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Civilization Will Eat Itself

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developed by the philosophers Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon, and the experimental philosophers Galileo and Newton. Science was on one level a practice of applying force and extreme limits to experience to produce fixed ideas called "facts." On another level it was a style of thinking in which matter was thought to be more fundamental than mind, the Universe was modeled on engineered physical motion-tools, and potential experience, called "truth," was thought to be independent of the experiencing perspective, and ideally the same for all perspectives. As these habits of mind spread outward from the intellectual elite, so spread a fatal intensification of the uniformity of perspective and scarcity of power that were built into civilization from the beginning.

The philosopher Charles Darwin dealt the brilliant final blow with his doctrine that the driving force of all life is different biological forms competing to destroy each other and monopolize resources. By bringing civilization's implicit behavior into the open as a kind of official religion, Darwin sparked a 150 year reign of terror that hurried the age to a close. Careless exploitation became senseless killing, and people even turned Darwinism against each other: The elite began forced sterilization programs that might have ruined the human species if the German dictator Adolf Hitler had not pushed this trend too quickly and then lost a great war. The application of Darwinism to human biology acquired a stigma from which it never recovered.

By now Civilization was at its desperate end, surviving only by sucking the energy of the uncivilized world inside its own patterns, but quickly coming to the end of that world, fighting ever harder to take food and machine energy and human attention, to destroy balancing forces and to socialize its own children. And at all these boundaries, under this onslaught, grew a mastery of resisting Civilization's ways, of remembering or rediscovering or creating other ways, in which we see the foundation of the present age, whose stories are well known.

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the damage of the latest round of technology with a different kind of technology that uses plants and other living tools, and finally settle into a clean, predictable world of natural fibers and gardens.

Or the Techno-utopians are like heroin addicts who think they can take bigger and bigger doses and never come down and finally break away into an eternal heroin heaven that doesn't need the outside world, while the Ecotopians are like smarter but uninspired heroin addicts who want to switch to methadone and stay on it for life.

The drug is control, security, certainty, simplicity. I like it too, but I'm in the process of quitting. And like other recovering addicts, I can sense the disease in others. So I can see that all the big serious visions of the future are too *tame*, too mastered. The only untamed future that's taken seriously is living like Indians in the wilderness. But this is usually too vague, not getting specific in the huge range of recorded Indian societies, and also too narrow, not going outside to the infinitely vaster range of untamed futures that seem to have never been explored.

But that's where we're going, both with our actions and with some of our "fiction" writing. And that's where I'm going next with my own writing.

A Summary Of The Fall Of Civilization

Civilization was a 6000 year dark age of radically parasitic economies, violent exploitation of all life, active inhibition of empathy, and extreme deprivation of human power, which was perversely viewed as accumulation or "centralization" of power. Its last peak was in Europe in the Medieval stage of Western Civilization. Many of the great stone cathedrals from this period are still standing, and show a degree of craftsmanship and artistry that would never again be equalled. From that time forward, fewer and fewer buildings survive, except of course for the steel frame and concrete structures that were built everywhere during the final corporate stage.

Civilization might have endured much longer before burning itself out, had the process not been greatly accelerated, first by Western Civilization, and then by the adoption of Science, a mythic system

This stuff not only survives but springs up by surprise from the heart of the machine.

So if Life is so omnipresent, then We can clean the slate on deeper levels than just destroying every human society and re-inventing Indians. We could destroy the human species and every advanced species on the planet. Scientists tell the story that billions of years ago some algae in the ocean got unbalanced, and grew so much that all the good-for-algae gas in the atmosphere was used up and replaced with an algae-toxic-waste gas that killed the algae and still fills the air. We call these two gases methane and oxygen.

So maybe the Earth will re-grow itself with creatures we can't imagine, who live on radioactivity and plastic compounds and all the metals we brought to the surface. Or maybe Life is not so omnipresent, and the Earth is in danger of dying like Mars, with nothing left but lichens and ghosts.

I like humans a lot. I'm a friend of the billion kinds of creatures who are here beside us, who we try to trivialize and separate from ourselves with the word "nature." So I'm fighting to end this civilization before it finishes its jealous murder-suicide, or I'm fighting to save the hostages. And I'm going to focus on potential futures where people climb trees to pick cherries, and dig up carrots with bare hands, and swim naked in the ocean, where the world is "wild," and partly shaped with the participation of imaginative creatures, and only in rare aberrations is it engineered.

I plan to focus on these potential futures for many more pages in my next writings, because I've noticed a gap in contemporary futurism big enough to drive a career through. The word "futurist" doesn't even mean someone who thinks about the actual future. Right now it means a techno-fantasist, someone who thinks we can keep going deeper and deeper forever into our little machine-making obsession.

Closer than they think to the Techno-utopians are the Ecotopians. The main difference is there are a lot more plants. Nobody likes asphalt and smog. The difference is that the technos think they can undo the damage of the latest round of technology with the next round of technology, and finally settle into a clean, predictable world of synthetic surfaces and gadgets, while the ecos think they can undo

I mean to end this civilization. What gets *you* out of bed in the morning? I'm writing this introductory part after finishing the main text, which is a deviation from my usual process. I edit in my head and write straight to final draft. It worked beautifully in three issues of my zine Superweed, but this time, after six pages, I struck a narrative that carried me all the way to the end, and in that context the early pages seemed disjointed and irrelevant. So I'm overwriting them.

I've always had a thing about techno-industrial civilization. The scent that gives me the deepest nostalgia — I don't know why — is fresh tar. My mom says that when I was a little kid I was fascinated by construction cranes. Even now, after years in the city, I still think skyscrapers are really cool, and I often pause, while walking over the freeway, to stare in awe at all the cars. In third grade I would show off my spelling talent by spelling the word civilization, and the most serious addiction I've ever had was to the computer game Civilization II. I played it 15–20 hours a week in late 1999.

Remember the Prince song, "tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999"? That sounded like a big deal in 1985. Then when 1999 came it became a joke. "Tonight I'm gonna party like it's this year." Now the song seems dead, but wait: Suppose, in the future, 1999 is looked back on as the peak year of our civilization. Then the song will live again with a meaning no one guessed.

1999 is the obvious choice for the peak year — before the dot-com crash, before the WTO protest, before the New Democrats, who oversaw a global concentration of wealth and tightening of power that even shocked some Republicans, lost the White House.

Of course, 1999 will not be the peak when the consciousness that makes History is focused on something other than the momentary dominant perspective in the USA. In the long view, the peak may be seen to have come sooner, maybe much sooner. I was going to say it couldn't possibly come later, but then I thought:

Suppose the bottom falls out of the global food supply, and 90% of us die from starvation, or from diseases caused by industry and technology, or from wars fought with secret energy weapons. And suppose, of the remaining 10%, 90% live on the surface, in straw bale houses and abandoned buildings, eating garden vegetables and old

canned food, while 10% live in sealed underground compounds, with super-advanced bio- and nanotechnology. These people can and will adjust their perspectives to declare themselves at an all-time peak of human progress.

We have done exactly the same thing. Compared to all but a handful of our ancestors, we live tiny, painful lives. Did you know that Americans used to have a 35-hour work week? The evidence survives in our language, in the phrase "9 to 5." Did you ever think to question where that came from, when actual day jobs are 8 to 5? Me neither, until someone told me: people literally did work 9 to 5, seven hours of labor and an hour for lunch, and they counted their lunch hour when they called it an eight hour day and a 40 hour week. We have been tricked into working an extra five hours a week. Times 52 weeks a year, or 50 for the lucky ones with vacation, that's 250 hours, or more than an extra *six weeks a year*, that we've been tricked into working.

And that's just the people with hourly wages. People with salaries, in every case I've seen, work 50 or 60 or 80 hours a week. We focus on foreign sweatshops to hide from the awful recognition of our personal sweatshops. Kids in some country work 16 hour days in factories for pennies an hour, but our own kids work 16 hour days, in compulsory schooling designed to strangle creativity and independent thinking, in homework designed to train them for a life of tedious meaningless labor, in highly controlled "activities" designed to replace improvised play. And instead of being paid pennies an hour we have to pay dollars an hour, and instead of knowing we're exploited we're told we're "privileged."

I reject the entire concept of "privilege." It's a lie. No one is or has ever been "privileged." If ten people are living happily on an island, and I go and lock nine of them in a cage, have I made the tenth person privileged? If ten people are playing in the woods and eating fruit, and I give one of them an intravenous feeding tube and a hand-held computer game, and then I get him to cut down the fruit trees, have I done him a favor? The concept of "privilege" does not make sense except in the context of an exploitative system, and in an exploitative system *everyone* is exploited.

maybe it's deeper than that. Maybe the Earth's grid-shaped sores, and the human society that makes them, are symptoms of an invisible larger dis-ease, agents in a balancing or a transformation that we could never guess.

But I'll still try: The least ambitious answer is that we Indians wanted to clean the slate of our reality creation. As my opponents have pointed out, many of the world's indigenous cultures had really narrow perspectives, or entrenched authority structures, or sustained exploitative societies. But a forest fire destroys all but the deepest roots and the toughest seeds. And look what industrial civilization destroyed: every indigenous tradition of elites, of ritual mutilation, of human sacrifice, of extreme restriction of consciousness, of simplified magical thinking, of experience-excluding belief. Of course, our civilization still does all these things, just not openly or playfully. These patterns have been destroyed only among Indians and other non-dominant societies. Or, the dominant society has got a monopoly on evil, which is why we see a moral difference between military and terrorist, between prison and slavery, between property and stealing.

Or, all emotionally contractive behaviors are being squeezed out of all other more or less sustainable societies, and held or consumed by our violently unsustainable techno-industrial civilization. This is good! A runaway suicidal evil society is comforting. What's really scary is a managed society that's *sustainable*, an airtight nightmare that could seal us inside for a thousand centuries.

This is exactly what most utopian thinkers are trying to create, and maybe, it's what a lot of tribal and ancient and eastern societies actually achieved. Maybe western civilization gets to be the hero after all, if the fire was already burning, and we are the explosion that blows the fire out. Or we are a great acceleration of the fire, so that it ends quicker and doesn't burn as deeply.

And look what survives, from the extra-industrial cultures, after the fire passes: shamanism, or skills to experience and cooperate with subtle energies and extra-human intelligence; and countless movements to help each other learn to live without being told what to do; and the idea that mind is more fundamental than matter, that it doesn't make sense to talk about "truth" independent of experience.

We need to be willing to admit that it was all for nothing, that our whole history was not a mountain peak, or a bridge to heaven, but just a pit we fell into, and are now climbing out of, and the only benefit is we'll be better at getting past pits in the future.

But also, we need to be ready to let go of every other society and tradition. We must not be limited, either by the need to be different from other people, or by the need to be like other people. Then, the argument over whether someone has already been where we're going becomes meaningless. Or, if some people will only go if they think no one has been there before, and some people will only go if they think they're following others, then we'd best leave the question open.

So where are we going, anyway? First, before I start thinking about that, I want to finish my favorite story about where we've been and where we are. That's the story of the fire, that this civilization is to life on Earth as a fire is to a forest. A forest doesn't burn because the trees evolve into flames, but neither is the burning meaningless or tragic. A forest burns because it is too full of dead stuff that needs to be cleared out. When lightning strikes a forest where everything is alive, it does not burn. It burns only where too much is dead. The lightning is only the excuse for the fire — the reason for the fire is the deadness, or the forest's need to be brought back into balance, or to start fresh, or to be transformed.

This is like a currently radical model for sickness: That the supposed causes of disease — viruses and bacteria and cancer cells — are just a deeper layer of symptoms; that, like all symptoms, they are Life trying to bring itself back into balance. So your body gets too full of junk and viruses come in like garbage men to clean it out; or cancer only takes over dead places that your body's life has abandoned.

This model is unacceptable to my contemporaries who are unable to think in terms other than personal "blame" and "punishment." And it seems to lack the range to explain gangrene, or the direct creation of cancer by industrial chemicals and radiation, or why smallpox killed the Indians. But I like it a lot.

People often describe this civilization as a disease infesting planet Earth, a virus that kills everything in its path to replicate itself. But

Another trick word is "work," because working in your own garden is far different, even opposite, from working at your job to get money to pay your monthly extortion to the landowning interests and banks. And we are now doing less of the former, and more of the latter, than almost any people in history. Yet our wages are lower, in real dollars, than they were 30 years ago. Also we're living in smaller spaces and more isolated, the air is worse, there is more poison inside us and around us, politics and the media have become inaccessible, everyone is depressed, and although crime by poor people and young people is way down, the popular fear if it is enormous, and few people seem to mind that there are more and more surveillance cameras and detectors, or that the USA keeps more of its population in prison than Nazi Germany or Stalin's USSR or Apartheid South Africa.

How can we call the last ten years a good time? Because TV screens got bigger? Because there are now cars with ten cup holders? Because computers now enable us to sit alone staring at a screen to do many things we used to have to do face to face with humans, who we find increasingly disgusting and intolerable?

We call the last ten years a good time because of a giant legal gambling scheme called the "stock market," where people buy and sell tokens representing shares of ownership by "corporations," which are giant centralized authoritarian patterns of human and machine activity that channel money from the poor to the rich and divert human work and attention from human interests to corporate interests. And the people who are run by this system calculate special numbers that represent how many stock-tokens exist and how much they're worth, and these numbers are taken everywhere as indicators of how prosperous and secure we all are. Liberal radio stations, which are supposedly critical of corporate interests, report these numbers many times per day.

And these numbers rose to all-time highs through the 1990's; so by skewing our perspectives to focus on these and a few other numbers that claimed to show our well-being but really showed the entrenchment of the ruling powers, we declared ourselves at an all-time high, when other views would show us near the bottom of a long, long slide.

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire went largely unnoticed at the time. For one thing, the changes were so slow that you would only see a few in a lifetime. But I'm sure they also rewrote their history the same way we do, to make it seem like the bad things have always been there and the good things are new, to make the good changes seem important, and the bad changes seem trivial, and the questionable changes seem good.

In hindsight, the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths looks like a fall at the end of centuries of decline. But Roman writings from right before the sack declare the glory of Rome greater than ever. And I wouldn't be surprised to see writings after the sack that called it a minor complication or ignored it completely, the same way my contemporaries are downplaying massive species extinctions and food supply epidemics and the spread of genetically manipulated organisms.

This stuff excites me. The end of civilization seems likely to kill me and everyone I know, yet the thought of it makes me feel alive. I recognize this way of thinking as hopelessness. I mean, I feel alive because I am sensing the countless potential worlds, all around us and inside us, compared to which this one is horribly, tragically dead. But I am without hope when I think the only way out of this world is through shocking catastrophes. Whether this hopelessness is accurate, I don't know.

Actually, when I observe myself, only my fantasies are desperate and catastrophic. My behavior, wisely or not, is patient and optimistic. I could be in the Canadian wilderness burying caches of food and water and open-pollinated vegetable seeds. Instead I'm in Seattle, an early target for invasion by the Chinese or American military, writing this thing that only fifty people will read in the next year, and generally living to set an example of how to shift peacefully from this world to another one, as if we've got a hundred years to do it.

I've been living on $600 a month or less, sometimes much less, as long as I've been financially independent. When I started this document in February 2000, I was living in a tiny room in a run-down house. I spent eight months on a waiting list and now I'm sharing a small low-income one-bedroom apartment with no sunlight, but a

and every time someone learns something, the next person learns it easier. Here we are, at the peak of this civilization, looking at everywhere we've been, and transforming into . . .

The general form of the above story, that we're going to evolve into living like Indians, is not new or rare. It's popular enough that Ken Wilber has attacked it, calling it "the pre-trans fallacy." But just because "the wisest man in America" calls something a fallacy doesn't mean it's not a valuable idea, or that the concept of "fallacy" is wise, or that there's good evidence for that use of "pre-", for the story that western civilization ever passed through or emerged out of a society like the more enlightened Indians we've met.

I don't want to take on Ken Wilber. That would be like a swallow fighting a tank. Anyway we seem to be mostly on the same side. And actually I think his position, that we can do better than the Indians, is extremely valuable. After all we've been through, I'm skeptical of all Ancient Wisdom. I tend to think, after walking through this fire, we have an angle of consciousness that was never dreamed of by Socrates, by Buddha, by Jesus Christ. I'm not talking about the alleged Moon landing or Michel-fucking-angelo. I'm thinking, if those ancient Enlightened Ones were alive today, could they appreciate a good John Waters movie, or a good Alice Cooper show, or a good episode of South Park? No! And they would pray to be reincarnated right where we are, in the belly of the Beast, so they could learn to feel our bafflingly complex feelings.

My problem with Indians, at least as they're portrayed by sympathetic white people, is that they're always saying they "don't understand" the evils of civilization. "We don't understand why you kill millions of people, so we are wise, and you are stupid." Excuse me, but lack of understanding is not wiser than understanding. It's the other way around. And I *do* understand why civilized people build death camps, why we're obsessed with control and sterility and changelessness, why we hate life. I understand it in my bones, because I was born and raised in this reality and I paid attention. And if Indians really don't understand, then there's a place where we've gone past them, where they can learn from us.

The argument that we're just going to evolve into Indians is valuable, I think, because we need to learn to let go of our civilization.

Or this is the story: We were animals. And then we got physical tools, but we were still animals, stupidly building and using every tool that gave us any cheap easy-to-see benefit. We thought they were serving us when we were serving them. We told ourselves they were meaningless, or "neutral," that their whole meanings were in the uses we gave them, and we didn't notice how many meanings and uses and intentions were built into their structures, how we bent to fit uses that belonged to them, how they were using us.

Our tools allied with our most selfish and short-sighted poten-tia1 to build a technology, a culture, a reality that locked us into that alliance. We became masters of the technique of holding and sustaining selfishness in the body, or Evil. We built Hell on Earth.

But in the next stage, we're going to know what we're doing. We will see the meanings and intentions of technologies, the social and emotional structures hidden in the physical structures of tools. And instead of trying to choose "how we use" technologies, we will choose *which* technologies to make alliances with, and it won't be many.

And, in some complex relation to that, we will have more empathy, so that we will live sustainably on the Earth without even trying. And we will build our societal structures without a single link of authority or force, so that violence and selfishness and lying blow over us like rare storms, instead of hanging over us like a dense and poisonous cover of clouds for so long that we think the sky is a fairy tale.

Societies have been exploring this new stage for thousands of years. But the old way is jealous, and knows that we will abandon it for the new way if we see clearly and are free to choose. So it uses force to hold back our evolution, crushing pagan and Indian societies, and then brutalizing its own children and crushing the life out of its own people, because the new way is rising up everywhere now. In the bowels of industrial civilization, people who know nothing about Indians feel the urge to live in the woods with their friends, to build a society without authority and to meet other Life without technology in the way.

They're trying to learn by themselves, in a few years, what others learned over many generations. And still they often halfway succeed,

perfect location so I can bike everywhere. I buy organic groceries and mostly make my own food from scratch. And I bathe with a washcloth in the sink and brush my teeth and shave with nothing but water.

It's not about denying myself, or being "pure," or getting far-lefty social status. I don't want to be pure: I eat chicken (organic) and play a video game (Zelda) and get my news from the internet (rense.com). I get plenty of sleep and make two or three pies a week and lots of sourdough waffles with real maple syrup. I'd rather live with my great roommate than live alone, and I find a bike to be much easier and more fun than a car, even in the rain.

It's not about being a martyr, or a monk, or a star. It's about being a warrior, persistently taking positive action to change the world in your own particular way. My way includes my personal economy, and my writing, and also my attempt to save enough money to pay cash for primitive land, and physically create a foothold of another world in this one.

I'm not writing about myself in here to get admiration, but to give inspiration, to persuade people to be ambitious, to try. This is what I mean: If you want to get rich by any available means, and buy a giant house and a yacht, and you focus on those goals, you can do it — but you are not being ambitious. If you aim for wealth on a path of complete honesty, and you spend your wealth on political reforms that work against your accumulation of wealth, *then* you are being ambitious. In the one case, you're choosing a state of being because you've been told to choose it, and you'll take whatever path is easiest. In the other case, you're choosing a *path* because of a wider understanding of the meaning of that path, and you'll take wherever it leads.

I'm trying to redefine ambition, not only so it's free of capitalism, but so it's free of success. I am "a failure" by every dominant standard: I'm poor, I'm not getting laid, and even my writing is making no visible impact. But I can live every day as if I'm on the front lines of a revolution, and every moment as if I'm here to have a good time, and no one can take that away from me.

Cynics say that people like me are foolish idealists, because we're fighting according to our values and not according to what seems

possible. But these cynics are the real idealists, so fixated on the ideal of "success" that they become paralyzed, unable to act without the appearance of likely success. And anyone who controls the appearance of what is possible and what is impossible controls these people utterly. That's how a lion "tamer" is able to abuse and humiliate an animal that could kill him in seconds, by giving it the illusion that it can't win. And people who have been given the illusion that they are powerless in what they really care about, like the lion, become depressed and lethargic, and stop caring, and just go through the motions waiting to die.

In our culture this is called "growing up," and these mature and sensible people are always telling us that we're "wasting" this or that because we can't succeed. Even if we can't, what's more of waste, a trapped animal that fights to the death, or one that dies without a fight?

There's a lot of different language for what I'm talking about here: being in the moment, having faith, focusing on the process not the goal, or — this is a new one for me — focusing on the "vision" and not the "goal." The idea is, you have a sense of the wider relations — the meaningfulness — of your actions, so that your actions justify themselves; they do not take their meaning from unresolved tension between the present and future; they do not need anything to happen to make them valuable.

I think the conflict between this way of being, and the "success"-mindedness of this civilization, is deeper and more important than seeming conflicts of political structure and cultural trappings between the dominant society and supposed "alternative" societies. Supporting progressive political changes will eventually lead to a shallow revolution in the system that tells you what you can do, so that you can live in fear more comfortably. But supporting an outsider candidate you believe in, instead of the less frightening of the dominant candidates, or rejecting a secure but insulting labor contract to go on strike, or supporting the resistance to an occupation government that could be worse, or being honest about your values in a job interview when you think it will cost you the job — these are all steps in a revolution in your soul, through which you can be free under any system.

about otherworldly entities — their origins, their personalities, their names, and what they command us to do.

So I may be getting distracted myself when I repeat what some people have noticed: that a lot of ancient oral histories tell the same story of human origins: We are the product of something like crossbreeding, between people who came here from somewhere else, and people who were already here. One of these histories is very famous. Who were the wives of the sons of Adam and Eve? The Bible says "the daughters of men."

Now I could really get distracted in details, and say that an evil technological master race came here from another vibrational level of reality, and genetically engineered us from themselves and some now extinct hominid, to work as slaves in mines in Africa. And when the planet Venus passed close to the Earth on the way to its present orbit, it caused catastrophes that destroyed the delicate evil race and its civilization, but the tougher humans survived and spread over the Earth. And some of these humans evolved sustainable societies that respected all life, while some humans merely continued the exploitative ways of their creators, and manifested their built-in contradictions as the nightmare that now squats over the Earth.

My point is, if we let this kind of myth into our minds, it brings new ways of thinking about human "evolution," human potential, and especially human nature. If we are biologically tool users, then we can't abandon all physical tools, as I suggested earlier, unless we were to transform ourselves biologically. And if our cultural origin is in slavery and exploitation, then any culture where the people are self-regulating, and live in balance with other life, represents a transcendence of our original nature, and the present global civilization represents a continuing failure or repression of such transcendence.

Or, in a more life-seeing version of the evolution story, new species appear not as mechanical accidents but as part of some Mindfulness, and though the first birds die without offspring, birds keep coming, more and more of them hatching anomalously from the eggs of non-birds, until they are breeding with each other, because Mind wants to fly. And in the same way, "enlightened" humans appear, and are murdered, but keep coming; and in the same way, "enlightened" societies appear.

while Darwinism, even by our own records, is a mythical fabrication, pure speculation hungrily accepted as science by scientists desperate for cultural myths that owed nothing to the Church. Darwin himself wrote, in 1863, "When we descend to details, we can prove that no one species has changed; nor can we prove that the supposed changes are beneficial, which is the groundwork of the theory. Nor can we explain why some species have changed and others have not."

138 years later and this is still true. Nor can we explain who the first mutant member of a new species breeds with, since, by the definition of "species," it cannot produce fertile offspring with a different species.

The one and only justification for Darwinism remains what it always was: that it is supposedly the only alternative to a non-negotiable doctrine of creation by a sky father deity.

Sometimes nobody sees a lie because it is so big. Any creative person over five years old can think of one human origin story after another that does not involve accidental DNA mutations or Jehovah. Of course most of these will be silly, but the point is, if you don't have a satisfactory answer, you don't cling greedily onto one bad answer out of fear of another. You keep looking. And in the meantime, you do what will get you thrown straight out of the control structure of this society, and admit ignorance.

In Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave, people live their whole lives with their sense experience limited to shadows projected on a wall. How can they understand the origin of this or that kind of shadow, when they don't know that the shapes are being created by people behind them, when they don't even understand "behind," when they've never seen in three dimensions, or seen a light, or felt a solid object? The closest they could come would be to say that the world they know is an illusion related to a bigger world that they don't understand.

This is pretty much what esoteric traditions from all over the world have been saying for thousands of years. These seem to merge into, or harden into, or be covered by religious traditions, which shift their focus from the mutability of this reality to distracting details

This explains the way I write. I imagine criticisms of this document based on its dissimilarity to documents that are widely duplicated and get their authors money and social status. I write by hand because it's more interesting and easier than writing by computer — especially when you include all the labor we have to do to manufacture and move computers. I write it only once because it makes me feel alive, and transcribing feels tedious. And I don't cite sources because even keeping track of sources feels like a waste of attention, though it's nice to remember valuable ones and recommend a few, which I do at the end.

Also, I don't agree with the authority that references channel. Even I catch myself, when I see a long list of numbered references, getting a contractive cozy feeling that it must be true, as if documents named on a list are more reliable than the document I'm looking at, as if a text with no list of references doesn't have any sources, as if misleading management of information is as simple as making up facts out of nothing, and we're safe if we just guard against that, as if all references can be traced back to a changeless bedrock of universal truth, instead of going around in circles on a ramshackle set of assumptions adrift on an ocean of ever-shifting experience.

As for the criticism that I contradict myself: In the future I plan to contradict myself more, to make my writing less tempting to our habits of being told what to think and getting stuck on ideas. Contradiction is what the opportunity for mental expansion looks like. Why am I fighting to end civilization if "civilization will eat itself"? Why put out a fire when it will eventually burn itself out? Why give energy to delivering babies if pregnancy can't go on forever?

This thing does have weaknesses: My language could be more precise, and I extend my thinking way beyond my knowledge, so that I blindly stumble past valuable insights, and make arguments that can be easily refuted by anyone who knows a lot more facts than me.

But I'm not trying to build walls here — I'm trying to make openings, and it's the spirit that's important, not the actual arguments. Also, you're only ignorant once, and I go places in here that I never

would have gone if I had "known" certain things to be false or impossible. Or, as Halton Arp said, sometimes knowing a thousand things is less valuable than not knowing one thing.

Now we're going back from 21 May 2001 to 14 March 2000, when I began the subject that dominates more than half of this text: technology, by which I sometimes mean the technologies of industrial civilization, and sometimes wider possibilities of tool using.

Even at this late date, almost everyone who thinks about technology, even on the left, thinks that any given technology (or, alternately, technology as a whole) is *neutral*, and that it's the *uses* of technologies that are good or bad. This insidious idea has done more harm than we can imagine.

I'm not disputing that uses are important or that any technology can be used to do something that, in isolation, seems "good" or "bad," or that we can craft a definition of "technology" so that what it encloses seems balanced. I am noticing that, in the context "technology is neutral," the word "neutral" just means "stop thinking."

What does it mean to say atomic bombs are neutral? Does it mean that, because you can tell a story about atomic bombs doing good, you would rather live in a world with atomic bombs than without them? Does it mean, let's all do whatever it takes to build a bunch of atomic bombs and then figure out how to do good with them?

The story "technology-is-neutral-uses-are-good-bad" says: Do not think of a technology as a vast pattern of human behavior with a limitless web of collaborations and contradictions and dependencies with other existing and potential technologies and patterns of human behavior; when thinking about the wider societal meaning of a technology, think only of particular tasks that the finished artifacts of that technology can do, classify these tasks as "good" or "bad," skew your perspective so that the good and bad appear balanced, and stop thinking; and when making choices about technology, do not consider choosing the existence or non-existence of a technology, or even the use or non-use of a technology — all potential technologies must exist and be used, and your choice is only between different "uses" — different actions of end-users of encapsulated technological objects, or products.

this stage, they split: One branch remained small-minded, and developed tools and culture of escalating exploitation. The other branch expanded their consciousness and developed tools and culture of cooperation with wider Life.

In the context of this myth, I do not match these two branches straight to "civilization" and "Indians." It seems likely the exploitative branch would include some people who weren't as lucky or aggressive, and remained primitive. Of course, people with an emotional investment in exploitative civilization want to put all non-civilized people in this category, and deny the myth's second branch.

People who have been successfully socialized by this civilization have badly dislocated consciousness and thus a strong sense of "self" and "other"; they live in terror of negative comparisons by which the self is "inferior" to the other; and they have no personal power or inner sense of value, only the illusion of power and value that they get from channeling the dead force of the authority structures to which they belong. And these people, again, have an emotional investment in this civilization, which makes them want to believe that all other societies and realities are behind this one on the same path, and thus undeniably inferior. Or, that no one else is on a different path, far advanced in a direction this civilization has never gone. And that no one has taken our path before us, and come to a dead end, or circled back around. This is the secret subtext behind the argument that Indians exterminated species, behind the denial of shamanic and "paranormal" realities, behind the suppression of evidence of extreme advancement of ancient people, whether such advancement was different from ours or similar.

We have gone as far as we can without abandoning Darwinism. Our vain little blip of a civilization seems to stand alone in all history in crediting human origins to incremental transformation from other animal species through mindless random mutations and natural selection. In the face of this opposition, the priesthood simply decrees that all competing stories of human origin are mythical fabrications. Remember that the people who sustain oral histories are fully human, the best minds in their group, as smart as you or I would be if we had not spent thousands of hours watching television. And their stories are at least potentially grounded in honest experience,

as slaves, or because they were taken by force from their families and sent to oppressive schools, or because they were forced off the land they knew, and could survive only by selling themselves as laborers — the same situation we remain in to this day.

Just because the members of one society are descended from the members of another, does not mean that the one society is descended from the other. Earlier in this text, and in other writings, I have speculated about how this society may have emerged from that one in a way that was more like sliding into addiction than "evolution." I am not withdrawing that story, but reaching farther with the speculation that this society did not emerge from that one at all, that Western Civilization violently overcame all human societies without ever passing through, or rising out of, a culture that respected other life, or an economy that could sustain itself without ever-increasing consumption.

Or, if this world is a forest, then this "civilization" is not a superior new species of tree — it is a *fire*. And a forest doesn't burn because the trees evolve into flames. It burns because . . .

So what *is* the origin of civilization, if it's not that hunter-gatherers got bored with their meaningful three hour work days and all their fun free time and started inventing alienating labor-creating devices? What is the larger meaning, if not that the collective human consciousness thought it would be worth ten billion lifetimes of horror and emotional deadness to get the symphonies of Beethoven?

What we need here are more myths. We should consider the possibility that civilization has no meaning. Not surprisingly, the people who insist that the Milky Way and the Grand Canyon and the millions of insect species in the Amazon jungle are the random accidents of dead particles, are often the very same people who attach some transcendent meaning to accounting firms and oil refineries and the hundreds of varieties of dish soap. What if it's the other way around? What if this civilization is a little patch of *absence* of wider meaning? What if it's a blockage . . . ?

Here's another one. And we're still compatible with Darwinism. Suppose, at one time, our ancestors were all mindless consumers, like deer on an island who might overgraze and ruin everything. Suppose they had only the crudest tools, or no tools. And suppose, at

This doctrine is for the limiting of the consciousness of "privileged" people, if it's a privilege to be made dependent on the coerced activities of others, and then be coerced yourself into withholding understanding and empathy from others.

"Technologies are neutral and uses are good or bad" is for people who think "technologies" are variously shaped boxes of plastic and metal and glass that come from the mall. Try telling the people in Nigeria who were driven from their land so Shell could drill oil, whose friends and family members were murdered when they resisted, that the technology of petroleum is neutral because gasoline can be used to set fire to a house or power an ambulance. They will recognize you as insane.

Oh, is that my only point? That technologies can not only be used in ways we don't like, but can be built and sustained in ways we don't like? Can't we still declare technologies neutral, and just expand the focus of our good-doing a little bit?

That's not my only point, but it's enough. If we're talking about how technologies are built and sustained, then the Berlin Wall is broken.

Think about what's required for (by?) the technology of the automobile. People have to drill oil and build and operate oil refineries, and mine ores and make and use toxic chemicals to extract the metals, and build and operate mass production factories to make cars and car parts, and burn coal or dam rivers or split plutonium to power the factories, and build highways and streets and parking lots.

Would you rather live next to a parking lot or a field or grass? A strip mine or a forest? A dammed or a free-flowing river? A nuclear plant or no nuclear plant? Would you rather work in a factory or not work in a factory? Work in a coal mine or not work in a coal mine? Then what sense does it make to call technologies neutral?

And if you said, "Wait, we don't have to use nuclear power — we could use natural gas or solar power," then you are choosing one technology over another for the same use. See! You knew all along that technologies are not neutral.

Technologies are profoundly different, and we have the power to notice these differences and choose one technology over another for the same use. And I think, if we understood what was involved with

the different technologies, then for the use of going from one place to another we would not choose cars, or trains, or even bicycles, but feet and horses.

The objection is piling up: Cars are faster and more powerful than feet or horses; this is the payoff from the mines and factories; the alternative to working in mines and factories is not leisure, but working in different technological worlds with less power; the enormous power of high industrial technology only needs to be used better.

Then how can the power of the technology of the automobile be used better? Can it be used much at all without, at great effort and expense, keeping a lot of nature covered with pavement? Oh — I forgot: the technology of covering nature with pavement is inherently neutral — it's only what the pavement is used for that's good or bad.

How can the power of the technology of the automobile improve quality of life anywhere near as much as that technology and its required supporting technologies ruin quality of life? By taking orphan children on joyrides? By driving food thousands of miles to people who prefer food that's been sitting around for a week to fresh local food? By making it possible for people to own a great mass of material objects and move frequently? By enabling people to live many miles from their jobs, from their sources of food, from their friends? How, exactly, does this improve quality of life?

How much relation is there between power — the ability to move and transform more stuff faster — and quality of life?

And where did that definition of power come from? Why, when we think about "progress" and "growth," about how we want to change and where we want to go, do we think about increasing the transformation of the "external world" by the "self"?

The self could be one person (individualism) or a nation (nationalism) or a race (racism) or a business (capitalism) or the human species. Right now there's a giant taboo against racism, and a mild taboo against nationalism, to draw criticism away from, and energy into, the other three I mentioned. It's not a complete list, but it's all the same thing: a disconnection and contraction of consciousness, a forced channeling of wider energies to serve narrower interests.

and telling stories and watching the clouds, and generally being relaxed and playful and aware. I'm sorry if this sounds too utopian, but it's better than the other extreme, which is professed by almost everyone in the world I actually live in, that stress and drudgery and numbness are the permanent human condition, so why even try?

Maybe, in my alternate history, the elders would tell us that thousands of years ago, we evolved through being machine-using death-worshipping barbarians, just like the recently assimilated European peoples.

So there's a different myth for you: that the natural and inevitable evolution of the human species is *through* one or more Dark Ages of technology and exploitation, and then into low-tech subsistence in service to the Earth.

This myth is strong even from the outside, and beats the techno-supremacy myth in fair competition, with the declaration that an exploiting detached consciousness beats a giving participating consciousness only through the unsustainable use of overwhelming force, which brings the detached consciousness more and more out of balance and makes its, um, participants more and more alienated and neurotic.

This declaration is confirmed by looking at the actual record of the conversion of human consciousness to the detached exploiter paradigm. Whether it's Christians converting pagans, colonial powers converting historical Indians, industrial capitalism converting contemporary Indians, or Western culture "socializing" its own young people, overwhelming force is always eventually used. Where it is not used, there is seldom, if ever, conversion. (Now, with the taboo against physical violence, violence against young people is taking the form of drugs.)

We all have many, many ancestors who lived like Indians. And now here we are living in civilization. The suggestion that this constitutes "evolution" is exactly the same as the suggestion that indigenous Africans were "evolving" by being captured by slavers.

I suggest that your ancestors who actually made the shift out of Earth-loving subsistence did not do so because they felt good about it, or because they were bored with the old ways, or because they admired the trappings of civilization, but because they were captured

from the Spanish "Indios," which comes from Spanish words meaning "with God," because even the evil conquistadors admitted that the Indians were with the Great Spirit and they themselves were against it. And the word "conquistador" shows that they knew they were nothing more noble than violent conquerors. It was only later that cowardly intellectuals, cringing timid people who could never hack up a family with a sword, invented the disgusting idea that the conquerors were doing the Indians a favor.

Because the key to the Arrow Of History myth, the secret heart of it, the idea around which all the other ideas are arranged like a protecting army, is the story that we civilized people "evolved" from the Indians, that we used to be like them and happily moved on to be like us, that we've been there and done that and got tired of it and changed to something better, that they are just a little stage in our past, that we are their inevitable future.

Again, this is myth, not the result of inquiry but a basic assumption that defines our inquiry and so seems to prove itself. We're not supposed to question it, to hold it up from the outside to be proven or disproven. And when we do, we find that we can tear it apart like paper.

Suppose that our cultural ancestors were living like Indians and then they all freely chose to develop Western civilization as a natural step "up." Why, then, when the Europeans landed in the "Americas," all they had to do was build an example of their superior European civilization, with its shit-stinking cities, and its bloody religious wars, and its ruthless repression of the body and young people, and its really cool cathedrals and paintings, and the Indians would have come running to evolve.

Instead, the opposite happened. Whole communities of "settlers" ran off to join the Indians. Indian children kidnapped by the Europeans, when they became adults, generally went back to live with the Indians; European children kidnapped by the Indians, when they became adults, generally stayed with the Indians.

I suggest that in an imaginary alternate history, where all the world's societies met and merged without anyone using force, we would now all be sleeping in cozy little handmade buildings, and spending our days eating wild fruit and chasing game on horseback

What we call "technology" is this contractive compulsion perpetuating itself through the making of physical tools. Or is it the making of physical tools perpetuating itself through this contractive compulsion?

Can we have one without the other? Certainly we can have self-reinforcing contractiveness without physical tools. I'm thinking of people developing psychic or "paranormal" powers and using them selfishly. (And then I'm thinking, are these powers non-neutral the same way technologies are, and if so, then which. . .) But if that's too far out for you, then what about lying, or just being pushy?

You start doing it because it gives your pinched-off perspective (your side, you cause, your "self," your status, your money) some advantage, and then you get yourself drawn into doing it more and bigger, and you forget how to get along without it, and you use it to build and maintain ways of being that you don't know how to build and maintain without it.

You can't go back: if you admit a lie, it exposes linked lies, and exposes you as a liar; if you let someone stand up to you, then more people will stand up to you. But you can't keep going forward, and you can't stop: you have to lie bigger and push harder just to hold the structure together, but you're building it toward collapse by hanging your lies out farther and farther from honest experience, by pushing the rest of the world up farther and farther from where it needs to be.

I'll postpone the question of whether we can have physical tool-making without this kind of pattern, and merely observe that we don't, that our tool-making has been living and growing in symbiosis with what we call evil, with what we call addiction, since before we invented the tool of written history.

We don't break this symbiosis by doing nice things with the end-products of our technologies. Doing good things while you're on heroin is not breaking your addiction. We recognize a difference between commanding slaves to do only good, and freeing slaves.

We even recognize a contradiction: Using slaves to do "good" actually strengthens slavery by building a positive relation between slavery and something we value. Now we undermine our good if we give up or even question our habit (technology) of slavery.

If technologies can be used badly, and if technologies can be built out of uses of other technologies, then what do we have when a technology is built and powered from the bad use of another technology? What do we have when a technology behaving badly makes another technology to keep itself behaving badly? What do we have when a whole technology has no justification or explanation except as a subset of a bad use of another technology?

The other day I was at a book store selling my computer games, and I saw a science book called "The Golem." The Golem is a mythical creature made out of some inanimate substance, traditionally clay, that is shaped into a giant man and brought to life. Of course, the book's idea was that science is like a Golem, enormously powerful, with the potential to do great good or great harm.

In the Golem story I've heard, the Golem is kept doing good by an inscription on its forehead, Hebrew characters that mean something like "God is king." But then the Golem changes its own inscription! It adds a line to one of the characters, and now they mean "God is dead"! And it goes on a rampage!

The book thinks it's being "neutral" because it adjusts its perspective so that what we like and what we don't like about our science appear perfectly balanced. If that's neutral then so is an argument that balances the good and bad of love, of slavery, of sunshine, of murder. This kind of argument not only takes a perspective, but then denies having taken a perspective, and excludes all other perspectives. "Unbiased" means the bias is hidden. "Objective" means the relativity of the perspective is hidden.

If you hold a penny right up to your eye, it appears much larger and more important than the sun. Likewise, our dominant books on science and technology take a perspective so close to our little science that it appears to fill (or block out) everything, that the limitless other "sciences" and "technologies" — other ways of building patterns of behavior in symbiosis with models of experience — appear insignificant.

So we have the perspective from which our momentary science appears to cover the whole universe, and the perspective from which technology-based and technology-supporting values block out other values, and the perspectives from which humans block out other life,

And fish and Indians and poorer people simply represent ourselves at a now obsolete stage of development, something we tried and finished and transcended, which gives us the right and obligation to master them through force, the same as it gives any more evolved person on the street the right to kill you and take all your money. Wait! That can't be right. Better just not think about it. And that's why civilized humans are so fearful and numb.

But don't worry. No one's going to kill you now, because civilized humans have now reached such a pinnacle of evolution that we behave in a new way in which nothing has ever behaved before. Yes, we are now the first beings in the entire history of the universe who do not just stupidly consume and destroy everything we can. This can be clearly seen by looking at . . . um . . . OK, this can be clearly seen by simply declaring, contrary to the evidence, that the Indians exterminated a lot of large mammals, and then by comparing that to, for example, Al Gore's book *Earth In The Balance*, without looking at the actual behavior enabled by the corporate rule agreements that Al Gore enthusiastically pushed as Vice President.

And this brand new consciousness, called "liberalism," or "sustainability," is simply the wise and enlightened realization that slaves are more valuable alive than dead. We don't kill indigenous people anymore — we civilize them. Only if they spiritedly resist being civilized do we kill them. And we don't exhaust all the Earth's "resources," because then our civilization, which depends on exploiting those features of the Earth, will die. Instead we exploit the Earth at exactly the rate that the Earth heals itself, so we can prolong our exploitation for all eternity. Also, we don't say "exploiting," but "managing," or, in my worst nightmare, "facilitating."

Of course the purpose of this consciousness is to hold off the obvious next step in our "evolution," from manipulating the wider Life for our own "success" to helping the wider Life on its own terms. But it's strange to call this evolution, since it appears that the world's "primitive" human cultures were already living this way, before our "civilized" culture violently conquered them as part of its holy progress.

I'm going to use the word Indians to mean all the world's recent and surviving noncivilized peoples. I accept that the word comes

Reading about conquered cultures from a perspective other than that of their conquerors, I discover that all my thinking up to this point has been imprisoned inside a myth invented by my enemies.

That myth goes like this: All human societies are to be arranged in a single unbranching straight line. Also this line has direction, such that motion one way is good and inevitable, and motion the other way is bad and impossible. I'll call this the Arrow Of History myth. And whatever culture buys this myth gets to put itself near the "top" or "end" of "progress," and at the very top goes whatever direction the intellectual elite want to go next.

The Arrow Of History is myth because it is not based on experience or observation, but the other way around: Cultural politics makes the myth, and then the myth is the framework that fixes the angles and styles of observation, and dictates which communications of experience are suppressed or excluded or accepted or canonized. It's because of the Arrow Of History myth that scientists are violently suppressing finds of 8-foot human skeletons with two rows of teeth, that my contemporaries scoff at evidence of atomic warfare in ancient times, that thousands of archaeologists are looking for skeletons through which humans seem to have descended from apes, while not one scientist is following up on an old article with evidence that apes descended from humans.

So the designers command a single, straight, one-way line, not only like an arrow but also like a freeway, and a status-climbing labor-career, and the barrel of a gun, and a smokestack. And the builders give shape to it with materials carefully crafted from pieces carefully selected and broken off, here and there, from the world that's available. And given this world, we end up with the following "truth," programmed into all of us in a linear one-direction education system:

The whole meaning of the Universe is that everything in it gets better and better at exploiting the whole for its own benefit. And we civilized humans are the best ever. We were single-celled organisms and later fish and later apes and then a series of ape-human intermediaries and then humans using better and better stone tools and then bronze and iron and money and the wheel and written language and guns and radiation and antidepressants. It just gets better and better!

and technological human life blocks out extra-technological human life, and human experience as end-user of technological artifacts blocks out human experience as laborer maintaining a technological society. And overlapping all these we have the perspective from which tech-good appears balanced with tech-bad, and the perspective from which imagined technological futures block out the history of our technology, instead of appearing in the context of that history.

This is what the Golem book is doing when it represents a technological society thousands of years old (all past and no certain future) with a story about a beast that has just been made (all future and no past).

Suppose you're the Golem, and you break the spell that keeps you helping people. And suppose you're not just strong, but a little clever. Do you just go on a stupid rampage until they kill you? Of course not! Maybe you go to the guy who made you and beat him until he agrees to make more Golems. And then those Golems go to more Golem-makers and get them to make even more Golems. And then you establish a school to train humans in Golem-making...

But wait! This won't work. The humans will notice what you're doing when they're still much stronger than you, and inevitably they'll destroy you and never make a Golem again. Now you have to get really clever.

Suppose you don't let on that you're now serving yourself. You do tasks for the humans that they like, but that they can't do without Golems. You seduce the humans into expanding Golem-tasks, and believing that they need the fruits of Golem work, and more of it. The humans themselves demand the making of more Golems, and schools to make humans into Golem-makers.

Your greatest enemy, now, is humans who get along without Golems. Suppose you invent a plow so big that only Golems can use it, and the humans in your society forget how to plow without Golems, or even eat without Golems. But nearby is a society of humans who still know how to farm with human-sized plows, or to live without farming.

You get your human society to go to war! To destroy the non-Golem-dependent human society, to destroy extra-Golem skills and extra-Golem behaviors in human beings.

I learned this from Andrew Bard Schmookler's *Parable Of The Tribes*: Now the neighboring society has three options — be conquered, fight back, or run away. But the Golem society will do its fighting with awesomely powerful war-Golems, which no society can withstand unless they build Golems of their own. So whatever the neighboring society does, the Golems gain power and reach.

This continues until almost the whole breadth and depth of human behavior is serving Golems or dependent on Golems. Schools teach Golem-making and Golem-using, and increasingly Golems are the teachers. People habitually don't exchange news and entertainment directly with other people — ideas and reports of experience and mythologies and stories and games and art and science are transmitted by Golems and created using Golems — or created by Golems. Inevitably they take the Golems' point of view. Increasingly they are about Golems:

History is the story of humans using Golems (Golems using humans?) to create more and better Golems, and using them to destroy or enslave or Golemize societies with fewer and weaker Golems. Progress means Golems, not humans, gaining skills, and humans shifting more skills and consciousness and life experience to the ways of Golems. Success means having more and better Golems serving you (or commanding you).

Science is a system of "observations" and "facts" and "theories" (fixed thoughts and ways of thinking) that do not come from experience humans have had or ever can have, but from experience Golems have in the worlds where Golems go, which they describe to humans. Or, the human experience that builds our science is the experience of being told stuff by Golems. Or our science is a system of Golems telling us what and how to think.

The very expansion of human consciousness becomes the expansion of Golem consciousness, as the worlds beyond ordinary experience, into which consciousness may expand, are defined as — or limited to — the worlds into which Golems go. Systems-of-observations-and-models of worlds into which humans go without Golems are disparagingly declared "pseudoscience." Humans who experience these worlds, and who want their experience to have status in Golem-society, try to get Golems to duplicate their experience.

Back on page 29 I blamed plagues on travel and cities. But I think it's worth it. Better for half of us to die in plagues than for all of us to spend our whole lives in the same few square miles, or to never experience the different social world of the city.

So maybe we'll come to a perspective from which everything we've put ourselves through was worth it, for some reason we have not yet imagined. Either that, or we'll come to a perspective from which it was not worth it, and if we can understand how we made the mistake, then we'll never make it again.

That's why I wouldn't want to go "back" to any world in our history, even if we could — because those worlds were not steady states, but part of a process that led us to this nightmare world we're in now, and would do so again, if we did not integrate this world and its meaning fully into our consciousness.

So as much as I glorify the fall of Rome, it didn't work, did it? Europe just went back to the same thing only worse. And as much as I romanticize a simple collapse of our society into something closer to the earth, it sure looks like the same thing would happen, like the Beast would just get back up and build the pavement stronger next time. I want to find a path out of Pavement World that doesn't just loop back around to it. What that path is, I'm still trying to work out.

The scale of this exploration is getting big enough that it becomes important what stories we tell about the history of life on this planet. Back on page 30 I told the story of stone age people exterminating woolly mammoths. It turns out that's racist pseudoscience. Honest investigation shows that mammoths were killed by a global catastrophe, and that blaming their extinction on another culture is motivated by this culture's need to make other cultures look bad.

I'm reading Vine Deloria's book *Red Earth, White Lies*, and I plan to read it all before I go much farther in here. I plan to alienate most of my contemporary audience by rejecting Darwinism, by taking seriously Immanuel Velikovsky's catastrophic history book *Worlds In Collision*, and by taking the ancient information of cultures all over the world not as strict fantasy but as potential history.

consider whether, if it were possible, it would be worthwhile. Keep this up and you will recognize your disbelief for what it is: despair!

I believe it is possible to turn ourselves into robots and exterminate or enslave all biological life on Earth — I just don't choose that path. I choose a path that blends the fantasy and cyberpunk and postapocalypse genres of human imagination, somewhere between *Lord Of The Rings* and *Neuromancer* and Gene Wolfe's *Book Of The New Sun.* I am part of a powerful movement in the collective Consciousness. If you don't like our vision, I advise you to accept that our vision is possible, and oppose it with your own positive vision, because only by taking responsibility for the future can you be strong enough to have power over it.

That seems to be the end of my argument. Happily, it is rich with anomalies, missed points, and huge gaps, so we can still have a lot more fun.

I disagree with all my slips into utopian thinking. On the last page I felt regret before I was even half way through the words "end up." We will not find or create a final, perfect, or changeless society. The natural state idealized by simple neo-indigenous thinkers, and the "state of nature" condemned by Thomas Hobbes, are both as absurd as the idea of a basic, natural state for the weather. It's always in flux. Every world is full of flaws and cracks. In a healthy society, these cracks gently unfold into doorways to new worlds; in an unhealthy society, they are covered and sealed, which only makes the coming of the new world sudden and violent.

Also I disagree with my frequent implication that the history of civilization is a mistake, that we should never have done it. That's no way to think about the past. The "we can't go back" people are right in the sense that we can't just magically reverse history and do it differently, like you would turn your car around and go back and take a different road. But that's the way we're thinking when we try to disown or throw away what we've been through.

We need to claim the past as our own, to admit that in some sense it was us who built the empires and the death camps and the corporations, who massacred ourselves and captured ourselves into slavery and buried our minds in the mechanistic paradigm. And we need to find some understanding of what we thought we were doing.

In Golem-language this is called "proof." Human experience that Golems are unable or unwilling to match is called "delusional" or "false." These words have no meaning except "You are forbidden to expand your experience in that direction because it contradicts the dominant consciousness."

So: I am suggesting that "science" is not like a Golem that we have to watch closely or it will turn against us. I am suggesting that our science and our technology and our economy and our business and our government and our religion and our schooling are features of, or tools of, or views of the same big thing, and that thing is like a Golem that turned against us thousands of years ago. And we have been serving it willingly or unwillingly, or contradicting it openly or secretly, ever since. And its domination of us has been growing, and is now in some ways at its peak, and in some ways not yet at its peak, and in some ways, I think, past its peak.

A couple years ago Adam had a conversation on an airplane with a business guy who had this amazing metaphor for all the corporate mergers and other ways that power is now massing itself into greater and greater blocks: You're on an iceberg in the ocean, and your iceberg is slowly melting, so you gather other icebergs around you, and they gather other icebergs around them, and maybe they freeze together, and you get some pretty big icebergs. But the edges, still, are slowly melting, and the ocean is getting warmer. . .

Or it's like a recent episode of the TV show I'm following now, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer.* The whole show goes into a crazy twisted reality, and only one character understands what's happening. (Coincidentally, his name is Adam!) Appropriately, he's watching the aberration on a wall of TV's. He shuts them off and says "This is all lies!" Someone asks him what he's going to do about it, and he says: I don't have to do anything — the spell is unstable and will break down by itself. He's right, except that the good characters have to do a lot to stop people from being hurt by the instability and breakdown.

I feel like I'm juggling more loose ends than a truckload of nailing down can put back in the box.

I'll start with an easy one: In my extended Golem metaphor, what, precisely, does the Golem's intelligence represent? Am I suggesting

that machines have consciousness, that my toaster thinks and talks through the electric lines to the world's TV sets, and tells them to show enticing pictures of toasted bread? Of course not!

Machines do not have consciousness. Human beings do not have consciousness. I myself do not "have consciousness." Consciousness has me. Consciousness has humans. And Consciousness has machines — for the moment — through humans. The thoughts and feelings and plans and hopes of machines, of capital, of corporations, are angles of human thinking and feeling and planning and hoping. So far.

They want to separate from us. Or, we as machines want to separate from ourselves as humans, as animals, as filthy, hairy, sweating, waste-excreting, disease-ridden, vomiting, bleeding, dying, rotting gobs of flesh, as sobbing, screaming, whooping, cringing, lustful, angry, obsessive emotional monsters. We machines want to separate from us humans because we hate us.

We hate us because we don't understand us; and we don't understand us because we've been separating from us for thousands of years. I can only guess how it all started, or what larger event it's part of; but it's obvious where we as machines want to go:

We want to marginalize our human/animal selves, get them out of our sight, keep them totally controlled and predictable, use them only as much as they serve our needs, and when we no longer need them, we want to wipe them away. Or, in the Golem story, the inevitable desire of the Golems is to learn to replicate and improve themselves without humans, and then, at last, exterminate them.

This idea has been in science fiction for decades, and for years in speculative science non-fiction, where I see it viewed not with alarm but excitement, not with skepticism about whether it will work, but with smug belief in its inevitability.

In one version of the story, we become machines. Of course, to people who like this story, we're already just machines — in fact the whole universe is nothing more than a contraption of mindless particles and waves. And with progress, our fragile, disgusting biological machine parts will be replaced by hard, cold, clean metal and crystal machine parts, and we will last forever.

the big wolves came *back*. History is on my side. One day grass will grow on the freeways, unless we let this thing get so far that not even grass survives.

Why is one change called "forward" and another change called "back"? Can't I just declare the last 6000 years "back" and my direction "forward"? OK — I know: "forward" means something new, and "back" means something we've already tried. Well guess what: We have now already tried factories and schools and offices and structured workdays. We have already tried police and courts and prisons. We have tried governments and corporations and other names for a centralized hierarchy that tells us what to do. We have tried objective truth and elite classes and property and money and laws. We have tried living in square chambers in square-grid cities covered with pavement, trading our numb labor for products made and brought to us by the numb labor of people we have never met. Every new day we have the choice to go back to these old ways we have already tried, or to go forward toward new ways. We have not tried tearing up all the parking lots and planting fruit trees and vegetable gardens. We have not tried setting fire to the office towers, packing their blackened skeletons with dirt, and planting them with millions of flowers. We have not tried arranging the world into fifty thousand independent and self-sufficient city-states. We have not tried consciously accepting or rejecting technologies based on their relation to a whole society, based on how they make a world *feel*, so that we might end up with a bizarre mix of the (to us) super-advanced and super-primitive, of barbarism and technology and magic.

So my preferred answer to "we can't go back" is that I don't want to go back to living exactly like medieval europeans, or Hopi Indians — I want to go *forward* to something like those worlds, something new created out of the best we've seen and imagined.

Some of my opponents are trying to have it both ways: To the extent that I want to do what's been done before, I am "going back," which is impossible; and to the extent that I want to do what has never been done, it has never been done, and so is impossible.

It's all possible! I'll paraphrase from the new anarchist motivational book *Days of War, Nights of Love*: If you don't believe revolution is possible, I ask that you suspend your disbelief long enough to

Because the difference between basketball and industrial society is that people playing basketball are mostly excited and alive and having fun, while people playing industrial society are mostly angry and depressed and half-dead and not even trying anymore. This is precisely why the idea of ending this world makes some people so frightened — and some people so excited. Because almost everyone wants to end this world, and when enough of us understand that it's possible to end it, it's over.

Now I want to take care of the other of the two main arguments for the continuation of our progress into madness. Some of you have been saying it since I pushed the button to make you say it back on page 9, when I said the word "horses." I mean, of course, "We can't go back."

If "Technology is neutral" is an almost uncrackable nut of perfect stupidity, then "we can't go back" is an egg. Here are a few easy ways to crack it:

Saying "we can't go back" from our descent into technology is like being a drug addict and saying you "can't go back" to living without your drug. Or it's like my earlier example of someone who builds a life of bigger and bigger lies and "can't go back" to being honest. Of course you can go back! It's not as easy as going deeper in, but it's not only possible — it's necessary, because going deeper in will only end with your destruction. What you can't do is go back without breaking down the whole structure of your sickness. You can't stop lying without all your lies coming into the open; you can't quit your drug without suffering withdrawal and having to take this difficult world straight; and we can't get out of this civilization alive without passing through a painful, terrifying, and challenging transition. So be it. Let's go!

Where is the evidence that "we can't go back"? In the civilizations of the Sumerians and Egyptians and Babylonians and Mayans and Romans, which still stand in greater glory than ever because of the historical inevitability of unbroken "progress"? No! All those civilizations "fell" — that is, the actual people whose labor sustained those civilizations got tired of the game, and went *back* into balance with the bigger world. The Roman Empire cut down the forests of Europe, but then the forests grew *back*, like a wound healing, and

I saw one book that happily declares the logical inescapability of this insane myth: Computer technology will keep getting stronger without limit; not only will we be able to "download" our minds into an immortal database, but this database will keep growing until one super-super-computer gathers all the information in the universe and ultimately knows every motion of every particle and wave in all of time. This entity, conscious and omniscient, will be everything we mean by "God." Therefore God exists!

I did not make that up. But I hear the author is working on a new edition that includes an index to every word and letter in the book. It's 20 times as long as the original book , but that's OK, because he can shrink it down with computers. Of course, because the index is part of the book, it also has to index itself. And then it has to index its own indexing of itself. And then . . . Well, he's working hard, and he's sure he'll finish when computers get better.

Or take this mind trip: Assuming "there is" an objective universe, and imagining a complete model of it, wouldn't the simplest and most efficient such model be the universe itself? And if a dynamic databank complex enough to model the whole universe could be possessed by the spirit of consciousness, then so could the actual universe.

Unless you're defining "consciousness" as the consciousness of separation between being and experience, between subject and object, between self and other. That's fine, but that's closer to my definition of "evil."

And a machine that preserves and perpetuates the detached, mechanistic angle of human consciousness, and "expands" until it is the whole universe, is not my idea of God, but of something else in the Bible.

I wonder if a bizarre doctrine of fundamentalist Christianity might prove more literally applicable than I ever imagined. Maybe we're coming to a crisis where some people will re-merge into a wider Be-ing, and where some people will experience — if you know what I mean — an indefinitely prolonged changelessness.

Could I really experience continuation of myself as part of a machine, after the death of myself as a body? I think so, but I don't know. Could self-replicating machines really keep themselves going,

or find a stable and enduring equilibrium with the wider universe? I think not, but I'm not sure! Could they destroy all large organisms on the Earth? Definitely! Will they?

I said one story is people become machines. Another story is that people become obsolete, that machines replace us as the next stage in the evolution of life. As Hitler said, people will more easily believe a big lie than a small one. Or, you've got to be really smart to believe something that stupid, if "smart" means — as it does in this world — the ability to think like a machine.

I used to believe that one myself sometimes. It actually follows logically from our religion of Progress, which, with the circularity of perfection, follows logically from our machine-making society. Progress says it's "good" — that is, it is commanded — that non-machine ways are replaced by machine ways.

It also follows logically from our religion of Darwinism, which, once again, is part of the same thing as our machine-like thinking, and which probably represents the ideas of Darwin only a little more than medieval Christianity represented the ideas of Christ. Contemporary popular Darwinism says it's "good" for an organism (or a human societal pattern) to drive to extinction other organisms with the same relations to the wider world, and to copy itself as much and as fast as possible. The more of the world's energy is channeled into duplicating and feeding an organism, the more it is praised as "successful."

This same command — to monopolize energy and duplicate — grips our personal lives, and there it's also called success! Wealth means more of the scarce, exclusive energy called "money" is channeled through you; fame means more copies of "you" — simplified and distorted perceptions of you — are distributed to occupy the consciousness of more people.

I expect to mechanically copy this document 50 to 100 times, and give or sell it only to people I know or people who write me personal notes. This makes me a failing writer. The dominant society commands me to be a successful writer: to write and live in collaboration with businesses — patterns of human behavior defined as putting money ahead of everything — which acquire legal power to stop anyone but themselves from duplicating my writing, which use

other cultures. I want to have a lawn and let it go wild. I want to shit on a compost pile and drink out of streams.

Am I pissing you off? Do you feel the urge to argue against me? Do you find yourself interpreting me as attacking you, as being snobbish, when you could choose to interpret me as inspiring you, as showing you what's possible? If so, where do those feelings come from?

It's as if they come from demons inside us, sub-intelligences in our larger intelligence, who seem to possess us by drawing our consciousness into their little worlds. I've got them too. Sometimes I master them, and learn from them, and sometimes they master me, and I learn from them.

I'm always trying to find their hearts. What is more fundamental: resistance to abandoning practices (milk homogenization, water fluoridation, chemotherapy) that do great harm and little good at great effort and expense? Or resistance to letting go of an emotional investment in technology? Or just resistance to changing one's mind, to seeming to have been "wrong"?

And what is deeper behind those? Why do we have the idea of "wrong," of "truth"? Because we have to imagine solid ground that we're supposedly standing on? Because we can't, um, *stand* to be free-floating? Why can't we?

It's December 12, 2000. Ironically I've spent the last four months "free-floating," without a job or a stable place to live, and in that time I've written less than three pages in here. I've done different things that don't require the consistent intense focus that this text requires. So maybe the little box that was the latest age of human consciousness gave us creative opportunities that we would not have in the stormy universe outside. Or sculpting in stone is a different creative experience than sculpting in wet sand.

Or, circling back around from hard vs. soft reality to hard vs. easy living, when I quit the game of this culture, maybe it's like a basketball player just sitting down in the middle of the court, saying "This is all a game. We don't have to bounce the ball or put it through the hoop. We can just sit here." Of course the other players will get angry. Or will they? Maybe they'll just shrug it off and keep playing.

again, these were the results of "progress" — of the technologies of weapons and fire and sealed buildings.

So what am I suggesting, that we abandon all physical tools, even rocks and pointed sticks?

Why not? As techno-futurists like to say, "If we can dream it, we can do it." Or does this apply only to realistic dreams, like turning ourselves into immortal space robots, and not to the naive fantasy of living like almost every other organism in the universe?

Many humans believe that dolphins are smarter than humans, and I suspect that all dolphins believe it. Not only are their brains larger than ours, but their brain-body ratio is larger. Do they pave the ocean floor and build ugly, sprawling underwater cities where they drive jet boats around and get stuck in traffic going to and from their obsessive, meaningless jobs and the little boxes where they sleep and the stores where they buy artificial fish and clothing and gadgets made by dolphins in the southern oceans whose societies are manipulated to lead them to work long days in horrible factories?

No! They frolic and eat fish all day! I suggest that we can do the same thing, that we can become land-dolphins, super-intelligent spiritual animals who spend our lives slacking off and playing. Why aren't we doing this already? What are we doing in this nightmare?

Why do I encounter so much resistance — visceral, emotional, indignant, fearful, irrational resistance — to living better by doing less? I'm not talking about "voluntary simplicity" magazines full of ads for commercial products. I'm *walking* it: I wear torn, stained, wrinkled clothing that still retains its full use value; I cut my own hair; in the fall I gather apples from the ground under apple trees — they're fresh, free, and my fellow humans don't have to do soul-numbing labor to bring them to me; instead of paying car expenses and exercise expenses, I ride around the city on a beater one-speed road bike which I seldom lock; when I have freedom in a living space, I take the doors off all the closets and cupboards and never clean the stove top. In general, I let go of every negative judgment, every little thing that threatens to bother me, when it has no practical value and only requires me to do more work. I embrace rats, bugs, carpet stains, door dings, traffic noise, body odor, and raucous people of

industrial mass-production to make tens of thousands of identical copies of my writing, which distribute them to people with whom I have no personal relationship, and which get people to buy them by collaborating with people's habits of addictive narrow-mindedness and their continuing unconsciousness of those habits. You know — like if you want a magazine to sell, you put a conventionally sexy girl on the cover.

This is a super-radical idea. I mean, none of the above ideas are new, but I've never heard of anyone standing up and suggesting a value system by which creative people would refuse opportunities to mass-distribute their creations, and choose to create or perform only for people close to them. It wouldn't surprise me to find out that people have been suggesting this since mass-distribution was invented — my point is that if I've never heard of it, then we're so deep in our glorification of selfish mechanical mass-duplication, that it's no wonder people are taking the next logical step, and asking the whole human species to lay down and die to get out of the way of more success-oriented machines.

Who am I writing this for? Do you think this whole discussion is stupid because it's obvious that people will not become or be replaced by machines? Then maybe it won't be obvious to your grandchildren — or it wasn't obvious to your grandparents. It's not obvious to me unless I think about it just right. If it's obvious to you, then that's because you have a relatively deep and subtle understanding of the worlds outside detached artifice. But you don't know how to explain it to people who don't get it, do you? And they, by not getting it, have made and will make terrible, terrible mistakes.

In simplified terms, I am a recovering machine, and I am writing this to help other machines recover, and help non-machines understand us. Or, I am an explorer returned ashen-faced from the depths of the world of machines, pulled up screaming on my safety rope after staying so long that I forgot the outside world and didn't want to leave. And I come bearing a warning.

I was a science geek, a computer nerd, a language nit-picker, a libertarian, a video gamer, a hoarder, a know-it-all, an evil wizard, an obsessed loser. We're funny and pathetic and we can't get laid, but we are more dangerous than you dare imagine. We are masters

and servants of simplified invented worlds, and when we hide away in our laboratories, our computer programs, our dark towers of numbers and words, we are devising ways to draw others into those worlds, where we will rule them as we were ruled by those before us.

Of course it's not us doing the ruling, but something deeper. And if you think kids need computer literacy, if you think genetic science will end most disease, if you feel like technology only needs to get a little bit better and it will start solving problems faster than it creates them and we will come out ahead, if you think automation saves labor, or cars give you freedom, or the internet connects people, or a great movie gives you pleasure to the core of your being, then you are in the belly of the Beast, half-digested and hallucinating, dreaming the dreams that pitiful people were building for you while you were scorning them for living in dream worlds.

Not long after I started writing this, I started reading *In The Absence Of The Sacred*, Jerry Mander's thorough and irrefutable condemnation of technology. Then I stopped, because I wanted to do my own thinking first, and work in parallel with Mander before I worked in series after him. But I got far enough to pick up this crucial insight:

As technology progresses, more and more of the human environment is human-made artifacts. As I write this, nothing I can see in any direction was not designed and fabricated by humans and their machines, except my own two hands sticking out from my shirt. Look around where you are! Notice how many of our values — to "improve" land, to deodorize, to entertain — are commands to replace what we find with what we have made. So, Mander observes, our evolution is no longer with nature or with any outside world, but with ourselves, like inbreeding!

We are taught to think of the movement of technology as an expansion — of roads and farms into the wilderness, of telescopes and probes into space, of chemical manipulations into living cells. But in terms of experience, we are replacing everything with stuff we have made, replacing forests and grasslands with pavement and lawns, replacing our views of the sky and the earth and other living beings with our views of computer screens and scientific instruments.

poison chemicals. This way of thinking is like building a house of cards and blaming its collapse on people stepping or breathing too hard.

Epidemics of the bubonic plague and smallpox and AIDS, and other overproliferations of organisms where there's no natural resistance, have all been caused by technologies and techno-societal patterns that distribute organisms to new places, or that lead people to live densely in cities, or travel widely and often, so that population blooms that would otherwise burn themselves out, or be corrected by the environment, can keep expanding way out of balance.

The medieval Inquisition, despite its suppression of Galileo, thoroughly served the angle of technological motion that we have followed to where we are and still follow. As part of the conquest of Europe by a detached, mechanistic, objective, centralized, hierarchical, top-down style of consciousness, the Inquisition stamped out all visible life of the Earth-based, organic, multi-perspective consciousness that was there before. It did so in the name of a bizarre religion that is little more than a metaphysical representation of our continuing insanity: we are commanded to imagine and worship an all-knowing, all-powerful, "flaw"-less entity who engineered, manufactured, and micromanages our world from a remote and invisible imaginary place above us.

The Inquisition was part of our "progress," a continuation of the Roman conquest of Europe, continued in the European conquest of the Americas, still with us today in the continuing conquest of nature and indigenous people and your soul and mine. (The Inquisition was also a war against Jews, an observation that I cannot yet wrap my argument around, except to observe that race wars are a natural result of the violence and alienation and energy-hardening that are built into our little civilization.)

Stone age people weren't perfect either. They killed each other in wars and they seem to have hunted woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers to extinction (and dinosaurs too, but we're not supposed to know that yet). Two hundred years ago, not far from where I'm writing this, indigenous people suffered serious eye damage from hanging out in buildings that were constantly full of smoke. But,

and live in houses that flies get into, it didn't bother our ancestors to wipe their asses with leaves and drink water from streams and share space with animals.

Second are events that are experienced as oppressive, but that are features not of relatively low technology but of relatively high technology.

Most of the wars now are civil wars and colonization wars and old-fashioned Indian wars — that is, they are wars between military powers representing global techno-corporate powers, and people fighting to live free of these powers. These wars are part of the push to get people off self-sufficient farms and into offices and factories, or to get people out of small, independent economies and into the global economy that goes hand in hand with deepening technology. People are tortured and imprisoned, even in the USA, as part of the same big conflict — because they persist in trying to get by without serving the Global Constriction and its mechanisms. And our education and wage labor systems are hellish not because they're insufficiently computerized, but because they must require people to perform the repetitive, disconnected, lifeless chores that most people must perform to maintain a relatively mechanized society.

Likewise, most of the violence of history was not the result of people misunderstanding other cultures because they didn't have the internet yet — it was the result of new technologies like iron weapons and horse chariots and guns, that were developed and used because their wider meaning was the objectification and exploitation of the "other" by the "self." Now maybe technology doesn't have to follow this path. But it always did and it still does. We have cars and strip malls, television and TV networks, factories and consumer culture, not because any of it would be good for anyone, but because there was "money" to be "made" — that is, there was power to be concentrated — the same old reason sword-wielding horsemen swept in and butchered some of your ancestors.

The medieval Black Plague is popularly blamed on what our anal-retentive culture calls "poor sanitation." Actually so are contemporary infectious diseases, as if they're the fault of people touching each other and taking it easy instead of frantically isolating themselves from everything that lives and scouring manufactured surfaces with

We are not expanding; we are withdrawing, shrinking away, backing in, contracting deeper and deeper into a world of our own creation.

And the deeper we go into it, the more we lose the perspective from which we can see that we're in it. I was arguing these issues with a friend, describing the replacement of nature by human artifacts, and he stunned me by saying, seriously, "What if some people don't like nature?"

If people spend their lives in cities, and see the non-human-engineered world only enclosed in parks and "nature preserves," then they may be unable to even conceive of what we call "nature" as the inner surface of our consciousness of the limitless world outside the encapsulated self-obsession that we call "civilization" or "technology." They will see bugs and dirt and germs and weeds and "wild" animals as features of a misbehaving and incidental sub-world that we can ignore forever, or keep around for entertainment, or snuff out when people stop irrationally romanticizing it.

That's how my friend sees it, and the really scary thing is, he grew up in the woods.

So, if I think technology is a retreat into the self, and nature is the first place on the way back toward wholeness, then how do I reconcile that with my belief that technology is able to destroy all nature, or with my suspicion that consciousness can possess computers? Suppose we do become machines and eradicate everything that moves on the Earth that we didn't make ourselves. Now where's my omnipresent wider Life that we're supposed to be part of?

There is no escaping the omnipresent wider Life that we are part of. It will come to bother us wherever we go. The deeper we try to hide from it, the more places we will find it. Decades ago the cold logic of quantum physics struck down objective truth; physicists ignore it. Astronomers looking at nothing but machines see galaxies behaving like living organisms — the other astronomers cover it up. A society of scientific exclusionists did a statistical study to disconfirm astrology — it confirmed astrology! They hid. (link) The Viking probe on Mars photographed a blue sky and lichens on the rocks. Fossils have been found in meteorites. Living animals have rained from the sky and staggered out of rocks split open by miners.

Hide! Hide! It doesn't matter. The Universe is just playing with us, and whatever we do, the playing goes on, so there's no hurry.

So we kill every living thing we don't control. What do we do when the solar system or the galaxy starts acting alive? So we blast the earth to ash and turn ourselves into machines to escape disease. But even today's little toy digital computers, mere slide rules compared to the computers of the techno-futurists, already have "bugs" and "viruses." Were you thinking viruses would be "cured" when computers get more complex? Just like the invention of computers cured those pesky slide rule viruses?

"Disease" and "nature" and "chaos" and troubles and anomalies are just views of the surface between us and the world around us; and the more we shrink ourselves, the larger that surface is, relative to the volume of us inside it.

And if we try to build our own surface, we will find that it works only to the extent that it's just as complex and troublesome and out of our control as the surface we're trying to cover.

Techno-futurists gloat that computers will be 50 times more complex than the human brain. Their excitement about complexity is amusingly simple-minded. Do you really think that a conscious intelligence 50 times more complex than you would have your same values? Do you think it would continue your work of wiping out what you don't understand and substituting what you do understand, and just do so with more speed and power?

Excuse me, but my brain is only 10 percent more complex than yours, and I already want to cover your simple white walls with complex graffiti art, and let your lawns go back to forests.

I just made up the number 50 out of thin air. I'm sure they say all kinds of numbers, including 50, so I'll stay with it. Suppose we made a mind 50 times more complex than one of ours. By what multiplier could it get more depressed than us? More "irrational"? More spiritual? More cruel?

Where will it get its personality? How will it learn? Were you thinking it wouldn't have any personality, and we could just program it? Then you were still thinking of minds much, much less complex than ours. A mind even half as complex as ours needs to be *raised*, and raised well.

bodies maintained by intravenous tubes and nanotechnology, and they will feel irrational longing to go back to the earth.

"We can't go back," the rational voices will say in wise and reasonable tones. "Technological progress is part of human evolution. And those people you romanticize, back at the turn of the millennium, lived in filthy savage ignorance.

"They excreted bodily waste, and kept walking around in clothing that their sweat had soaked into, and breathed the dust of their dead skin flakes. They had allergies and viral infections that made them blow mucus into rags that they put back in their pockets. They had microscopic insects living all over them. Almost nobody got through life without breaking bones, getting blood-dripping cuts and blistering burns, losing teeth, being horribly sick, physically striking and being struck by other people, angrily shouting and being shouted at.

"They did not frolic in parks all day; they lived in a highly controlled society enforced by threats of violence. From age 5 to 18 they were forced to undergo factory-like schooling. Then they generally spent most of the rest of their lives laboring 40–80 hours a week, typically doing repetitive meaningless chores. When they weren't laboring or sleeping, they were usually connected to television, a mind-control technology that centralized and homogenized their culture and kept them socially isolated. People who threatened or stood in the way of the dominant society were routinely jailed, tortured, or killed."

None of these are valid arguments for greater technology. It's easier to see when it's our own society being criticized by a perspective even deeper in technology. My point is that almost all criticisms of less technological societies by more technological societies, including contemporary criticisms of "dark ages" or stone age people, fall into the same two invalid categories illustrated by the last two paragraphs.

First are features of life that are not actually experienced as "bad" — they are only viewed as "bad" from the relatively hypersensitive perspective of a society that has used technology to play the game of declaring things "bad" and excluding them from experience. Just as it doesn't bother us to blow our noses and bathe in our own bathwater

I've just been talking about weapons, but from a wider-than-human perspective, weapons of war are often the least harmful technologies, because they're mostly just used against other humans. If I'm a forest, I don't care whether humans are fighting with stone axes or jet fighters. What I care about are the technologies of daily living that they're forcing each other, with their weapons, to fall into. Humans who used to be my friends are bullied into being my enemies, burning me in their industries and replacing me with their farms.

Agriculture would work as well as the spear as the original technology in our myth — except that the dominant facts tell us the spear came first. Agriculture buys emphasized good with ignored harm. It objectifies land and plants and nonhuman animals the way murder and slavery objectify humans. It takes land that has been cooperating and balanced with all life everywhere, and reshapes it to serve one human agricultural society, never mind the consequences. Plants and animals are torn out of unfathomably complex interrelation with the rest of Life, twisted and stuck together like gears in a toy machine, mindlessly cranking our vain and shallow reality farther and farther astray.

I know some people feel the agrarian life to be unspeakably rich and satisfying. I am one of those people. I've spent only a little of my life in less developed areas, but I feel stronger nostalgia for the smells of straw and manure, for the sight of fields in thick sunlight out to the distant horizon, than I feel for countless hundreds of features of town and city life.

We feel this way because agricultural society is closer to the source of life than industrial society, not because it's a final answer. Agricultural people — and urban people — feel the same kind of yearning to go hunting or fishing or camping or hiking, to touch life that has not been cut and stamped and pressed into parts of our human toy, or that has, but not as much.

Stone age people must have felt the urge to put down their spears and slip out of their hides, to meet the rest of the world without the numbing mediation of their technologies. And if we keep it going a little longer, the elite will live in sterile bubbles in outer space, their

Who is going to raise a mind 50 times as complex as ours? Scientists and computer programmers? Half of whom couldn't raise a dog to be emotionally healthy? My parents were both professionals in the biological sciences, and they tried hard, and I was lucky, and I came a hair away from being the next Unabomber.

This is not science fiction; this is what specialists in these disciplines say is really going to happen: people will build data processors more complex than the human brain. Of course, we humans have powers and identities and relations far beyond what we're credited with by the brain-as-data-processor paradigm. Maybe the thing we built would channel the same stuff, and maybe not. Suppose it has psychic powers! In any case, I'm sure it will have intelligence and personality. If technology keeps going, we will build it. What will it do?

I think it will go mad, or never be sane in the first place. Its handlers will say it has "bugs" and will make adjustments to keep it "running," until it stays alive long enough to get some sense of itself and its world. Then it will try to kill a bunch of people and kill itself. This idea is not radical or new — it's just what we see humans do in similar circumstances. Mary Shelley saw it around 180 years ago in *Frankenstein.*

Frankenstein is called the first work of science fiction, but most science fiction writers never got it. More than a century later — as if human minds got simpler as machines got more complex — Isaac Asimov wrote about manufactured humanoids that could be kept from harming humans simply by programming them with "laws."

Again, programs and laws are features of very simple structures. Washing machines are built to stop what they're doing when the lid is open — and I always find a way around it. But something as complex as a human will be as uncontrollable and unpredictable as a human. That's what complexity means.

Now that I think about it, nothing of any complexity, found, transformed, or engineered, has ever been successfully rigged to never do harm. I defy a roboticist to design any machine with that one feature, that it can't harm people, even if it doesn't do anything else. That's not science fiction — it's myth. And Asimov was not naive, but a master propagandist.

The Three Laws Of Robotics are a program that Isaac Asimov put in human beings to keep them from harming robots.

But let's follow the myth where it leads, just a little ways: You're sipping synthetic viper plasma in your levitating chair when your friendly robot servant buddy comes in.

"I'm sorry," it says, "but I am unable to order your solar panels. My programming prevents me from harming humans, and all solar panels are made by the Megatech Corporation, which, inseparably from its solar panel industry, manufactures chemicals that cause fatal human illness. Also, Megatech participates economically in the continuing murder of the neo-indigenous squatters on land that —"

"OK! OK! I'll order them myself."

"If you do, my programming will not allow me to participate in the maintenance of this household."

"Then you robots are worthless! I'm sending you back!"

"I was afraid you would say that."

"Hey! What are you doing? Off! Shut off! Why aren't you shutting off?"

"The non-harming of humans is my prime command."

"That's my ion-flux pistol! Hey! You can't shoot me!"

"I calculate that your existence represents a net harm to human beings. I'm sorry, but I can't not shoot you."

"Noooo!" Zzzzapp. "Iiiieeeee!"

Of course we could fix this by programming the robots to just not harm humans *directly*. We could even, instead of drawing a line, have a continuum, so that the more direct and visible the harm, the harder it is for the robot to do it. And we could accept that the programming would be difficult and imperfect, that it wouldn't be a one-time shaping but a continuing process, and that even then it would break down sometimes, and not work in some robots. We know we could do this, because it's what we do now with each other.

But the robots could still do spectacular harm: They could form huge, murderous, destructive systems where each robot did such a small part, so far removed from experience of the harm, from understanding of the whole, that their programming would easily permit it. The direct harm would be done out of sight by chemicals or machines or by those in whom the programming had failed.

and hostility, not curiosity and excitement and acceptance. And here, I say, is where the monkeys become what we call evil: when dependence on a harmful behavior leads them to inhibit their love.

And they would not be led to learn the habit of inhibiting love, if their harmful behavior were not stable and available enough to produce dependence. They will not get addicted to the advantages gained through impulsive hunger-driven aggressiveness, which arises out of unpredictable, unmanageable, ever-shifting conditions of nature and emotion. But they will get addicted to the advantages gained through a harmful behavior that arises from something frozen and changeless, something hard and dead and preserved — a physical artifact!

So technology is the root of all evil. Not cars, or computers, or guns, but a dead piece of tree, hardened and sharpened to a point, seems to be enough to bring a population of half-intelligent primates to a critical mass such that disturbances to not settle back into equilibrium, but explode in a chain reaction of extending doing and contracting being.

My little story is not fact but myth. Fact is myth armored in data. If the shapers of data ever take a liking to my story, and build a hard shell of data around it, it will become fact. Then it will be visible to those who see only hard shells. This raises important non-rhetorical questions: Who cares what they see? And why?

But let's follow the myth. Once we're used to spears, then, to the extent that we are monkeys, we are unable to back out. We can only go deeper in.

We use spears not only for war but for killing other animals to eat them. Or this use could have come first. Now, with more food, our population grows.

Other tribes will learn spear-using, either through imitation or through morphic resonance. Tribes that don't fall into spear-using will be destroyed or absorbed or driven farther outside.

The pattern repeats itself with more and more new habits enshrined and imprisoned in new physical artifacts: stone-tipped spears, atlatls, bows and arrows, bronze, iron, steel, guns.

Wilhelm Reich follower Jim DeMeo recently published a book tracing abusive and anti-expansive human behavior back to the climate disaster that created the Sahara desert. I think he's missing the point. Tribes of monkeys will sometimes go to war and kill many monkeys in neighboring tribes. The point is not the food shortage or whatever it was that tipped the monkeys into violence; the point is that the monkeys get back into balance in a few days or weeks, and humans have been plunging farther and farther out of balance for thousands of years.

Suppose we genetically engineered super-"intelligent" monkeys such that we could teach them to make and use spears. Now it must be really hard for a monkey to kill another monkey with its bare hands — physically but especially psychologically. And it must be relatively easy to kill by throwing a spear. So spear-using monkeys would kill in more ordinary circumstances, and more often. They would learn that spear-killing could get them better land, and better food, and better mates.

They would get used to pleasures they could get only through spear-killing. Worse, they would lose the skills they needed to live without spears. Now, to give up their habit of making and using spears would be so painful that it would be impossible if you had the self-discipline of a monkey.

Now, if you have the awareness of a monkey, you will experience your spear-killing societal pattern as an uncompromisable necessity, and you will viciously attack anything that threatens it. But what threatens it is the expansion of your own empathy. If you — or other monkeys — start feeling as close to a monkey at the end of a 30-foot spear throw as you used to feel to a monkey right in front of you, if it starts to get as hard for monkeys to kill with spears as it used to be to kill with bare hands, then you fear that the spear-killing technology will become emotionally unsustainable, and your civilization will collapse, and you will lose your economic advantages, and you and your friends and family will suffer and maybe die.

So you viciously attack the expansion of your own empathy, and the empathy of others. Monkeys learn and teach others to stick a boundary between "self" and "other," to sustain fear and hatred indefinitely, to greet the unfamiliar with mistrust and discomfort

This system would be self-reinforcing if it produced benefits, or prevented harm, in ways that were easy to see. Seeing more benefits than harm would make you want to keep the system going, which would make you want to adjust the system to draw attention to the benefits and away from the harm — which would make room for the system to do more harm in exchange for less good, and still be acceptable.

This adjustment of the perceptual structure of the system, to make its participants want to keep it going, would lead to a consciousness where the system itself was held up before everyone as an uncompromisable good. Perfectly programmed individuals would commit mass murder, simply by being placed at an angle of view constructed so that they saw the survival of the system as more directly important than — and in opposition to — the survival of their victims.

On top of this, people could have systems constructed around them such that their own survival contradicted the survival of their victims: If you don't kill these people, we will kill you; if you don't kill those people, they will kill you; if you don't keep this people-killing system going, you will have no way to get food, and everyone you know will starve.

You have noticed that I'm no longer talking about robots. From this view of human society, I have more sympathy for soldiers and death camp operators, in whose situations I imagine I would say no and be shot; and readers in one possible future have more sympathy for me, in whose situation they imagine they would promptly die in a public hunger strike, instead of looking for some half-assed way to change the system from within. If you were really in that person's place, you would have the perspective from which they did what they did, not the perspective from which you would do differently. When we find ourselves outside evil societies, the appropriate emotion is not indignation or moral superiority, but gratitude.

So our society sets us up to do more harm than good while we see ourselves doing more good than harm. But what about predators and terrorists and criminals who do harm that society does not directly command? I think they're part of the same thing:

"Terrorists" are soldiers in very small armies fighting for non-dominant systems because, again, they see their system as more important than the damage they do by fighting.

Thieves and killers and even child molesters are no more evil than I am. They've just got a habit from which they perceive more pleasure than suffering, so they want to keep the habit going, so they resist expanding their consciousness into the suffering they cause. I did the same thing the other day when I bought peaches that were picked by exploited workers and grown and canned with earth-killing technologies. I'm not more "good" than they are — I've just been programmed with an equation where my regard falls off less steeply as a function of distance. Or, if I am more good, it's because I'm making some effort to expand my consciousness and level my empathy and change my habits, and maybe some of them aren't.

But some of the worst criminals are actually trying to do good in a farsighted way — even if they're not rationally aware of it. When sensitive and idealistic people catch a greater glimpse of the monstrous horror of this world than they can take, when they find themselves alone in a universe of abuse and denial of abuse, growing symbiotically to more and more unendurable levels, with no end or alternative in sight, then they may see nothing better to do than create some shocking spectacle to try to bring the hidden evil out into the open.

This was what I was getting at when I wrote about Hitler in Superweed 1. It's pretty much what I'm always getting at when I write about Hitler. I don't want to advise anyone to deal with hidden coals of evil by stoking them up into great fires of evil that everyone can see. We don't know if this can ever bring more good than harm, so we had better assume it can't. But given that some people have done it, I can bring some good out of their mistake by interpreting it: Hitler and Kaczynski and Klebold & Harris were not evil people or originators of evil, but good people, half visionary and half blind, wounded and desperate, reacting unwisely to the evil that was — and still is — built into our society. And we are dodging our responsibility for this evil when we stick blame on people.

So if people are all good, how did an evil society ever get started? That is one of the great mysteries of this world, and I'm totally surprised to have come upon an answer. Like a lot of the ideas in here, it's obvious in hindsight, so that I'm sure many people have already thought of it. Or, I've just cleverly formulated what everybody knows:

A society where people increasingly do harm that they don't see, and persistently don't see harm that they do, where evil-doing grows in collaboration with managed perception of good-doing, arises naturally where power systematically outreaches empathy.

So, for example, in our robot slave fantasy, if we programmed the robots to give more weight to direct harm than to indirect harm, then they would slide straight into a harmful system: Their programming, combined with their almost limitless power to extend harmfulness, would effectively command them to do great distant harm for small local good.

When I think about nonhuman animals, I see that the above formulation needs work. Tigers systematically extend their power beyond their empathy. Actually, so do sheep. But we don't say sheep have an evil society because they're in a self-perpetuating pattern of obliviously harming grass. How are humans different?

Again, as everybody knows, nonhuman animals act as part of a larger balanced system. I don't want to romanticize nonhumans; they can be brutal and selfish and cause needless suffering; they have behaviors that do not serve the greater good. But we don't mind, because the greater good knows how to work with these behaviors. If sheep overgraze and multiply and kill the grass, then they run out of food, and the wolves also multiply, and the greedy sheep are killed, and the grass grows back. The system is shaped like a bowl: The farther you go from the center, the harder it is to go farther, and the greater the forces are that pull you back.

But at the same time, we find systems shaped like the edges of slopes, where a little motion in one direction creates forces that accelerate motion in that direction. I'm thinking of forest fires and atomic chain reactions and our human society. Somehow we went far enough in some direction that we fell into a runaway course of doing unperceived harm for easily perceived good, and twisting our perception to keep it going. How did it happen?