortunately precisely what occurs through compulsory training and education of contemporary civilized human beings. In contrast, the development of the natural and sane human mind does not entail any sharp delimitations between its various stages and functions. The true self is a continuation and culmination of the original self; it develops out of the original self, just as the original self develops out of the tribal self. In sum, psychological reality consists of the tribal self, together with the original self, and the dynamic interplay between them is responsible for the development of the true self. The true self is something that unfolds/progresses. Traumatic civilization has not eliminated the original self, but it has stopped the flow of tribal ideas into consciousness, which arrests or distorts the higher/maturer development of the personality. In order to resume deep thinking in the human mind, so that we can become our true self, it is necessary to push back and ultimately dissolve civilization, internally and externally.

The Message

The sadness of the modern age is that the public needs to be reminded of “unchangeable human needs.” This truth is not something to be imposed upon them, but something to be evoked within them. The fact is that people do not feel satisfied in the roles assigned to them by civilization. There is a widespread feeling that one’s true identity or potential is not being fulfilled, but unfortunately there is no awareness of the tribal self except among a small minority of individuals. Once the message of a tribal self is re-introduced into public consciousness, it may lie dormant in the minds of individuals for a long time, but it is never entirely forgotten again, as it was in childhood. This message is the catalyst for an intellectual awakening among the population, accompanied by the feeling that something old and familiar has been uncovered.

The power of this message to move an individual is due to the psychological fact that, although repression shuts down deep thinking, tribal ideas continue to push for entrance into consciousness. The mind seeks always to integrate all its ideas into one comprehensible whole. Whatever is part of the repressed unconscious is trying to penetrate into consciousness. When an individual gets the idea of a tribal self from an external source, via the message, it takes hold deep down. The message appeals to the conscious mind, tugs at it, rings true because it touches and stirs the repressed truth that is striving to break into awareness. For this reason, the triumph of civilization over the tribal self is never secure, so there

must be a constant bombardment of lies and distortions from the representatives of civilization.

Whether or not an individual awakens to the message of a tribal self depends on the mental condition of one's personal life. Crisis can open a person to ideas that would otherwise be shunned or rejected. A desperate or confused person seeking help may accept the notion of a tribal self intellectually, because it makes sense of one's life-history; but this is not yet to grasp tribal ideas from within, the result of deep mental dialogue. Intellectual awareness of one's tribal self, via the message, is the first prerequisite of a sane person, but it is not enough, not the same thing as hearing one's own primal voice. Each individual must validate or prove, for itself, the message or theory of a tribal self.

The Journey Outward

What is required in order to hear one's own primal voice and resume deep thinking is a journey outward by the original self, which is a matter of fighting to live according to fundamental ideas that one recognizes as good and right, a tribal ideal. This is the path of a warrior because civilization without (laws, institutions, and technologies) and within (the false self) is organized against it. It takes inner resolve and courage to go against civilization, outwardly or inwardly. The path of a tribal warrior in the modern world has nothing to do with picking up a spear or wearing a loin cloth; rather, it involves committing to, and standing up for the great ideas of prehistory: face-to-face democracy, rivers and streams as drinking places, respect for wildlife, etc. These ideas do not require more data, arguments, congresses or conferences because they are the irrefutable elements of original knowledge. The warrior stands on the unshakable foundation of basic truth, and the vicious lies of civilization that the Earth is property, or that the common good results from each person maximizing its own self-interest, for example are dismissed as the meaningless babble of the ignorant.

The psychodynamics of the cure consists in overcoming our fear of deep thinking by strengthening the original ego, through everyday practice, to the point that it no longer turns away from its own subversive ideas. We are afraid to think deeply or critically, due to the horror of the past. It is safer not to think about tribal ideas, and spare oneself the painful memories of punishment (and the attacks of anxiety) that are associated with the recall of these ideas. The childhood fear that one will be murdered or grossly harmed for primitive thinking lives on.

The child settles for an unsatisfactory adaptation to social reality namely, repression of its tribal self because it is unable to deal with the threatening menace of civilization in any other way. However, adults are no longer in the helpless

position of childhood; it is no longer necessary to give up the struggle with civilization. There is plenty of opportunity in our everyday lives to question and refuse humiliating and debilitating authority. What matters, for now, is not that we win this or that battle with external reality, but that we stay true to tribal ideas in the face of civilization, and integrate them into the conduct or character of our lives. This is what slowly brings about a radical change in the personality.

The path of a warrior is that of upholding a tribal ideal with the therapeutic aim of bringing a strengthened ego into direct and open communication with the tribal mind, which dissolves the false self (and its punishment mechanism).

The personal journey of loosening the grip of the false self by strengthening the primary self is certainly not by itself going to bring about the overthrow of civilization; but it is the subjective precondition for building an environmental movement that will achieve this end. The public is firmly in the grip of the false self, which means that a revolution is definitely not on the agenda. The influencing machine of civilization is in our heads, and we must defeat it there first; for it is not to be expected that people brutally held down (for 10,000 years) by counter-revolutionary forces will revolt until the psychological groundwork of liberation has been adequately prepared. After enough of us have done the hard inner work of self-restoration, that is, re-claimed enough of our sanity, then we will come together in tribal units and smash civilization.

Crossroads

Human unhappiness within civilization is widespread and growing. People feel increasingly empty, anxious, depressed, and angry. Everyone is seeking an answer to serious mental problems. The Chinese ideogram for crisis combines the sign of “danger” with that of “opportunity.” This is exactly where we are in history, at the crossroads between two radically different futures. On the one hand, there is the danger of insanity, and on the other hand, the opportunity for a return of tribalism.

The Path to Insanity

Basic, vital needs or tribal needs are not being satisfied in civilization, and this produces frustration, which in turn activates aggression. As civilization “progresses” toward global interlock among new technological forms, we are removed farther and farther from the simple and basic joys of life, sitting in a shaft of sunlight, conversing around a fire, food-sharing, walking, the blue sky overhead,

and so frustration and aggression also progress. More and more of a person's concern and compassion for others and the natural world are withdrawing, and re-focusing on the self, in order to neutralize the growing frustration and anger within. This is the psychological explanation for the culture of selfishness that is underway everywhere in the modern world the first step on the road to insanity.

The second step, which is now on the horizon, is megalomania, a severe pathological state of consciousness in which the steady withdrawal of love from others and nature gives rise to the deluded mental condition of exalted self-importance. The megalomaniac feels more and more powerful, euphoric, and in control of things (due to an abnormally inflated self-love), while in reality s/he is becoming more and more isolated, impotent, and out of control (due to an excessive loss of love for others and nature). This pathological condition of megalomania is fueled by inner hatred, which is desperately seeking pacification by consuming more and more of a person's available love, but it fails entirely to deal with the root-cause of our mental illness, namely, unmet primitive needs.

If people cannot access the tribal ideas that inform them of basic needs, then they cannot find the proper targetnamely, civilizationfor their frustration and aggression. As a result, rage is trapped in our minds and bodies and is destined to reach heights that are psychologically unbearable for any individual, which leads to madness. Insanity, the third and final stage of civilization, occurs when the original self becomes a tortured prisoner within the walls of its own fears, frustrations, and hostility. It is now extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reach and influence the original self with any rational message.

The Path to Sanity

Civilization has enslaved us in the chains of dependency, isolation, and artificiality. All that we have suffered in civilization still exists in our minds for nothing vanishes from the human mind and it is accumulating into rage. The mechanism that civilization employs in order to prevent this rage from discharging itself against its source namely, civilization is the establishment of a dictatorship in our heads, a false self, that re-directs this rage toward the citizen in the form of self-blame. According to the false self, each individual is to blame for its own misery. The false self gets the energy it needs to punish and enslave us from our own blind frustration and aggression. Without conscious commitment to a tribal ideal, a firm hold on basic truth, by which to evaluate, condemn, and go against civilization, a person is at the mercy of its own mounting disappointment and aggression that the false self is designed to turn inward.

The tribal ideal is a staff for strengthening the original self and fighting off the false self. By upholding a tribal ideal, sometimes through the spoken word, sometimes through action, and sometimes through silence, we build self-respect on a solid foundation; for at the core of our being we are still fiercely independent, intelligent creatures, with strong affective ties to small human groups and large natural/wild places.

The importance of this self-respect as a prime motivator of human nature can hardly be overstated; it may enable an individual to defy civilization, even in the face of the hatred of the whole modern world. When an individual acquires fundamental self-respect, then s/he will be made a fool no longer, and all the blows of civilization are nothing but the battle scars of a proud warrior. Civilization is powerless against it, because a person who has re-claimed fundamental self-respect cares nothing about the laws and standards of civilization.

This self-respect leads to genuine self-love, the second and decisive step on the path to sanity, for self-love (and happiness in large measure) consists in becoming one's own ideal again, as in childhood. This self-love eventually overflows and becomes love for others and for external nature. Concern for life on Earth is the result of a surplus of love, or as Nietzsche put it, "abundance in oneself the over-great fullness of life the feeling of plenitude and increased energy." In other words, caring for life on Earth flows from an unbroken and expanding primary and healthy narcissism. Without this caring that flows from self-love, science and ethics will preach in vain for the preservation of biological diversity, ecological integrity, and real wilderness.

The megalomaniac or pathological narcissist has no love for others or for nature, because s/he needs all available psychic energy, and even more, in order to stave off a false self that is becoming more demanding and brutal. In megalomania, the backward flow of love, away from others and nature and toward the self, is a defensive reaction to the underlying reality of intensifying personal hurt and hatred: the original self is becoming weaker, and the false self stronger, because the gross injury to the psyche of the human being, by the trauma of civilization, festers.

Identification with the tribal ideal is the antidote to the massive narcissistic wounds inflicted on us by civilization, and it threatens civilization with disintegration because it goes to the source of our injury and begins to heal it. The third and final stage of the making of a revolutionary or eco-radical occurs when an individual, after arduous intellectual praxis, either remembers or intuits basic truth. The individual now hears its own primal voice, which rises up from within as an unstoppable conscious drive to assist fellow creatures and to make a positive contribution to the planet.

In sum, the path to sanity begins with the awareness of a tribal self. A personal commitment to this ideal builds self-respect, which in turn builds self-love. This self-love eventually overflows to take in others and nature. At last, individuals are psychologically secure and strong enough to enter into cooperative associations with one another in favor of a mass movement aimed at re-establishing small human villages, embedded in a healthy/wild landscape.

Conclusion

When the final crisis of civilization comes in the 21st Century, the present system will do whatever is necessary to perpetuate itself. People who are in the stranglehold of the false self will support whatever the system does, including the exploitation and destruction of National Parks, Designated Wilderness Areas, and The Wildlands Project (whatever it achieves). Unless people possess an assured, sane psychological core, everything else is in jeopardy. The personal pursuit of sanity is, or will shortly become, the overriding issue for the vast majority of people, and toward this end, each person, isolated and fearful in modern society, must be armed with an ideal or vision of what s/he would like to be and should be. There is nothing better to offer people than a tribal ideal. It is, then, up to each person to do the difficult psychological work of personal liberation that must precede real change. This personal task of healing the mind can be and must be accomplished, to a decisive point, in modern-day circumstances.

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