

Admission of Ignorance

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Admission of Ignorance comprises the following three essays:

I: Summary of *A Singular Reality*

II: On Tension and Vulnerability in Knowing

III: Consciousness or Extinction

These three essays form a single work, with each intended also to stand in its own right.

This page accompanies each one.

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Part III: Human Civilisation

Consciousness or Extinction

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*For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments. This you may say of man – when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back. This you may say and know it and know it. This you may know when the bombs plummet out of the black planes on the market place, when prisoners are stuck like pigs, when the crushed bodies drain filthily in the dust. You may know it in this way. If the step were not being taken, if the stumbling-forward ache were not alive, the bombs would not fall, the throats would not be cut. Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while the bombers live – for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died. And fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live – for every little beaten strike is proof that the step is being taken. And this you can know – fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe. [John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*]*

I open with some articles for nailing to the door of the the contemporary world order:

- Environment

1. We are living in an environmental crisis of our making, that is unprecedented in the human era. It is certainly not the first time that civilisations have ceased through overconsumption of resources, but the first time that the pattern has occurred globally. In this way at least, it is unprecedentedly serious.
2. Our planetary life support systems — climate, oceans, soil, forests, resources, biodiversity, food — are under great strain, with the strain estimated to be critical in many cases. At the present rate of consumption and degradation, the earth will not be able to sustain us.
3. The simultaneous strain of nearly all earth systems and peak consumption of nearly all resources means that there is no redundancy, and no possibility of one pathological effect being compensated for by another.
4. The interconnectedness and complexity of the earth's systems gives rise to non-linear, catastrophic and irreversible responses that easily pass beyond our ability to predict or to mitigate by manipulation. There are numerous 'time-bombs' that could irrevocably change that which we take for granted.
5. The increasing strain on everything is driving and will drive severe weather, famine, drought, environmental degradation, migration and war. All of these things will drive each other. The human suffering will be great, and *poor people and women* are bearing and will bear the brunt of it.
6. There is, on the other hand, sufficient food and energy to provide for the needs of the world's population. The strain we are experiencing is not a result of fundamental insufficiency of the earth, rather something in us that is insufficient.
7. Food is perhaps the key issue. Starvation and obesity are endemic, and yet there is enough to go around. Probably half of all food produced is wasted. When food is done right, environmental health, the diversity and health of species, human physical and psychological health, community and family all flourish. When it is done wrong, all of these things suffer.

8. The measures offered in response to the environmental crisis by those in power, and to social crises, are at worst desperate acts that perpetuate existing power interests and worsen, often dramatically, existing problems, and at best are cautious measures that leave the deep structures of power intact.
 9. Environmental and human health are aspects of each other. They are generally responded to in a reactive way, by mitigating effects, and while it is possible that this might represent the best option available, it is also true that the underlying causes are actively exacerbated. As far as our health is concerned, we are therefore on the back foot.
- Economics
10. Economics is held alongside ecology and environment as a justly competing set of considerations. It is not, and rather *an* historically and culturally situated way of doing things, whereas the environment is that by which we may live, and therefore choose how we do things. Environment and economics may be correctly situated by analogy to our health and the job we choose to do, and nothing less distinct.
 11. Economic growth is fundamentally at odds with life on a finite planet. Human ingenuity is a significant factor in human development, but there is no way that innovation can avert the ecological catastrophe that is unfolding around us as result of our consumption.
 12. The distribution of wealth in the world is wildly unequal, and increasing. The claims as to how the distribution of wealth changes conflict greatly, for free market economics must be able to claim that it has made people wealthier. (This claim probably has similar social importance as the claim in the middle ages that God existed.) Free market economics does by certain metrics make some people wealthier, but it does so via unequal societies and nations, via the abolition of protecting regulation, via environmental degradation, and via the creation and exploitation of underclasses. That it provides higher material standards over time does not demonstrate that it is the only means by which this could be achieved.

13. Economic growth is fetishised aim and an unconscious narrative. Substantial narrative justifies it as an end in itself, with intense focus on the details of how it may be maintained, and no focus why it should be maintained.
14. Economic growth is measured by a highly limited metric, that only takes into account a subset of things that actually have value to people and counts any exchange within this subset of goods, meaning that destroying and rebuilding, and the sale of shit contribute to economic growth. Economic growth does not take account of human well-being, which has a complex relationship to financial well-being.
15. Free market economics is founded on an extremely simplified set of assumptions about how people behave and what they value. It is not a well evidenced theoretical framework, and outwith the power dynamics it would be evident that it was a very limited theory. In reality, it is a set of ideas by the rich and powerful, for the rich and powerful, and hell has been committed in their name. The ideas are *performative* - they create the reality they describe.
16. The earth system that sustains life is an externality to mainstream economic thinking. Environmental degradation that results from exploitation for economic ends does not reduce the profitability of such activity on its own terms, even though we are destroying that which sustains us in the first place, the only place in the universe we know to be capable of sustaining us.
17. National currencies are of unequal value. Countries that have been industrialising longer, or industrialise more rapidly, have more valuable currencies. Therefore development occurs on an unequal playing field, setting up *de facto* exploitation, including slavery, at a systemic level. Migration is therefore inevitable and the historical responsibility of the countries people wish to migrate to.
18. There is on the other hand such a thing as a living wage, which is constant in the sense that there is an amount in any given country by which one can live. These constant amounts are wildly unequal due to the unequal value of currencies and yet it is the production of goods by poor people for rich people,

it is the producers constant that is taken into account and minimally satisfied, rather than the small decrease in the consumers constant that would make such a huge difference for the producer.

19. Free market economics is paradoxical and perverse in that it abhors regulation in principle, and yet a vast amount of highly complex regulation is required to maintain its 'freedom'. Furthermore, vast financial and other subsidies, historical and contemporary, are essential for its functioning. It is also perverse in that military intervention and horrific human rights abuses have frequently been used to establish it.
20. Economic thinking would have us place an economic value on ecosystems, on culture, on knowledge and on art, as if these things were not entirely of worth for their own sake, now and forever.
21. There is a haemorrhaging of skill occurring. Because economic thinking values replacement over reuse, and delocalised production, traditional skills and techniques are rapidly being lost. This source of individual purpose and social cohesion is replaced by a vacuum.
22. Traditional economic thinking emphasises want over need, excess over moderation, consumption over abstinence, entertainment over serious thought, and the individual over community.

- Finance

23. At the rarified level of complex, debt-based financial products, there is huge profit to be made by gambling. It matters not whether in real world terms production or destruction is occurring. Money can be made by gambling on whether something will go up or down.
24. These activities cause cycles in the economy that have disastrous effects on the livelihoods of people who live by making and trading real things.
25. Taxation, the financial principle by which a society pays for its collective functioning, is grotesquely skewed. Most individuals and small businesses pay tax and can not get away with not doing so. Rich individuals and corporations

can pay almost no tax relative to their profits, and the regulatory structures that would have this otherwise are weak. Governments and corporations are ultimately equally implicated in this.

26. Governments cannot print money. Banks can, and they do so when anyone is granted a loan. Because the tender with which debt is legally dispatched, the tender of taxation, and bank credit are synonymous, the absolutely greatest source of power, control of the money supply, lies not with governments but banks. Of all the examples so far of how economically driven thinking subverts the higher principles of civilisation, this is the most staggering.
27. The above point is never talked about. There is not serious discussion, except on the fringes, of what money is and where it comes from. If you are a person or a business you have to earn it, or borrow it and pay it back. If you are a government, you have to receive it in taxes, or borrow it and pay it back. If you are a bank, you write it into people's or government's accounts and then get interest in the time it takes to clear the 'debt', and also receive bailouts of taxpayer's money during crises of your own making. On the one hand money is the absolutely real and limiting concern of billions of lives. On the other hand, it is a figure on a bank's computer. It actually happens that money that *people have earned* disappears into writing off the balance sheets of shell entities that then cease to exist.
28. Debt is *the* contemporary means of exploitation, and the most powerful form of exploitation. The 'developing' world is enchained to the interests and whims of the 'developed' world through unpayable debt. Much of the debt is historical, and belongs to repressive leaders who enjoyed western but no popular support.
29. There is little or no provision for the protection of debtors, but only for creditors, at all levels of society, everywhere in the world. The historical precedents for dealing with excessive debt, and the historical recognition of the need to do so, are not taken seriously by the structures of power.
30. The huge income sources available to governments through corporate taxation, taxation on financial transactions, and less belligerent and paranoid foreign

policies are all but ignored while the hairs are split over the social infrastructure that means vulnerable people are not left to die.

31. These elements easily give rise to austerity, which, the details aside, carries the great paradox that those responsible for the money supply create an economic situation that offers the justification for governments to attack their own social infrastructure, and then uses free market narratives to pave the way for corporations to provide it slightly more cheaply and worse, with those corporations fundamentally allied to the entities who created the circumstance in the first place.
 32. For the relatively wealthy, through wildly disproportionate house prices and the binding debt of mortgages, and for the poor, through their usually inescapable circumstances, the expenditure of much human energy is greatly constrained.
 33. These means of financial subjugation are so normalised that one is immediately on an uncomfortable fringe if one even acknowledges that they exist.
- Corporate conduct
34. The fundamental and legally enshrined paradigm of corporate activity is the maximisation of profit, meaning that there is no *intrinsic* concern within it for environmental health or social justice. As hallmarks of human civilisation, corporate activity falls somewhere beneath these insofar as working under these concerns is imposed rather than chosen. For corporations more powerful than most governments, the ethical responsibility cannot not lie with them.
 35. Corporate and financial actors are exploitative and manipulative, acting as imperial superpowers in a system almost entirely closed in justifying itself. Great crimes are committed against the earth and its societies, all over the world, in the pursuit of corporate profit, with national governments often fully complicit.
 36. Corporations and financial markets exploit, create and profit from natural disasters, war, suffering and unrest, and economic cycles. This sort of capitalism,

- ‘disaster capitalism’, has become dominant, and is currently effectively eroding the strongest and last bastions of social provision, the European welfare state.
37. Corporate structures are largely undemocratic, with nominally democratic shareholder-board-CEO structures deeply vulnerable to exploitation. Certainly by the standards of governmental democracy, they are authoritarian structures. Therefore corporate conduct falls below a widely proclaimed standard of human civilisation, democracy itself.
 38. International trade agreements enshrine the right to trade ‘freely’, and this means the maximisation of corporate profit. What it also means is trade and profit unimpeded by local and often hard-won regulation to protect people and the environment. These are agreements that say the like of I can sue you because plain cigarette packaging damages my profitability. These agreements are highly complex, little known about, secretive and yet represent a level of governance *over and above* national government.
 39. International aid budgets, modest compensation for vast and systemic inequity, are increasingly spent on furthering corporate agendas under the justifications of free market economics.
 40. Regulation of corporate activity by governments is vulnerable to manipulation by corporate lobbies, actors with as much power as many governments, who with almost unlimited financial resources are free to muddy the water as they wish. Regulation of corporate activity through fines can easily become an operational risk rather than a deterrent, while the absolute magnitude of the fine is sufficient to make people think justice has been done.
 41. There are revolving doors between corporations and governments, military, media, academia and law, at least. Just as much as these institutions have well defined roles, relations and limits in human civilisation, they are just as much or more a single complex of the power dynamics.
 42. A significant part of corporate culture is advertising. This is thrust upon us, while demeaning the dignity and intelligence of humanity, especially women, and drawing us to to excess and ill-health.

43. There has come about a managerial culture where, analogous to the rarefied financial world, there exists an operational level that is concerned with the administration of the substance and process of real lives. While this must always exist to an extent, its top heavy and self serving nature is demoralising and dehumanising.
 44. The pursuit of knowledge, the most noble of human pursuits, is now deeply beholden to corporate interests. The notions of pure science and art for its own sake are fantasies in an academia where corporate funding and government budgets (or lack of them) are such fundamental actors.
 45. Corporations spend a great deal on their image, and their image and justifications for their actions is taken relatively seriously when in fact, in many cases, it should be treated totally cynically. Nominal acts of good are used to obscure a far darker background.
- Nations and justice
46. Democracy is a rightly prized social achievement and yet in practice is, where it exists, it is highly limited. Structures of voting mean that the expression of individual preference maps to a limited set of similar options, and often strategic voting, 'the least worst', is the only option. They also mean that cycles set in between the limited options. Moreover democratic choices are almost perfectly unified in their above adherence to the above economic, financial and corporate status quo.
 47. At an international level, western democracy is held as an ideal for other nations, and yet in practice this often means establishing an ill-suited system that is in fact a vehicle for free market expansion. Moreover, this can inflame tension along racial lines in the frequent case of there being a poor majority of one ethnicity and a rich minority of another.
 48. The concept of a nation is a vehicle of iniquity. As opposed to culture, which is not divided by barbed wire and armed guards, nationalism is a sorry narrative used to justify a retrogressive and easy to grasp stance on global economic

realities that are hard to understand, and that nationalist leaders are actually ideologically complicit with.

49. The collaboration of nations, as aspired to in the United Nations, is fundamentally stunted through the veto on the security council of the powerful nuclear-equipped nations.
50. International 'order' is maintained not least through nuclear threat. The reliance of the powerful on weapons with the capability to destroy the planet many times over hangs over us like a sick monster.
51. Warfare is profitable at many levels. The fuelling of war, the sale of weapons to both sides, and the sale of arms to repressive regimes implicated in torture and murder are the reality of our civilisation. Notably for the second half of the twentieth century, and into the present, an 'enemy' has been manufactured when needed.
52. Justice, upheld with democracy as a principle of human civilisation, can be bought. There exists such a thing as a good lawyer, at the right price, and it can be seen that economic iniquity therefore pervades justice too.
53. Our approach to individual criminality is *the* least sophisticated facet of our civilisation. To treat all crimes, with all their different motivations, from conscious pre-mediation to emotional acts to accidents, from freely chosen paths to the result of inescapable social, physiological or physiological circumstances, with a period of internment carrying the possibility of abuse and that generally increases the chance of re-offence, is not civilised.
54. The rich and powerful — individuals, nations, corporations — commit horrific crimes with near impunity. Justice is only ever administered *by* the powerful. Narratives maintain a line that if you are on the right side of, you can bomb and torture and evade tax and exploit.
55. The acceptance of systemic Israeli violence towards Palestinians, the condemnation of Palestinian violence and lack of understanding as to its origin, the disallowed nature of pointing such a thing out, and the expulsion from structures of power that befalls those who speak out against this all stand as a

microcosm of global suffering, injustice and disinformation. There will be no peace while this lie pervades.

- Media

56. Last but not least is media. There is a special wrong here, for media is maintained and maintains itself as that which is meant to *comment* on all of the above. And yet it *is* all of the above. The majority of media is corporate owned and tows the line of the world order.
57. Media occupies itself with small things, like fashion and sport and gruesome crimes, political rows, distressing stories about the latest risk to human health or the environment, and of course the fine details of the latest floundering of the economy. It does not *fundamentally* occupy itself with hard questions about economic growth and money, about the conduct and hypocrisy of nations, or the intense bravery and sacrifice and hope that is everywhere responding to all these ills.
58. Journalistic objectivity propagates the *status quo*. Its requirement of balanced coverage propagates the interests of the powerful, by everything from what is and is not covered, to which part of the sentence is relegated to the subordinate clause. Especially, two views are presented as two sides of a question, when one stems from entrenched power, and one does not, and therefore they cannot have equal weight.
59. Corporate media maintains narratives of ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ by which the most hideous acts of inhumanity are normalised. It also maintains the equi-importance of environment and economics, by which the destruction of that which sustains is normalised.
60. Corporate media maintains a sense of the unequal value of human life by grossly unequal attention to human suffering. One murder in the west for millions dying from war or thirst or hunger in a country no one in power has any *interest* in. An act of destruction in a safe western country where such things are unusual against those in countries where they are a matter of daily life.

And so ends these articles. The first two essays in this series contained extensive speculations about consciousness and knowledge, and what remains is to mesh the above criticisms with those ideas, in an attempt to arrive at a perspective that could in a small way contribute to healing.

First then, the above observations are deliberately succinct and unelaborated. Each one of them could be substantiated by reference to a great deal of existing material, but this is beyond the scope of this essay. All the articles are contentious, but I believe that in essential claims, none of them are fundamentally false. Their truth is of course quite a separate issue from alternatives, and lack of obvious alternative is not a reason to not say them.

They draw on extensive sources, including but not limited to Paul Hawken: *Blessed Unrest*, Naomi Klein: *No Logo*, *The Shock Doctrine*, *This Changes Everything*, Hill & Myatt: *The Economics Anti-textbook*, Amy Chua: *World on Fire*, and David Graeber: *Debt: The First 5000 Years*.

Some reconciliatory remarks should be made. First, this is not a call for communism or anarchy, or a case fundamentally against money and business. I recognise money, including debt, and trade as fundamental human activities. And there is a place for the protection of business interests, just as there is a place for the protection of people and planet. It is rather a call for a serious moderation of capitalism, that places it firmly within the rule of human society, in its finer sense – democracy, justice, social and environmental protection. I do not then seek to deny the possibility of institutional good, and rather this is a plea for it. Secondly, it is not to deny that within the institutions referred to there are no those whose aim is to do good, or who succeed in doing good.

I do not wish to take a fundamentally negative view of the world. There is hope everywhere, amazing bravery and determination in the face of impossible odds, unlimited financial and military might, and torture and death. And there is amazing determination against the constraints of the system that many within it would seek to change. Both of these must be acknowledged as the very substance of hope, as must be the sheer wonder

of human creativity and persistence.

In *Blessed Unrest*. Paul Hawken estimates that there are six million organisations fighting back for social and environmental justice, which quite astonishingly, is approximately one per thousand people. It is perhaps the largest movement in history. I make no claim about how anything will play out, but I do not note the negative out of lack of hope, but rather because I believe that an uncompromised and uncompromising recognition of this darkness is essential to this movement.

Drawing on everything said so far, the darkness I feel it is most important to identify is the hypocrisy of our civilisation. We may die of environmental meltdown, or we may die of hypocrisy. The paradox of contemporary western civilisation is deep. On the one hand, we nurture and proclaim a moral and ethical position of tolerance and compassion. Not least, this has found its expression in the great cultural shifts of the 20th century in regard to sex, race and sexuality. What has been and is fought for could be said to be a more *equal valuing of human life*. On the other hand, our civilisation is sustained by an unprecedented level of exploitation, and *unequal valuing of human life*. The economic system is absolutely inimical to this, and media almost universally propagates the unequal valuing of human life, if not explicitly along the lines of race and sex (for that would not be acceptable!), along the lines of rich and poor.

Wealth and its unequal distribution are key. It has often been observed that some of the great civilisational achievements of the 20th century, civil rights and the end of apartheid for example, were not glorious ends to oppression, but a shift in the manner of oppression, from by force to economic. One the great unfolding tragedies of our time is the illegal and violent occupation by Israel of the occupied territories. We can perhaps suppose that some day perhaps in the not too distant future the tide of international opinion will turn, and that after the walls come down, and after the rightful celebration of that moment, that the form of the situation may be perpetuated economically.

So too then is economic imperialism key. One may discern a long trajectory of empires from the Roman Empire, to the empires of Christian Europe, to the European colonial

empires, to American lead military and economic supremacy, and discern one western power quest. There is no room for small words here. What we may be looking at now, in contemporary globalised society, is *the last empire*. Somehow ecology and economics come together in a reckoning of the paradox of civilisation, and the nature of power and agency, which ultimately is no more or less than consciousness. The theme of power and consciousness will be returned to at the conclusion of this essay.

We are in the grip of a drive by the institutions of the *status quo* to maintain that at all costs. It is terrifying to observe the tenacity of this drive. Especially through international trade agreements, and the development of food and energy sources that *greatly exacerbate* the environmental crisis (e.g. GMOs and fracking), and the well-oiled curtailment of civil liberties, we can discern the desperation. As Klein observes, these actions signify that these institutions have grasped the seriousness of the situation.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is the force of darkness, who possesses ‘the will to dominate all life’. Archetypally, we may discern this influence among us. Monsauron for example would seek manipulation of organisms at a genetic level, justified by distorting co-option of the conversation about how we may be fed; the ownership of seeds that have been common property forever, resulting in the decimation of diversity to a few species; the manipulation of agricultural practice that lays slow waste to fertile land; the manipulation of trading practices that force farmers into cycles of dependancy and forces thousands to suicide; the manipulation of knowledge to justify these practices; the manipulation of less powerful nations through co-option of international aid programmes; and the manipulation of the legislation of powerful nations to create immunity from laws that would protect against such acts. *This is surely the will to dominate all life.*

The nature of the lies that pervade has already been alluded to in the points above about media. These lies must be seen and seen through. This is so important that I will further make clear some of the concrete occasions of untruth that I perceive:

First, the unequal valuing of human life is implicit. Although there are brave and explicit acknowledgements to the contrary, this is against a background of normalisation of relative

worth. It is not that it is exactly said, but depending on place and context, much more or much less emphasis is placed on human suffering. There is a place of course for ‘local news’, but not for treating relatively mild suffering in the west as catastrophic, and brushing endemic suffering in poor countries and war zones (both of which are largely the creation and responsibility of the west) in passing or not at all.

Secondly, the two most pervasive mainstream narratives of world affairs are growth and terror. Viewed conceptually for a moment, it is a great indictment of the contemporary order that its dominant narratives reduce to *fear* and *greed*. Both of these narratives are unequivocal lies. Growth in its widely used form is a categorical impossibility for a finite planet. Terror is a manufactured threat that serves many purposes. Of course there is violent extremism, but it is fuelled by western foreign policy, and pales to relative insignificance against the sustained terror of that foreign policy.

Thirdly, conspiracy theories have achieved a bizarre status. On the one hand, despair, ignorance and credulity are enough to foster some absolutely bizarre creations, theories that are obviously ridiculous and for which only psychologization suffices. On the other hand, many targets of conspiracy theories are totally legitimate. In particular, false flag attacks, where those in power commit an act of violence against those they represent, or knowingly allow one to happen, and cast the blame in self-serving way, *are as old as history*. Much of the violence of the 20th century has been revised along much more cynical lines, and the questions continue into the present day. The pursuit of allegations is not the point here, but rather that the allegations are *legitimate*. ‘Why would they attack their own people?’ is not a question we should be dumbfounded by. The really important point here is that these two scenarios of conspiracy theories are willingly conflated, so that the ridiculous ones delegitimise the plausible ones. There has to be intelligent discernment beyond this, beyond the persisted of the negative connotation of ‘conspiracy theory’ that delegitimises by association.

Fourthly, institutional admission needs to be seen for what it is. The proclamations of governments and corporations are largely the work of those whose job it is to say that

thing, and this fundamentally strips their value in serious discourse. Corporate media nonetheless (and of course) takes these proclamations seriously, and in this way is not real journalism. The task here is to see through what we are meant to accept, and in this way our consciousness increases while institutional power is lessened. Harder but even more significant is correcting for the bias placed by corporate funding of academia.

Fifthly, and relatedly, the way global issues are talked about in the mainstream generally makes little concession to the structures of power. Therefore journalism often takes the form of ‘this is going on, these are the objections to it, these are the justifications for it’ when in fact the source of the objection and the source of the justification are a difference of kind. Of course all viewpoints are situated, and power probably plays into all views of things. It is not the objectors are transcendently right. However there is a vast difference between a small organisation that would not exist if it were not for the compassion of a few people, and a vast organisation where the institutional line is vacuous and the budget bottomless. Therefore the relativisation is abhorrent and misleading, and again must be seen through.

I now return to the paradox of civilisation, for this position becomes the starting point for the concluding sentiments of this essay, which draw back on everything that has been said about consciousness in all the preceding ones too.

It is important to be clear that this discourse is serious about civilisation *as is*. It recognises the burning beauty of human creation. It recognises what this species has made for themselves. It recognises the vast achievement that is entailed by just how much we have created, in so many spheres. It also recognises that significant parts of this achievement are entwined with the spheres that have been most strongly and necessarily criticised.

It recognises then that civilisation is a noble thing, that it is the creation of structures by which our better instincts towards each and the world may be enshrined as the only acceptable thing. It recognises that civilisation is most deeply that by which those who are vulnerable may receive protection and care, and that by which those who are different may receive tolerance. And it suggests that civilisation is also the urgent need to regulate

trade and debt and money.

It recognises too that for all our finer achievements in the cultivation of knowledge and art and society, much of what we have has been materially made possible by great domination and exploitation, *and* there is more exploitation now than ever before, *and* — and this is hard point — that that exploitation is so effective and normalised that relatively few really know or dare to really acknowledge the extent of it.

There is a box, a paradigm, of western civilisation, that at least in public is not overwhelmingly thought outside of. Following from all the discussion of knowledge and consciousness so far, there is a direct link between ideas, or the lack of them, and action, or the lack of it. The pathology that plays out in practice is co-substantial with limited consciousness, that can dwell *so much* on stock market fluctuations and be unmoved, still be able to keep going, in the face of the needless deaths of millions of children. Something has to be behind such and any pre-weighted acceptability versus marginality. Knowledge and consciousness are deeply structured.

There is no such thing as developed world, we can only say that the whole world is developing. We are conscious and therefore we can shape it. While it is helpful at times to attribute agency to anything from a photon to a corporation, I believe that fundamentally, here and now, the agency lies with us. This spans ‘the system’ and its fringes, including the complex reality of being one of those in public and another in private. Between the rights and the wrongs, civilisation is a word maybe in need of quotation marks. It is a struggle of ideas and actions between a fragile and incipient universal ethics and great forces that would tear it to pieces without a second thought.

May it be said to these forces, in the strongest terms, *fuck your empire*. The snowdrop knows the truth that life not power endures. The empire, as it were, provides the wood for crucifixion.

What then of the lives, lived in the interplay of consciousness and unconsciousness, where in Jungian psychology crucifixion is the image of wholeness? This essay will not go

to places like ‘we need this, if there wasn’t this we’d be fine’, to places of explicit but ultimately hopeless requirement. It rather seeks to hold a space that might be conducive to positive change. These following remarks are made in that spirit.

First, let us always acknowledge the immensity and worth of individual life and consciousness. Each one of us is vaster than we ourselves will grasp in our lifetime. Whatever the philosophical or psychological position, this world is not less than all of those brilliant, beautiful, often thwarted lives.

Secondly, let us acknowledge the difficulty of individual lives. Just attending to one’s own needs and those of one’s family, negotiating all the complexities of human interaction, taking care of oneself, enjoying oneself, these things in a certain reckoning are nearly all that occupies nearly everyone.

Thirdly, we should understand that we now live with rates of change that produce world-changing changes on timescales of the order of or less than our lifetimes. This *should* be profoundly difficult to deal with, especially in light of the above.

Fourthly, as much as we would like to, we cannot live ethically by a single stroke. The networks of power and dependency are too complex for there to be simple options. Almost every attempt to live ethically will entail some sort of compromise, whether we know about it or not. Therefore better we do not hang ourselves, but accept that this aspiration and compromise are inimical. And accept also that every method has advantages and disadvantages, that the quality only ever transitorily inheres in *a* method.

Fifthly, the preference and specialisation of individual lives are absolutely essential to the functioning of the world. Everyone’s place is worthy of respect and understanding. No inherited or chosen circumstance elevates anyone in account of its explicit nature. Quality only ever transitorily inheres in *a* calling.

Sixthly, lives and institutions and societies are highly constrained. This is absolutely fundamental. Any idealism or aspiration plays out in this matrix. One may decide to

take a stance on the boundaries or within ‘the system’, and this will be felt. Or one may be too constrained in one’s own life to take the position one feels compelled to at all. This is very common. What is essential is that intrinsic constraint is treated as exactly not aberrational, but the challenge. Moreover, as much as I do not wish to make comment on the ‘problem of evil’, I think that constraint is far more productive thing to focus on. I see constraint everywhere, but not evil.

And finally, as has been emphasised, there is hope everywhere, at a level of action and at level of nuanced understanding of the complexities of the global situation. Revolution has become a rather complex word, and it is clear that revolution resulting in more of the same is a common pattern. What would be really revolutionary? What could make a new heaven and a new earth?

Three things come to mind for me. First, that we would settle for *some profit* and that the situated rather than ultimate importance of profit be enshrined in the structures of civilisation. Secondly, that answers, at a practical and intellectual level, could be accepted to have *some validity*, not just on their individual merits or lack of them, but as an intrinsic attribute of an *answer* itself. Thirdly, and this is the greatest, an end to the oppression of women, that the feminine should take its rightful place, and that our understanding of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ be re-valued and re-visioned, something so truly revolutionary that we cannot even begin to imagine what it would look like.

I now return to the deep theme of knowledge and consciousness. What remains to do is to reiterate the position on knowledge in Part II in this more concrete context, and from there return to the singular theme of consciousness and with that treat that whose significance has become so apparent – *power*. I will, as it were, attempt to situate the situator.

Conceive of a partial claim to truth that uses the methodology of its specific substantiation to aid its claim to rightness by the rejection of the significance of where that methodology has not gone or cannot go. Such a thing is ridiculous, and such is the situation, with materialism, in a nutshell, and in my view. There is no basis for the cultural assertion

of the sufficiency of that paradigm, other than the strength and success of its specific claims, and the enculturated nature of the paradigm, which like free market economics, we are firmly 'in'. It is clear too that the civilisational mindset that was forged through the scientific revolution and the enlightenment leaves us in a profoundly *ambiguous* place when we talk of its 'success'.

What is the significance of materialism to our present situation? This is of course a vast question, but a few comments will stress the importance of the connection.

Older than materialism, and rooted in the the Socratic tradition, is the sense that by our participation in the Ideas, we can know things. We have a strong sense of the knowability of the universe. Older also than materialism, and rooted in part in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is a sense of our entitlement on earth. Out of materialism comes an ability to deduce with great success the effects of various manipulations, on account of the seeming coherence that mathematical physics reveals. And our ability to manipulate is now very great. Put these three — knowability, entitlement, manipulatability — in the hands of animals whose own introspection may reveal that their conduct is as unconscious as it is conscious, and in that unconsciousness there resides that which may in earlier ages have been called Hell, and we should be alarmed at the possibility and unsurprised at the tragic consequence. Still, we must evolve, and so it all unfolds.

As well as this, materialism leaves us with some difficulty over complexity. Science began with the relatively simple systems, 'parts', a most understandable state of affairs. What this has engendered is a reductive bias that is much associated with materialism in critical circles. Actually science has made great advances in non-reductive approaches, and must be fairly said to span in its interest the whole and the parts. *However*, wholes are much more difficult to manipulate or predict. Therefore the material trajectory has left us, rather like a small child, with much enthusiasm and little skill in dealing with human and ecosystem health – and surely a look around makes this undeniable.

It is actually quite easy to deny the importance of ecology if at a deeper level, the radical interconnectedness and interdependence of wholes is denied. On the the other hand,

economics is one of the sciences to arise out of the state affairs whereby those studying messy wholes were envious at some level of the success of physicists and sought their methods. Economics is therefore easy to understand (the mainstream theory is simplified to a point of being laughable), and more importantly, engendered by the intellectual trajectory of the west. Ecology, its ‘inconvenient’ rival, is engendered by much more sophisticated and incipient intellectual trajectories. Moreover, culture *is* nature, humans are of the environment, the oppressor oppressed – *we are this*. Therefore any sense of separation either from the whole, or from its crisis, is false.

Finally, as extensively discussed, materialism leaves consciousness in a rather sorry place, whereby the *singular thing that consumes us utterly and throughout our whole lives* cannot be placed, *for the observer has truly become the observed*. Inwardly and outwardly, I believe that consciousness is the ultimately significant thing, spanning ideas and action.

At a level of ideas, consciousness is that which allows us to see ideas situated within a holarchy of loose paradigms, and it is what allows us to have an idea rather than the idea have us. It is that which could allow us to move beyond paradigm shifts being a process of successive immersions to something more like surfing a wave. This would be unprecedented, a paradigm shift of paradigm shifts, a difference in kind of our human capacity, and as revolutionary as those things listed above. Finally, and exactly relatedly, consciousness is what would allow us to value multiple partial answers over one dangerous monolithic one.

At a level of action, consciousness is the nothing and everything answer in the desperate search for what may be done, even just what may make sense of all of this. *And there is exactly no answer*, for it will be determined by consciousness *to the extent that consciousness exercises itself*.

To the extent which it exercises itself. What happens when it does not? Unconsciousness. This leads to the final big connection I wish to make, to power. Power is deeply important theme. In the postmodern worldview, worldviews make worlds, and worldviews come from power dynamics. Different actors are relativised by their situation within a web

of power relations. This is a vital insight, essential to dethroning the self-made proclamations of so many institutions, and essential in our greater questioning of proclamations. The mass acceptance of going to fight for one's country at the outbreak of the First World War has been rightfully contrasted to the mass protests at the geo-political charade that was the invasion of Iraq.

But this relativisation of everything in terms of power dynamics gives way to difficult ground. What of all the endeavour for social and environmental justice? Is it not a play of power between governments, corporations and NGOs? Sometimes, often, it is. How under postmodern exposition of power dynamics, and situated epistemology and morality, do we hold on to what is right? We know full well we cannot pin down what that is, but we also know full well we damn well want to.

We are at a hard point, and something bold is needed to break what seems intractable. My suggestion is that power is an aspect of the conscious–unconscious relation. By power here I mean exactly externally wielded power, for elevation of any kind over others, and for its own sake. *I suggest that pursuit of power comes about through relative unconsciousness, that a consciousness that always questions itself cannot be gripped by power, and that power is unconscious possession.* Therefore relativism through power dynamics is broken by consciousness, and all the situated viewpoints of the postmodern plethora are afforded a possibility of sincere expression. And therefore also comes the recognition that the forces that would shred civilisation, while warranting great opposition, are within us.

Another way of saying this would be that consciousness is the hidden variable of the actor in the network, in practice rather than theory.

Consciousness is literally all we have. I have talked a great deal about sustainability without saying what I mean by it, and I can only say that I mean by it there may be human life, and that the beautiful and compassionate things that we have created may endure. People, *and their problems*, are the enactive fundamental. There is our agency and freedom and there is constraint. Blame has no place. The postmodern, although seemingly hopeless, I think is ultimately heartening. It is human consciousness turning

on itself, and that means worldviews change, and that means the world changes. How is no-one's to know or prescribe.

What can be said is that knowing fundamentally matters. It matters that we do not place the cart of our description or paradigm before the horse that figured it out in the first place. This miraculous brilliant creative horse is pulled around by its own cart as a matter of course, occasionally regaining control before the cart takes over again. It is not a matter of ditching the cart, just pulling it.

It matters that an achievement, in theory or practice, does not stray outside itself by negating or subsuming that which is not it. It matters that worldviews serve consciousness, rather than unconsciousness serve worldviews. It matters that we are open to each other's curiosity. It matters that we conduct ourselves with an openness to the inner and outer phenomena of the universe, and to the many truthful paths.

I think it matters that private admission not public admission be the basis of discourse as much as possible. This is true of both what is admitted by others, and what we admit to ourselves. In both cases, it is the private admissions that really hold the insight. I think it matters too that we understand clearly our freedom, with its possibilities and constraints. In mind, in the evolution of culture, in the pursuit of knowledge and in global markets, we are not as free as we think we are. There is a strange reoccurrence of this theme, as things endure in powerful ways and enduring things offer themselves as free. An yet truly, the freedom is ours.

Here and now, it matters that we situate science so that the remainder of the wisdom of humanity may be available for our healing, that the postmodern reaches back to the ancient, although in anything but an unconditional way, and that this is already happening.

It is clear to me, and I hope I have argued sufficiently, that the absence of these things feeds the destruction and excess we see around us. Moderation is not the limited ingress into life but a holding of the poles, without conflict, compromise or transcendence.

Everything I have said so far, in all these essays, comes together in healing. Insofar as our health matters or will at some point matter *more than anything else*, then every claim on the nature of reality will come to play over the question of healing. And since environmental and human health are ultimately *the same thing*, this is just as true of planetary health. Consciousness of knowledge and knowledge of consciousness serve health, and there is no greater reason to pursue them.

Knowledge matters. A conscious place is one of ignorance, of the humble and awe-inspiring kind. An unconscious place is one of certainty that we are not even fully aware we operate with. Our narrow-mindedness is the limit of knowledge, and our susceptibility its degradation. It does not matter what knowledge is in question, scientific or spiritual, these things are always true.

Compassion matters. I believe that human compassion could be said to be the ability to regard the circumstance of another and admit that if that were my circumstance, I cannot truly say I would not have acted like that.

In this way, the symmetry of left and right, as much as it is relevant is broken. It is true that the left and right have archetypal qualities that like all psychological positions have a shadow: social provision tipping into control on the ‘left’, individual freedom tipping into selfishness on the ‘right’. However, on the basis of this statement of compassion, and the value of understanding over judgement, the right is shown to be something that fundamentally draws us back. Moreover, causes that would attribute simple causes to complex problems hold us back most strongly, and are seen everywhere in the popular right, with its minuscule intellectual and ideological substance.

At the time of writing, it is the centenary of the First World War. There, in one day in the Somme, 120,000 young men were killed. One hundred years later, after the Second World War, and the cold war, the war on terror could be construed as the Fourth World War – it is just conveniently fought in the homes of poor people now.

We began with specifics and it is apt to re-enter them here, for it is of these times and of

many such times that the worst of the worst will fill the space if nothing else does. What is really at stake is the sustainability of human life in a complex but far from hopeless planetary crisis.

This work modestly offers that admission of ignorance is a path of healing, with ‘this one’ firmly included. What it further offers is the insight that while other animals have all sorts of marvellous adaptations that ensure their survival, for us this is consciousness, nothing more and nothing less. May words fly through the structure of lies. For knowledge, for health, and for life, may consciousness burn.

Key references:

Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*

Rod Hill and Tony Myatt, *The Economics Anti-Textbook*

Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest*