

How to Fix Our Broken World

Global Problems, Their Causes and the Process of Transition

by Justin Morgan.

Introduction and Summary

The first thing to recognise is that the world is a shambles. Around a third of the human population suffers from some definition of poverty – from malnutrition, starvation and lack of clean drinking water to disease, overcrowding and abject living conditions¹. Roughly another third of the population is causing problems both for itself and for the world because of its *overconsumption* – not just the health problems associated with indulgent lifestyles, but also resource and energy crises as a result of the over-exploitation of natural capital and environmental destruction with its effects on health and yields, as a result of extreme pollution of the air, water and soil. The remaining part of the populace – dominated by sectors of the Indian and Chinese populations – is quickly aspiring to join in with the lifestyles of overconsumption, a situation which is physically impossible in terms of resource use. Roughly speaking, the ‘third’ world of poverty and the ‘second’ world produce the majority of the things that the ‘first’ world uses – food, clothes, toys, computers, household appliances, furniture etc. Combined with the problems of overpopulation, and situated in an economic system that depends on endless growth just to function, these crises – a resource crisis, a water crisis, an energy crisis *and* an ecological crisis – should be enough to make us worry about the future of our society, even when climate change is taken out of the equation. And even that isn’t everything: crime, torture, war, nuclear proliferation, human rights abuses, reduction of civil liberties, homelessness, refugee camps, government corruption, inequality, poor health, depression, fear and anxiety are extreme, and such problems are by no means limited to so-called ‘developing’ countries. Slavery is still a reality for a great many people, to varying degrees², and despite the scale of technology at our disposal, a world of abundant leisure and comfort has failed to materialise for the vast majority of people. Instead, money encroaches ever more fiercely on more and more aspects of life, degrading communities, stifling creativity and plundering traditional cultures as it does so.

The list of problems actually goes on and on, and the feedback mechanisms which link all of the problems together are ultimately rooted in the truth of a society gone horribly, horribly wrong. The underlying causes of these problems are complex and countless – from crazy economic policies, to the aftermath of colonialism, to general racism. Here, I will take a particular standpoint about the ultimate genesis of these problems – but I will stress that, strangely enough, the causes are not as important as the solutions, and so you do not need to agree with my analyses in order to appreciate the solutions. Our world is so broken that it no longer matters what broke it; it needs to be *replaced*. One does not need to know why one’s car is wrecked in order to get a new one, but I think that in this case, thinking about the causes can help us go a lot further.

So what *is* my conception of the causes? At the risk of melodrama, it is that society itself is founded on lies. If not lies, then deeply rooted misinterpretations of the world and our place in it. The chief lie, the number one delusion, the myth to end all myths, is this: that individual things can be demarcated and assigned personal responsibility for their actions, independent of everything else. The truth, instead, is that there is no coherent way to divide up the continuous and constantly-changing universe we inhabit, and that even if arbitrary borders are conceived around particular

1 1.4 billion live on less than \$1.25 per day (UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2009) and 2.5 billion on less than \$2 a day (UNDP Human Development Report 2005).

2 An estimated 12.3 million people are working as slaves at any given time: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/notesanddefs.html#2196> but this does not consider sweatshops or indeed the wider phenomenon of wage slavery.

regions of the universe, that region cannot exercise any control of its own over anything. It has no capacity to muster up the ‘energy’ to affect anything else – not in and of itself. It cannot be uniquely blamed for causing something. This will be the subject of part one.

In so many ways, the myth of independent blame-ability underlies the flawed society we now live in and so causes all of its problems. When we believe in the myth, we identify ourselves with an individual region of the cosmos and then divide up the rest of the world into things which are good, bad or neutral for our own individuality, inescapably leading to a world where selfishness is the only viable option – or so it appears. Because ‘good’ things really have no power to do good, ‘bad’ things have no power to do evil and ‘neutral’ things are actually inseparable parts of the real universe, we end up constantly craving more ‘good’ and less ‘bad’ and becoming ever more ignorant of ‘neutral’, leading to various forms and manifestations of greed, hatred and ignorance respectively. It is greed that drives our environmental destruction, overconsumption and overuse of finite resources; it is hatred that drives our wars and conflicts and fears; and it is ignorance which fuels anxiety and an inability to see the real causes of the problems.

If we remove the underlying delusion and simultaneously replace our society with one that is not plagued by this delusion and the problems that arise from it, then we can eliminate all of the suffering that these things cause. The problems with the world are so severe and so numerous that only a complete replacement of society will do any good at all. But if society is replaced in a particular region without a change to the underlying assumptions and world views of the people, it will be in vain. And if the mentality of a group of people changes, but not their society, then, at best, they leave the rest of the world behind in turmoil; but most probably, their mentality is constantly challenged and even shattered by a society that fiercely opposes it. Both society and our world views must undergo radical upheaval – total replacement – at the same time, in order to succeed, but it will have to be a gradual replacement of both aspects concurrently.

In part three, I present a rough guide as to how we might go about doing this. It *will* happen.

And there we have it: the problems with the world, the underlying cause, the ability to remove it and a plan of action for doing so.

Preamble

When I was around eleven years old I drew the Greek letter epsilon onto a blank page followed by the word ‘project’. Now, I thought, what should the epsilon project be³? It has to be the *ultimate* project. I soon realised what the ultimate project was, what it *had* to be. Although I wasn’t aware of many of the things wrong with the world at that time, I knew at least that poverty, war and violence were still enormous issues, and I somehow knew that they didn’t *have* to exist. What I did next surprises me perhaps as much as it may surprise you. I made a list headed something like “How to make a better world” and wrote down about five steps of the process. Unfortunately I have since lost this list, but I know for sure that two of the steps of this process were “Make a global political system” and “Introduce a new money system”. Both of these steps do in fact feature, in the third and final part of this work, as preliminary stages to a slightly updated process for making a better world.

3 I am pretty sure there was no logic behind choosing epsilon, since I have no recollection of projects alpha, beta, gamma or delta.

Having written a rough plan for the epsilon project, my next move, strangely enough, was to write a novel. Reading it back today makes me cringe: forty-five thousand words of flat characters and childish descriptions. But the novel was set on a fictional planet called Zirth, a technological utopia free of all crime, violence, poverty and war, whose inhabitants would become overwhelmingly distraught – would even faint – when they heard about the horrific practices, insane policies and destitute lifestyles endured by those poor, poor Earthlings. The same ideas would be the basis for my next two novels. I only wish the characters were not so one-dimensional.

Retrospectively, I would imagine a child who conceives the epsilon project and seeks to transform the world into something much better as someone very driven, very energetic, very imaginative, very determined and very, very naïve. But this was not quite the case. Instead of being incredibly hopeful and optimistic that I had found the solutions to urgent problems, and that I could be the one who'd finally save the world from its ills (which would of course have been quite selfish) - instead of that, I was very depressed. I felt like withdrawing from the sorry, hateful world completely, I developed (possibly unrelated) 'social anxiety problems' which made me fearful of interacting with people, fearful of crowds and fearful of the world at large, as well as intermittently suicidal. I had no desire at all to pursue the "epsilon project". I thought to myself, "why should I"? Why should I have to do anything? Why should I feel responsible for putting right things I had nothing to do with? Why should the mistakes and problems of our forebears be put on my shoulders or anyone else's? I realised that something like the epsilon project would entail an extreme amount of work – work I knew I might never complete in my life-time. Why should I be born into such a hateful world and have to feel compelled to do something about it? There was a dilemma: I wanted to live in the world as it should be – how it *could* be – free of all its innumerable atrocities, but I wanted to live in it from the start, without having to do all the work to get it. I knew that it was utterly necessary to pursue this project, so depression was inevitable.

Perhaps things would have been happier if I had been talking to other people about it. But I carried my thoughts alone, and for years I shared them with no-one. I want to shake them off, but if I do, I'll be left with the world as it is – how I don't want it – and the only way to avoid that is to continue to carry the burden, to do whatever I can to help things.

I put forward a philosophy, an analysis, a vision and a plan for realising that vision, over the four sections that comprise this work. Although the four parts are sequential, they do not actually depend on each other's findings. This may be difficult to see at first, because I do refer to conclusions made in the previous parts, but I also make it clear that although each part is *supported* by each other, they do not necessarily *require* them. For example, the philosophy is arguably sufficient, but is in fact not a necessary requirement for, the ultimate plan. This is very important to understand, because it might otherwise be tempting to dismiss the plan of action on the grounds that my philosophy is wrong, or dismiss the philosophy because you think the plan would not work.

Nothing that I will say in these writings is really new. Other people are saying the same things. However, as far as I can tell, my vision, and the plan for attaining it, discussed in the third part, are not being pursued by anybody already, at least not in the precise form that I describe. Yes, there are a lot of people *saying* what I'm saying, but not a lot of people doing it.

Different people have different ways of understanding and interpreting things. In the classroom, for example, some people might understand a mathematical or scientific concept the first time the

teacher explains it; those who don't get it require a different interpretation – they need to hear a different way of explaining it – before it will suddenly 'click'. And so it helps if the same information and the same conclusions are expressed by as many different people as possible, because differences in the way they see things will mean more interpretations are available to the readers, and so overall, more of them will get it. That is why I think it is useful that I have written down my *own* interpretations, because some people might find them easier to grasp than another writer's interpretations, even if we are talking about the same things.

The complication, however, is that written and spoken language are imperfect means of communicating ideas, and this is especially true for my own subject matter. You may find that you have read or heard similar ideas and arguments, but that your interpretation of them was completely different – perhaps the complete opposite – of your interpretation after reading my own. This is an experience I have quite often when consulting different sources: I know their ideas are essentially the same, but differences in the way they have used language to communicate them translate into huge differences in the way the reader understands the concepts, and reflect differences in the ways the writers interpret the ideas themselves. And so you may find yourself disagreeing with some things I say, when in fact you are being misled by my use of language, or have been misled in the past by someone else's.

Furthermore, I confess to being very conscious that what I write down is not *quite* what I mean. The English language just isn't good enough at describing the difficult concepts that need addressing. What's more, there are so many concepts to consider, so many arguments and threads of arguments to intertwine, develop and counter. The structure of the arguments has to be as clear as possible, dealing with ideas which are extremely complicated, extremely controversial and extremely easy to confuse with unhelpful interpretations (see above). And my command of the English language, the inaccurate tool I have at my disposal for conveying my already imperfect interpretations of these difficult subjects, may not always be spot on (but I hope you can at least count on good spelling and grammar).

This does not mean that it is all in vain. Imperfect descriptions are better than keeping these important ideas to oneself, especially when, as I said before, we need all the interpretations we can get if we are to present these ideas to as wide an audience as possible.

Note that after the first section, there is a decline in the number of sources and references that I give to back up my points, and an increase in informal language, such as use of the first person pronoun. This should be expected, since the later parts contain a lot more in the way of interpretation, speculation and *proposals*, rather than empirical observations.

The work begins by tackling two extremely difficult philosophical topics: free will and identity. After establishing a position on these concepts, the second part turns to the question: What does this suggest about how we live and how we should live? It is in the second part that I address many of society's ills, *in terms of the philosophy established*, but other writers address the same ills in terms of other philosophies, or not philosophically at all, and can still reach the same conclusions. It is a matter of interpretation, and the interpretation that works best for you.

Ultimately I am merely setting out the personal train of thought that led me to the conclusions about what we actually need to do to solve the world's problems. I do this in a spirit of optimism, and I

respectfully reject any unfounded claims that the world's problems are unsolvable, not least because this is a non-falsifiable claim. They might be difficult – and I believe they *are* difficult – but there are reasons why we haven't even got close to solving them, why in fact they're still getting worse all the time; this doesn't mean it is impossible to solve them! Not many people are engaged in this process at the moment, but no matter how long we try, we can never reach a point at which it is an observable fact that there are no solutions; we can conclude only that we have given up hope, or that we just haven't found the solutions yet, or that we haven't yet reached a critical point at which the solutions become viable or effective.

Summaries of the Four Parts

1. The universe is effectively a continuous spectrum of energy, and the practice of dividing it up into discrete, separate chunks is an arbitrary process that amounts to imagining boundaries around things – boundaries that aren't really present, or which need not be considered as such. The universe is a relativistic one, in which things only exist because there are other things around them to relate their position in time and space; this is just another way of saying the foregoing. The 'practice of dividing' I mention is what I also dub the 'attribution of Personal Causal Efficacy'. Attributing PCE to something means it can be blamed: it is the practice of believing that an arbitrarily defined entity has the ability to cause things in an *absolute* sense, which is to say, without reference to or help from anything around it. The division between it and the things around it was created by the defining of its identity in the first place. In other words, there is no such thing as an absolute identity, and this entails no possibility for absolute causal efficacy (usually, but misleadingly called free will).
2. Belief in identity and PCE, and a mindset in which the whole world is divided up into distinct objects with such individual identity and autonomy, leads to behaviouristic responses to the world – responses which both justify negative mental states like hatred, anger, greed and ignorance, and which exploit those states to shape our society. Society is supported by this mindset and also supports the having of that mindset, particularly through the monetary system, which quantifies the worth of distinct objects and causes us to think of each other as separate and autonomous. Our lives in separate homes and our use of separate vehicles to move around the world also play a significant part in supporting the illusions of identity and freedom, and the existence of nation states takes the illusion to a bigger scale, a scale in which the negative consequences are massive and horrific (e.g. war).
3. There are many forms of society in which the world's current problems simply do not arise. For example, a society not based on the mindset of identity, separateness and autonomy, and the selfishness that they promote, could instead be based on small, freely associating communities, not organised into nations or nation states, in which work is both meaningful and fairly shared. *Personal* possessions would be few, and the community could share its goods and services without the use of a monetary system. These communities would be based on interdependence (while our current individualist society is based on being as independent from everyone and anything as possible), which is not only stabler, but also promotes positive relationships and reduces loneliness and anxiety.

There are several avenues of approach for transitioning to such a world. We can establish self-sufficient prototypes of these communities in the real world – this not only safeguards them against potential collapse of mainstream society but also allows for the social

mechanisms to be tested and refined. We can also gather together experts in all relevant subjects to design and build experimental communities of this sort in order to gauge relative success. However, it is also essential to leave time for mindsets to shift so that they are amenable to new lifestyles. In this sense, a stage-by-stage transition from current to new society is advantageous, and we cannot ignore the political approach to this goal as an avenue worth considering. As people begin to realise that the form of society demonstrated by the established communities is free of the current world's problems, there ought to be faster take-up of the ideas, until the whole world is, theoretically, composed of such communities. If we're lucky, the corresponding erosion of current society will be a peaceful surrender; at worst, it will undergo catastrophic collapse, leaving only those communities who made preparations in time, to whom the task of rebuilding the rest of the world will be left.

4. The idea that belief in PCE has caused all of our problems is just one way of looking at it, but it can be argued that this is why the major religions of the world originally came about – to reduce the world's suffering by convincing people of their fundamental interdependence, insisting on the existence of a *single*, all-powerful entity from which everything originates and from which everything is made. This entity is our boundary-less, all-encompassing Universe, but it is personified as 'God'. This promotes a holistic view of the Universe, in which everything has a wider purpose, even including the development of the delusion of PCE in the first place. The transition of our world to a stable, interdependent one could be seen as the inevitable culmination of the holistic tendency of the Universe to increase its own beauty and complexity, born out of its innate 'desire' for creativity and playfulness.

Part One

The Philosophical Foundation: Freedom and Identity Reconsidered

Summary

The claim of personal causal efficacy in humans and other living things is not falsifiable, but has considerable counter-evidence from studies of consciousness. Still, there are benefits to rethinking the problem entirely. By considering the problem of assigning things identity, both in philosophical terms and in light of theories of quantum mechanics, we can establish that the ‘person’ in personal volition does not rightly exist; if generally accepted, this view would prompt a complete overhaul in our perception of ourselves.

‘Free will’ is a misleading term. There is a difference between willing something, and causing something to happen. It is quite obvious that thoughts arise in conscious beings to the effect of ‘wanting’ or ‘willing’ for something to happen. But the more interesting problems are “Were these wants or wills created in the person who experiences them or caused by something outside them?” and “Do these wants or wills have any effect on what then happens?” These are actually two phrasings of what is essentially one question: “Does the individual him or herself have any way of intentionally causing something to happen?” I will proceed to call this the problem of personal causal efficacy, or PCE – the problem of whether one can bring something about of one’s own volition – and it is a problem that has been discussed for millennia.

At the extremes, there are claims that conscious human volition causes everything in the universe (these are theories of strong idealism – the concept of the primacy of the mind); and there are claims that humans have no PCE at all and are in fact nothing more than elaborate organic machines that respond in ways that are completely determined by their environment (theories born of material realism – the doctrine that only matter exists). There are then positions in between these two extremes, such as believing that people are both strongly affected by determined factors and have some effect over them (what we might call a position of ambivalence); and so-called ‘compatibilist’ ideas, in which free will and determinism supposedly coexist.

Instead of starting with existing views, we might analyse the problem by removing living or conscious beings from the equation and considering the problem just for inanimate things. Can we attribute PCE to a rowing boat, for example? This might seem like an odd way to approach the question, but if we can establish an answer to this question then we can compare rowing boats to humans, and if there are any reasonable similarities we might claim some sort of inductive evidence. Let us then consider the example of an empty rowing boat floating on its own at sea. Does the rowing boat control where it goes? Certainly it is the movement of the water that causes the boat to move – it floats away, not because it wants to, but because of the currents of the water. We assert this with confidence, even though the will of the rowing boat is not falsifiable; we could get an army of rowing boats and set them on the water at the same time on the same body of water and observe that they all do roughly the same thing, but we cannot prove that one day a rowing boat would be placed there that soared into the sky instead of staying on the surface of the water (for

example). Obviously there will be differences in the movements of each rowing boat: they can be attributed either to differences in the rowing boats' constructions, or to differences in the current of the water due to either the positions in space or time of the boats, or to the boats having different ideas about where they might like to go. The objective reason why the latter is so unlikely is that there are empirical (that is, scientific) tests that we could conduct to establish firmer statistical and physical links between water currents and objects that float in them.

Boats don't have PCE, and for similar reasons, planets don't decide how they wish to orbit their parent star, volcanoes don't erupt merely when it takes their personal fancy, light bulbs do not light when they feel like it, and it isn't too much a stretch of the imagination to realise that plants do not use PCE to decide when to respire and when to photosynthesise or when to take up water from the soil. A plant will act in response to its surroundings – such as bending itself in response to sunlight – in much the same way that a planet will 'respond' to the presence of an even larger body by being attracted to it, or a light bulb will 'respond' to the presence of an electric current by giving out light. There are particular causal stages that we can identify and even isolate between the stimulus and the response. We can, for example, isolate particular genes in the plant that cause it to exhibit a particular property, or change its conditions to note what behaviour continues to occur and what behaviour stops; we can repeat these experiments with other plants to confirm that what we are changing really is the factor that adds or removes a particular effect. Again, we could attribute these changes in behaviour to subtle and unnoticed differences in other conditions, or to the 'freedom' of the plant to do something different because it would like to, but as evidence mounts, the probability that 'volition' really has causal efficacy diminishes⁴.

The difference between a rowing boat and a plant, we might say, is that a plant acts in the way that it does because it has some other function in mind – namely, survival. It turns itself to face the sun not just because there is both light and a relevant genetic precursor present, but also because all of these things help it to continue to survive. A rowing boat has no such concerns, and will happily fall down the waterfall to smash into pieces on the rocks below. However, what we are concerned with here is whether the plant itself is directing its activity. To put it rigorously – neither a reductionistic nor a holistic system requires PCE to do what it does. A planet is an example of a reductionistic system, in that we call it a planet because lots of smaller lumps of rock have stuck together to make something larger, and those smaller lumps were made from even smaller particles of dust. The whole system – the planet – has been totally determined by its parts: the smaller lumps came together because of gravity, and not because they had a shared desire to form a planet. A plant is an example of a holistic system, in that all of its parts work together for a common goal – the survival of the whole plant. The parts came together as they did in order to fulfil this function. We could not reasonably say a rowing boat is also a holistic system, because although humans put it together with a particular function in mind, it does not act according to that function: the way it acts determines the function and not the other way around. This is why reductionism and holism are summed up by the useful maxims 'the parts determine the whole' and the 'whole determines the parts' respectively. In both cases, notice, there is determinism.

You might argue of these examples that the sun has PCE over the plant because it causes it to turn to face it, or that the water has PCE over the rowing boat because it causes it to move with its currents. However, it is not the sun that causes the photo-tropic behaviour of the plant, it is the light from the sun, and this light is caused by the nuclear reactions that occur in the star as a result of the

⁴ Most of science is not actually about 'proving' something, so much as providing enough evidence that the alternative explanations are vanishingly improbable.

chain of events that caused the star to begin fusing hydrogen in the first place – a chain of events that ultimately must be traced back to the big bang, and even, arguably, before that. The water moves for a variety of reasons – notably the actions of the wind, the moon and the sun. If we can attribute the movement of the water and the shining of the sun entirely to prior causes, then the probability that the water and the sun have their own kind of freedom tends to zero, and hence we cannot grant them the label of PCE.

We are now charged with the task of comparing a rowing boat (or for that matter, water and stars) to living creatures – and we may as well cut to the chase by considering the human. A human, like a plant, will act for its survival. However, it will also act in other ways that don't have anything to do with surviving, such as reading a book or writing an essay, and it may occasionally act in ways detrimental to its survival, such as smoking tobacco, taking drugs or throwing itself in front of an oncoming vehicle. This is where we have to consider a third type of system – one that is both reductionistic and holistic, such as by being a composite of some reductionistic systems and some holistic ones. A man-made product is probably a good example: disparate functions in a computer program will always work together to produce a desired output, but they will also only act in ways permitted and in fact determined by the physical circuitry of the machine. In some sense, everything falls into this category. A plant does not always act for its survival, as evidenced by the fact that it dies. So we might say that there is a spectrum of systems ranging from reductionistic to holistic.

As we have already said, both reductionistic and holistic systems are causally determined and do not have PCE, which means that if we are to suggest that humans have PCE, they must exist outside this spectrum. It is clear that to some extent they are part of the spectrum: it is hard to deny that someone withdraws their hand from a hot object because there is a neurally-induced reflex action, as hard as it is to deny that all the organs of the body work simultaneously to remove any harmful material and maintain the survival of the whole organism. We cannot claim that the sun was not a causal factor when we see a human remove an outer garment while strolling through an un-shaded area. What we can claim is that the human had the choice, or freedom – that is, the PCE – to keep the garment on, despite the sun. This is analogous to claiming that a planet is influenced by the gravitational attraction of a star but retains the freedom not to orbit it if it wishes not to. We might similarly claim that although a plant would be well-advised to turn so as to collect light from the sun, it retains the freedom to stay as it is. If we saw such a plant, then we might look to attribute its timidity, or perhaps obstinacy, to some other factor, such as a genetic disadvantage or the fact that it has been tied to an upright stick. We would not suggest that it chose its behaviour itself.

Humans are in fact very particular about the things to which they do and don't ascribe PCE. Plants, bacteria, fungi and all inanimate matter are never granted PCE. The existence of PCE in non-human animals is often the subject of debate. Are predators compelled to kill their prey for eating or do they weigh up the situation and make a personal decision beforehand? It seems that most of the time, only other humans are exalted to the status of 'having PCE'. We must address two issues: what does it mean to have PCE, and why would humans only attribute it to themselves?

Personal causal efficacy, properly defined, is a denial of prior causes. If X has PCE and performs action A, then the ultimate causal reason for A's occurrence is X. There may have been other factors that influenced the occurrence of A, or that needed to happen for it to be possible at all, but X had the final say; it had the ability to produce A or not to produce A in spite of the influencing factors; it had the deciding vote. In this sense, X can deny all previous causes and produce A entirely 'by itself'. Quite often, we allude to a process by which X considers the influencing factors

– the surrounding conditions – and then ‘decides’ on a course of action, which it proceeds to put into effect, by virtue of having of PCE. If X is human, and called Jim, and if A is knocking a book off a table, then we must remember that X definitely had causal efficacy over A (“the book fell off the table because Jim pushed it off”) but whether or not he had *personal* causal efficacy is in question (“Jim decided to push the book off the table, and that’s why it fell off”). The first example is equivalent to “the plant moved because the sun moved”; the second is equivalent to “the plant decided to move and that’s why it’s currently in that position”. The second example does not mention the sun, but likewise the first example does not mention the causes of the sun moving; however the implication with “Jim decided” is that nothing had causal efficacy over his decision; the whole point of his deciding was that he had some sort of ‘freedom’ from prior causes to do one thing out of a number of possible things.

Of course the reason why humans think that only they are blessed with this ‘freedom’ – this divine ‘will’ to go one way or the other with nothing to compel them either way – is consciousness. We think to ourselves “I shall knock that book off the table”, and a few moments later we observe that our hand is colliding with said book with the result that it exceeds its supporting threshold. We do not ‘feel’ anything compelling us to think this, and we do not ‘feel’ anything compelling us to push the book, not in the same way that the book would feel our hand if it had the relevant neural systems. Thus we consider that our own personal volition caused the behaviour, because we didn’t *feel* anything causing it.

Psychological studies dispute this on two levels – on a behaviouristic level, that you were positively reinforced by a book dropping on the floor in the past and so given the opportunity to do it again, you do so; and also at the neurobiological level, that your brain, with all of the necessary genetic conditions in place, was disposed to push the book, and so produced a conscious experience both of the intent to push and the act itself. Evidence for behaviourism is mostly from experiments with non-human animals, so we won’t analyse it here, but experiments have been conducted with humans that demonstrate an unusual feature of our experience: that we do not act after we have thought about acting, but rather the brain sends out a signal for our body to act, and then consciously thinks about performing the action while it’s waiting for the signal to arrive – and in some cases, the brain actually manages to send a conscious experience back in time.

In the ‘precognitive carousel’ experiment, subjects have a slide projector and are told to press a button when they wish to advance the slide. Curiously, however, they report that the slide advances just as they were ‘about to decide’ to press the button. The reason is that they have an electrode inserted in their brain, which detects increased electrical activity and controls the advancing of the slides. The button is a dummy. Numerous other experiments that detect the brain’s electrical signals confirm that these signals precede a subject’s conscious decision to do something, by about 0.8 of a second (Pickover, 1998). Yet more surprisingly, we do not consciously experience things in the order they occur: the brain needs a small but finite time to process sensory stimuli, yet we perceive them immediately. Somehow, the brain can send conscious experiences back in time. (Dennet & Kinsbourne, 1992).

Of course, if conscious thought is triggered after the neurobiological precursors to performing an action, then that thought cannot be part of the cause of the action: it may well be the case that behaviour causes conscious decisions, rather than conscious decisions causing behaviour as we are used to believing. Then why do we need consciousness at all? Studies do show that people respond to things that they don’t perceive consciously, but they also demonstrate that these responses are

slower than conscious perception (Marcel, 1980), and they necessarily occur without ‘visualising’ or in any way ‘experiencing’ things, which has its disadvantages. An interesting idea for the purpose of conscious experience is that it creates the idea of the passage of time and hence also forms the basis of how we remember things (Chown, 2004; Hartle, 2004) – but whatever consciousness is good for, it doesn’t include making decisions!

The picture emerging from this is that we have environmental and genetic factors that collaborate to stimulate neurobiological processes that set in motion the causes of carrying out the best course of action, and then create a stream of conscious thought to match the behaviour in order to establish it in our memory and construct a useful illusion of the flow of time. Is this enough to deny personal causal efficacy? If not, then the problem of identity certainly is.

The Problem of Identity

The ‘identity problem’ is probably best summarised by the classic “when does a heap stop being a heap?” Imagine, for example, a heap of one thousand strawberries. If you remove one strawberry, it’s still a heap. Remove two strawberries and it is still a heap. But at what point is it no longer a heap and perhaps just a pile? Two strawberries certainly don’t make a heap; neither do ten, really.

A more advanced philosophical problem in this regard is that of Theseus’ ship. Theseus (of Minotaur fame) was a king of Athens in Greek mythology. The ship that he used to return to Athens after his ordeal was supposedly re-used by the Athenians and was well-known as the “ship of Theseus”. However, philosophical ambiguity ensued when it transpired that every time one of the ship’s wooden planks rotted, it was replaced with one of identical size and shape, and put in with fresh nails. After many years, it was doubtful whether any of the planks in Theseus’ original ship survived, and hence whether or not it could still reasonably be called the ship of Theseus.

Some claim that it was indeed the same ship, believing that if the parts are recreated using the same craftsmanship and put together in the same arrangement, then the ship retains its identity. However, suppose that as each old plank is discarded, a scavenger collects it up and begins to put a ship together using these parts. Isn’t his ship more likely to be the ship of Theseus? If the new ship is also Theseus’s, then there are now two of them! If we take the opposite view, that the new ship is not the ship of Theseus, then we have to ask ourselves, and what point did it change? Was it after the first plank was removed (what if Theseus himself changed a plank)? Was it after all the planks had been replaced? Or was it as soon as Theseus left the ship?

When we say that someone “has the same bag” as us, or the “same shoes”, we don’t mean that the particles in both items are one and the same, and we certainly don’t mean that there is some ethereal soul that permanently links together all products made in the same production line. It would, of course, be a hassle (but a pedant’s delight) to have to say “you’ve got shoes that came from the same production line as mine!” But what if the production line broke down after your pair of shoes was made, and all of it had to be replaced? Is it still the same production line? What if the company had to relocate? What if the product had been discontinued for a certain length of time, then made a comeback after the company had been taken over by another and had all of its factories outsourced? Then it would be necessary for us to say, “the pattern of atoms in your pair of shoes is approximately identical to the pattern of atoms in mine!” (You might think it would be easier just to say “Our shoes look the same”, but that is a different matter – if one person’s shoes were caked in mud, for example, they would not look the same, but if they’re the same model we might still

consider them to be the ‘same’ shoes).

Clearly the arrangement of the constituent parts of an item features prominently in our use of the concept of identity. If we could somehow replace each individual atom or molecule of our shoes with new ones (so that we don’t have to bother with cleaning or repairing them, of course), then we have a Theseus’ ship problem. If however we dispense with the gradual replacement and just buy a new pair of shoes of identical (or approximately identical) construction, then it is much easier to see why it’s not helpful to consider them the ‘same shoes’ (because you’ll have an old pair of shoes as well).

So what conclusion can we draw? What constitutes ‘identity’? How can we rigorously pinpoint when two things are the same? The point is, we can’t. We can discuss two reasons for this: the concept of change, and the concept of matter itself.

Firstly, let us imagine a flip-book representation of the Theseus’ ship puzzle. Imagine a drawing of the ship on the first page. We’ll simplify the whole idea by using colour-coding: a plank of wood in the original ship will be brown, a decaying plank will be black, and a replaced plank will be orange. On the first page we have an all-brown ship. On the next page, one of the planks has turned black, and on the page afterwards this plank has turned orange. If we flip through the whole book, we will see the ship gradually change from brown to orange after a sporadic development of black patches. In this flip-book, every page has a different drawing: this matches the real world in the sense that even if you can’t see a change occurring, subtle changes to the ship are happening all the time (if nothing else, the particles in solids constantly vibrate). Since every page is different, we might reasonably conclude that none of the ships constitute Theseus’ ship except the first. But of course, the beginning of our flip-book is at an arbitrary point in time: we could extend it backwards to show the original construction of his ship and Theseus’ eventual use of it. All of these pages would be different too. Here we begin to suspect that Theseus’ ship never exists!

Notice the usefulness of this analogy. The thickness of the flip-book represents the time dimension. The width and length of each page represents space. However, we could easily change our perspective so that the width of a page represents time and a cross-section along the width represents space. Or we could say that each page constitutes a different part of space and that no time is represented: in this perspective, we have a sequence of different-looking ships, which we might intuit as a shipyard housing various ships; unquestioningly, the ships are not the same. In other words, swapping time and space makes no difference. This is what happens with the scavenger whom we met above – he moves an earlier version of the ship into contemporaneous existence with the current version.

Dematerialising Matter

Now we consider the concept of matter itself. The things familiar to our experience such as tables, plants and people are composed of chemical compounds. These are made of just three types of thing: quarks, electrons and gluons – all of which are called particles. Gluons pop into existence out of a ‘quantum vacuum’ in order to hold together quarks in groups of three called baryons. The baryons are held together by the exchange of spontaneously created particles called pions. A group of baryons surrounded by a cloud of electrons is called an atom. You can get different types of atom simply by changing the number and type of baryons it contains; these types of atoms are known as elements. The way that the electron clouds of neighbouring elements interact gives rise to chemical

bonding: at a fundamental level these interactions occur by the means of an electromagnetic force.

The fundamental particles themselves – the electrons, quarks and so on – are classically considered to be zero-dimensional points and hence indivisible. Yet they possess a number of mathematical properties such as electric charge, angular momentum (or ‘spin’) and most curiously, mass⁵.

But particles have an even stranger facet, which is expressed in the concept of wave-particle duality. All particles exhibit behaviour reminiscent of waves, and so they are often described as such. Particles are variably described using a particle model or a wave model: both models are mathematically constructed and do not literally refer to ‘very tiny golf balls’ (as is the classical depiction of a particle) nor ‘vibrations of a medium’ (like most waves are). There is no consensus on what particles actually are, and there is a considerable school of thought that scientific endeavour should deliberately avoid the issue because it isn’t relevant and hasn’t hindered our development so far.

99.95% of the total mass of the atom is held by the baryons in its centre, or nucleus. A hydrogen atom has a diameter of roughly one ten thousand millionth of a metre; its nucleus has a diameter of roughly one thousand million millionth of a metre. In other words, 99.95% of the mass of an atom is concentrated into 0.001% of its size. Most of the atom is therefore ‘empty’. Combine this with the fact that the true nature of the small amount of stuff that’s there is actually unknown, and we have a material world that looks surprisingly non-material.

The term ‘wave’ in the wave model is misleadingly used because the particles do not literally turn into waves, neither do they behave anything like water waves or sound waves (and even a light wave is slightly different). The waves that are meant here are in fact ‘wave functions’ – probability distributions showing how likely it is that the particle will be in a particular state following an observation. Prior to an observation the particle’s behaviour is determined by taking a composite of all the different possibilities, but it cannot be said to be in any one state more than any other. If two electrons, 1 and 2, exist in states A and B respectively, and then a minute later we find two electrons in states X and Y, then provided there has been no intervening measurement, it is impossible to say that electron 1 changed either from state A to state X or from state A to state Y (Mohrhoff, 2007). It is impossible to do this not because we don’t have enough data, but because the particles did not literally exist in any definite states in the intervening time, and the different probabilistic rules that apply in the cases of having and not having the data allow us to confirm this strange result empirically.

The result relies on the fact that all electrons are identical – and in fact, all particles of the same ‘species’ are identical – except for the wave-function that determines the probability of finding them in particular states (such as their position, momentum and energy), which is what changes (Greene, 2004). Greene asks a difficult question: if a set of particles in a distant place were to have their quantum states manipulated so that they matched the states of all the particles making up your body, simultaneously destroying the states of your own constituent particles⁶, would that set of particles now be you? Would you have literally been teleported or would it only create some lifeless

5 The ability for a point-particle that has neither constituent parts nor spatial extent to have a mass has prompted physicists to propose the existence of a universal substrate called the Higgs field – roughly analogous to an even spread of treacle across the cosmos that causes things to slow down when they try to accelerate in it (hence inertia, the intuitive concept that a heavier thing is more difficult to move). But the Higgs field has never been discovered.

6 This is what happens during ‘quantum teleportation’ – a process successfully carried out for individual particles.

clone? If indeed it is 'you' after the teleportation then this suggests that identity is vested in the sum total of the quantum states of a thing's constituent particles, but these states are always changing, so presumably if the teleportation had a few errors it still wouldn't matter – but after how many errors would it start to matter?

The state of atoms is indeed constantly changing. Gluons and pions (as types of force particle called 'bosons') are constantly being brought in and out of existence. Quarks are categorised into three types called 'colours' as well as six other classes called 'flavours'; these have nothing to do with colour or taste respectively. The exchange of gluons causes quarks to change colour. The exchange of pions causes quarks to change flavour. The effect of changing a quark's flavour is to change the type of the baryons: two types of baryon exist in the atomic nucleus, called protons and neutrons. When a quark's flavour changes, a proton turns into a neutron or vice-versa (but the number of protons and neutrons remains constant throughout). Another type of boson, called a weak gauge boson, causes protons to turn into neutrons (or vice-versa) without conserving the number each type of baryon, and this necessarily changes the element into another one: this is called radioactive decay – a process from which no atom is immune and which could occur at any time. In addition, many chemical bonds habitually break and then re-establish themselves, and in metals, the clouds of electrons spread out across the whole substance so that each atom loses any special claim to particular electrons. As already noted, even solid matter continually vibrates and it is not thermodynamically possible to stop it; in addition, even supposedly empty space will spontaneously produce things.

There are a few more observations I will make in case your conception of the universe has not yet been drastically overhauled:

- So-called 'entanglement' allows the quantum states of particles to become connected across arbitrary distances: as soon as the state of one particle is change, the other instantly changes as well (usually in order to be in the opposite state of its partner). To what extent is a particle's quantum partner still a 'different' particle?
- In order to explain a phenomenon called 'radiation resistance', the Wheeler-Feynman absorber theory posits that every time a particle of a particular species is moved, it instantaneously sends to, and receives a response from, an adjacent particle, which does the same thing, with the process repeating across every particle in the universe, until they all know about the original movement. (Gribbin, 1998).
- Interpretations of quantum mechanics have to take these things into account. The transactional interpretation takes up the Wheeler-Feynman idea and explains all quantum interactions in terms of instantaneous messages between groups of particles. The sum over histories interpretation of Feynman requires that particles in some sense take every possible path available to them, all of which contribute to the final outcome. Ulrich Mohrhoff (2007) claims that quantum effects are best understood by dispensing with the idea of separate particles and considering a single entity with multiple simultaneous states. This effect is already observable in the case of the Bose-Einstein condensate: a group of particles that behaves like a single particle⁷. And lastly, the spirit of this idea has been suggested in the form of the 'wave function of the universe' – a way of treating the whole cosmos like a single particle.

These instantaneous connections between distant particles make it difficult to establish that one

⁷ The particles in this case are 'bosons', one of two basic classes of particle; the other class, the fermions, are forbidden from occupying the same quantum state.

particle is really separate from the totality of particles, and hence to pinpoint its identity. We have additionally proven that the ultimate constituents of familiar items (and unfamiliar ones too) are never staying still: to return to our analogy, every page of the flip-book of time is different from the last and from the next. The concept of 'identity' is a convenience, or a convenient illusion. When you look at matter as close as its fundamental constituents, you find that the same parts are common to all things. A calculator and a tambourine are not distinct items because they contain completely different things – they are simply the manifestations of the way in which the sum total of particles in the universe happens to be arranged at the time of your observation. Eventually this arrangement will be so different that the vision of a calculator and a tambourine will no longer be present. The way that humans perceive things makes it convenient to invent the notion of things having identities; in fact, they have none.

Human Identity

To what extent does this apply to humans? Surprisingly, it applies more strongly than it does for calculators and tambourines. In order to stay healthy, the cells of the body have to copy themselves (mitosis) and eventually 'die' (apoptosis). 'Dead' cells are discarded (we see them as dust) and new ones are formed from material we call nourishment. This process happens remarkably quickly: we get a new stomach lining every five days, a new skin every month and a new head of hair perhaps every three years – but it is a continual replacement; in other words, a very fast version of Theseus' ship. 98% of the body has been replaced after a year; but because of the longevity of heart and brain cells, a person will only have a completely different composition roughly every decade. Even the genetic information contained in every cell is subject to mutation.

By taking in food, drinking water and breathing in oxygen, we re-construct ourselves several times throughout our lives and leave behind the debris in the air and in sewers. Every time a cell copies itself, it has to duplicate the genetic information; but after so many replacements this process is prone to errors, and this is thought to be the ultimate reason why we have to die. It is not too hard to see that the development of a human from conception through to birth – from the nourishment, water and oxygen that the mother takes in – is not much different from the way we regenerate ourselves through life. Likewise, the way that the body decays after death is not much different from the way that our waste materials go into the environment when we are alive. As we have seen, every moment in time is different from every other, and so none of these points in time should have any special claim to the 'start' or 'finish' of 'identity'.

The development of a human up to birth is a causal chain of events, but it did not begin at conception. There was a causal chain of events prior to this, involving the lives of the mother and father and how they came together, but this chain of events began with the births of the mother and father, which were also the result of similar causal sequences. Eventually in the chain of events we reach the development of the human species itself, and if we go even further back we must consider the evolution of the earth and how that gave rise to species development. The earth did not pop out of nowhere either: it developed from a sequence of events that brought it together from the debris left over from an exploded star, and so on. When we get back to the big bang, there is a tendency to think that we can't go any further, but there is no scientific implication that this is the case: there are in fact a number of theories about what may have caused the big bang, but they are understandably rather difficult to test, as all explosions that happened 13.7 thousand million years ago are. It is quite likely that the growth of our universe was caused by the collapse of a universe that existed before, and this universe had a predecessor as well. The development of any given human, then, is

quite likely to be the result of a beginning-less series of causal events, and is itself one event that forms part of the sequence that continues causally into the endless future.

Since we can neither assign anything a rigorous ‘identity’ in time nor in space, the question of “when does life begin?” or any similar questions (“when does death begin?”, “when did the universe begin?”, “when did I become a fishmonger?”) are not answerable – things do not begin, because they do not have any existence separate from the endless causal sequence of ever-changing events⁸.

The Elimination of the Individual

It seems as though the original focus – freedom – has been lost, but in fact, we now have the result that we need to make a profound statement about personal causal efficacy: it cannot exist, because the ‘person’ in ‘personal’ cannot exist (there are also reasons why causal efficacy may not exist, having to do with quantum mechanics, but that would be another diversion). If there is no individual to exert its will on the world, then we certainly can’t assign it the ‘magical’ property of PCE. This is a fairly unusual way of resolving the debates and paradoxes inherent in discussions of freedom: by denying that there is a distinct person, we can no longer attribute any event or sequence of events to that person.

But this is a fairly radical view is it not? What does it really mean? Firstly, it is not as radical as the suggestion that ‘nothing exists’. Rest assured, people exist. What does not exist is the individual person – the ‘I’, or ego, as distinct from the rest. The name on one’s passport or ID card refers to an entity that has existed from a particular time called one’s birth day and that continues to exist now – this is the entity that does not exist – that is, this way of identifying with the person is illusory. Although there is a body that exists, it does not (cannot) retain any identity from one moment to the next.

It is only useful to give things names for the sake of convenience. We call a table a table not because it is one but because it is useful to have a way of referring to the item in our experience – whatever it actually is.

But does this preclude the existence of something that makes humans different? Does it preclude the existence of a personal soul or inner spirit? I will not say that it does, but such concepts are not helpful; they arise out of a desire to make humans ‘special’ – a desire for an egotistical self-importance – a way to avoid the conclusion that we do not each have any claim to being a ‘me’. In a sense, if there is no identifiable ego or ‘distinct person’, souls cannot possibly inhabit only that distinct person or ‘know’ when they should arrive there; and how do we establish the identity or identifiability of the distinct soul? We have the same problem. The observable or plausible mechanisms by which such a thing would come into and/or go out of existence at the right moments or how it would interact with the rest of the universe are thin on the ground. The personal soul is an extension of the ego – a way of answering the question “who are you?” without reference to anything else, including the past causes that actually made you. The eternal, *personal* soul is not falsifiable, and neither is it justifiable.

The behaviourist psychologist B. F. Skinner gave the name ‘autonomous man’ to the entity that we are eliminating here. This is a useful name because it emphasises that we are stripping mankind of

⁸ This has the curious consequence that the answers to the questions “who am I?” and “who are you?” are the same.

its autonomy. Skinner (1971) devoted much explanation into how there is no sense in believing in the ‘freedom’ of an ‘inner man’ that can make decisions and instead proposed that behaviour was entirely attributable to the environment – in other words, to prior causes, as we have already established.

The absence of PCE is not an academic technicality, nor something we need to ignore because we somehow ‘rely’ on the notion of identity. The concepts of identity, and of free will, are indeed integral to our current society – but far more than is necessary. It might seem as though believing that PCE does not exist leaves us to be helplessly washed along in a series of meaningless events we can do nothing about; the reality is quite the contrary. Lacking *personal* causal efficacy does not mean lacking all causal efficacy – it means that the ‘ego’ lacks its power and domination. By discovering where causal efficacy really comes from, instead of assuming we exercise it ourselves, we can truly instigate change. As for quantum particles, it no longer makes sense to see ourselves as separate ‘selves’: to eliminate the individual is in fact to enchant the community.

References

- Chown, M. (2004). Clock-watchers. *New Scientist* 2445: 34-7.
- Dennett, D. C. and Kinsbourne, M. (1992). Time and the Observer: the Where and When of Consciousness in the Brain. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 15 (2) 183-247.
- Greene, B. (2004). *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. London: Allen Lane.
- Gribbin, J. (1998). *Q is for Quantum*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Hartle, J. B. (2004). The Physics of ‘Now’. *The American Journal of Physics*. 73 (2005) 101-109.
- Marcel, A. J. (1980). Conscious and preconscious recognition of polysemous words: Locating the selective effect of prior verbal context. *Attention and Performance VIII*.
- Mohrhoff, U. (2007). Particles, consciousness, volition. *Anti-Matters* 1: 23-54.
- Pickover, C. A. (1998). *Time: A Traveler’s Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Part Two

Consequences of the Lack of Individual Efficacy, and the Necessary Redesign of Society

Summary

It is possible to establish a scientifically and logically tenable position of the non-existence of individual efficacy and identity. Three aspects of the consequences of this position are to be examined: the fact that society as it currently stands is based to a remarkable degree on the concept of identity and the individual; the fact that this leads to many or all of the enormous problems this society currently faces; and the potential that the denial of individual identity has for the development of a new society that does not suffer these problems.

The previous essay considered the notion of identity and concluded that ‘personal causal power’ or individual efficacy cannot exist, because the individual identity of causal subjects is lacking. We now turn to the consequences that this view has for society, and the negative consequences of society’s obsession with the view of individual egos.

The individual, or ego, or self, is an imaginary concept. Instead, the world is a continuous stream of unfolding processes, embodied in each moment by a continuous stretch of space and matter⁹. It is the constant flow of boundary-less energies, which we could think of as the continual weaving of a cloth. If you consider a particular group of threads and then put an imaginary box around it, calling it a distinct and independent unit, then you have created the illusion of individuality. The threads do not exist without those that came before them, and will merge smoothly into those that come after. They have no independent existence, and the same applies to everything in the universe: they have a *dependent* existence.

In his seminal work, *The Ascent of Humanity*, Charles Eisenstein asks us to consider a fork ‘simply existing’, recognising that most people think of a fork floating on its own against a black backdrop. This is unrealistic and in fact impossible. Forks *never* ‘just exist’ without an inordinate number of past causes and of related, caused phenomena. Things only exist in relation *to each other*. As discussed in the prior work, this truism is expressed both in the theories of relativity – in which velocities, masses, lengths and durations are only meaningful in relation to each other – and in quantum mechanics – in which isolated particles act as though they have no definite properties.

The Problem with the Illusion

We must first address the question, “What’s wrong with believing in individual identity?” It may be demonstrably false, but is it really harmful? Don’t humans need their sense of identity, lest they wallow in despair? Quite the contrary.

⁹ The concept in physics of a discrete space-time – that there exist quanta of space and time – refers only to the fact that space and time become meaningless if you were to consider smaller scales.

The problem exists in our perception. We begin simply with the belief “I am an individual, with an individual identity,” which immediately establishes a dualism between oneself and the rest of the universe. Thus, the idea of having personal identity separates the person out from their world. The consequences of this alone are huge. You are now an individual unit moving through an external landscape, quite like a Newtonian mass moving across absolute space in the pre-Einsteinian view. Every interaction with the world is now a transaction – you can expend your personal energy by transferring it to the world, and the world can repay you, such as with food. The transactions are going on basically all the time: as you move through the world, it affects you, and you affect it.

Every transaction has three possible characteristics: it can benefit your individuality, it can harm your individuality, or it can be of no important consequence. We can say these are the good, bad and neutral transactions respectively: good transactions nourish the ego – you want as many of these as you can get; bad transactions threaten to destroy your individual place in the world – these are clearly to be avoided or attacked; and neutral transactions can be simply ignored. ‘Good’ things need not be good in the moral sense; they’re just things you want to get.

As you may see, this mode of thinking is what we usually call ‘selfish’ behaviour, and this is a very appropriate adjective. But isn’t it possible to believe you are an individual, without becoming selfish? This would be a view like, “I have an individual identity, but it is not important.” This still leads to interactions as transactions – every action a balancing act between how much good and how much bad it does to you – but this time you make no attempt to maximise the good and minimise the bad, but just accept it as it comes. This makes you much more like the Newtonian mass, since such bodies are incapable of caring about what happens to them; they let all the external forces push them around. This promotes a feeling of helplessness and loneliness: you are constantly pummeled by forces you can’t do anything about. Surely at some point you’re going to get angry: how dare that body of mass m crash into me and give me a momentum p which propels me straight into the sewage works? Don’t I have a right to be happy, or at least to pursue my happiness?

Herein lies the crunch: when you separate yourself off from the rest of the universe and claim individuality, happiness can only possibly come by maximising the ‘good’ transactions and minimising the ‘bad’. If the PCE-possessing ego is *you*, then the only way you can be happy is to nourish that self-identity. Since everyone would like to be happy, everyone who has the view of separate individuals must ultimately at some point believe they must behave selfishly.

True, you will continue to do things for the benefit of others: this is partly due to the reality that you are not, in fact, a separate ego; but it is also justified within the ego-mentality in terms of noble sacrifice and responsibility – i.e. helping others increases your status with them, which makes you a better Self and increases your chances of these other people servicing you. In other words, helping others is recast as just another way in which the Self is ultimately benefited. Helping others makes me a ‘good’ person, while harming others makes me ‘bad’ – in the eyes of other separate individuals. This view is only possible when we believe we have personal causal efficacy, such that our actions can be directly attributed to our Self.

Of course, some people might even answer in the negative to the question of whether they deserve happiness, and begin a program of self-mortification, in which they actively minimise the good transactions and maximise the bad. After all, if your individual identity is unimportant, you’re dispensable, and you might even be in the way of others.

Others: this is the next stage. Only a solipsist believes they are the *only* self, alone in the rest of the universe. If *you* have an individual identity, then so do the other individuals. If we believe that personal causal efficacy can be ascribed to every individual, then what this means is that every individual entity can be *blamed* for something we think it does. It is therefore possible to categorise all of them as good, bad and neutral based on whether it can be blamed for the good, bad and indifferent things that it has done. You can probably already see how this has precipitated into the blame culture that exists in modern society, and how it has reached unprecedentedly maddening heights with constant lawsuits, constant arguing, constant conflict.

But a subtler tragedy of this mode of thinking is the effect on us when we blame. To blame something for hurting us and put it in the ‘bad’ category creates an anger, or a fear, or a hatred, towards that thing, which is actually useless. Because the thing that is blamed *has* no personal causal efficacy *in actuality*, we are constructing fear, anger and hatred out of nothing, and working ourselves up *in vain*. Similarly, to blame something for helping us (again, the thing need not be human: I could be talking about a handbag that you think will make you look fashionable, or a piece of music that you like) and to put it in the ‘good’ category, is ultimately futile. When the handbag goes out of fashion, when you’ve heard the music so many times, when the person who helped you then betrays you in some way, when you’re on the fifth slice of chocolate gateau, it appears to lose its ‘good’ status, and leaves us sad, disappointed, angry or ill, and it also leaves us wanting more in the way of ‘good’. In other words, believing that a thing can be uniquely blamed for causing you to feel good has severe repercussions when it fails to do so. The saying, “All good things must come to an end” is a crude consolation message for this phenomenon.

Suppose Alice believes she is a separate individual, and Bob believes *he* is a separate individual, and further, both Alice and Bob agree with each other. Now instead of making a transaction with the impersonal ‘background universe’ on which all your lonely wanderings take place, you are now making transactions with lots of other individuals, as well as with the remaining stuff – the stuff that doesn’t claim individual identity and to which we ascribe none – usually called the ‘environment’.

Let us suppose that Alice, as an individual, believes she should not be selfish. Perhaps she’s religious. She thinks that although she has a separate existence and a unique identity to be proud of, she is just one individual out of billions and is therefore unimportant. Further, both she and others have a right to pursue happiness, and she respects this, limiting her selfishness only to matters of survival or where she doesn’t impinge on others’ pursuit of happiness (i.e. good transactions). Bob, on the other hand, doesn’t care about other individuals. There are billions of them, so they’re all unimportant, so it doesn’t matter if he goes on a killing spree of all those who oppose him. It would be good for him, bad for the others, but they don’t matter.

Now imagine what happens when Bob assaults Alice in a dark street, stealing her wallet and then disappearing into the environment. Alice recognises Bob’s pursuit of happiness, but sees that Bob did not do the same for her. Bob is clearly an individual who does not care about others. This was a ‘bad’ transaction from Alice’s point of view, and it was Bob who initiated it.

Or was it? Wasn’t Bob conditioned by other individuals and by the environment to do what he did and be who he is? If Bob were a Newtonian mass, then he would have no control of his own over what he did. However, this is not how Alice thinks. She believes Bob has personal causal efficacy, meaning that he (his self) is to blame for whatever he does. Bob is an aggregate unit – things affect Bob from the outside, and things happen within Bob as a response. This arises from Alice’s view of

Bob as a separate entity. The inner workings of Bob might be mechanistic, deterministic or even deified (in other words, he might have a soul inside him), but regardless, he has this inner nature causing his responses. If Alice believes in free will, this inner nature would be the agent of that will. Bob is like an outdoor lamp that comes on when it's dark: the ambient light triggers the inner workings, and, regardless of how the response is decided, it is this intrinsic nature of the lamp unit that can be 'blamed' for how it acts. It is because we assign individual identity to the lamp, or Bob, that we blame the lamp, or Bob, for what it does. If we gave individuality to particular components of Bob – the atoms that compose him, perhaps – then it would be impossible to blame *him*, but the effect of placing blame is the same.

Alice then has two major ways she could respond to the tragic incident. First, she could become overwhelmed with compassion. Bob must be going through serious difficulties. Perhaps he had an abusive childhood, or perhaps he is mentally ill. One way or another, he needs help and forgiveness. Although Alice may be shifting the blame from Bob to other things, she still does not deny Bob's ultimate responsibility, because Bob is a distinct unit, and to the extent to which his inner self directed his actions, it is that inner self that constitutes the final link in the causal chain. So Alice must believe that the inner self can be changed – improved. Hopeful though this approach is, it is irrelevant, since the underlying causes of Bob's behaviour, as it should become clear, are actually rooted in the belief of separate identity.

That first possible response is disappointingly rare, and is most common in highly religious and/or spiritual people¹⁰. The second and more common reaction is anger, probably mixed in with fear and anxiety ("Don't go out of the house after dark, son – not after what happened to Alice") and possibly even hatred. Bob is to blame for the deed. Bob's inner nature is corrupt, bad; it caused him to violate another Individual. (The word 'Individual', capitalised, will henceforth refer to the separate self, soul or ego – the individual perceived to be genuinely separate in the manner already described.) He caused someone to experience a 'bad' interaction – that is, stole from the Individual and hence reduced its power and its esteem. (We could use the idea of stealing figuratively, if the example in question were not literal theft.) Bob must surely be punished. He should also experience the 'bad', to exact revenge. Reduce *his* power and esteem, and we can achieve retribution, whilst at the same time making it less likely that he'll repeat his crime. Bob is a *bad* person: it's not just the deed he committed that was bad, and not just in Alice's perception (and in the perception of her family and friends, who would support and perhaps even fuel Alice's anger), it's Bob himself.

Bob's selfishness – his greed, perhaps – has ignited Alice's anger. 'Greed' is the extreme variety of the desire of an ego for 'good' transactions – things that benefit it; 'anger' or 'hatred' are the extreme varieties of the ego's response to things that are 'bad' for it. Only the ego mentality can create greed and hatred, for if we believe the universe to be a continuous and undifferentiated process with no PCE-possessing individuals, there is nothing to blame, and so nothing can possibly be viewed as the ultimate cause of a happy experience (which is how greed thinks about the things it craves) or as the ultimate cause of an unpleasant experience (which is how anger and hatred perceive their targets).

As it happens, Alice's approach of anger-fuelled punishment is not very effective: if criminals can be caught at all, they often re-offend, and there are still people being born into the world who will go on to be involved in crime. The struggle for vengeance is eternal – it's an endless cycle of greed and hatred, ultimately fuelled by the simple fact of *both parties'* delusion of separately-existing

10 The two concepts are not necessarily linked.

individuals. This is interesting: the criminal commits the crime through his delusion and the victim, responding with the same delusion, suffers from anger and fear.

Although Alice's response isn't what we'd normally call selfish, it is self-oriented, or self-centred. The self-centred view is a behaviouristic one: punish someone to stop them doing something and reward them to make them do something. Punishment translates to the initiation of a transaction viewed by the recipient as 'bad'; reward translates as 'good'. The world is not just separated into Individuals, here, but into good Individuals and bad Individuals – good transactions and bad transactions. If you have a bad transaction with someone, it means they're bad, and if you have a good transaction with a bad Individual, it means there must have been bad reasons for them to be involved in it. As it happens, behaviourists recognised how comparatively ineffective punishment is, but by and large, the behaviouristic system is very effective at controlling anyone who believes in Individuality.

To summarise. Belief in the Individual makes us separate the world into Me (and by extension, all the things that belong to Me), other Good Individuals, Bad Individuals and Neutral Individuals. (Note that Individuals need not be people.) Even if you try to resist selfishness, you are still involved in transactions with the Other (that is, anything that isn't Me), which can be either good, bad or neutral. Since good transactions make us feel good, support the feeling of Me and increase our security against the Bad, we will strive to have them as much as possible. Since bad transactions make us distressed, fearful, angry or mentally and physically hurt, we try to avoid them, or actively attack the Bad Individuals who would violate the Me with their pursuit of what they perceive as Good. We suffer – feel hurt – not just when Bad things happen to us, but also when the things we thought were Good fail to deliver, and we fabricate all of these negative emotions ourselves, since the things themselves never had any ability of their own to cause anything good or bad in the first place (i.e. never had PCE).

Pursuit of the Good never ends, not as long as there are things perceived as Bad Individuals, and also because the things perceived as Good inevitably keep expiring. In extreme cases (or arguably, in most cases) this leads to covetousness and greed. When Bad things happen, hatred arises, and this inevitably leads to more Bad things happening, in a never-ending cycle. Threatened by the Bad, we must constantly try to hold on to the Good things that are bolstering the security of the Individual – that is, secure and acquire personal property or anything treated as such. Enclosing the Me in a fortress containing the Good things, we become increasingly isolated, further supporting our belief in our separateness and exacerbating our anxiety and fear. At the same time, our ignorance of everything considered Neutral grows and grows, until all we know about are the the Good and Bad things in our immediate surroundings.

It should not be difficult to see how this mentality has caused a great many of the problems we see in the world today – if not all of them. Racism, for example – categorising races into Good and Bad. Problems of environmental destruction are born quite directly from the conception of things as Good or Bad: we treat the Good things as resources to be exploited as much as possible for the benefit of the Individual; and the Bad things must be culled. This in turn comes from the conception of the environment as something separate from us – or, more precisely, from our extraction of ourselves in our perception, as Individuals, from the world, leaving behind a dead 'environment'. War (including such things as the War on Terror) is a very extreme consequence of the anger and hatred described above, and also on the greed of territorial expansion – itself an extension of the idea of individual identity to the national level.

The problems of the world are discussed in far greater detail elsewhere, and in particular, are discussed in relation to the belief in separateness in the already-mentioned *Ascent of Humanity* (but some of them may still be mentioned in the following sections).

We will shortly see that society specifically *supports* the idea of the ‘Individual’. If society’s problems are caused by this deluded mentality, and if society supports that mentality, then clearly the illusion of the Individual feeds on its own consequences, and vice versa.

Putting the View in Perspective

Many things can perpetuate our (illusory) sense of identity, many of which are integral to society – for example, our nationality, language, ethnicity, property and religion. It would not be possible to eliminate everything that even vaguely implies separateness, because this would include the very fact that we *perceive spatial extent*, and space does nothing if not separate. So, although we might classify ourselves according to our culture or religion, culture and religion themselves are not ego-supporters – not unless we use them as such. Since there is more than one culture and more than one religion, we cannot help but be separated by this, but this need not lead to these groups drawing boxes around themselves and calling themselves distinct, autonomous ego-groups that possess PCE.

To understand this point, it is important to recognise the difference between separating, or classifying, things the way that space separates them, and contriving boundaries around those things that are thought to be real – boundaries that deny the connections between things. One way to intuit this would be to think of a set of weighing scales, which has two ‘separate’ bowls. You put something on one bowl, and the other bowl goes up. That’s fine. But delude yourself into thinking that the bowls are unconnected individuals, and that’s when problems start. Someone puts an object on one bowl, and it chooses to lower itself as a result; the other bowl also chooses to raise itself. If you identify yourself with one of the bowls, you can quickly see how you might resent the other’s elevated position; you might resent the object that was placed upon you, and so on.

The two perspectives are just different ways of interpreting things, but the latter is the one that causes problems. However, since they are only views, and do not actually change what’s happening, it isn’t readily apparent which existent phenomena we should dispense with in order to create a better world. It’s not the phenomena themselves that are the problem, it’s the views they promote. Think of language. A language has separate words for different things and different actions. This need not imply anything about the real world, but the possibility still exists for people to think the word for ‘bowl’ is a reference to an autonomous ego that doesn’t depend on anything to exist. Clearly, though, we could not blame this on language. Language itself does not put up barriers between words like ‘bowl’ and ‘bar’; that would be a view we impose afterwards. True, we wouldn’t be able to do it if we didn’t have the words in the first place; but that is why we need to weigh up the benefits of having languages in society against the possible side-effects.

SOCIETY’S ROLE

Of many aspects of society, we will need to ask the question, “does this have a lot to do with creating the ego-conception?” This is quite often going to be a question of degree. The main culprits will be things that set up hard barriers – hard perhaps in terms of physical solidity, or hard in terms

of the difficulty of breaking them.

The plurality of languages, then, rather than language itself, might fall into this category. That people speak an enormous number of different languages does create a tendency to objectify the identity of a language group. There are ‘those who speak Zulu but not Ndonga’ and ‘those who speak Ndonga but not Zulu’. Communication between the groups is very close to impossible, and so they are cut off from each other. It’s not a physical barrier, but it’s almost as good as one. At best it leads to curiosity – a desire to break the barrier. But while the barrier is still fully up, the best you can hope for is complete ignorance of each other; the worst would be feelings like fear and mistrust – who knows what they’re saying, so who knows what they think? Who knows what they’re plotting? The language barrier alone is not likely to lead to war, but it can certainly make negotiation difficult if a conflict is ever brewing.

Having an international auxiliary language in our redesigned society would be a very good idea. It need not lead to people abandoning their own languages, and would allow them to communicate, to trade, negotiate and merge. (This is not the ideal solution, in my opinion, however. The ideal, of having a language created from the merger of all living languages, is discussed in Morgan, 2007.)

Nations

Next to discuss is nationality – which a great many people would specify as one of the defining features of their identity. Nationality entails barriers, both physical and mental. The physical barriers are obvious: there are solid fences marking the borders of most nations. Those who cross between nations have to ensure they have gone through with the relevant bureaucracy. Showing passports, declaring your baggage and passing between possibly armed guards who flank a nail-studded gate (for example) promotes a considerable degree of separatist thinking. People from different countries are considered to be different, even if they might look similar to you, share your opinions, eat the same sort of food, have the same religion and speak the same language. The nation is set up to be different – it governs its people in (slightly) different ways, and usually has a different currency. If nothing else, it declares its identity with such paraphernalia as flags and anthems. A person in a country who was born in another country is considered foreign. He or she *may* be irrationally feared, and if he/she has jumped the border without authority, will be considered a criminal who should ideally be hunted down and deported.

The clearest way to see if an aspect of society should be changed or eliminated is to see if it produces any of the effects described above – namely greed, hatred and ignorance. And in the case of nations, it is easy to think of the greed of the former empire builders and the greed of countries holding on to territory that they don’t even fully control, something which can lead to war. Hatred of another country or its people can lead to violence, and there are plenty of historical and contemporary examples of this. The existence of barriers between nations and controls on entry and exit will of course promote ignorance; this alone, in the right people, could lead to anxiety or fear.

Similar arguments apply for ethnicity, and it is the perception of distinct ethnicities that causes many people to want their ethnicity to be given the extra ‘protection’ of becoming a separate nation. Separatists clearly equate having their own nation to having greater protection – of their identity and their people – against ‘bad’ things. These ‘bad’ things are likely to be caused by other people’s perception of separate ethnicities, races and nationalities in the first place, such as racial persecution. And so immediately there is a vicious circle here.

Nations (or ‘states’) are described as ‘autonomous’. They have different governments. This ability to govern ‘independently’ (as in the idea of a country being an ‘independent’ state) is very closely linked to the idea of an ego that has free will. We think of a soul with an identity making autonomous decisions, just as we think of a nation with a national identity making autonomous legal decisions. The parallel is remarkable, but far more frightening, because a nation is a bigger thing: everything is scaled up – a plurality of people with a bigger area to work with, much bigger barriers to try and uphold, far bigger battles to be fought should the homestead be threatened.

And what are these barriers that people try to uphold? In truth, they don’t exist, because the nation was created by simply erecting the barriers where some people happened to do so. There may have been guiding principles as to where they put the boundary, but that boundary wasn’t naturally there: in truth, it was arbitrarily constructed, and the same goes for any pigeon-holing exercise that tries to create an autonomous ego where none exists. There are no scientifically rigorous differences between people of different nationalities, or even those of different races: many studies support the view that any choice of a racial boundary on genetic grounds is ultimately arbitrary¹¹. The boundaries between people on national and ethnic grounds are social constructs. We made them up¹². There’s nothing to uphold here except a *view* – a mistaken one, and one that very often leads to turmoil like violence and war and fear and greed and quality of life gradients.

The case for dispensing with such a view is colossal. Our redesigned world will have no nations and will not be ethnocentric. There is one species of human, and they share the same planet. Constructing such enormous, artificial and greed-ridden boundaries would be an abominable idea even if those two things weren’t true. Upholding barriers, especially those as monolithic and powerful as national and racial boundaries, is expensive – not so much in the financial sense, but in the sense that it expends energy, and not just joules of energy, but emotional energy that the fear of the foreign entails. It is so embedded in culture that we may not even notice this energy, when for example a news report speaks of the death of ‘three Canadians, five Italians and seventeen Americans’. Isn’t that just twenty-five humans? What was the logic in dividing them up like that? Aren’t you already a bit cross that I chose America to have the most fatalities in this hypothetical example? Wouldn’t you consider it strange if a report said ‘three houses burnt down – one of them had bricks from a quarry five hundred metres away, one of them had bricks imported from the south of France and the third was made of bricks from twelve kilometres to the west’. It sounds ridiculous in its current form, but all we need is some adjectives that describe each of those ‘brick-identities’ and it becomes very easy to get obsessively compulsive about the categorisation.

What would you think if you read, ‘three books are on the curriculum – one of them was written on a train in Austria, one of them was written in a bath in Sweden, and one of them in a South African office’. We find that we don’t much care where the book was written. But today’s society might care more where the author was born, which then suddenly becomes a property of the book, ‘a Hungarian book, an Indian book and an Australian book are on the curriculum’. These might well be the same books as the ones in the previous example. A legitimate reason for separating the books like this is that it might just about be possible to glean some information about what the book will

11 For example, Claudia Travassos and David Williams, http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-311X2004000300003&lng=es&nrm=iso

12 Note – what we are saying here is that the precise dividing line between one nation or ethnicity and another is arbitrarily defined; this doesn’t necessarily mean that such lines are non-existent. The same situation applies in linguistics, where the boundaries between dialects can only be defined arbitrarily.

be like, and what sort of background the author may have had. It's not a very good reason, as it happens, because diversity within the same country is still pretty huge, but bad reasons would be 'books written by authors born in different countries are inherently different', or that 'nationality is part of the identity of the book and the author'. And why not? Because the national borders were arbitrarily conceived in the first place. Because intrinsic identity does not exist.

It doesn't take long to develop stereotypes. The very fact of creating divisions where none exist, and inventing a vocabulary for describing these divisions, enables people to make sweeping generalisations with ease. At best, stereotypes and generalisations are simply inaccurate and amusing; at worst, they lead to genuine xenophobia and tension. The trouble is, the more a nation believes itself to be intrinsically different, and the more it uses that belief to separate itself off from the rest of the world and establish innumerable barriers around itself, the more it actually *becomes* different – which ironically starts to make a statement like “Italians are different from Slovenes” carry more weight. It's not that there *is* any intrinsic difference between Italians and Slovenes – it's the fact that they thought there was that has made them diverge.

In case the concept of nations doesn't already have enough nails in its coffin, imagine you have just declared the surface of your table an independent state, 'Tableland', and a friend has similarly created the state of 'Deskland' from the surface of a nearby desk. The salt cellar, the pepper pot and the vinegar bottle have now suddenly become citizens of Tableland; they are 'Tablelandic', and have Tableland imprinted in their identity. This is just by virtue of the fact that you 'declared' independence of the table. Where did this nationality-identity come from? Nothing moved from the table to the items on it; nothing moved from you to the table when you declared its sovereignty. It was just an announcement. Likewise, the pen and pad of paper are both now Desklandic. Now suppose you want to move a salt cellar to Deskland. A fence has been erected and you have to fill in a few pointless forms on behalf of the salt cellar, and at the demand of your friend (overlord of Deskland) and display a piece of paper that you created for the salt cellar, asserting its genuine Tablelandicness. A guest then comes in for lunch and announces, 'Deskland is currently inhabited by two Desklanders and one Tablelander.' Doesn't she mean, 'There are three items on the desk'? The guest is not necessarily being racist, but she is making distinctions that need not be made, using a view – a mode of thinking – that is not relevant or helpful for her purpose.

And finally, we must remember that although sovereign states of some description may have existed for ages, the modern notion of a nation state, and all of the legal and militaristic powers that it entails, is a fairly recent one¹³. Certainly there have been no more than two centuries in which the *whole* world has been divided into nations. If that sounds like a long time, remember that homo sapiens has been living on the planet for at least two hundred thousand years.

Humans evolved in Africa about two million years ago, and evidence suggests that homo sapiens itself also evolved exclusively in Africa about two hundred thousand years ago. The reason we find humans all around the world nowadays is because of migrations of these original groups. Each migrating group of humans – if they had language at all – would have had the same language, would have had similar appearances and would have shared customs. As they spread through the world, they inevitably lost contact with each other and their language, appearance and beliefs diverged. The vast majority of people, then, are ultimately descended from immigrants – immigrants descended from original 'Africans', and it is little more than the ability of space to separate things that has led to the divergence of different groups of people.

¹³ The concept of state sovereignty was formalised in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Such nationalistic folly as ‘there will always be an England’ is as sycophantically propagandistic as a fallacy like ‘there always has been an England’. A universe that is continuous in time and space will let everything change beyond recognition, and such change, whether we notice it or not, is always carrying steadily on. This is one of the biggest problems with the nationalistic mania – the stubbornness against change.

The Home

Nations set up physical and mental barriers between people on a large scale, and there is a similar situation with things on a small scale – that is, with the individual home. The walls of our houses literally separate us. It goes back to the ideology described at the beginning: there is “me and mine” and then there is the rest of the world, divided into good, bad and neutral. On the national level, our country is the Individual – it is us and it is ours – and other countries are divided into allies, enemies and countries we don’t care about. Similarly, one’s house is the fortress of the Individual and its property (me and mine), and other houses are either neighbours we like, neighbours we don’t like or resent, and then the vast majority – the houses whose residents we don’t know, don’t want to know and have no reason to care about. Notice how well the adage “an Englishman’s house is his castle” is consonant with the mentality of warfare: a castle is a defensive building; it’s there to protect those inside it and to have a good chance of defeating those would dare to breach it.

The home, then, is the armour of the Individual. It safeguards all of the ‘good’ things we have accumulated for ourselves – our property – and it keeps out all of the ‘bad’ things that might offend, attack or threaten us. It is an essential stronghold for the lonely Individual, for it keeps away what would otherwise be a life of constant fear and anxiety. As it happens, the constant fear and anxiety is still with us; we only manage to keep it at bay for a while. We have to be concerned with the security and upkeep of our fortress. We have to make sure to lock the doors and windows, to clean the place and maintain the contents. We lock ourselves in, and find we have to do all the work to sustain our ability to remain locked away. An awful lot of our time is consumed in doing the housework and the gardening, cooking for ourselves (if we even have time for that) and clearing up afterwards, and we must do all of this ourselves, for that is the price we pay for having our own home. Our property is rightfully our own responsibility. But between going to work to earn money to pay for our house and the things we put in it, and then maintaining ourselves and our house and the things we have put in it, we find there is often very little time left over to do any of the things we enjoy (assuming you don’t enjoy these activities, and even if you do, the sheer necessity of doing them yourself all the time, and the sheer repetitiveness of them, is enough to make them tedious).

Now, of course, we have not reached the stage of having one house per individual. Most people live with their family – probably a spouse and children. We can share the housework between these people. If one of them is ill, the others will be happy to take over. This is a blessing. But the trends are towards having smaller families, and single-parenthood has become much more common. Increasingly, children have their own lives, even when they still live at home, since they are growing up more and more with the mentality of being separate, independent Individuals, and so they are less a part of the family. The extended family is often absent in the West. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and the rest almost always live in separate houses which could be in different parts of the country or world, and even if they do live locally, in many cases they do not see each other as often and cannot help each other as much – generally for lack of time (too much work to do

to maintain individual security).

Thus, the individual home has the effect of exacerbating our loneliness, fear and anxiety; burdening us with inordinate chores; and breaking up the family. But most significantly, it is a concrete manifestation of our belief in separate Individuals, as well as an ingrained feature of society which promotes having that belief in the first place.

The Car

By now you must realise where the argument will take us. Again, we have a mentality of separateness, of being distinct units of individuality. One of the main characteristics of this mentality is the feeling of autonomy. Of course, if the Individual didn't have free will (that is, personal causal efficacy), then it would be a helpless soul, doomed to have other helpless souls uncontrollably pushing it around; such a depressing and hopeless view is too terrible for most people to believe, but instead of rejecting the Individual, they either accept free will or at least act as though it existed – for the sake of their sanity. Having a car is a good way to assert one's autonomy.

Think again of the picture of the world that is produced by the belief in the Individual: me and mine, moving around in a world of other 'mes and mines', avoiding contact with most of them, but seeking the good and shunning the bad. Compare this with a picture of the road. There you are, the Individual, encased in a fast-moving vehicle, literally insulated from the outside¹⁴. The car can take you basically wherever you want. With it, you can quickly and easily seek out the 'good'. You drive around in a universe of anonymous others, separated from you to the point where not only do you not know any of them, but you have no way of communicating with them, except perhaps hasty hand gestures and a monotone horn. Road rage, of course, is the extension of the anger we were talking about earlier with reference to Alice's predicament.

The individual car is subject to the same analysis as the individual home. It requires maintenance and security. We have to lock it up, clean it, pay taxes on it, feed it petrol, pay more taxes on the petrol, get it repaired when something breaks or wears out, and so on. Just as the individual home is an extension of the Individual to a brick-and-mortar-encased ego, the personal car prolongs the ego-conception to our time outside the home. Being in a metal container like a car promotes our feelings of being individual and autonomous, separates us out from the world and makes our ego feel safer. This last point is somewhat ironic:

Obviously motor accidents themselves are so common that it isn't easy to estimate just how many there are, but about forty million people obtain serious injuries every year as a result of them¹⁵. One and a half million people die in car accidents each year, making it the tenth largest cause of death worldwide, and the most common cause of death that isn't a disease¹⁰. It's difficult to gauge how many additional people are adversely affected by the consequences of air pollution, but there are such estimates as 24 thousand people in the UK dying prematurely as a result of pollution every year, and 2% of heart attacks in London being a result of pollution¹⁶. Studies suggest that pollution aggravates or causes a very wide range of ailments – including heart disease, which is the undisputed number one cause of death itself – but how much of it is down to cars is difficult to say.

14 Indeed, as a good analogy to a previous discussion, the concept of the outside is only created by the presence of the vehicle's boundaries.

15 World Health Organisation statistics: <http://www.who.int/research/en/>

16 BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/medical_notes/336738.stm

They certainly can't have helped. Asthma, which has become particularly common in recent decades, is certainly worsened by air pollution¹⁷, and it can kill. Some exhaust gases are carcinogenic, and some cause acid rain, which kills plants and aquatic life and erodes structures. Ozone, which is toxic, is created at ground level as a result of car fumes. Clearly it's not just humans who are killed by cars: the habitats of animals are greatly disturbed by roadways as well, and their road sense isn't as advanced as ours. There is the additional problem of particulates and oil contaminating waterways, rivers and lakes, which not only depletes water quality but also kills aquatic life. Noise 'pollution' is another problem associated with vehicles: it's hard to get away from the constant drone of traffic, and there is evidence of yet more health problems caused or exacerbated by excessive exposure to traffic noise¹⁸, as well as effects on the lives of other animals. Light 'pollution' is also made worse by air pollution. As more and more people get cars and depend on them more and more for their daily lives, the maintenance of the extensive road networks becomes more important and more expensive, congestion on the roads reaches extreme levels, making journeys more stressful and increasing journey times, all the while making more noise, killing more people and more animals, causing more pollution and depleting more of the oil supplies, increasing the price of oil and causing people to complain about the price as a result. Importantly, there is the fact of our sheer dependence on the car. If a petrol strike went on too long, the economy would collapse. We are compelled to drive places because we have such busy schedules. The streets are not safe to walk around in, because of the cars, and it's too slow and noisy and dangerous to do so... which means we would prefer to drive, which just makes the problem worse.

And on top of all this, there is their contribution to global warming.

As separate Individuals, we spend almost all of our time doing separate, individual things: we live in our separate, individual homes, and use our separate individual cars to travel to and from the place where we top up our separate, individual bank accounts...

THE ROLE OF MONEY

From the very start, we have been referring to 'transactions' between the Individual (me and mine) and the rest of the world. In modern society, these transactions are done with money. It is with money that we pay for the 'good', and money we expect in compensation for the 'bad'. Economic theory presupposes the existence of a so-called 'rational agent' – another guise of the Individual – which makes 'rational' decisions: i.e. seeks to maximise its stock of 'good', while also (paradoxically) spending as little as possible, and will only give out what good it has in exchange for good or money in return.

Money supports the ego view in a fairly obvious way. In fact, it is the notion of property which does this. The Individual is not just your body – it is also your ego. We can imagine the ego as a region of space which contains everything with which someone identifies. Remember, it doesn't really exist, so it can be as big as you want it to be – as big as you can make it. Everything within the imaginary ego space is called the property of the Individual. This is a store of the 'good' things that the Individual has amassed, and it is a measure of how 'good' the Individual perceives itself, how 'good' other Individuals perceive it and perhaps crucially, how secure the Individual feels against

17 Ibid. footnote 11.

18 For example, in this BBC News article, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1676507.stm>

attack. It's like a bubble of stuff floating around in the universe, continually accumulating more stuff to put in the bubble. The bigger the bubble is, the safer it feels against the 'bad' that seeks to destroy it. A thief is a typical example of a 'bad' Individual precisely because it seeks to remove things from your ego bubble. Of course, we call our property 'mine', and other people's property 'theirs': the world is thus divided up in precisely the illusory fashion that we have already discussed. Good and bad ego bubbles float around against an uncaring backdrop.

Money puts a value on your ego bubble. If you want to find out *exactly* and *quantitatively* just how advanced, 'good' or big your ego bubble is, you just need to get it valued in terms of money. Likewise, the 'good' things in the world can now simply be called goods, and they have a monetary value to tell us just how good they are for the Individual. Our money is also part of our property. We can hence easily evaluate the power our ego-self holds by looking at our bank balance. In order to accumulate new goods – in order to bring them into our ego domain – we merely have to give away the appropriate amount of money. And *that* is the transaction we enact with the universe. Nowadays this is quite often a digital process, which means we don't have to interact very much, if at all, with other Individuals. We can send the money electronically and have the good delivered straight to the palace of the ego (the house).

This is advantageous because most other Individuals cannot be trusted: they could be 'bad'. If something 'bad' emerged in our ego bubble then we would want to pay something 'good' to remove it, and this is called a service. The amount of circumstances that this covers is very broad. You perceive the state of your hair as a 'bad' thing, and yes, the 'bad hair' is now another Individual in the universe. Since it falls under the 'bad' category, you must attack it or at least run away from it. So the hairdresser provides the service to do this. In order to use it, we have to give away some of our money, some of our property: we have to give away *a part of our ego self*. But it's worth it, because we'll get rid of something 'bad'. By weighing up how much 'bad' is removed and how much 'good' is gained against how much of our property we have to expend, we can make a decision about almost any action. If the accumulation of 'good' and removal of 'bad' appears to outweigh the cost, then it is deemed economically viable: it is the most 'rational' course of action. If we don't have to pay very much for something we see as very 'good', then we are so happy to have made a decision that comfortably grows the ego that we call it a 'good deal' or something like that. On the other hand, if we have to pay too much, or if we don't get very much out of it, it's a 'bad deal'. When we say that we have been 'ripped off', we mean that the ego bubble has been unfairly stripped down¹⁹.

Hence economic behaviour is directly related to the perceived dualism of good and bad and the perceived pluralism of separate Individuals. It constitutes the transactions between the Individuals (the rational agents) and each other, and between the Individuals and the environment, and is always motivated by how much it will bolster the Individual – the Me or the sense of Me. These transactions are financial transactions. The behaviour can easily be summarised by the word 'selfish'. Of course, to obtain the money, we are obliged to provide goods and services to others: this is also a kind of transaction. Our time as well as our goods have a monetary value. We sell our time for money because, again, the reward outweighs the expense: the money can be used for the inflating of the ego. You may argue that the money also does have to be used for obtaining the means to survive, but there is no difference: a dead ego is clearly not a very 'good' one, and so survival is simply the most urgent and fundamental way for the Individual and the sense of ego to persist and grow.

19 No wonder we despise taxation: it's like institutionalised ripping off.

Here is something I said earlier in the essay: “True, you will continue to do things for the benefit of others... it is also justified within the ego-mentality in terms of noble sacrifice and responsibility – i.e. helping others increases your status with them, which makes you a better Self and increases your chances of these other people servicing you. In other words, helping others is recast as just another way in which the Self is ultimately benefited.” Consider how this view is borne out in our view of business. A capitalistic business is like a big Individual. Its behaviour matches the mode of thinking described above. The ultimate purpose of an Individual, like a business, is to serve its own interests (i.e. make money). Now imagine that a company has made a mistake and shipped faulty batteries with a batch of its products. Why should it bother to do the decent thing and recall this batch, or provide new batteries to the affected customers free of charge? Surely this is a waste of its time which isn’t servicing its interests. The same goes for any sort of after-sales support or for measures that a company implements for ‘helping the environment’. We understand that a business does in fact help its customers, because if it didn’t, the company would get a bad name, and ultimately people wouldn’t want to use them any more – and this would be ‘bad’ for the business. And so, ultimately, we understand that a business behaves selfishly, and that even in situations where it helps people, it is really only doing it for its own benefit. And we call this ‘corporate responsibility’.

We have already seen how the belief in the Individual causes suffering directly (by fuelling greed, hatred and ignorance), and so, since money supports and is driven by the view of the Individual, it too is a cause of suffering²⁰. It is also a more direct cause of suffering, as I will now attempt to explain.

The Conflicts of Capitalism

“Consider the following economic propositions. The first is from Henry David Thoreau’s Walden: by reducing the amount of goods we consume, we can reduce the amount of time we spend in unpleasant labor. The second appears to assert just the opposite: we must all consume as much as possible so that everyone can have a job. I submit that the first is more reasonable, even though the second is defended by many people today. Indeed, it might be argued that if America were to convert to a network of small communities, our economy would be wrecked. But something is wrong when it is the system that must be saved rather than the way of life that the system is supposed to serve.”

B. F. Skinner, 1976.

Let me modify those economic propositions just a little. The first: By reducing what we consume, and/or by introducing labour-saving machine technology, we can reduce the amount of time we spend in unpleasant work. The second: By consuming as much as possible, everyone can (hopefully) have a job, and by working as much as possible, everyone can (hopefully) earn enough to pay their debts.

²⁰ But don’t misunderstand. “The love of money is the root of all evil” is not quite true. It is the love of the Individual, or rather, the *idea* of the Individual and the world view that springs from it, which is the root of *suffering*. I’m sure that’s what the Biblical Timothy meant to say. But if money is our way of encoding this delusion, then it is an easy mistake to make.

It is clear that society has opted for the latter proposition. We hear statements like “people will be out of work” or “there’s not enough work for people” or “I’m going to see if there’s any overtime for me”, which testify to the fact that society is founded on money rather than on needs. (And indeed, we can justifiably speak of a single society in the world because almost every country uses essentially the same economic and banking systems – including China to a very large extent²¹.)

On the one hand, there is a deeply-ingrained duality in our minds between work and play, between our duty and our free time, between necessity and leisure. It bespeaks a belief that survival, and the means of ensuring it, is supposed to be hard work, distinct from play and separated from enjoyment by the dark hand of necessity. In a world entirely divided into separate Individual bubbles that only serve their own interests, it is obvious that nobody gives up a part of what they own for free, and so ‘good’ things have to be earned. And our work is supposed to be monotonous, repetitive and generally unpleasant. Those who have “easy” or “enjoyable” jobs are often the subject of a riling and resentment among the working class. There is a reason why our work has to be unpleasant: the interests of one ego-bubble scarcely ever intersect with the interests of another, because there is a constant state of competition for the ‘good’, so of course if one bubble wants to get something from another, it isn’t going to be easy, and it will only happen if it is a ‘viable’ transaction. This work, necessary in our society for survival itself, is what comes first in our lives, and it generally does not overlap with play.

But the work is never done. Today’s job may get done, but there will always be something else to do tomorrow. The conflict here is not that there is always something to do: it is the fact that we *want* there to be work to do for our entire lives, that there *has* to be work to do for everyone, for their entire (working) lives, so that they can exist in society. And this work has to last long enough that the wages will be substantial enough that they cover the costs that society demands we pay. Is it any wonder that unemployment is such a big problem in so many places? Given that society is geared around everybody of working age having a theoretically endless amount of *paid* work to do?

When we find ourselves wanting overtime, or uttering one of the statements above, there is a hidden conflict of interests. Work is unpleasant, but I have to want to work, because I want the survival that doing it will get me. Society makes us feel compelled to want to do what we don’t want to do. We have to *want* to do unpleasant things. Being able to enjoy our work is a bonus, not a requirement.

Society, then, is based on the principle that everyone must work, regardless of whether there is actually any work to do. If there is not enough work to do, then this is seen as a problem, and jobs have to be ‘created’. And while many of us consider that the goal of technology is to make our lives easier and to reduce the amount of work we have to do, we can see that these notions are contrary to the way society operates: if machines replace us, then we don’t earn anything. (At the limit of this idea, we might imagine an entirely hypothetical scenario in which machines make food and other products wholly on their own, but the humans aren’t allowed to buy any of it because they can’t afford it – because the machines are doing all the work.) We also find a contradiction with environmental responsibility, because if we cut our industrial activity to sustainable levels, there would be less work to do. No matter how much death and destruction they may cause, oil-powered cars and aeroplanes, like tobacco or cocaine, cannot be eliminated, simply because the economy

21 Cuba and North Korea are notable exceptions, and the Arab countries are slightly different too because they oppose the charging of interest on loans for religious reasons, but instead, banks tend to become shareholders in the recipient’s business.

would suffer. Thus, any environmental or welfare scheme that involves eliminating or reducing the use of any product or service is necessarily contrary to the system, because it could ‘put people out of work’, regardless of how beneficial it would be in other terms; and this extends to the overconsumption of the rich countries. The diseases of rich people – heart disease, obesity and so on – could be prevented more often if the people did not consume so much and became less dependent on cars – but that would mean a *reduction* in goods and services! GDP would go down! People would be out of work! Thus, operating in parallel to the conflict between wanting to survive and not wanting to do endless, menial work is the conflict between wanting a healthy life and healthy planet and the need for endless industry.

Although working is tantamount to survival in this society, it is not actually directly related to survival. Survival is about having enough food and water to keep our body functioning, and being free from debilitating disease. Society does not say “This is what everyone needs, so let’s think about what work needs to be done to achieve that; now let’s divide that work among the people”. If society did that, then clearly, consuming less would mean there would be less work to do. But that is the stuff of Communism, in which the state decides what is best for the people and divides the work between them so that this ideal is achieved (hopefully). Our society – capitalism – does not work like that. That is why it demands economic growth.

Simply put, if the economy does not grow, then there isn’t enough work for everyone to be able to earn enough. If we suddenly left work one day and realised, “That’s it! All the work is done!” then we would also realise that we aren’t going to get paid any more, and poverty may ensue. Lack of work (which means lack of unpleasant activity for most people) corresponds to poverty. That is because our work is not based on our real needs, as defined above. Our work is motivated by the imaginary need of money – imaginary, because society merely agrees that all the real needs should have a price expressed in monetary terms. We might ask, so why couldn’t the system just change so that everyone only did work that was necessary to obtain, as Skinner puts it, “not money, but the things that money buys” - i.e. our real needs? Ultimately, the answer is that society is totally invested in the delusion that life is supposed to be unpleasant – that survival is supposed to be hard. To base society on real needs – so they might have us believe – would either mean Communism, which the capitalists have made almost synonymous with treason, or Anarchism, which is such a threat to the governments’ power that it is always painted in terms of chaos and violence, such that everyone fears it.

If the economy of our current system did not grow, the resultant lack of work would trigger a depression, characterised by poverty. Without the necessity of a growing economy, people would start thinking to themselves, “Do we really need to build another helicopter?” or “Haven’t we made enough swivel chairs to go around yet?” This might even lead to environmental responsibility.

In a society like ours, there is a necessity for a *constant* demand for helicopters and swivel chairs, just so that helicopter and swivel chair manufacturers are always “in work”. Nowadays, entire cities, states or countries may be dependent on, say, their car industry or their tourism industry or their wine-making. But clearly, cars, tourists and wine – at least not in the quantities required – are not absolutely essential for the well-being of the community concerned, and yet the economic system has tied the success of such industries to the success of the people in a highly artificial way. A more sensible society would only do work that was either necessary for people’s survival and well-being, or desired for a particular purpose. If this were the case, the planet would breathe a sigh of relief that it isn’t going to be stressed to breaking point.

So what was wrong with Communism when it was implemented in the Soviet Union, and elsewhere? There are, of course, many answers to this question, but the one that is most often overlooked is the idea that the imperative of growth was still driving the mindset of the Communist governments: we overlook this because capitalist societies share the same assumption. State Communism had the perfect opportunity to deny the necessity of growth, but it evidently wanted to compete with the rest of the world – or rather, they *needed* to out of fear of being vulnerable in the face of America’s constantly growing military forces.

Ending economic growth does not mean a return to primitive lifestyles (neither should a return to primitive lifestyles be particularly feared). Society has the imperative of work, the imperative of competition, the imperative of growth. Wouldn’t you rather live in a world with an imperative that everyone’s needs be met and with defining values of enjoyment and play? Society assumes, actually, that economic growth is tantamount to the growth of happiness and the growth of creativity, but we need only look around at the world that our economic growth has built to see that it has failed utterly²². Such observation is all we should really need to do to realise that society must be replaced.

The conflict between wanting to work and not wanting to do menial labour is not the only conflict of interests that capitalism promotes. There is also a conflict between buyer and seller: buyers want to spend as little as possible, yet sellers want them to spend as much as possible. This puts us, as buyers, forever at odds with the people who can provide for us, and as sellers it puts us forever at odds with the people we provide for. Activists may urge us to support our local merchants by buying from them, or to support organic farming by buying organic, or to avoid buying things from corporations who have been involved in reprehensible practices, but this very often means spending more money, which is undesirable to buyers. We might think that we *would* buy products that are produced in environmentally friendly and morally righteous ways if only we could afford to, or that we would give copiously to charity if we could afford that. But money, and its scarcity, and its equation with survival, holds us back, makes us forever anxious.

It goes further. Protecting the environment (as it is called), improving healthcare or education, implementing social responsibility schemes or even customer support schemes have monetary barriers associated with them. It is therefore in the economic interest of corporations to avoid such schemes wherever possible. The monetary barrier can only be broken ‘artificially’ by governmental intervention or by the fear of getting a bad reputation. In other words, money is the only driving factor. No matter how much a company claims to have customers’ best interests in mind, and no matter how much it truly *wants* to be ‘good’, it is always held back by the monetary barriers. ‘Economic viability’ is the only thing that matters. It doesn’t matter if it’s the right thing to do, it doesn’t matter if lives are at stake or if the health of ecosystems is at stake, and it doesn’t matter how much unhappiness or stress it might remove – if it isn’t economically viable, it isn’t done. (That is the way the system itself operates – this isn’t just a case of people being mean and greedy, although the two are interlinked.) Where is the sense in upholding a system that is forever at odds with what is good and righteous and ecologically responsible?

Recently, a letter came through to my household concerning the food recycling scheme that had been operating in my area for several months. The beginning of the letter explains how enormously

²² One indication of this, for example, is found in the results of the Happy Planet Index, which combines subjective life satisfaction, life expectancy and ecological footprint; economically developed countries tend to have low scores.

successful the scheme has been, even winning an award for its contribution to the recycling effort and the protection of the environment. It goes on to say that the scheme is being cancelled because it's too expensive.

Browsing through the book *Worldchanging*, edited by Alex Steffen, I get a very optimistic feeling – seeing a diverse range of technologies and initiatives that are being used or that have been proposed for the creation of a better, more sustainable material world. But time after time, this optimism is doused and ruined in the final paragraph or so, when it turns out that this wonderfully efficient and altogether brilliant design idea has not yet been implemented because there aren't (yet) any economically or commercially viable ways of doing so.

Situations like this pervade our world. Despite there being the capacity for all people on Earth to have enough to eat and drink, a great many people do not, and another section of the population has *too much*. And lack of money is that which, by definition, keeps poor people poor. There are almost certainly resources available for everyone to have access to clean electricity, yet so many people do not. Nicaragua, for example, has continued to struggle to provide electricity to more than half of its population; one of the chief reasons for this is that the main way that the system can allow such a poor country to provide electricity is to attract foreign investors, but, as the country discovered, poor people are not profitable, and so the service is only offered in richer areas.

Even in the developed world, people's lives are held back by lack of money. There is an enormous range of technological products on the market, some of which are of a good quality, with lots of features, and are hence expensive; and others are simpler, cheaper and more prone to break-down; why couldn't the resources be used to produce *only* products that are of a high quality and that reflect the state of the art? Clearly it is because not everyone can afford that. And although we have mobile telephones, people continually limit their use of them to save on the bill – at least, they do where I come from. Is this because the planet simply doesn't have the resources for everyone to use telephones regularly? No – that would be a *logical* reason for keeping our 'phone calls short.

One more specific example will suffice: that of the Superconducting Supercollider, an immensely powerful particle accelerator that could have probed matter at a scale never before reached, with the aim of testing various theories at the core of physics. This project was cancelled in 1994 because it was, not surprisingly, too expensive.

Time and again, money impedes both artistic and scientific projects, and it is the barrier to anything that is for the welfare of society or for the welfare of the environment. Creativity is also held back for the same reasons – as well as the desire to do good quality work. Doing better work, or being creative, have the same monetary barriers associated with them. Film makers cannot be truly innovative, or creative, because who knows whether such an innovative idea will be favourably accepted by the market? No, it is far less risky – financially – to follow a formula that works – that is, makes money. Computer game developers, for example, might have a very creative game idea, but they must sell this idea to publishers. If the publishers don't think it will be profitable, they will reject it. How can a computer game developer make sure that publishers will accept them? By making something that they know will be profitable. And how do they know it will be profitable? Because something similar has already proven to make money. So they make things that are similar to things that have already done well – which means not being innovative, not being original, not taking risks, but just following the same old formulas. This is why there are so many remakes of films nowadays, and why so many novels are turned into films. Film makers, game developers,

musicians, authors etc. are the creative people, and publishers act as the conduit through which their creativity must enter the market, but this very system actually works *against* creativity. In other cases, there may not be a publisher, but the share-holders of the company may act as similar barriers. Publishers, agents and share-holders pressure companies into behaving only in ways that are economically viable – i.e. which support the selfish ego mentality. Survival anxiety makes up for the rest.

The conflicts of capitalism:

1. We want to spend as little as possible, yet we need others to give us as much as possible.
2. We want to be creative, but the market wants us to do what we know will sell.
3. We want to do as little menial labour as possible, but the economy demands that we are forever working.
4. We want to support endeavours that we think are good and right, like charities, but we are held back because we think we cannot afford it.
5. We want to help the environment and be socially responsible, but any such schemes that are too radical will not be economically viable, and any green innovations that aren't profitable won't get implemented.
6. We want to be healthy and educated, but even these systems have monetary barriers associated with them²³.
7. We need to reduce our consumption (in rich places) for the sake of our health, and also to avert the problems of resource depletion (not just oil, but fish, water and many minerals), but this would be contrary to economic growth.
8. We want to be part of a community connected with our locality and with the people around us, but the economic system makes us dependent on a constant artificial need for particular industries and on distant strangers who make products for us.
9. We want to have access to the latest technology and to use it to its full potential, but because it is privatised and commercialised, we often cannot afford it or have to limit our use of it, and only the very rich are able to use high quality equipment.
10. We want to improve our scientific knowledge, but the machines needed to do this are getting too expensive.

These conflicts put us in a profound state of ambivalence. The market tugs us one way, but our desires and needs tug us another, and yet we are taught to respect the market and espouse its principles as though it were our god. We might sum up these conflicts as, “We want to do good, but the system seems to think we want to do bad.”

²³ For example: pages 58 and 63 of the UNDP HDR 2005 cite examples in the USA and China respectively where people fail even to seek needed healthcare on grounds of cost - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2005/>

And that leads us to the central conflict. First, we must realise that our society is not purely capitalistic. Pure capitalism is one in which the market literally governs everything. There would be no central government in a purely capitalistic society. Powerful companies would govern everything. Nothing would be 'national'. There would be competing police forces that you would pay for, competing hospitals to pay for, competing schools to pay for, competing transportation networks to pay for, competing fire fighters to pay for and no legal system at all. (Incidentally, Communists are wont to point out the waste and the duplication of services implicit in this system. Over-production and over-consumption are indeed yet more problems with the system that are not relevant here.) If someone beat you up and stole your wallet, then it was clearly in his economic interest to do so, and so his action was right. You were in the wrong because you hadn't invested in a personal alarm system or couldn't afford a gun. The only thing you could do is appeal to your insurance company.

But most people recognise that there is something not quite right about a world where violence and theft are normal. Yet it is the assumption of our society that if left unchecked, they would be totally normal, because in the picture of separate ego bubbles, our interests don't overlap, so that the easiest way of getting the 'good' things is to take it from others by force. There is the assumption that pure capitalism, as described above, is the natural system and the right system. But we draw the line at accepting violence and theft as morally right, and that is where the government steps in – to save us, ostensibly, from ourselves. To save us from what we would supposedly do to each other if there were no legal system to stop us. To save us from the plunder and violence that would inevitably result from an unregulated capitalistic system. We are taught that it is human nature to steal from each other, hurt each other and rape our way to domination, and so it follows naturally that we must have a government, to rein in our badness. And to prove that it is human nature, we are told to look at the world around us and see how much violence, theft, rape and hatred there is. And, excuse me?

The government supports the myth and then installs itself as the supposed saviour. It perpetuates the myth by pointing to all the things that are wrong, and promising to put it right if you elect them. The government reins in pure capitalism. This is ultimately what creates all of the conflicts. The economy is set up as though it were going to be pure capitalism, and then the government superimposes itself on the system and tugs people in the wrong direction. "If only the government would stop interfering with corporate practice!" And so the government, the capitalists and the ordinary people are all in conflict with each other, perpetuating the myths that gave the system rise just by virtue of having these conflicts. (This is not a conspiracy, though, and I strongly suspect that most people do not *consciously* intend to create this situation. It has evolved this way.)

Pure, unchecked capitalism is not the solution, of course. The system must be totally replaced. The assumption that pure capitalism is the 'natural' society must be removed, not least because it is only 'natural' if you have the view of separately-encased PCE-possessing ego bubbles. Was this the society that humans implemented when they first walked the earth? Certainly not. Money itself took thousands of years to develop. In the earliest times, there were no markets, let alone market forces. But it is enough to see that the problems that would supposedly arise from "pure capitalism" if the government didn't exist are problems that exist anyway – and which are all too prevalent. Violence, theft, war etc. *hurt* people. Of course we do not want them. That is why the system must change. Many problems are indeed implicit in the system, but to think that we can solve them by having a conflicting system – the government – posted on top of it, is ridiculous.

All governments are ultimately in agreement about the myth. In fact, the spectrum of left-wing and right-wing only differs in how much the government interferes with what would otherwise be pure capitalism, with right-wing “giving more power to the market” and left-wing tending to soften the blows of the system by supplementing it with welfare schemes and nationalised services. (And nowadays, the parties available to vote for in most ‘developed’ countries are all right of centre.) This is the tragedy of democracy. Have you not noticed that whichever party is in power, nothing seems to get any better?

This may be an appropriate point to mention the financial crisis that began in late 2008. I had already written the first version of this book by the time it started, and this is an important point: the economic system *is corrupt and damaging even when it is working properly*. If the economic problems come to an end, we will still be living in a broken world, and because of the damage that the economy does, as we will shortly see, it will be a world that gets ever more broken. We should therefore not be content for things to get “back to normal”²⁴.

The approach that governments have taken to the economic crisis is very interesting. The April 2009 G-20 summit in London agreed on a \$1.1 trillion stimulus package. Yet the United Nations Development Programme, in its 2005 report²⁵, estimates “a cost of \$300 billion for lifting 1 billion people living on less than \$1 a day above the extreme poverty line threshold”. It also estimates that \$7 billion would be needed annually to supply adequate sanitation to the 2.6 billion people who don’t have access to it, which would save about 4000 lives a day; and just \$4 billion would apparently finance “basic health interventions” that would save “3 million infants a year”. In fact, the cost of reaching the Millennium Development Goals in all countries – a set of targets for eradicating extreme poverty, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensuring universal education, gender equality, environmental sustainability and more – is estimated at \$121 billion for a year²⁶. The \$1.1 trillion stimulus package, then, could have achieved the MDGs for 9 years – which would presumably be enough time and money to make whatever structural changes were deemed necessary to render a constant cash injection unnecessary. In fact, the world’s combined annual military expenditure is also just over \$1 trillion (and \$121 billion represents about a fifth of the yearly military spending of the developed world). So governments are prepared to spend enormous amounts on saving their economic system, and on perpetuating their military might, but won’t spend anywhere near so much on ways to help people. So deeply are they invested in the myth, so unshakeable is their faith in the *system itself*, that they will go to any length to ensure that it continues. We will shortly see, however, that their system cannot possibly be sustained forever.

Fuelling the Individual

The entire world now uses essentially the same economic system, thanks to global organisations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation. In this system, more than 90% of money is created by banks when people take out loans. This is now an entirely digital process: creating new money is as simple as increasing the number that represents how much credit is in a person’s account. (The rest of the money exists as physical coinage.) Although the banks have arguably done something most children nowadays could easily set up on their computer, they still expect compensation for this service – that is, the loan must not only be paid back (this amount being termed the principal), but extra money has to be paid on top, called interest. The

24 See this article – <http://carolynbaker.net/site/content/view/1066/1/> – for a more vehement perspective on this.

25 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2005/>

26 Specifically, for 2006. See http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/costs_benefits2.htm

recipient of the loan must somehow take money from other people in order to pay this, but there is a problem. Since only the amount of the principal has been created, the interest has to be paid from money that is taken from elsewhere. But since all money is created when a loan is taken out, the people from whom we get the money to pay the interest also have debts to pay, and so they too must get money from still other people. This is ultimately the reason why competition is an integral part of the economic system, and why having a job is a necessity. At some point, however, either another loan will have to be taken out, or someone has to go bankrupt.

In other words, the amount of money in the world is continually increasing – it has to, because the amount we all collectively owe to the banks is always more than existed in the first place. On a personal level, we realise that it's not a good idea to pay back our debt by taking out another loan: we pay it back by selling something to other people – goods and services. But somewhere along the line, some people are having to take up more loans, and so they have to provide goods and services to pay them back, which leaves other people in debt, who have to do the same. So because the amount of debt is increasing, the amount of goods and services has to increase too. The former is called inflation²⁷; the latter, economic growth.

Hence there is an economic growth imperative, and this necessitates the creation of more and more goods and services. Never mind whether or not these goods and services are necessary for people's survival – never mind whether they cause happiness or suffering. They are needed, just to support the economic system. If the economy doesn't grow enough, there is recession or depression; and if the money supply grows too much, it can get out of control and collapse the currency. There have in fact been many financial crises of one kind or the other over the past century, suggesting that the economic system is indeed quite fragile. But regardless of this, it has continued, and this is really only because there are so many goods and services there to be created, and because of the continual state of war that has existed over the past century²⁸. To create one, you find a so-called gap in the market. This is where we comb through all the stuff that it's in the usually-ignored 'neutral' category, and try to find a way of convincing ourselves and others that it's actually in the 'bad' or 'good' category. Invent something, persuade people they need it (advertise), and the job is done: i.e. economic collapse avoided and continual inflation of egos assured. Instead of inventing something, you could open a new shop or provide a new service or provide an existing kind of shop or service in a place where there is a lack of them. Planned obsolescence, incidentally, is an advanced tactic which will get people to continue spending and hence continue growing the economy and hence also growing their egos. This entire process has to appeal either to greed, or the greed of safety and security which is the wellspring or else a cause of fear and hatred (e.g. burglar alarms, caused by a fear of our ego bubble being breached, which is consonant with a greed for the safety of the ego bubble). The new goods and services have to appeal to the perceived wants of the ego: the things it wants to accumulate or remove.

There is no goal. There is no limit. Economic growth has to increase for *eternity*: there is no goal built into the system. This means, essentially, that our greed *has* to be limitless. We *have* to keep wanting our ego to inflate, or else we wouldn't want to buy any more than we needed. The belief in the Individual has to persist, and there has to be no end to how big our ego can get. And if we want our ego to continue growing, we surely have to believe that it isn't currently big enough. What can we call that feeling? Dissatisfaction? Emptiness? Disappointment? Sadness? Discontentment?

27 Inflation of the money supply and inflation of prices are not the same, but the former is a major cause of the latter.

28 It is easy to grow the economy by rebuilding a place that you have just destroyed, and it's almost always companies from the victor countries that get the contracts to do this.

Suffering? Whatever it is, it can't be pleasant. And that's how we always have to feel – the economic system demands it, or at least supports it. It is exactly this feeling that advertisements have to appeal to.

I said that creating new goods and services is about recategorising something 'neutral' as 'good' or 'bad'. It could of course also be identifying something already perceived as 'good' or 'bad' and meeting the need for people to get it (if it's good) or get rid of it (if it's bad). But let's look at the first one, which clearly has to be employed at some point, given that there must be a finite number of good and bad Individuals. An example of something neutral might be a forest. You don't care about it as a forest, but you do realise that it can be converted into something 'good' if it is chopped down and made into furniture. Clearly, constantly increasing goods and services also means using up more resources. A 'resource' is only called a resource if it is fuel for economic growth, i.e. if it can be used to make something in the 'good' category or to remove something in the 'bad' category. Economic growth is hence about perpetuating the division of the world into good and bad Individuals, so that more and more things with a net 'goodness' can have a monetary value associated with them – with the necessity that the process must never end. Whether or not the *universe* is infinite, it is obvious that the *planet* is finite, and it doesn't take much to realise that constantly creating new goods and services must be unsustainable (“But what happens when there's nothing left?”)

We can now see that environmental destruction – one of the world's biggest problems – is easily explicable in this framework. The depletion of resources, such as the depletion of fossil fuels, is also another symptom. Hence the energy crisis – which will leave our homes without power and our cars without fuel – and the resource crisis – which will leave us unable to make plastics, medicines and other materials. As you can see, these things are now integral parts of our ego bubbles, and so these crises would be catastrophic for them. Then there is poverty – another massive problem of the world – which is usually defined by an income threshold, i.e. people not having enough money and so not being able to participate in the economic system which now rules the world. Poverty has many causes. Just giving money to poor people is demonstrably futile, because the problem still persists. We might easily conclude that the incredible poverty that exists in the world today is a built-in feature of the economic and political systems that govern everything, given the fact that it is physically possible and technically feasible for everyone in the world to be well fed and comfortable (which is a truism at the moment, but if the population growth trends – largely caused by poverty in the first place – continue, it will not be).

Indeed we can see that the workings of the economy promote a growing gap between rich and poor even in 'developed' countries²⁹. Banks charge interest on loans, and they also give a proportion of their profits to those who have an account with them. Thus, the more money you have in your account, the more money you will get; and the less money you have, the more likely it is that you're going to need to take out a loan, and the more you will have to pay in interest. So rich people are constantly receiving money from the profits, much of which the bank received by charging poorer people for taking out loans.

The economy works in such a way that the money supply keeps growing and goods and services have to grow to keep up with it. The growth of the money supply leads to inflation, because when there's more money, its value goes down and so prices rise; only by making more goods and

²⁹ See, for example, the UNDP Human Development Report 2005, page 55, and the specific example of the UK on page 68.

services, i.e. growing the economy and increasing GDP, can the rate of inflation be ‘stable’. A more sensible system would be one in which goods and services are created *as they are actually needed* and the money supply grows accordingly, which means there would be no inflation. What this would mean is that the money supply *must directly serve our needs, instead of our needs being forced to serve our money*. After all, what is the purpose of money? If you’ve been trained well, you’ll say that it is a medium of exchange, a mere tool to facilitate exchanges between people of diverse trades. But this is not how money operates today; if anything, it is a barrier to exchange, in the ways we have already examined.

Many writers³⁰ have aptly likened the economy to a cancer, since healthy systems grow only up to a certain point (and later they shrink and die) – but cancers, like our economy, want to keep growing and growing until they consume all possible resources and kill the entire organism. The economy can also be likened to an addiction: like an addict, it is forever greedy for more ‘goods’, and it is prepared to sacrifice everything to get them, until eventually it runs out of resources and the addicting substance has devastated its health, and so its lifestyle collapses.

The metaphor of the addict is very useful, because this is also the behaviour of each PCE-possessing Individual. Individuals are constantly craving more ‘goods’ – that is, more Individuals that are perceived as ‘good’. Remember, these ‘good Individuals’ do not actually possess PCE, which means they can’t, in reality, be ‘blamed’ (or rather, ‘credited’) for causing whatever good feeling you get out of having them. Thus, you will continue craving more of them, because you falsely believe that they are making you better or happier. The entire economy is an enormous Individual, falsely believing that its continual, destructive accumulation of goods is actually making it more ‘advanced’ or ‘developed’, until eventually it has consumed everything. At the same time, the economy itself encourages people to have the view of Individuals because it demands us to divide up the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ so that it can sell people things that they perceive to be ‘good’. In other words, the economy encourages us to behave such that we want to inflate our own imaginary egos, and itself behaves as though it is an ego that needs to be inflated – forever.

Finally, we can extend the problem of money to the national level, since as we saw, nations are just very big Individuals. A nation is an ego bubble, and it behaves in essentially the same way as the analysis above describes. The sum total of the monetary values of the property of the ego bubble, again, dictates how ‘good’, how advanced, how ‘big’ the nation is/feels. To put the terminology in context, the sum total of the value of the goods and services of the nation – measured in money – is the indicator of how developed the nation is. That number is called the country’s Gross Domestic Product. Ignoring other criticisms of GDP, we need only note how the world view of separate Individuals translates so precisely into the very vocabulary of world politics and economics. The world view which, as we have already seen, is the wellspring of suffering.

Could it get much bleaker?

Death

It is not only observationally evident but also a facet of everything in the universe recognised by both science and religion that all things are impermanent. In fact, impermanence is a fairly crude way of describing something more fundamental. A vision of the universe void of Individuals is one where the universe is a continually unfolding process: the universe is a process, not a collection of

³⁰ For example, Margritte Kennedy in *Interest and Inflation Free Money*.

static, separate Individuals; it has four dimensions. If we say that something is impermanent we imply, in a sense, that there is a plurality of things and that among them there is the thing which has perished. But in a continuous-process universe, the apparent perishing of a thing is just another way in which the entire universe is continually changing and evolving. There was, in a sense, no boundary between the thing in its existent state and in its perished state, because there was no separate thing there to begin with.

We imagine separate floating bubbles, and one of the bubbles bursts. But in fact there are no separately floating bubbles – only a very large process. When something appears to die, its energy is merely changing form, and so it is not really death, but transmutation – and such transmutation is occurring all the time as part of the continuous process, though we humans do not perceive all energy changes as death. And so impermanence is a fact of the universe, indeed, but it means only that the universe does not stay still: it keeps changing. A plant may die, but the actual boundary between its life and death is a matter of convention: it doesn't vanish after its death; it rots and decays into the earth. At what point does it stop being a plant? The question has no answer, because it assumes there was an Individual.

It is like a train entering a tunnel. At what point is the train *in* the tunnel? When the very back has exceeded the threshold? When it first enters the tunnel? When it first enters shadow? There is no one answer to the question. The boundary is a concept we make up. It isn't really there. All we really have is a train continually moving in relation to a tunnel. And this applies to life and death. When does life begin? At conception? When it reaches four cells, eight, sixteen? When the heart starts beating? When it can first see? When it's born? (And that's a train coming out of a tunnel problem!) And when does it end? When brain activity ceases? When the heart stops? There may well be medical and legal definitions, but they are merely conventions, like saying that a person is entitled to drink alcohol when they turn eighteen. Nothing particularly special has happened at this boundary. Which is not to say that nothing particularly special is happening when someone is born or dies! Only that it is a continual process and that no one part of it can be definitively 'blamed', if you like, for the actual deed. An infinite series of events leading up to any particular moment constitutes the cause of that moment; and so each particular event (and there is even no such thing as a single identifiable event, but if there were) has zero contribution to any 'blame' for the particular moment in question. The concept of 'blame' is hence meaningless.

In nature, in fact, processes tend to be not just continuous and without real boundaries, but cyclical. Think, then, of a circle. Any of the infinite number of points that constitutes the edge of the circle could be considered either a beginning or an ending, but if you look at the whole circle from above – from a higher dimension – you can see that there are really no beginnings or endings at all. It is another useful analogy.

But in this society we believe that we are Individuals. We can continue to amass things to support our ego bubble and we can build up our defences against those things that would threaten us. We can bolster the ego bubble until it is enormous. But we know that at some point we will die. Does the ego bubble then burst? Opinions differ. For those who believe that they will enter oblivion and no longer perceive anything, the ego bubble and all that is in it is useless. But they can still hope that other Individuals will look upon them kindly: "He was mighty and powerful to the last!" And this is the final insult, in a sense, because in Western culture at least, people are buried in separate graves, with gravestones to mark the place, noting who they were and when they lived. It would be easy to think that people believe that some essence of their Individuality remains – so that they will

always be that person, and will rest forever more in that place. A big part of the Individual may have died, but some unidentifiable part of them somehow stays behind, as though an Individual can never truly be eliminated. Others literally believe that their Individual has an ethereal essence that makes them who they are – the soul. Their body may die and their possessions become useless, but the soul remains behind. The Individual is thus perceived as eternal, immortal. Death – the ultimate change to a person – is not enough to quell the veracity with which we cling to the concept of the Individual.

This is especially true for those who believe in the literal ‘soul’ of the Individual. A magical presence imbues the Individual. And if we don’t believe in the soul but still cling to the Individual? Then there is despair. We go through all this work – growing, sustaining and defending the ego space – only to have it die at the end of life. All that accumulation and defence is for nothing. It is ultimately destroyed. How cruel the universe is! How pointless life is! So we retreat to our meaningless greed and selfishness that drives the growth of the ego, constantly seeking new pleasures to distract us from the truth of our impermanence. Hedonism and existentialism are examples of the countless philosophies that have sprung up around all of these principles.

We cling not just to the Individual that is our own self, but to other Individuals – the ‘good’ ones. A loved one is a ‘good’ Individual, and so when one dies, it is very painful. I am sorry to have to put it this way, but in a great many cases, a loved one is an Individual who is part of our own ego bubble. Our spouse, children and friends are quite often just ‘good’ Individuals which bolster the ego sense, and we are in their own bubbles. This is true to a certain extent. I must add, however, that it is in these relationships where genuine love and compassion *are* manifest. But this sort of love is often mixed in and confused with clinging to Individuals, and since the Individuals do not really exist and are impermanent, any changes to them make us sad, fearful, disappointed – pained in some way.

Suppose a grandfather has died and left us his model boat, asking us to take care of it. We put it in a glass case, have it on display, get it out every so often to clean it, and we admire it regularly. Then one day there is an earthquake, the glass case topples from the side-board and the model boat is destroyed. We find its wreckage amongst a pitiful pile of glass shards. If you react - “Oh dear – what a shame. Perhaps I’ll find a way to repair it,” or even if you simply collect it up and dispose of it, then you were probably not perceiving it as an Individual. If you react with anger, sadness, regret, guilt, shame – anything like that – then it is because you clung to it as an Individual. Perceiving it as a ‘good’ Individual means that anything that threatens it would be ‘bad’. It would be difficult to blame an earthquake the way you would blame a thief, but you can still blame yourself, for not nailing down the case, or your wife, for not warning you of the earthquake hazard which she apparently knew about. To blame is to assert personal causal efficacy *of an Individual* (the ‘personal’ bit refers to an Individual, actually). This implies that you have the world view of the Individual, and it is accompanied by one or more of the bad feelings listed above. If you don’t believe that the world is made of Individuals, you cannot blame anything, so you would not feel guilt or anger. Sadness arises generally from a perceived change for the worse; sadness (and other negative emotions) at how something has changed presupposes that its state has changed from good to bad, or from bad to worse. By not dividing the world into good and bad or bad and worse or good and better, and simply working with what *is*, and accepting the continuous spectrum of perception and experience that we are presented with, we can eliminate the pain that these changes cause. By eliminating the Individual, we remove the pain caused when a part of the ego bubble – including possessions and even loved ones – turns bad, leaves, dies, breaks.

This is not to say that we shouldn't care at all when our loved ones die, or when terrible things happen to things we hold close to us. This is also not to say that we should be happy about these things. But depression, anger, blame, fear and guilt – strongly debilitating emotions – are not helpful, nor comfortable, nor even necessary. You probably think they are inevitable: perhaps some of them are, some of the time. But we are so caught up in the world view of Individuals, so consumed by a society that so emphasises this mode of thinking, that it is difficult to avoid the consequences. This world view and the society based on it has been centuries in the making. The habits will not go away easily, but it is not falsifiable to say that they are absolutely unavoidable.

The same kind of analysis also applies to wider issues, like crime and terrorism and war and so on, much of which has already been covered. Terrorists are 'bad' Individuals – so kill them. And from the terrorists' point of view, enemies of the cause are 'bad' Individuals – so kill them. No: there are no Individuals, good or bad. If *this* mode of thinking were properly intuited, then *both* sides would cease their mad, fallacious thinking.

Interdependence

The four aspects of society mentioned above – the separate nation, the separate home, the personal car and personal money – are all related. The car, for example, conspires with the house to make us lonelier and more separate. It's far too dangerous to frolic about in the streets outside our homes, because of the cars, and so we can't walk and talk and meet our neighbours there. We are ever more insular in our separate houses – caring less and less about our neighbours and having less and less reason to care, since they are independent – financially and otherwise. Our fear of 'bad' things out there combined with this loneliness makes us distrustful and ignorant of our neighbours even if we do meet them in common grounds. We are less watchful of each other; we help each other out less and less. This makes the state-imposed police forces more necessary. But the individual house also provides a closed door behind which deeds like abusive relationships and abuse of children can take place. A community would not be so likely to have these problems: a community can make sure everyone is taken care of, and everyone can watch over everyone else. This is an incidental point, in a way: it's not as though the existence of the house causes child abuse, for example! But all of the forces together contribute to the problems – the ideology of separateness as well as all of the real forms of separateness, when combined with other less general factors.

The four aspects are related by the ideology summed up in the single word 'independence'. Nations are 'independent'. When a new one is created it gains its independence – it becomes separate. Having one's own house is a way to become 'independent', of one's parents generally. Having a car gives us 'independence'. And the goal of money is to become financially 'independent'. But independence is a word that requires qualification. It is like the word 'better'. Something cannot be simply 'better': better than what? And something cannot be simply 'independent': independent of what? The unspoken goal, especially of financial independence, is to become independent of *everything*: to become a totally separate Individual, able to do what it likes, go where it likes, and amass its own property and hence get what it wants.

A person independent of everything is indeed a separate ego. It is also a very, very lonely one. It is also physically impossible, since we cannot possibly exist without energy to sustain us. When a nation gains independence it generally doesn't cease all imports and exports and block all communications to and from the rest of the world. Indeed, a great many nations nowadays are totally dependent on imports of *food* – a requirement of its people's survival. Driving a car may

indeed allow us to go where we want, independently of the whims of bus and train times and the convenience of those who could otherwise give us a lift, but when we use the car exclusively, when public transport is consequently reduced and when our ties to our friends and family do not generally extend to sharing transport facilities, as the ideology of separation has in fact promoted, we become in fact dependent on the car, and therewith on the oil that fuels it. In other words, using a car does not make us independent: it just makes us dependent on the car.

When we are financially independent, we are not self-sufficient. We are still dependent on food and water. There is still an incredible sequence of events that constitutes the cause of our existence; we depend on our causes to exist. In fact we are dependent on all the people we pay to provide us with what we need and want. We are independent only in the sense that we are able to pay anybody who is providing those goods and services, so long as there isn't a monopoly: in other words, we're dependent on people growing our food, but we are independent of the particular people doing it. This is an intensely isolating process. It promotes distrust and fear of people and is fueled by it. In a sense, it makes us the lonely, floating ego bubbles we believe we are. On a more practical side, it means that we have no idea how to make our own food, clothes or shelter; we depend on total strangers who have specialist knowledge of these things to provide them. If there were a financial crisis or a collapse of society, we would be so unable to look after ourselves that millions of people would perish.

To be 'independent' is actually to separate ourselves off from the rest of the world, while still being dependent on it, and only to interact with it using money – money, which is an abstract concept and which has no intrinsic value or use. The reality is that independence from everything is impossible. We are dependent on each other and on the world and we are an inseparable part of it: this is called interdependence. To deny this simple fact of nature is asking for trouble, which we are duly getting in the form of environmental destruction and the sheer despair of lonely people and their inability to look after each other. Recognising interdependence forges relationships. If we actually all knew the people who grew our food or made our products, we'd probably have to get on well with them, and there would be correspondingly less crime, fear, worry and dodgy business practice, and we'd have more friends – friends we literally *needed!*

A good analogy is the theory of relativity. A person does not simply exist, on its own, independently. Such a person would be what we have termed an 'Individual'. A person can only be said to exist by specifying its relation to other things: that is the principle of relativity (but it applies to everything and not just people). You cannot say the person is at position 3,5,7,4 in the four dimensions of an absolute space-time background; you must say that person A is 3,5,7,4 away from person B, who is 9,1,2,5 away from person C, and so and so on until, for example, person ZZ1 is 4,3,0,12 away from person A. That is interdependence. The people can only be said to exist in relation to each other. It is a proven natural law of the universe that independence is impossible! To deny interdependence, then, is to deny the very thing which is in reality pinpointing our existence, and this leaves us in a void of loneliness: striving for a perceived independence robs us of our claim to existence³¹.

31 It does so happen that the theories of relativity are a tad more complicated than that. But a relative spatio-temporal system is a fundamental fact that you must understand before you can fully grasp inertial frames of reference and hence the stranger consequences of relativity. Perhaps if the speed of light were slower (and hence the effects of relativity more readily noticeable) society wouldn't be based on independence! (Perhaps the fact that society used to be made up of close-knit communities or tribes, whose members depended on each other, is a consequence of Variable Speed of Light theories?)

Shying from Controversy

You might still be struggling to accept that belief in the Individual really does cause so much suffering, or you might still be offended by a point previously made. Let us – for a moment – forget the philosophical arguments that brought us to this point. Forget scientific arguments and forget religious ones. Think only of these truisms: there is immense suffering in the world, and on a large scale, this is borne out in the immense problems that the modern world now faces – poverty, crime, environmental destruction, depletion of resources, the energy crisis, the terrible state of education and health care, the growing prevalence of autoimmune diseases, war, torture, hatred and racism, suicide, the unsustainable lifestyles most people live, the incredible wastage these lifestyles generate, the fact that the average working week is getting longer³² and the average life expectancy may even get lower, homelessness, and the general anxiety and despair and angst that most people tend to feel quite regularly. In other words, think only of the fact that the world is in an extremely poor state, and the fact that it would be nice if it were not. This is pretty much uncontroversial and acceptable to everyone. It doesn't even matter that society is probably headed for total collapse: we can ignore that as well for the moment.

Is it possible, then, for the world to be in a better state? For one thing, to say “no” is a non-falsifiable claim. We could try and try, but failure to improve the world might mean we just need to try something else – you can never *prove* that it is impossible. For another thing, believing that it is impossible is a hopelessly pessimistic view. To wallow in misery and a broken world is one thing, but to be convinced that it's actually impossible for it to be any better – that probably explains the suicide rates, at least. The fact that some, or perhaps all, of the problems mentioned have actually been worsening is basic proof that the world has in fact been in better shape before. This instantly raises the chances of being able to improve the world – raises hope. Ultimately, we won't know if we can improve the world until we try, and we can never finish trying.

My point is that you can find many of the things I've written to be controversial or objectionable, but you must still agree that we should do *something* to improve the world we inhabit. Even if you intended to behave selfishly, you would not be serving your own interests if you ignored any and all approaches that aim to reduce the suffering in the world. Many writers³³ have said that in order to improve or save the world, a vast shift in our consciousness is required, even inevitable. Indeed, a major change to our world view is needed. This book argues that the current problems are caused by a mistaken world view, because society has been built around that view, and so clearly a new view must replace the old one, so that a new society can replace the old one. But we have already seen how society itself supports the same world view. It's easy to imagine that humans are naturally selfish and greedy, for example, because society supports and in a sense rewards such behaviour, such that it is very common. Those that call for momentous shifts in perspective and consciousness frequently neglect to suggest how this will happen. It might happen when people become so dissatisfied with the current world that they feel the change is necessary, but it will happen most powerfully and more reliably if society itself is changed, in order that the old world view is no longer supported or compatible, and such that a new world view is a natural consequence of living in that new society.

32 Evidence may be found in, for example, Juliet Schor, *Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (Basic Books, 1993).

33 For example, in *The Consciousness Revolution* by Peter Russell, Ervin László and Stanislav Grof
<http://www.peterrussell.com/CR/index.php>

I believe that the philosophy I have outlined - “belief in the Individual causes suffering” - is a good explanatory framework for analysing the causes of the world’s problems, but it is perhaps not the only valid one. Multiple interpretations are often key to understanding things. The more we hear something and the more varied the presentations of the same ideas, the more likely it is that we grasp the underlying motivations and principles. But all of these interpretations must be compatible with each other.

I have done my best to prove that it is society itself which creates its own problems. It is like a bucket of mud with some gold nuggets in it: it’s corrupt and dirty, but there is still much beauty and goodness to be found. It is *not* like a bucket of impure water: essentially fine, but spoiled by dirt and impurities. If it were like that, then improving the world would be a fairly simple matter of removing the dirt. And that would be what, exactly? The criminals? That wouldn’t solve the energy crisis, though: the dirt there must be fossil fuels, which are non-renewable. But that wouldn’t power our cars or make our plastics, which rely on oil. And it is indeed hopelessly naïve to think that just getting rid of the criminals, the homeless, the poor, the terrorists, the disabled etc. will cure crime, homelessness, poverty, terrorism and disability respectively. The best police forces in the world haven’t succeeded yet, and are not silly enough to think that there is a finite number of criminals and that some day their job will be done. The belief that homeless and poor people, for example, are somehow ‘bad’ – i.e. lazy and unworthy – and must be eradicated, is clearly exactly the ideology I have just spent thousands of words condemning, but it also fails to recognise the underlying *causes* of homelessness and poverty, such as abusive parenting, economic problems (going bankrupt because there just wasn’t enough money in *existence* to pay back that loan), war and persecution, droughts and so on.

Society itself must change. In order to arrive at a model of how society *should* work and how to transition to it, we can use the ideology presented herein – that the world view of separate Individuals has caused the problems with our current society. Whether or not you still doubt this ideology at this late stage is in fact not relevant; we are now simply using it as a tool to arrive at something which will be better (i.e. entail less suffering and not be teetering on the edge of collapse).

The Redesign of Society

How, then, would society look if it were not based on independently existing identities? How can we reverse society’s problems by reversing the damage done by its underlying premise? It is tempting at first to think that this is all leading to Communism, but this is not a helpful attitude, since the aim of removing *identities* from the world is something new, and which deserves to be considered from the ground up without any political preconceptions. You will see that, although there are a few similarities with Communism, the society that emerges from this train of thought is considerably different, at least from any implementations of Communism in the real world.

Clearly, the four main aspects of society that are based on the struggle for ‘independence’ – nations, individual houses, personal cars and personal money – could be eliminated. I say *individual* houses because we would still have homes, and would still need shelter: all we would dispense with is the fact that there is one housing unit per ego or family. I say *personal* cars because public transport need not necessarily be abolished. I say *personal* money because that’s what I mean: I have considered at length the wild notion of having collective money – a global, shared bank balance, as it were – but eventually I realised that the best such system appeared to be identical to dispensing

with money entirely. Perhaps such systems may be helpful, though. For one thing, I must make clear two points: that we must transition to the new society in manageable phases (for one thing, to allow time for people's world view to shift) and that the societies I describe may not represent the final stage of this process; it will still require improvement and refinement. I concede that novel economic and monetary systems may be useful facets of transitional versions of society, but I maintain that the ultimate goal should be the elimination of the whole concept of money (for the reasons I have already explored).

The best tactic is to wipe the slate clean and build a new society from the ground up, one that is not susceptible to the enormous problems of the current one. The mud in the bucket must be completely flushed out, and water must be poured in – the purest water we can get. If you don't believe that the world is like a bucket of mud and that it is actually like impure water, then this process amounts to tipping out the impure water and replacing it with clean water – which is arguably easier than arduously extracting every little impurity present. Thus, regardless of the causes of the problems, we can definitely solve them by completely re-inventing society such that they do not arise. But it is also completely necessary to start from scratch. The immense problems of the world can only come from deeply ingrained flaws in the design of society itself, and so it is time to rethink everything and replace the whole thing. It is not even strictly necessary, then, to target the particular problems the world now has. So long as the new society is demonstrably free of them, and free of any other such devastating properties – so long as it entails *less* suffering and more happiness – then we have succeeded.

We have explored the problems of current society in some depth now. But enough of what the new society will *not* have. Let us turn to what it *will* have.

Part Three

How to Transition to a Better World, and what that World Might Look Like

Summary

Recognising the suffering and destruction caused by our society and by our mentality, we realise that both of these things must be replaced. We need a society in which everyone's needs are met and where people live together in a manner that promotes their mutual happiness; the society must promote a mentality of interdependence. The previous essay identified many aspects of current society antithetical to these principles, and their elimination is the starting point for designing a new world.

In the previous essays, we have explored the idea that society's obsession with a world divided into separate, independent, selfish individuals is the underlying cause of most or all of its problems. The question now is – what would the world look like if it were based on interdependence rather than independence, and if its people had abandoned the view that they are discrete and blame-able individuals who must always maximise their self-interest? Instead of going through meticulous reasoning and explication, I will now simply describe my personal vision of what this new world might look like and how we might expect it to work. It is by no means necessarily the *only* society we should want to live in, and it is not one we could aim to switch to immediately: and so, after describing it, I will explore other possibilities, as well as the possible stages of transition.

Verbose Description

Politically and economically it seems that anarchist communism is the closest ideology that fits the society I will describe. Wikipedia happens to provide a good description of what I mean by this term:

The abolition of wage labor is central to anarchist communism. ...[P]eople would be free to engage in whatever activities they found most fulfilling and would no longer have to engage in work for which they have neither the temperament nor the aptitude. Anarchist communists argue that there is no valid way of measuring the value of any one person's economic contributions because all wealth is a collective product of current and preceding generations. For instance, one could not measure the value of a factory worker's daily production without taking into account how transportation, food, water, shelter, relaxation, machine efficiency, emotional mood etc. contributed to their production. To truly give numerical economic value to anything, an overwhelming amount of externalities and contributing factors would need to be taken into account -- especially current or past labor contributing to the ability to utilize future labor.

This is a good description because it recognises the inability to attribute personal causal efficacy to a person's work, which would arguably be necessary for justifying giving monetary rewards for that work. To put it in the language of the philosophy of my other essays, if your work is conducted as the result of an infinite chain of causes, if you genuinely cannot be *blamed* for anything, and if your

separate individuality is an illusion, then how can that separate individual be given such a precise numerical compensation for its work? How is it possible to measure the contribution of a person, when the identity of the person is an illusion and their contribution is precisely zero, because it was part of an infinite chain of contributions? Think of a one-dimensional line made up of an infinite number of points. Each point on the line is zero-dimensional: it contributes precisely nothing to the whole line. And remember, ‘to blame’ and ‘to give credit’ mean the same thing, but the former has negative connotations; the latter, positive connotations.

Thus, there would be no individual numerical wealth (i.e. money) in this system, which would instead be based on the principle that all of the Earth’s resources are shared by its inhabitantsⁱ, such that nobody can claim ownership over land, shelter, food or food production methods or natural resources. The concept of private ownership would also cease to exist for the vast majority of manufactured goods, the only exceptions being for pragmatic reasons: it makes hygienic sense, for example, for people to keep hold of their own towels, toothbrushes and clothes that are in their size (though no legal protection can be given to them, since no legal system would exist, nor would one be necessary). Products and services would be provided at no cost to anyone – not even the assurance that the consumer is also providing products and services to the community. Mutual trade, or bartering, would be possible, but neither necessary nor encouraged. This system is usually termed the ‘gift economy’.

Where this system differs from anarcho-communism (which is just an ideology) is in its physical embodiment. The belief is that the physical organisation of a society should be closely linked to its ideology and the lifestyle it wants to promote. As such, and taking into account the points of my previous essay, the ideal environment is a self-contained, *sustainable* community consisting of *free access* buildings, navigable entirely *on foot*, and *without arbitrary boundaries*. The community building(s) would function, analogically, like a big university campus with accommodation, eating facilities, classrooms and lecture theatres, libraries and computer rooms, creative resources, halls and leisure facilities, with important distinctions, as previously italicised:

1. Usage of all the facilities is, of course, free – that is, there is no obligation, least of all financial, to do anything in return for use of the facilities.
2. *To the greatest degree possible* (which depends on the geographical location of the community space and the available resources), it would be sustainable, meaning, effectively, that all the food eaten is grown on site, and all the energy needed is generated on site, and all the products used are manufactured on site. This is an ideal scenario, and the first two of these would probably be physically possible in a large number of cases; the third, however, depends on how many other products are actually needed. Such products could continue to be brought in from the nearest place that they are made.
3. Everything a member needs to survive would be contained within a community space that they can navigate in its entirety on foot within the day. The most important thing to notice about this is that there would be no need for anyone to use cars or public transport in their day-to-day activities. Although no legal measure could exist to stop the manufacture of cars, it is likely that if they existed, it would be solely as toys, while other forms of transportation can be used for travelling long distances.
4. No arbitrary boundaries would exist, which means no division into nations or administrative

zones.

Some people might opt for a simple life, in which they stay in their community, work on the land to grow food, and do other survival-related jobs like cooking and repairing the roof. *You would not have your own house, nor a house for your family.* This is an important part of the community's physical embodiment. You would have only a small private room with a bed and a place to hang clothes, towels etc. The food that you grow goes into the stocks for the community; you have nowhere you can horde them for yourself – and crucially, should have no reason to, since a lot of the time someone else will do the cooking/preparation for you, and you need only go to the communal dining area and eat it.

Crucially, a person who does the cooking is someone who *wants* to do the cooking, rather than someone employed to do it. If you want to do the cooking, you might choose not to work on the land, but you might do both. To the extent that it is physically possible, you could in theory do neither, and let the others take care of your nutritionⁱⁱ, while you do something you really want to do, like writing a novel or composing music. There would be no stigma associated with this: each community space must be sustainable, such that there is always enough food for the number of inhabitants physically able to live in that space. To deny someone food who hasn't worked for it would simply mean throwing it away, which is not something you'd want to do. But crucially, the novel-writer or the music-maker is very likely to share his/her work with the community. The people who choose to spend all day making dresses are not likely to horde them for themselves – and the fact that they have very little space in which to hide them away supports this ideal. They might decide to have a space in which they showcase their dresses – a space that might on the face of it look like a shop – but a shop where you can use the goods for nothing.

The novel-writer writes novels not to survive, but because he/she wants people to read them; the music-maker makes music not for money, but so that people hear the music; the dress-maker makes dresses not to live, but to see people wearing their dresses. Having people doing work that they enjoy *because* they enjoy it means that they will care about the quality of their work, and others in the community are more likely to care about *them*.

There is the assumption here that everyone has something they want to do, and to the extent that it's physically possible, they can pursue that desire without needing to worry about their survival. But the culture of the community must be such that everyone is taught, at an early age if possible, how to do 'survival-related' jobs, so that if ever there aren't enough people doing them, anyone will be able to take over, even if they'd rather be playing chess, realising that if they didn't, they might go hungry. And this can easily be part of the culture, since the survival-related tasks would be conducted in such proximity to you, and you would have plenty of time to learn them. The growing of the food is always in plain view, and the tasks are shared between you and people you know. You might switch jobs regularly; you might do five different jobs in the same day, without having planned for that to happen! Other people might prefer to do the same job their whole life. The term 'job' is used loosely here, because you might enjoy painting watercolours so much that it doesn't feel like work. This doesn't matter. You might, if it were possible, spend days in which you do nothing but go to parties and play badminton in the surrounding fields. That would be fine.

At first glance it seems like a money-less society would have to go without industry and technology, but this is not necessarily the case. Provided that there are enough people already engaged in food production and other important activities, there should be opportunities for people to design, invent, build and work in factories – if they *wanted* to (but any industries that existed in

this system would probably operate at a much, much slower pace than they do in the modern world). It's very likely that, if it's technically feasible to manufacture computers (which it is), then some group of people is going to want to do it. If they didn't, it simply wouldn't happen; there would be no economic pressure. Computers aren't necessary for survival; manufacturers of them might only exist in proximity to the needed resourcesⁱⁱⁱ.

This could trigger the growth of a 'specialist community' - a community dedicated to the manufacture of computers, in this example. You would still need people to get food, but people would also engage themselves in the 'industry' - again, because they want to. Of course, mass producing something like a computer requires a large number of supporting industries and some heavy machinery, so an industrial community might span a very large area; it might also depend on importing certain products from a long way away. If this is the case, the exporters would be making their product because they want to, and may export on the understanding that they will eventually get to use the new product, since after all, mass production would stem only from a desire for the masses to be using one's products. The process of mass production is largely automated; notice, then, that this society would be able to support the replacement of menial human labour with automated machines - it would not signal unemployment as it would nowadays.

A typical exchange might involve a community contacting a specialist industrial community to obtain some of their products. The industrial community asks itself - do we have enough capacity to make things for them? Do our workers want to do it? Should we set up another community to handle this work? Note that the decision-making here can be done in whatever fashion this particular community deems appropriate. The key point is that there is a community that wants a product, and if there is a group of people who like making that product, then they will do so for that community. (More ideas on how to organise the complex business of inter-community exchanges are given later on.)

I feel that the internet would be a very appropriate form of instant global communication in this system, which could strengthen co-operation between all the world's people, and facilitate the free exchange of information, ideas and creative media. But the society here is by no means dependent on the internet, and it is imperative that it can function without it.

I think it is imperative to minimise dependence on technology and finite resources, since it endangers lives if these things go wrong - that's the argument best suited to phasing out our current dependence on oil. Energy production would have to be mainly or exclusively by renewable methods, and this would be made much easier than it would be in today's world because the energy requirements of this society would be considerably lower, especially the energy requirements for the simple, survival-oriented communities. This is largely thanks to the abolition of individual housing (and hence individual washing machines, computers, lighting, lawn-mowers, cars etc³⁴). Note, however, that technology can be used to minimise menial labour - i.e. to stop people from having to do jobs they don't really want to do. In today's world, there is an associated paradox - fewer people are doing menial labour, but lots of people are made unemployed. In this society, unemployment does not equate to poverty, and so any reduction of menial labour is a great thing. If the whole society could hypothetically be run by machines - which I think would never happen - everyone could live without what we normally think of as a 'job'.

You can freely migrate between the communities at any time. You can stroll into any of the

³⁴ It is nigh maddening that each household should have its own personal lawn mower, for example, when such things are only used occasionally. But of course, the economy would suffer if people actually shared things.

accommodation blocks you find along the way, and if they have a free room, you can use it. You can go down in the morning to the dining area and though the cooks might never have seen you before, they will give you food unconditionally, and you can either become a full-fledged community member or simply move on. The community has enough resources for a certain number of people (200 might be good, with an ideal average capacity at any time of 150; it would not be difficult to know all of these people personally). Note that there need be no boundaries between communities except those imposed by the environment, like mountain ranges, and so goods and services and food and workers can easily be shared amongst large groups of them.

Given that there are no individual houses, it might seem that the family unit has no place. It would be possible to share sleeping quarters with a child or spouse, but other than this, the family unit would have no basis, the idea being that the community at large *is* the family. There are numerous possible advantages to this. Many people would not feel a need to have children, for example, because, as adult members of the community, they *are* the guardians of the community's existing children. This could bring about a culture in which people treat other community children not much differently to their biological children, and so many people might choose not to have children biologically, or to have fewer of them, because they effectively already have them. If this is the case, it may turn out to be a good way to reduce and stabilise the population, reversing the potentially catastrophic trend of today. Note that the biological family still exists; if the culture develops this way, then children can continue to enjoy a special relationship with their actual parents. But the boundary between their home or family life and their life in the world at large would be almost invisible, at least until they move away from their family, if they do³⁵.

Criminal behaviour would be far less common, not least because you are always in view of the rest of the community; there are, so to speak, no locked doors to scheme behind. In a sense, everyone is the guardian of everyone else; you are 'peer-moderated', and this replaces legal systems and police forces – neither of which would be necessary. The fact that community members depend so strongly on each other for their mutual survival, and the promotion of the abolition of the ego-view that this society is based on, are other factors which should help to quash crime.

Stealing, for example, is usually caused by wanting something you don't own. (The very existence of a legal system demonstrates that crime is still at large; it isn't a way of combating it; and contrariwise, the non-existence of the legal system would be balanced by the great reduction in actual crime cases.) Violent attacks are often perpetrated for reasons pertaining to money³⁶. Wars are often fought between nations for resources. What's more, nobody could be homeless (that is, without shelter) in this society, nor impoverished – given that it is physically possible for poverty not to exist. Our enormous environmental problems would be far less severe, since cars and polluting industries, including fossil fuel power stations, would dwindle. Notice also that the land currently used for individual houses and their back gardens could be reclaimed for arable use, at least in theory, so that hunger and dependence on imported food would naturally reduce. (More on this later.)

There would also be no education system to speak of. You learn as you go along. If you want to learn something in particular, then there are bound to be people willing to teach you, including

35 Unlike today, where children (and adults to a lesser extent) are shielded quite strongly from the real workings of the world and must go through with a fairly sudden leap from protection and security to an adult life of fending for oneself.

36 Many also result from drunkenness, but it seems likely that a happier and healthier society would have less of an alcoholism problem.

people who make a full-time occupation of it (they might advertise their services on community notice boards or on the network). There is no need for qualifications either, so long as you are trained on the job and so long as you can demonstrate your competence.

A guiding principle of the form of society described here is that the products of humans' incredible imagination and ingenuity would be available to everyone. No longer do you have to settle for what you can afford; no longer do you opt for the cheapest to cut costs. The creative people of this world want to create what comes into their head – not that which will do well in the market. No longer will money, nor wage slavery, nor national boundaries impede people, nor make them selfish. I call this system, for want of a better term, Physically Embodied Anarcho-Communist Egalitarianism, or 'PEACE'.

The Key Points

There is no money. Goods and services are provided unconditionally: they would be produced/provided because the producer/provider enjoys the process of production/providing. This, along with the effects of social pressure, would be the prime motivator of all activity. This is the 'gift economy'.

You do not live in your own house, nor in a house shared with your family. Private ownership is limited to a bedroom in a community building that has only enough space for things which should be private for pragmatic reasons – e.g. bed, towel, toothbrush, clothing.

There exists a 'community space': an area within which it is ideally possible for around two hundred people to survive as sustainably as physically possible, and which can be fully navigated within one day exclusively on foot. 'As sustainable as physically possible' means that all food required is grown in this area, all energy needs are generated in this area, and as many products necessary for survival as possible are manufactured from resources found within this area. Although the community space defined here may not achieve this, a group of adjacent communities forms a much larger community space, which should meet these goals. Everything in all of the community spaces has free access – regardless of your home or birth community.

There are no boundaries around a community space, which means that people, resources, products and services can migrate freely. There are no nations, no 'states' and no administrative zones.

There is no government, no legal system. The behavioural causes would be set up such that these entities are unnecessary.

If a group of people wishes to manufacture something quite complicated, they can set up a 'specialist' community space, or group of community spaces, in proximity to the resources they need to do this. In this way it is possible for industry to continue, but only if there are people willing to do whatever work is necessary to support it. Their survival, in the meantime, is assured.

Cars would be redundant in the sense that you would not need one to get to the places you need to go for your survival. Long distance travel would be easy on foot, since you can freely rest at all of the community spaces that exist between the start and the destination, provided there's space. But mechanised public transport, or the use of horses(/mules/camels) (and carts) are also possibilities. At the most, cars would exist as toys; they would depend on the existence of complex, specialist

industrial communities.

Education and training is conducted chiefly ‘on the job’. People are taught at an early age how to participate, at the very least, in the work that is necessary to keep a community space going – i.e. growing food, cooking, maintaining the buildings, making clothes, washing them, auxiliary nursing tasks etc. As such, there is no specific ‘education system’.

Because you no more live with your biological family than you do with the one or two hundred other people in the same community space, the community space is your family, and in the same way that you can rely on them to make food and give you clothes, even if you’re not doing those things yourself, you can entrust the care of your children, the elderly, the ill, the disabled and the infirm to the community. This could bring about a culture in which one is easily involved with the upbringing of other community children, and so some people may be inclined to have fewer children of their own, which hopefully helps to keep the population stable. In a sense, everyone is the guardian of everyone else; you are ‘peer-moderated’; this exists in place of legal systems and police forces.

Curing Problems for Good

If you’ve just read the second essay in this series, you will notice the jump from meticulous trashing of modern society to a manifesto of a completely new society. This reflects a key philosophy: the idea of wiping the slate clean, and simply starting again. It is no good simply to think of those aspects of society that must be changed or eradicated; the fundamental, underlying workings themselves are at fault – and moreover, as I have argued, the underlying assumptions and world views that fuel society are erroneous. If we have the attitude of simply ‘changing the world’ – making a few choice alterations here and there to root out the problem areas – then we are very likely to maintain these underlying faults, since they are so fundamental to the workings of the world today.

Indeed, making changes that will actually make a difference – a meaningful difference – is well-nigh impossible, since society provides overwhelmingly compelling forces to keep things more or less how they are. For example, we have seen the incredible destructive power of cars (and other vehicles). To make a meaningful difference in the world, we ought to take the radical step of eradicating cars completely. But how would our society function if we did this? Enormous sectors of many powerful economies of the world are dependent on the car industries. Millions of people are dependent on their vehicles to get to their job on time; thousands of industries depend on lorries to transport goods and raw materials. If we banned cars, the economy would surely collapse, and the world would be worse than when we started. This approach, of making a radical *change*, is flawed, because it assumes that the economy must remain intact. It assumes that something dependent on cars must remain untouched – a contradiction. It is like cutting off the branch of the tree that you’re sitting on. The more intelligent solution is to get off the branch and move on to a new tree entirely. And this doesn’t even bring in the fact that banning cars alone will only go a limited way to solving the innumerable ills of the world.

In the last essay, we identified that not just personal cars, but personal homes, money and nations were to be obsolete. ‘Obsolete’ or ‘redundant’ are good terms for it, because we must not think that dispensing with these things would represent a retrogression for our quality of lives – quite the

opposite. To have your own car is often a necessity, *in today's world*. But in a different world – in the world we must build, and in the PEACE society I have outlined – to have a car would not only be unnecessary, but mostly useless. Similarly, having money is tantamount to being wealthy and healthy *in today's society*. To dispense with money, today, is to become poor and destitute, but in a world where money isn't needed nor used, the concept is irrelevant. Implicit in all this is the realisation that our society can be more or less whatever we want it to be. Money, for example, is not a precursor to life – it is neither necessary for survival nor for happiness, unless we define it as such in our social mechanisms. Money is not a natural law. Hence we can dispense with it – or if we like, we can make it into something else. It can mean whatever we want it to mean, because it is purely a human invention, a human concept. We made it up.

Coming to the realisation that humans can make any society they want – i.e. the realisation that *it doesn't have to be this way* – is not easy for many people, who shrug off life's difficulties with catchy clichés like “that's life” or “mustn't grumble”. Yes, it probably *is* life, and no, it isn't worth grumbling, but nevertheless, the world can be better. You don't *need* to suffer just because our forebears made the world *this way*.

The idea that we can simply ‘change’ the world to make it better is, unfortunately, the mindset of environmentalists and politicians alike. Such people tend to believe that introducing a new law is the best way to improve the world, and as such, they do not recognise just how deep the problems are. Think back to the car example. I am quite sure that no government would ever be radical enough to ban them – that's another problem – and certainly all the measly bits of extra legislation and taxation that they can pass through the relevant bureaucratic mechanisms will have comparatively very little benefit, when the problems are so huge and unwieldy. As soon as such laws and taxes have a detrimental effect on the economy, the government will most likely be voted out in favour of one that will reverse the legislation and lower the taxes, and the world essentially continues as it was before. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Governments thus have very little room for manoeuvre: they can implement some small changes, which may well – to their credit – have positive effects, but they will be nowhere near good enough for ridding society of those things ultimately causing the myriad problems it faces.

The law, the justice system and financial incentives like tax cuts are only a few of a whole slew of forces that affect people's behaviour anyway. And although the government technically has power over the economy, most countries nowadays use market economies which are designed for minimal government intervention.

Society has become very complicated as a result of its attempts to apply fixes to a world that it simply assumes to be fundamentally good. It ‘fixes’ crime by applying ever more forceful policing, by installing more security cameras, by building more prisons; it ‘fixes’ health problems and accidents by building more hospitals; it ‘fixes’ rebellions and terrorism by dropping bombs; it ‘fixes’ congestion and air pollution by introducing congestion charges and making more cycle tracks; it ‘fixes’ poverty by sending development aid. In general, it aims to fix any problem, X, by increasing the budget of some sort of ‘anti-X’ department and, of course, by passing more and more laws. In contrast, the approach advocated here is one where we prevent crime, poverty, environmental degradation, rebellions and so on from ever needing to occur in the first place, and thus we are able to cut out an enormous amount of complex, redundant institutions and, thereby, any and all of the problems associated with them (e.g. torture and abuse in prisons; squandering of development aid by corrupt officials etc.).

When government implements a new law or introduces a ‘patch’ to try and change things (this is all assuming that the government has good intentions in the first place, and on this point I’m not even going to go there), they are using the ‘polluted water’ model: assuming that society is essentially good, but that it contains impurities which must be ‘removed’. They are trying to *treat* a problem – not cure it. To cure a problem *for good* requires that we not only eradicate the problem, but remove the forces that cause the problem so that it never arises again – a combination of cure and prevention, if you like. It is very clear that government and the legal system have been totally ineffective in solving problems to this degree of success. We may, if we’re lucky, remove some criminals from society, but crime keeps on happening, doesn’t it? Many people are tempted to believe that this indicates that crime is simply unsolvable – but no: recognise that crime rates have actually been increasing, and so it has been better in the past. As we have seen, we cannot attribute the problem to ‘bad people’, by saying that there just happen to be a lot more ‘bad’ people nowadays than there used to be. This explains nothing; it just demands more explanation.

Crime, like everything, has causes. If, as I have argued, it is impossible to blame *any* individual thing, then what is it that is making the greatest causal contribution to any problem of society? It must be society itself. True: the big bang was the ultimate cause (even if it wasn’t the first), but we can’t do anything about that. We *do*, however, have an enormous amount of control over society. Society must therefore not be *changed*, but completely substituted by something new, not least because of the sheer number and magnitude of the problems of which *it is the ‘most fundamental’ underlying cause*. Notice that we cannot, of course, *blame* society itself – even if it looks like that’s what I’m doing³⁷. We must instead recognise that it is an enormous underlying platform from which all other causes and compulsions arise. The causes of a problem in society form a chain of causes. This chain *does not stop* – at all – least of all does it stop before we reach *society itself*. Society itself is thus the lowest-level (so to speak) thing *and the thing over which we have the most control for the purpose of solving the most problems*. Society should hence be the most obvious target³⁸. Please re-read the last four sentences until you understand this important point.

Thus, even if you cannot appreciate that our underlying social – and in many cases that actually means economic – mechanisms are actually causing the crime, the poverty, the war, the environmental destruction, the “I can’t be bothered to get up and go to work today; surely there must be more to life than this tragic daily grind” feeling that you get, you can perhaps at least appreciate that wiping the slate clean and starting again is the most logical course of action when the problems (not just the ones in this sentence) have become this numerous, this deep and this serious.

So we have the right mindset: don’t change the world – replace it. The world doesn’t have to be this way, so we can make something new: start from scratch, experiment, and make *sure* that the causes of the problems just aren’t present. Is it hopelessly Utopian? Maybe it is: but you can at least be optimistic enough to believe that a *better* world is possible, even if the *best* world we can imagine isn’t. Even in this case, we can make the most impact by ditching our current social models and bringing in some brand new ones.

A world without cars and money and houses and nations, then, immediately evokes the idea of local, self-sufficient communities. The absence of cars suggests that people won’t be straying too far from home very often, and a complete lack of monetary system certainly makes most sense when you obtain the necessities of life yourselves. Most of the PEACE idea then springs easily

37 In part four I will return to the surrounding issues of this view.

38 The other one, again, is our mindset. The two are causally linked, however.

from there. A local, self-sufficient community is different from our towns and cities. A city is, almost by definition, an unsustainable area. The concentration of people in a city is enormous. Food, water and power simply have to be imported from outside: there just isn't enough room in a city for the arable land necessary to feed all of its inhabitants. For example, London requires an area 120 times the size of London itself^{iv} for providing all of its resources. Tokyo, the world's largest urban area, requires a land area bigger than *Japan*^v.

We have just seen how decidedly useless governments are: that's why you didn't see them mentioned in the PEACE description. It's not that government itself is to blame – it's not that any government is, in itself, a bad entity. It's just that in this social model, government is unnecessary – a redundant concept from a redundant world. People do not 'be nice to each other' just because the law rewards them for doing so (or punishes them for not doing so). We can build the causes for 'being nice to each other' right into society, in exactly the way that our current society has built the causes for many people not to be nice to each other into its workings (thus, ironically, necessitating government).

Working in PEACE

When we have money, we don't need to trust each other very much. Since we must eradicate money, we must also bring back trust. A money-less community is necessarily a group of people who trust each other. A money-less and self-sufficient community, then, is one where everyone must trust the other members, and have responsibility themselves, for the survival of the community as a whole. This provides a certain amount of pressure – a causal force – for people to work for the well-being of the community, thus making money (an incentive – that is, another kind of causal force) redundant in the first place. This pressure would not be quite the same as social pressure as it exists today: it would not make us particularly uncomfortable, precisely because *we aren't alone*. We trust the people we live with, and it's a collective effort. It's not solely down to us to guarantee survival, but at the same time, our contribution is invaluable. This sort of social mechanism supports, and is supported by, a world view in which nothing can be blamed – precisely the opposite of the world view supporting and supported by our current society.

But there is something else which provides a causal force for work, which is also something that will negate any ill effects of social pressure. If money and survival are not motivating us – because money is redundant and our survival is collectively provided by the members of our community, whom we know, trust and love – then what else will make us do things? The answer: fun. There are many things, even today, that people do for no obvious gain; they do it, so they say, just for the fun of it. People like to play – not work. So how would it be if work itself – survival itself – were motivated by the desire to have fun? And that was the key insight that made me reject notions of money entirely from the model of PEACE. People will do things for fun – and where they aren't helping with the well-being of the community, social pressure and the fun and/or social pressure of the other, trusted members of the community, will pick up the slack. For example, if you don't find hoeing potatoes fun, then either there will be someone in the community who *does*, or somewhere along the line, someone will feel compelled to do it. And if nobody does it, then potatoes may just have to be off the menu, and your community will have to find something else to grow – something they do like growing – or bring in new members, or go to other communities and see if they have a surplus of potatoes.

This raises another point. If for some reason you don't get along in your community – and it's important that you do – you can, of course, move. And if your community is having difficulties being totally self-sufficient, then other communities can help it out – these are most likely to be adjacent communities. After all, each community space has a maximum of about 200 inhabitants. There is therefore unlikely to be any appreciable physical gap or barrier between adjacent communities for miles. Adjacent communities form a larger community. You will probably know and trust many people from other communities. It isn't difficult: school teachers regularly get to know the names, faces and habits of perhaps a thousand pupils or more – and they're constantly changing, too!

Since there isn't money, you don't have to 'have a job' in the conventional sense, and so you don't 'go to work'. If you're not working for a living, then consider instead playing for a living!

More Consequences of the Lack of Intrinsic Identity

It is probably not difficult to see that there are many ways in which society would be radically different just because of the idea of PCE-lessness. For example, it would be impossible to convict someone of a crime, because their personal contribution to the act effectively amounts to nothing – but we can support this facet by dispensing with the legal system entirely, hence dispensing with prisons and courts and judges and lawyers, and supporting instead a world in which there are no causes of 'crime', and/or in which any harmful behaviour that may be leftover is easily within the power of the community, the village, or the region, to solve.

From the same basis, we can see how thanking someone, or praising them, or giving them a certificate of achievement, or even, more radically, giving them qualifications, doesn't make sense, since it denies the dependent nature of someone's successes. We do not pass exams because we are good; we draw upon a number of sources – our teachers, textbooks, cognitive faculties, discussions, practice exam papers and so on – before the event, and so our success is a contingent one. Qualifications would not be necessary in the new world anyway. But it may seem sacrilegious to dispense with praise, gratitude and celebration. We need not go that far – it is only praise, gratitude and celebration directed at an imaginary independent individual that is unfounded. Depending on the achievement, we would have to praise the village, the community, the earth or the team. Of course, such things are still dependent, and we would have to recognise this.

Obviously, identity cards and passports and the like would have little meaning, and lo and behold, the new society would have no use for them either (this is no accident; it's set up that way, just as our society is set up to support and require notions of identity). It is also tempting to suggest that we couldn't *name* people, but this would be confusing independent identity with simple identifiability. That said, in our current society, our official name constitutes an important part of our supposed independent identity, and we could de-emphasise this in a new society in many ways. Some cultures, for example, have name changing as part of their rites of passage, but we needn't necessarily go that far. In Asia, it is already common for the personal name to be written last and for the family name to be written first. It is also common in many Asian languages for the pronouns (I, you, he, she etc.) to be different depending on the relationship between the speakers and/or for there to be suffixes that must be appended to names, as well as changes to verbs, depending on this relationship, such as father to son, man to woman, stranger to stranger etc. In all cultures, it is hardly unusual for our name to be different depending on our company: a teacher called Samantha

Jones might be Mrs. Jones to her students, Samantha to her colleagues, Sam to her friends and perhaps Sammy to her parents. If we dispense with the ‘official’ name, such that none of these names is more correct than any other, then we remove another support of the independent identity.

Of course, intellectual property law could certainly not exist. Nobody could reasonably claim exclusive rights to an invention, nor to their other creative works. Now, intellectual property law *ostensibly* only exists to allow someone to make money from their work – i.e. it grants them a temporary monopoly on something. This purpose would also be obsolete. No-one would have to feel so threatened that they would have to close off access to their creativity just so that they can participate in society (which is currently equated to making money). Society would simply have no need for IP law, which is also opposed to the ideological principles of that society, and so we have again the desired effect of our new world view supporting and being supported by our new society.

TRANSITIONING TO A NEW SOCIETY

We cannot simply jump to a new society overnight. On the other hand, changing to a different social mechanism need not be as lengthy a process as you might think. After Germany’s defeat in World War Two, for example, the country was almost entirely in ruins; it had been ‘flattened’. Yet West Germany quite quickly built up its capitalist society, and East Germany also quickly built up its Communist society. After four years, the American, British and French occupation forces left the country. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a large number of countries, and hundreds of millions of people, had to change to a very different type of society. It was a difficult transition and it caused a lot of problems – but the transition itself was able to happen comparatively quickly.

The transition we are concerned with here is much bigger and more radical than changing from communism to capitalism, or from the ruins of fascism to built-up capitalism. But even so, it need not take centuries.

By ‘transition’ I mean a gradual phasing-out of the current society and a gradual phasing-in of the new. We must have this gradual process, and it must occur in stages, because it is such a big change. If we could somehow jump suddenly from today’s world to the PEACEful society I outlined above, it would either be a complete failure or a painful shock. It would be like a six-year-old child starting to wear adult clothing: she would be drowned in them. She needs to wait until she has grown up; and she needs to change the size of her clothing gradually as she gets bigger. So that is what we must do: we have to grow up, and we have to change our society to suit each stage of our growing-up. (And as I have said before, the PEACE society is but one potential change of clothes.)

If you have read the preceding essays you will know that it is our mindset – the world view of separate Individuals – which is perpetuating society as it stands. We need to give time for this mindset to change. Society, and the world view on which it is based and which it supports, must change *together*. They must both be part of the transition. I will return to this point later.

How, then, are we going to implement this gradual change-over?

It is unlikely that the entirety of society, worldwide, will undergo a single shift to a single form of society. It is far more likely that it will shift between a number of different types of society, and that

it will shift differently in different parts of the world. There are several forms of society which head in the direction of what we might call 'ideal'. These types of society ought to have a few important things in common:

- They should not be beset by the enormous structural problems of our current system.
- They should ensure that everyone's basic needs are met such that they can live a comfortable life, something which our current world has notably failed to achieve.
- They should allow people to pursue creative, inventive, academic and exploratory activities with few to no barriers.
- Ideally, they should be localised – that is, food grown, products produced, decisions made and energy generated on a local scale. The practical reason for this is that such societies are stabler: if a localised community has a problem, it doesn't spread far outside of it; in our globalised world, if one country has a problem (economically) then it doesn't take much for it to bring the whole world down with it. It is also easier to manage local communities. Beyond this, however, a localised society is much better able to care for its inhabitants; it reduces the sense of loneliness and isolation so prevalent in a world based on illusory independence. When people depend on their neighbours for basic needs, their interdependence is far more visible, and it is less easy to uphold the view of separate Individuals: remember, our society has encouraged people to believe in separate Individuals by forcing them to be 'independent' (financially and in terms of having their own house and car) and it has also played on a pre-existing belief in the Individual in order to promote this form of society. We can thus do the opposite by basing society on interdependence, and the best way to do that is to localise our lives, so that we very visibly and overtly need each other.
- If there is a monetary system, it should serve the people's needs and wants, rather than people working in servitude to money. If technology advances or if consumption goes down, then the work load would also go down.

There are plenty of forms of society that meet these criteria; we will examine five ideas, though there are also bound to be plenty of variations on them. They are in no strict order:

1. "Stable Market Localism"

Stable Market Localism is a label that I shall apply to this fairly non-radical, but nevertheless worthwhile, form of transitional society. Activity would be much more localised, with communities growing their own food and generating their own power and so on. The economic system would be much like capitalism, however (hence 'market'), but the crucial difference is that there would not be an economic growth imperative – hence 'stable'. To achieve this, each community would have its own local currency, ensuring that economic activity remains in the region. The currency would use a feature called 'demurrage', pioneered by the finance theorist Silvio Gesell. In this system, interest is not charged on loans; neither is it accrued on accounts. Instead, money decays: for example, you might lose 1% of your money every month. The effect of this is to encourage people to spend their money quickly in order to avoid paying the fee at the end of the month (called a 'circulation assurance fee'), and thus it encourages exchanges between people. Cash would deteriorate most quickly and savings accounts deteriorate most slowly or perhaps not at all – but they would never

attract interest. Thus, there is no advantage in hoarding money, and every advantage in spending it. The money from the fees goes to a local government to pay for the administration of the system and to spend on things for the public good, as though it were a tax. Income tax would not exist; instead, there would be taxes on products based on how environmentally friendly they are. Banks would not create money out of nothing when they make loans; only the government would have the power to create new money, and they would do so *in response to* a growth in goods and services. This would mean that there would be no inflation, and there would only ever be enough money in existence to handle all of the necessary exchanges.

This system is easily extended to large regions or to the globe by having a universal demurrage-based currency operating in parallel with the local currencies and only used for inter-community exchange.

Real life implementations:

The greatest success story of this economic system is the Austrian town of Wörgl during the Great Depression. Originally, 500 of the 4500 inhabitants were unemployed and around 200 families were penniless. The mayor, Unterguggenberger, knew about Silvio Gesell's theory and decided to try it out. He made a list of projects that were necessary for the welfare of the community, and workers were paid with new currency. They had to buy stamps every month for 1% of the note's value and attach them to the notes. Thus the workers endeavoured to spend their wages before the end of the month, and the money circulated very quickly: to hold money meant to have a burden. When all the mayor's projects were finished, jobs were still created very quickly. The people even wanted to pay their taxes earlier than necessary! After a year, the unemployment rate was reduced by 25%. One hundred and seventy other Austrian towns wanted to introduced the system, but in 1933 a law was passed that forbade all 'emergency currencies', and came at the behest of the central bank, whose monopoly would be threatened. After this, the unemployment in Wörgl rose to 30%^{vi}.

In recent times, there has also been a surge of interest in the localisation of the economy and the use of 'complementary' currencies. Many towns or regions have introduced a currency that is tied to their usual national currency, so that there is an exchange rate of 1:1, and then shops and businesses volunteer to accept this currency and their employees can volunteer to receive part of their wages in this currency, which is only accepted within the local area. More than thirty of these currencies are operating in Germany only, with great success^{vii}. In America in particular, the concept of 'time banking'^{viii} or Local Exchange Trading systems has become very popular; in this system, there is a record of participants in a particular community along with their skills and the services they can provide; people provide their services for no charge, but the amount of hours that they have worked is logged, and this entitles them to that quantity of hours from someone else in the community in the future. In Switzerland, there is also a highly successful complementary currency called the WIR Bank, which is designed to serve small and medium-sized businesses, and which is capable of surviving economic problems in the general economy^{ix}.

Finally there is the Transition Towns^x initiative founded in the UK, whereby citizens get together and devise a localisation plan for their town, with particular emphasis on surviving peak oil and climate change. The introduction of a local currency, the teaching of basic skills in agriculture and domestic self-sufficiency, starting community gardens, educating people about the issues, investigating ways of improving public transport, and so on, are some of their key activities, which they conduct with the support of the local authority. As of 2009 there are nearly two hundred Transition Towns initiatives in twelve countries.

2. Localised Libertarian Communism

'Libertarian communism' is often used as a synonym for anarchism, but the true sense of the term is simply communism with civil liberties (i.e. libertarian as opposed to authoritarian). If such a society were localised, and hence decentralised, it is far less likely that it could develop into an authoritarian regime, as did many actual implementations of communism. Economically and politically, this form of society could operate in many ways, but common to all of them is that everyone's contribution is viewed equally, and that there is some form of decision-making process which is to some degree centralised (but only within each community). There could be a democratic group that decides what work needs to be done and then divides this up fairly among the population; and it may or it may not decide to pay people equally for such tasks (generally, the smaller the community, the less necessary this would be).

One potential problem with a society that assigns everyone a job is that some people may end up doing things they don't really want to do, or at least something that they don't want to do for the rest of their lives. There is a solution. Each sector of work can have its own 'planner' – someone with experience in this sector – who works out everything that needs doing in his/her sphere of activity. Then, each person has to do a certain number of hours of work per day or week – and everyone would have the same quota. They would choose to spend these hours in whatever area they wanted to (so long as they had the necessary skills; if they do not, the planners can assist them), and they can split up their day's work however they wish by simply reporting to the relevant planner, who will record what has been done and how long it took. Based on this data, all of the planners can meet up to work out how much work has had to be done, and thus, how many hours each person needs to do. If a monetary system is found necessary, it can be tied quite precisely to the amount of work done.

Some technicalities would need to be worked out – such as making sure not to demand work from those who cannot reasonably do it (e.g. the ill and the elderly) – but this sort of economy seems like a good compromise between centralising all activity and making sure that everyone is engaged in activities which they find enjoyable and fulfilling, while simultaneously ensuring that everyone is treated equally and that there is no necessity for everyone to be working as much as possible.

This system would be easily extended to regions or to the globe by simply having all of the planners getting in contact and organising things at the larger scale.

3. Technocracy

In this form of society, engineers and technologists would, using a careful inventory of all available resources (in a large region if not the globe), work out how to apply technology on a large scale such that human labour is reduced as much as possible. Production, as much as possible, would be automated; and the most efficient and durable technologies would be used, but without depleting resources to a damaging extent. Society would again be divided up into sectors, with people working in whichever one matched their aptitudes and wishes. Everything produced would be free. Some supporters of technocracy would like to implement an economy called 'energy accounting', whereby all of the goods and services are enumerated according to how much energy has been used

to produce them. The total amount of energy used is then divided by the population, and each person can spend their energy allowance however they wish. Apart from this, no monetary system would be needed, although it is possible that things would be different in the initial stages of building an advanced technological society.

Central to technocracy is the idea of scientists and engineers being much better suited to the running of a technological society than anyone else, especially politicians. Most of the planning in this system would be specialised, with experts in each sector managing how the sector does what it does, but *what* the sector does is informed by the people at large, and so it need not be extremely centralised. Technocracy could potentially be implemented on any scale desired, depending on the availability of the required resources, but it is likely that it would not be so localised as the other forms of society detailed here, and it is worth bearing in mind the potential problems of this.

4. Intentional Communities

An intentional community (IC), or commune, is generally a group of people who have withdrawn from some or all of current society and who have chosen to live together in a particular way. They can take a number of forms – PEACE is an example of one form; an ashram is another. Shared ownership, and thereby shared responsibility, are central tenets of all communes, however. Some communities might build and use green technologies for efficient use of their resources and for clean, renewable energy; others might opt for a very simple, agriculture-focused lifestyle. Some might be bound together by a common spiritual approach to life, or by a common passion for a particular activity, such as art or music. In small communities, money and government are likely to be unnecessary, as trust and friendship take over as the guiding forces of society³⁹.

Real life implementations:

Hundreds exist, and interestingly, most of them are in the USA. This may be partly because well-off Americans actually have the ability to set up breakaway communities, but I also feel that it suggests something else: that the will to withdraw from modern life is strongest in the place where the pillar of ‘modernity’ – economic development – is highest. Intentional communities are not necessarily self-sufficient, and so they vary widely in their intent and workings: some are little more than cohabitation agreements and sharing of work; some are for minority religions or new age philosophies; some have advanced governmental systems, their own currency, etc.

I have not discovered a single one that meets the criteria of PEACE. And it must also be said that success of intentional communities varies. Some – notably Damanhur (Italy), Findhorn (Scotland), Auroville (India) and Twin Oaks (USA) – have been going for decades, which is in itself evidence of success. Interestingly, all four of these were founded on particular philosophical or spiritual principles, principles not altogether dissimilar from each other, and, I might add, perfectly compatible with the very particular philosophy I have described in these essays. There are a few reasons that I would give for why some communes have not worked: the failure of the community to share a common mindset or world view, and for that mindset to go at least some distance in eliminating the ego; the fact that modern society still exists all around them, and that some participation in it is still a compulsion – a burden, or barrier, I would say; lack of experience and

³⁹ The extremity with which modern life is increasingly governed by legal contracts is both a cause and a symptom of a lack of trust, and utterly consonant with a world populated by untrusting and untrustworthy Individuals.

fear of experimentation (this would be a common problem so long as community life is an exception and not a rule); and not fully basing the community's society around community-oriented principles – making it too much like society at large, perhaps.

The fact that economic development, and therewith, the world view of separate egos, is strongest in the USA, and the fact that modern society and capitalism are so pervasive and compelling in that country, are very obvious causes not just of the will of so many Americans to establish ICs, but also of the failure of many of these attempts. This again shows how both society and the mindset supporting it must evolve concurrently if we are to be successful.

5. “Bi-economic Collectivism”

Imagine a very large region, composed of localised communities that operate how they wish to – they might use one of the forms of society described above, and they might be characterised by a shared culture or occupation. Every time a product is created or a service offered for purchase by other communities, new money is created that can pay for it, and it is immediately divided up and distributed to all the communities in proportion to their population. This money is owned by the community as a whole and is not used by individual people. The community would have to organise for itself, using decision-making strategies appropriate to it, how to spend their money. Note that anything created within the community solely for ‘domestic’ use would not be monetised. A demurrage feature is also applied, such that after a certain period of time, a percentage of the community's collective pool of money is transferred to a universal pool of money. Any community can apply to take money from this universal pool, and an experienced, representative group of people would make final approvals on how the money would be allocated.

In order to ensure that communities and surrounding communities are acting in ways that are as sustainable and as localised as possible, there would be a charge for the use of the collectively owned transportation system, such that importing things from a long way away would be more expensive. This money would go straight to the global pool. (Another possible idea here is that contiguous communities would organise themselves into regions, each with their own currency, with a fee for converting currencies, such that trade within the region would be favoured.)

There are several interesting things about this approach. Firstly, it would not matter if a community were not self-sufficient, so long as there are other communities producing a surplus of basic goods, because each community can simply tap into the universal pool of funding. As a consequence of this, the ‘community’ can be defined very liberally: it could be a very small group of people in a caravan; it could be a single factory; it could be a hamlet, a village or a town; potentially, it could be a single person. Perhaps the best way of defining it would be “a free and voluntary association”. And of course, it must be noted that there is, again, only ever enough money that all goods and services that are offered for ‘export’ can be purchased: there is, of course, no pressure for growth.

This thoroughly hypothetical scenario is certainly not perfect: there might, for example, be potential problems if communities ever merged, because then the amount of money in existence would instantly decrease. One other way of organising economic activity would be to use a financial system similar to Local Exchange Trading (LET) systems. In this idea, money is created whenever a transaction occurs, such that if both communities have a balance of zero, and one of them is selling something of value x to the other, then that community ends up with x and the other ends up

with negative x . There would then be a requirement that every community periodically balances its account.

I call this sort of society ‘bi-economic’ because it is essentially anarcho-communist at the level of the community, but it is essentially like ‘Stable Market Localism’ at the larger scales. One might therefore see it is a kind of fusion of communist and capitalist approaches.

Technology

Technology has had both positive and negative effects on society. The internet has allowed unparalleled communication, has opened up vast areas of knowledge to people and has facilitated all sorts of creative collaboration; medical technology has saved countless lives; transportation networks have allowed people to see the world and have facilitated trade; our scientific knowledge has advanced greatly with the help of new technology, and so on. On the other hand, advances in military technology have made wars so much more devastating; the waste products from industry and power plants have caused enormous environmental problems; natural resources have had to be mined to a damaging extent; and our sheer dependence on modern technology has left many people extremely out of touch with the natural world and has, ironically enough, facilitated an unprecedented loss of basic, practical skills.

Our new society, including the five described above, differs from current society in a crucial respect – it is incredibly stable. It does not demand endless economic growth, and so consumption does not keep increasing; it does not feature any military conflict; and the population is stable too. As such, we would not be dependent on technology (except perhaps in a technocratic society). In most cases, then, use of technology would be an optional supplement to people’s lives, and the building of technology would be motivated by enjoyment and curiosity. Once technology were present in all the places it were desired, we would only need to have experienced people to maintain it; we would not be dependent on having ever more of it built. To improve upon existing technology, the materials of the existing technology would be recycled. In this way, we can reap the benefits of technology while minimising the potential disadvantages.

There is one possible problem, however, which is medical technology, because this has an arguably more urgent use than other forms of technology. In anarcho-communism, there is no way of making absolutely sure that certain industries exist, but it is very likely that passionate and scientifically-minded people will set up specialised communities that do continue to provide medical equipment. However, there would be no way of ensuring that there are enough communities like these to provide advanced healthcare to the whole world. But this problem may not be so bad, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there would be far fewer health problems: overconsumption would no longer occur, so neither would the associated health problems; lack of pollution will mean fewer people with respiratory diseases; lack of cars will mean fewer accidents; lesser dependence on industry will also mean fewer workplace-related accidents; eradication of absolute poverty will dramatically reduce all sorts of associated health problems, because certainly everyone will at least have access to clean water and adequate sanitation, and nobody will live in disease-ridden slums; reduction of crime will also reduce crime-related injuries; and having happier people will reduce the prevalence of psychological problems, alcoholism, drug addiction and so on, and all of their derivative issues. A healthier world will necessarily lead to healthier people. It is possible that our advanced medical technology is only actually necessary *because* of all these problems caused by society itself – but

that is not easy to prove and it is not a view that I would feel confident upholding. Even so, we obviously can't eliminate disease and accidents completely.

The second point is that, again, a stable society means that, generally speaking, once enough medical equipment is in existence – enough to ensure that everyone has the opportunity for a long and comfortable life – it then only remains to maintain it and to keep hold of the knowledge of how to operate it. Beyond maintenance, improvements to the technology would not be absolutely necessary, and so they would fall under the 'enjoyment/curiosity/compassion' motivators, which are covered by the existence of specialised communities, who distribute their creations, if for no other reason, because there is no point in holding on to surpluses of things.

A third point is that a much more localised medical system would exist. Traditional plant medicines could be harvested, and people would learn the uses of them; and people would pass on their knowledge of healthcare, first aid and so on, such that everyone in the community is equipped to deal with basic ailments. Each community would also have some very experienced medical people, who might operate a special medical wing in the community space; these people would probably have been trained in a specialised community much like a university. This localised healthcare and education system would further improve the society's ability to take care of its people.

Finally, remember that although we are aiming to replace society completely, it would not be very efficient to destroy everything and then recreate it. As such, plenty of technology already exists, and there is no reason to abandon it so long as we can use it responsibly. When the transition reaches a particular point, this technology will come into community ownership. A specialised community need not start up from scratch – it could more easily take collective possession of an existing industry and continue with its operations^{xi}, or adapt it to new purposes.

PEACE, or anarcho-communism in general, may not be able to *ensure* that particular industries exist on a large enough scale that they are universally accessible, even if those industries have the capability to help people⁴⁰, but the other four societies described above do, and this is arguably one of the main reasons why it was necessary to consider these societies: they can, reasonably comfortably, build up whatever technological infrastructure is desired, and can then easily transition to a more PEACE-like society afterwards, if that is wished. For example, libertarian communism can simply incorporate industrial tasks into its organisation, and once they are complete, it can, with no economic repercussions at all, remove them from the agenda and hence reduce everyone's workload. The use of these transitional societies may be a key aspect of the process of improving the world.

Transitioning at the Local Scale

Although PEACE aims to be a foundation society for the world, and although its full advantages would only be felt if it were widely adopted in contiguous regions, it is organised around 'community spaces' – which are effectively just like intentional communities. Thus, we can attempt to build up a PEACE-like society 'piece by piece'⁴¹ by simply establishing intentional communities. People are already doing this – although they aren't setting up exactly what PEACE envisions. Again, one prime motivator in setting up an IC is the will to withdraw from current society, and this

40 It is worth remembering that our current society also fails to achieve this.

41 Or, if you would allow me to indulge in petty puns, 'peace by peace'.

will surely come from dissatisfaction with the lifestyle it offers. As current society gets more and more prevalent, as its problems get worse and worse (as they are), then its foundational world view – that of separate egos – will become more pervasive, but also less attractive. More and more, people will become wholly dissatisfied with society, and they will want to break away from it. (Arguably, the desire to escape from the world is already borne out in many ways: vacations or retreats, playing video games, taking hallucinatory drugs, becoming a monk/nun, committing suicide etc.) If and when current society heads towards calamity, the forces that drive radical upheaval of society will become stronger.

Concurrent with the establishment of new intentional communities are movements like Transition Towns, which aim to reform and relocalise existing settlements. But simply setting up communes and localising towns and hoping that society becomes unbearable enough that people will follow suit en masse is a *laissez-faire* approach of arguable naïveté. That is why I will next consider a more controlled, directed approach as well. I believe that all approaches must be pursued concurrently.

The Political Approach

As I have already pointed out – and not to put too fine a point on it – the political system is useless. But I think it would be a shame to rule it out of the proceedings, precisely because it is in politics that most of the human ‘power’ resides in today’s world. That is, our governments and politicians wield enormous power. Of course, they only tend to use it to *perpetuate* society, and not to do anything worthwhile, but it would be a shame not at least to *try* to tap into it.

Unfortunately, this power is limited further by the fact that there is not one single political system or one government. This is a shame, because you will notice how I have spoken of ‘society’ as though there is only one – and indeed, the societies that exist in the world are so similar, and are getting more similar all the time, as old cultures are destroyed and taken over in globalisation, that it is very easy to pretend that a single society exists. This is largely because, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the whole world has been using the same economic systems – capitalism and fractional reserve banking. But despite this, there are still at least 192 separate governments, ruling their respective nations in largely similar ways.

But the transition must be global. This is not just for the noble goal of trying to supply happiness to absolutely everybody, regardless of where they hail from (though that *is*, of course, the ultimate goal here), but because the global economic system is practically dependent upon all of its participants. If, say, Germany suddenly dropped out of the global economy, I am sure there would be a crisis in the rest of the world. Likewise, if an important producer country like China dropped out, it wouldn’t be able to supply the first world with its copious products and cheap labour. The deeper problem here is that society is not operating sustainably. Around half of all countries in the world have more people in them than their land area can naturally support, which means that they are dependent upon food imports. Any disruption to this system would be catastrophic. Even countries without such large population densities, like the USA, are not actually using much of their land area for growing food, and are still importing huge numbers of products from abroad. The transition to a new society, then, must be a global one, because society is currently operating on a global scale, such that any change to one area would negatively affect the rest.

How can a political system fragmented into 192 parts be exploited for global change? Well, we

could slowly change one or two important countries and hope that the rest of the world follows suit. In addition, we could leverage the power of existing regional and international organisations such as the United Nations: they could put pressure on their members to implement a program of reformation.

But what would they need to propose? The most difficult issue is the fact that many parts of the world are simply too densely populated for self-sufficiency to be physically possible. To make all parts of the world sustainable, then, we either need to redistribute the world's population, or reduce it. Rest assured, both can be done peacefully. If they are not done peacefully, then eventually there will be sudden and devastating non-peaceful ways in which the imbalances will be corrected. More on that later. We shouldn't restrict ourselves to one approach: since there are two possible courses of action here, we should pursue both, to give the greatest chance of success. Let's look at redistributing the population.

A large number of migrations in today's world are done for *economic* reasons. Except for reasons like persecution, war and famine, people nowadays will move to where the *money* is. Where is the money? In the cities, and that's why we are seeing a mass influx of people from rural areas to cities. But as we have seen, cities are by their nature unsustainable, and so this exacerbates the population imbalance we must solve. Imagine now that you live in the PEACE society I outlined above. Why might you want to migrate? It could be because you don't like the people you're living with very much, or because you prefer the scenery in some other location. These reasons are also reasons today, but they are minor, since today they are mainly just the province of the very rich – who are the minority. In PEACE, such migrations based on personal taste would be available to just about anyone; unfortunately they are not currently relevant. A more major and pressing reason for migrating would be because the community you're in is overcrowded and is struggling to grow enough food for everyone or to receive it (as gifts) from surrounding communities. In this instance, migrations would be compelling and natural. They could even be accomplished on foot, since you would be able to stop at all the communities you find along the way, and they will surely have enough food for you. (One of the design features of a community space in PEACE is that it can accommodate up to around 200 people, but only expects an average of 150 – and this is mainly to allow for migrations.) You would continue until you find an amenable community – probably one that has few members. Thus, the PEACE society – because it is designed to be sustainable in terms of food – would naturally encourage migrations that distribute the world's population 'evenly', and what's more, they would be painless.

But we don't yet have PEACE in society – so how do we encourage migrations like this *now*? And on such a big scale as is necessary? It must be done in stages, along with many other phases of the transition. Here is a rough guide to how the transition may proceed:

1. Introduce a new currency and economic system.
 - This is a necessary first step because of how pervasive and influential the current economic system is in modern society. A currency would be introduced that uses the demurrage system described in the section on Stable Market Localism. Since we are envisaging a political approach, such a currency would operate on a national or transnational scale. Its effects would be to stabilise the economy and encourage environmental responsibility. At the same time, support would be given to towns and cities to create their own complementary currencies – i.e. currencies suited to localising their own economy without cutting them off from the rest of the economy.

The demurrage system prevents the hoarding of money and encourages people to give away their surplus money (because otherwise they will be subject to the demurrage fee at the end of the period). Especially in the case of local currencies, this has the effect of promoting a community spirit through exchanges, and it also supports investment in charitable, artistic, inventive or socially responsible endeavours. There is also a tax on products based on their environmental impact, and one aspect of this that should be implemented is a tax that is a function of the distance that a product has travelled from manufacture to consumption. These measures should encourage people to source things locally, produce things locally, and to live in places that are localised.

A more detailed guide on the technicalities and advantages of this sort of system, as well as the necessary reform of tax and land policy, is found in Margritte Kennedy's *Interest and Inflation Free Money*^{xii}.

2. Establish self-sufficient intentional communities and promote migrations.

- Intentional (ideally PEACE-like) communities should be set up – and they should be set up in places where there is a lower population density and where there is unused agricultural space. If it is a political entity that is doing this, as I am suggesting, then it should set these up in areas whose carrying capacity has not been reached. It should then promote these communities to get people to move to them. In combination with the economic reforms, we should be promoting an exodus from unsustainable cities.

3. Establish community buildings in existing settlements.

- The previous step was about setting up brand new ICs in unused land. This step is about transitioning existing settlements to PEACEful communities. Hopefully the forces are already in place for arable land in a settlement to be used for growing that settlement's food, and hopefully the population is already redistributing itself as a result of the changed economy. Now, we set up community buildings: buildings you'd expect to find in PEACE, where people sleep either in shared rooms or in small separate bedrooms, and where there is space for communal cooking and eating and other activities like learning and play. People in the area can use these facilities and can move in to the accommodation. Local, renewable power generation should also be part of this stage of the process: i.e. reducing dependence on distant power stations that use finite resources.

4. Reform education.

- In PEACE, education is a matter born partly of the curiosity of children and partly of adults simply sitting down with their children, telling them things, teaching them how to read and write and so on. This does not require schools, let alone government-set curricula, national targets and endless examination. In a political approach, it is unlikely that such radical steps would be taken; and so the compulsory education system could at least be exploited to teach children important basic skills in food production and preparation, making and repairing clothes and the like, as well as academic matters to do with ecology, the economy, the political system and so on. I would suggest that schools become a new type of community building, a setting for learning and for curiosity that would be open to adults as well.

5. Redesignate the roads.

- As life becomes more and more local, the need for personal vehicles will lessen. To support and recognise this, we would stop maintaining the roads. The roads should again become routes for *people* – not cars. It may not be necessary to ban cars; they would probably dwindle on their own. Yes, vast changes to the economy and industry would be happening at this stage – but largely on their own.

6. Redesignate the houses.

- This is perhaps the most difficult step. Ultimately it might be best to cross this bridge – the bridge of deciding what to do about people still living in separate, personal houses – when we come to it, but here are my thoughts anyway. It seems that people's personal gardens, and even the space that their houses are occupying, would be better off given over to agriculture, or at least to public access. Thus, I suggest we first of all set up schemes that encourage and facilitate the donation of superfluous household goods to community buildings (or to recycling centres or charities, as we already have in many places). At this point, if there is a tax on the production-to-consumption distance, then it should be zero for those already in a community space.

When someone has moved out of their house to go to a new community development, their previous house can be reclaimed and converted for community use itself. It might have a specific function – as accommodation or as an eating establishment, or as a place for doing particular work. When many adjacent houses have been renounced, the possibilities for redesigning them as community spaces become greater. A group of houses could be demolished and *recycled* as a community building with agricultural space. Or they could be left as-is and redesignated as public access buildings, and the gardens could be merged.

Radical though these steps already are, they will not work to great effect unless the world is acting on its problems *together*. Political unification or at least co-operation is a badly needed prerequisite for this sort of change. Globalisation is already causing a shift towards unification (or rather, uniformity, which is the down-side of globalisation – a down-side PEACE clearly avoids). Organisations such as the European Union, the United Nations, the African Union and others demonstrate that political and economic unification is a popular idea amongst power-mongers. So although some nations may be fiercely resistant to a change to their power structure, it may not be as difficult as it sounds to enact global change. And if even one reasonably powerful country were prepared to implement a transition like this, it is quite possible that others would follow suit, especially perhaps if there are demonstrations of support from people in other countries: after all, we're trying to make *better* lives for people here – a government that wants to deny people the opportunity for a better life for the sake of perpetuating its out-dated notions of territorial control is clearly going to be unpopular, and, as I've said before, any radical change to a powerful country is going to have serious effects on the rest of the world, such that pressure for co-operation could be quite high.

It is also possible that, if one country did become so radical as to implement such reforms, other countries and their media might react defensively and propagandise against it. However, the reforming country, through modern communications like the internet, can remain in touch with the rest of the world. It is for this reason that the truth is often very difficult to suppress; what seems

more important is whether people choose to believe it, and that is where the evolution of their mentality becomes significant.

World Government

You may feel slightly worried about the suggestion that a global political system would be needed – as a prerequisite to implementing a global transition. I would not be advocating *keeping* a global political system. In the context of PEACE, it would be useless, and could do more to hinder than to help. However, world government still garners more of a negative connotation than I think it deserves, thanks partly to dystopian New World Order conspiracies and partly to the horrors of imperialism. The latter is misleading because it entails the domination of one country, force or ideology on the entire world, rather than the elimination of countries altogether. If the British Empire had taken over the whole world, then yes, there would have been a world government, but it would actually have been a world Britain, since the whole world would have been dominated by and controlled from the British nation. A better world government would be one where individual nations simply cease to exist. In other words, global imperialism is about reducing the world's nations to one; my idea is about reducing the world's nations to zero.

Many people fear that if there were a world government, there would be a world culture, and everyone and everywhere would lose its uniqueness. Again, I think this fear is grounded in imperialistic concerns. For example, there are many places in the world, such as the Basque country, that assert their independence and try to break away from their parent nation on linguistic, ethnic, cultural or historical grounds. On the one hand, in the context of my essays, their clinging to illusory notions of identity is unfounded, and if they succeed in their goals of national independence then they will only exacerbate the feelings of separation and independence which have so corrupted the world today in the manner that I have described. But when we are talking about diversity – of culture, language, art and so on – then their fears of assimilation and standardisation are very real, because that is precisely what globalisation is aiming for: social homogeneity, commodification, standardisation. If globalisation *as we know it* succeeds, then there may well be a world government, but globalisation should not be as we know it if we want to preserve the diversity and hence beauty of our world and its peoples. A globalised capitalist world government, as demonised in New World Order conspiracy theories, would also not be the same as what I am envisaging, and that's because of its economic underpinnings – the strive to capitalise on the entire world in order to feed endless economic growth. Now if you imagine an ancient people who have been making statues of traditional deities in a particular way for centuries, you can see how they will fear domination by another country and then by a world government *if* it means economic domination – because their traditional methods will not be 'competitive' any more.

A proper global political system, as I envisage it, would actually do far, far more to ensuring diversity and the preservation of local methods and cultures than would the extreme fragmentation of nation states that would result if every Kosovo and Catalonia – every breakaway republic – were recognised as having national independence. This global political system would be part of the transitional phase of society. Imagine the PEACE society in development, in which the population is still not properly distributed and old lifestyles are giving way or re-adjusting themselves. The economic system would not be as we have today, one where globalisation is a necessary destructive force. So that particular problem doesn't apply. Diversity, then, would be encouraged, because culture would be continuous. There would be no economic, linguistic and legal territories. The

demise of discrete, separate, independent nations would mean the rise of a continuous, interdependent community. Ultimately I think the global political and economic systems of such a world should serve only auxiliary functions in the larger transition to a wholly money-less and government-less one. Diversity might be tempered somewhat if the government tried to exercise very fine control, probably through extreme delegation. Such delegation could be used to *assist* the transition – but control wouldn't work, largely because coerced transformations are often contrived ones, and not 'genuine'.

Summary: Scenarios of Transition

Scenario 1 – political approach: A political party rises to power⁴² in a reasonably influential country and follows the initial stages of the plan outlined above – replacing the financial system with a demurrage currency and localising its economy. At first, it's likely that other countries, as well as international organisations, would oppose this change, because of the detrimental effect on the world economy, but if society and happiness in general in the country in question are demonstrably better, then popular opinion will favour it, global and regional political institutions would be lobbied, and other places will emulate it. The society that I called Stable Market Localism (SML) will then have been created in these places. As localisation proceeds, it will eventually transpire that power has been devolved so much that the existence of the former nations is tenuous, and so the stage is set for transitioning away from SML.

Scenario 2 – non-political approach: More and more intentional communities are established and more and more places are making grass roots efforts to remodel their own localities to be less dependent on a globalised capitalist economy. Some of the intentional communities could unify, either as libertarian communist societies, or as bi-economic collectivist ones; as their size and number grew, successful ones would become models for others, and more and more would follow suit. Eventually, capitalism collapses, along with the governments who supported it, and only those communities who were adequately prepared would be left in a fit state. With unchallenged power, and with urgent cause, these people would be able to help everyone else to establish functional communities.

Both scenarios. Either way, the power of communities grows and the power of former governments dwindles. At this point, each community can organise itself how it really wants. Some may choose to use an anarcho-communist model like that of PEACE; some might use libertarian communism; some might even set up technocracies. Some communities might also organise themselves into a union that uses bi-economic collectivism, or some other system that allows them to trade and collaborate without becoming too big and centralised. In some places, people may even opt for anarcho-primitivism – returning to nomadic or hunter-gatherer lifestyles. One thing worth considering is the issue of technology that was raised earlier. Whereas the developed world can use technology that has already been developed under their former societies, the developing world is notably lacking in infrastructure. Remember that we noted that SML, libertarian communism, technocracy and bi-economic collectivism do actually lend themselves to ensuring that certain industries exist. It might therefore transpire that the developing world opts for these sorts of systems, at least until they have developed what they want to develop, such as clean transportation networks that connect the communities, computer technology and medical equipment; afterwards, it

42 Instead of rising to power, it could seize it via a revolution, but this is not something that I will specifically condone.

would be much easier for them to transition to a society like PEACE.

This would lead to a world composed of a large number of societies with their own unique situation – culturally, politically, economically, ecologically and so on. The diversity would be enormous, and people would be free to migrate to whichever community they found most amenable to them (so long as there were sufficient resources). There would be places that have a specialist focus, such as those that manufacture particular products, those that focus on art or music, or educational communities – that is, a self-sufficient community populated by academics and by people who want to learn about what those academics know about.

These would not be insular communities that shun all outside influence (as though they too are Individuals), because the manner in which they have come about means that they already have a like cause. The internet and other modern communication and transport technologies would also help to ensure that they are unified in diversity, rather than highly divergent. And societies like technocracy, bi-economic collectivism and libertarian communism lend themselves very well to the concept of having a wider level of co-operation that complements the freedom at the lower level.

Some writers might insist that one particular form of society is obviously best; they might insist on technocracy, or on communism; they might insist that technology is, or is not, used extensively in people's lives. But I do not think that it is realistic to expect a homogeneous shift to one society, on any scale. Those forms of society that I have discussed already are all very much consonant with a world view not based on separate egos. Although they may use concepts like money, they are very different forms of money, used as technical tools to manage the society effectively and not as a guiding force. But eventually, as people's world views and their lifestyles become adjusted to concepts of interdependence, the societies will change accordingly, eliminating out-dated notions, and from here on, I cannot predict exactly what will happen, for if we have got this far, then we have already succeeded. Beyond this, the world might change in ways that we can scarcely imagine.

A further suggestion, to try to ensure a more controlled approach to the implementation of such a transition, is to gather a group of experts to help – experts in agriculture, economics, politics, transportation, society, even probably things like anthropology and religion. These experts could collaborate on which forms of society adequately avoid the world's current plight and monitor which approaches are working and which are not. I call this sort of group 'CURE' (CURE is Utopia Research Experimentation). CURE would, if possible, experiment with its own intentional communities, as well as analyse and evaluate which communities are working and which aren't, and why. CURE can also participate in the lobbying of governments and governmental organisations: after their experimentation and research they can document their findings academically and report them; this is somewhat different from the sorts of psychological research that is conducted nowadays because it would base its data on larger, real life communities.

There are some organisations similar to CURE already, such as the Bioneers^{xiii} and the Club of Budapest^{xiv}.

Further Questions

Although there are many forms of society that adequately eliminate all of the problems we need to solve, I cannot think of anything other than PEACE-like societies which can successfully eliminate

all four of personal cars, houses, nations and money. But of course, these four things cannot and must not be blamed for our plight in and of themselves. There is nothing inherently evil about a car, or even about money, difficult as it may be to accept. We may dispense with *personal* cars, but what about non-personal cars? Cars left lying about the world that anyone can use if they happen upon it? And what about public transport? Personal brick-and-mortar houses may be out, but this leaves a whole slew of options about how to design dwellings. There is the question of whether small bedrooms in a big community building, or shared rooms, are better, but as usual, probably both need to be present.

In some of the forms of society mentioned, technologically advanced cities linked by green and clean public transportation networks (perhaps magnetic levitation devices) would be possible, but can such things really exist without any kind of monetary system? But with the realisation that society can be whatever we want it to be, and that we can and must design a new one from scratch, there are so many possibilities. Ultimately, we have to design, experiment and test, if we want to find out the answers to some of these questions, and if we want to find out which systems work better than which others. But we need to remember that the need for change is urgent now.

I invite you to dwell on these questions, to imagine a better world, to design one. It must not include any of the problems of current society, though, so you have to think about how crime, poverty and environmental destruction – and a great long list of other things – would be avoided. PEACE is my own answer to the question, and I have mentioned many other possibilities, but there may be others, and when the world is in such an urgent state, with so many crises building up at the same time, we must pursue as many avenues as possible.

Surely Someone Has Already Thought of This

You might be thinking - “If this plan [the political side of it] has any merit, then surely people would already be pursuing it.” Indeed, there are many people with goals very similar to the plan outlined here. Unfortunately, like me, they haven’t got very far in terms of actually *doing* anything. As I said in the introduction, not much that I say in these essays is completely original: mainly, it is my particular interpretation and the way that I have compiled and presented the ideas that are new.

Intentional communities like the ones already mentioned have already put into practice many of the ideas I have presented. There have been other examples larger than ICs, though, such as the Kibbutzim movement, a successful example of anarcho-communism that lasted for almost a century in Israel before becoming gradually assimilated into the capitalist economy at large. A similar fate befell the hippy movements of the sixties, and a very similar fate befell the anarchist societies of Spain during its Civil War (death by fascism). In these cases, the ideas and societies themselves were not at fault: but the reigning ideologies – in particular, the world views of separateness and egoism – and the reigning social formats were too strong for alternative societies to stay rooted for very long.

Early human societies, and many of the ‘primitive’ tribal societies that do survive today, were free of the attitudes of blame and selfishness, and are perhaps the most successful implementations of anarcho-communism and the gift economy^{xv}. It is possible that such forms of ‘society’ survived for more than a hundred thousand years in the pre-agricultural hunter-gatherers of Africa. There were, in those days, no conquering Europeans, intoxicated with the delusions of egoism that drove their

notions of territorial expansion, to kill them off. The destruction of native American cultures, the Aborigines and other indigenous cultures, for example, constitutes nothing less than genocide. Again, society and mentality must transform simultaneously if we want to achieve lasting, global effects.

The internet, as well as the free and libre open source software movement, and the free content movement^{xvi}, are also cited as examples of working models of anarcho-communism^{xvii}. People exchange ideas, information and creative media freely. Nowadays there is also much energy to be found in environmentalists calling for changes to our lifestyles. These are examples of many imperfect manifestations of a shift in our mentality; new age philosophies and local currencies are others. They are imperfect because they are not nearly good enough nor strong enough to make any great contribution to the inordinately vast transformation that is necessary to fix the colossal flaws of this horrifying world. However, they are very important indicators that the will for change is present and the ability to live differently is at the ready. The environmentalists telling us to be sparing with our car journeys, the new age gurus telling us to believe in our spiritual oneness, the enterprising people wanting us to pay with a local currency, the supermarkets who try to lure us to their products with promises of how they “help the environment” or “are committed to sustainability” - all of these are watered down realisations of various truisms, variously perverted and subverted to fit into a capitalist system. As remedies, they are useless. But as harbingers of a change to our way of thinking, they are good signs. They are like tiny pieces of a new jigsaw puzzle that people have managed to hammer into the very different and nearly-completed jigsaw puzzle that already exists. The fact that people have done this is heartening. But I do feel the urge to shout at them to stop with the hammering and for goodness’ sake just make the new jigsaw puzzle properly.

If we do *not* implement the transition in this way, then the consequences could either be terrible or devastating.

The End of the World

The transition entails the end of the world as we know it – but not in an apocalyptic sense. It is the end of the world, and the beginning of the new.

Let us remind ourselves why we want the world to end and a better world to take its place:

Widespread poverty and destitution; unsustainable population growth; wars continuing to wage, with all of their associated horrors, such as rape, forced conscription, disruption of food supplies and health and education systems, the creation of refugee camps with sanitary deficiencies, psychological trauma and unexploded land mines which lie dormant for years and then kill civilians^{xviii}; the existence of more than thirty thousand nuclear weapons^{xix}; malnutrition, drought and famine in many parts of the world, and a growing threat worldwide; dependence on finite resources – especially oil, which may reach its peak production very soon, coupled with a rapidly growing demand for the energy, plastics, medicines and other products manufactured from these non-renewable resources; destruction of the ozone layer; a rapid loss of biodiversity (e.g. species extinction); problems with toxic waste and nuclear waste; growth of new and powerful diseases at least partly caused by the pollution of soil, water and the atmosphere; dissatisfaction, or deep anxiety, with life, even in developed countries, exemplified by high suicide rates, the prevalence of

depression and more and more people being diagnosed with psychological problems in general; a striking and growing gap between rich and poor (with eighty percent of the world's gross domestic product belonging to about a billion people, and twenty percent left for the other five and a half billion); poor countries paying \$38 billion more each year in interest than they receive in development aid; one in three urban dwellers in the world living in slums (78% for the poorest countries), accounting for around 900 million people, coupled with unsustainable mass influxes of people into cities; increasing violent crime and terrorism and a requisite climate of fear and insecurity (coupled with similar factoids like "64% of rich Americans with an average wealth of \$38 billion felt financially insecure"); governments trying to solve violence and rebellious uprisings with warfare, with military spending rising for a sixth consecutive year in 2005, growing by 5% to \$1.04 trillion (the USA accounting for almost half of this); the G8 countries together selling over \$12 billion in arms to the poorest countries; an instability in the economic system, in which developed countries produce too little and import food and other products from poor countries who produce too much – i.e. there is extreme poverty in some places yet overconsumption in others; an ever growing gap between the richest and the poorest people^{xx}; reduction of available fresh water for over half the world population, with an estimated 2 million children dying every year for lack of clean water^{xxi}; poverty and hunger actually worsening in many countries^{xxii}; 25 million people displaced by violent conflict worldwide^{xxiii}; reduction of civil liberties, including widespread torture and other humanitarian abuses, all over the world; problems relating to overconsumption and affluent lifestyles (e.g. cars) such as obesity and a myriad other health problems; loss of community, annihilation of traditional cultures and beliefs, break-down of the family; more and more people, including women and children, forced to find unsavoury jobs just to survive in society (e.g. an estimated million Asian children working as prostitutes and an estimated 12.3 million working in slavery at any given time^{xxiv}); deforestation; acid rain; topsoil depletion; toxic substances entering soil, rivers and lakes; desertification; excessive noise causing stress and other health problems; binge drinking; the stifling of creativity implicit in intellectual property law, and the way that money acts as a barrier to creativity.

Oh, I forgot to mention global warming again⁴³. And this is by no means an exhaustive list of the problems. It is interesting that even the CIA is prepared to admit this scale of plight, for it says in the entry for 'World' on their World Factbook:

...From 2006 to 2007 growth rates slowed in all the major industrial countries except for the United Kingdom (3.1%). Analysts attribute the slowdown to uncertainties in the financial markets and lowered consumer confidence. Worldwide, nations varied widely in their growth results. Externally, the nation-state, as a bedrock economic-political institution, is steadily losing control over international flows of people, goods, funds, and technology. Internally, the central government often finds its control over resources slipping as separatist regional movements - typically based on ethnicity - gain momentum, e.g., in many of the successor states of the former Soviet Union, in the former Yugoslavia, in India, in Iraq, in Indonesia, and in Canada. Externally, the central government is losing decisionmaking powers to international bodies, notably the EU. In Western Europe, governments face the difficult political problem of channeling resources away from welfare programs in order to increase investment and strengthen incentives to seek employment. The addition of 80 million people each year to an already overcrowded globe is exacerbating the problems of pollution, desertification, underemployment, epidemics, and famine. Because of their own internal problems and

43 The point of this being that the world is in a hellish state even if climate change, or indeed any other specific issue that happens to receive a great deal of media attention, were not happening.

priorities, the industrialized countries devote insufficient resources to deal effectively with the poorer areas of the world, which, at least from an economic point of view, are becoming further marginalized. The introduction of the euro as the common currency of much of Western Europe in January 1999, while paving the way for an integrated economic powerhouse, poses economic risks because of varying levels of income and cultural and political differences among the participating nations. The terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 accentuated a growing risk to global prosperity, illustrated, for example, by the reallocation of resources away from investment to anti-terrorist programs. The opening of war in March 2003 between a US-led coalition and Iraq added new uncertainties to global economic prospects. After the initial coalition victory, the complex political difficulties and the high economic cost of establishing domestic order in Iraq became major global problems that continued through 2007.

That's just for the 'economy' section.

You might think that not all of these problems are solvable. Personally I live in the flagrantly optimistic (and perhaps somewhat naïve) belief that *all* of these problems are solvable, *if* we completely replace society with something new. We cannot solve just one problem without tackling them all; this is because society is built around the existence of all these issues, as I have explained before. This is why I tend to have nothing to say when asked, for example, "What do you think about the problems in inner city schooling?" or "What do you think should be done about violent city gangs?" because actually, nothing can be done about them while society as it is remains intact. We can only implement temporary, ineffective or marginally-effective measures which will have little effect or which will only cause more problems elsewhere. So in answer to those questions I must simply say, "I'm sorry, but the whole of society needs an overhaul if we want to sort that out". Such a lot of problems – all of them feeding on each other (I'm sure you may have thought to yourself "Hey, isn't that just a consequence of something you already mentioned?" - yes, they are all consequences and causes of each other) – can only be solved by total, radical transformation of the entire world's social systems and world views.

If we don't do this, then, as I say, the consequences will either be terrible or devastating. If they're terrible, it means that society has just got worse and worse: the trends of increasing crime and poverty and so on will just continue, until the world becomes a living hell for just about everyone. If the consequences are devastating, it means the world will collapse under the weight of its own problems, leaving us stranded in anarchic peril, not knowing what to do: hundreds of millions of people could easily starve to death.

Please let us make sure that the end of the world – whether terrible or devastating or a peaceful phasing-out – is followed by the beginning of a better one.

Part Four

The Philosophical Foundation Revisited

Summary

The boundless, continuous Universe from which everything originates is what religions call God. Thus, to believe one is separate from the Universe is to believe one is separate from God – and this belief is precisely the belief in PCE, because by believing you are a separate, blame-able individual, you separate yourself out from the cosmos, but since you are, in reality, an inseparable part of the cosmos, you actually become lonely – you actually suffer. It is in this way that separation from God (the Universe) is Hell, and this provides a philosophical basis for explaining why the world has become the way it has.

Society, or Mind?

I have said that our mind-set – our world view – supports our society, and that our society supports that world view. Indeed, the society that we have was created chiefly because of our world view, and our world view was created by society. It sounds paradoxical, but it isn't. The world changes our way of seeing things, our way of interpreting things, and this in turn causes us to change the world in the ways that we do. But ultimately there is no real separation between the world and our minds. Our minds are part of the world, and the world is part of our minds. The universe is a continuous process, which has brought about both the world and our minds together.

But if we are to achieve happiness (a mental state) and live in a better world (a state of society), then should we be focusing on our world view – on which society is built – or society – from which our world view originates? Clearly we must target both – and simultaneously, or else any change to mind will just be wiped out by a society that doesn't promote such a view, and any change to society will just be opposed by minds that don't see things that way. In this point we must appeal to the things that all our minds agree on: the will to be happy, and not suffer – the will to be able to see a *good* world.

People like B. F. Skinner, the most famous behaviourist, whom I've quoted and referenced a few times, recognised the need for society to change. But he believed that our minds were totally determined by society: he didn't recognise the two-way causal link. Similarly, Buddhism emphasises the need to eliminate the incredible suffering that living things experience in the world, but the Buddha believed that our suffering was entirely down to what went on in our minds, and that only by changing the mind could we achieve happiness. (One analogy in Buddhism is of a bare-footed person walking over rocky terrain: if you want to alleviate the pain of it, just wear sandals – don't try and smooth out the whole terrain!)

Ultimately the conflict here is perhaps the oldest one in existence: the conflict between mind and matter, between the subjective and the objective, between magic and science, between the personal and the collective – the singular and the plural. These are fundamental dualisms, and the solution was at the beginning of the section: there really is no distinction between any one of each pair. The approach advocated in the writings of, for example, Ken Wilber, is an 'integral' approach of

recognising and taking into account everything subjective and objective that is both singular and plural: the mind of one person is the singular subjective, and that's what we mean by a person's world view; the plural subjective is what we call culture, and the set of social customs, taboos, tastes and behaviours that it comprises; the singular objective is the domain of science and behaviourism; the plural objective is the domain of systems theory and of the concrete mechanisms of society. All of these must evolve together. That is how we got our society in the first place.

Freedom?

You might be thinking: "If freedom doesn't really exist, then how come all of the ideas for society that are presented here seem to be characterised to a remarkable extent on what can only be described as... freedom?"

Indeed, in the societies I have described, government would either not exist or would have only a tenuous role in actually 'governing'; people would have an unprecedented level of freedom to pursue whatever ambitions and passions that they had; civil liberties would be very high. It would not be difficult for a deterministic philosophy to advocate an authoritarian society that believes it should have as much control over people as possible, but that has not happened here. Firstly, remember that freedom and Personal Causal Efficacy are not the same. Freedom is a concept that requires qualification: freedom from what? The societies described here provide freedom from coercive government, freedom from impersonal market forces, freedom from fear, from hunger, from crime. They provide freedom from a lot of things that exercise extreme control over our lives in our current society; they do not provide freedom from *everything* – for that is impossible. In a world without PCE, causal efficacy is possessed by the Universe as a whole; it is, effectively, nature itself that determines what happens, but this is unavoidable, for we can never be free of nature (despite society's apparent urge to be so).

Although a great deal of anarchists believe in free will, and believe that governments stand in the way of our free will, it is not necessary to believe in free will to believe that governments are unnecessary. Many of the societies I have described dispense with governments – at least coercive national ones – but not on any ideological grounds, but rather because they no longer serve a purpose. Free will, or rather, PCE, refers to the ability of things to act without any recourse to anything perceived as external; one does not have to believe in this concept to believe that people should be able to lead a life that they want to lead, free from governmental and economic pressures. Neither would this be particularly individualistic, because community life, social relations and mere survival would take over as guiding principles of people's lives.

Many people are afraid of a world without free will because it seems to reduce the world and its 'spirit' and its beauty to mere mechanics. We will see in the next section how this is far from the truth.

Mythos

Religions, philosophies and scientific theories have all presented various stories about the creation, destiny and nature of the universe. Many of these stories reflect biases and delusions implicit in

concurrent changes to society (and vice versa, of course). Underlying all of them, however, is a genuine connection to something that passes as truth or reality, in so far as such words have any meaning. This has led me to consider the possibility of an overarching ‘monomyth’ that describes the creation, destiny and nature of our world – what I call the mythos of the universe. Since there are many interpretations of this, it should not be taken as ‘truth’, but as a way to intuit the universe and our lives – a way that is consistent not just with a large number of existing philosophies and observations but also with a society that seeks such things as happiness and creativity.

It ‘begins’ – although we will see how the beginning is also an ending – with a space-less time-less ‘something’ of infinite energy. This is effectively a pre-cosmic quantum vacuum as appears in some scientific theories. Space and time are meaningless at this stage, however, and so it cannot be imagined. From the quantum vacuum things can create themselves spontaneously, a phenomenon still observable today in the phenomenon of so-called virtual particles. But at this stage, this creation could only come about from the contrivance of spatial extent – a contrivance which amounts to the imagining of a relative position of something (and only a *relative* position is possible since no absolute space-time exists). This relative position would be the illusion of space and the illusion of matter at the same time, since without ‘stuff’, there is no space to speak of, since space is always relative to stuff, and without space, there could be no stuff. In other words, in order to create matter, there needs to be spatial extent to separate the different parts of the matter, since matter only exists in a relative sense.

This original quantum vacuum – unimaginable and infinitely creative – is what various cultures conceive as God/Allah/Brahman, the true Tao and so on. Its process of ‘imagining’ or ‘contriving’ relative positions where none exist is a process called ‘creating’ in Judeo-Christian terms, but is also called ‘dreaming’ in many other cultures, such as aboriginal Australians. We might therefore imagine this original entity as a ‘Mind’, and so don’t be surprised when I anthropomorphise it.

The Mind can dream up whatever it wants, but if there is no notion of time, it has in fact already dreamt up everything there is to dream of in an instant. Another problem is that should it dream of several things simultaneously, all of these things will have relative positions and will therefore begin to interfere with each other, in ways that are simply natural consequences of the fact that they have relative positions. Yet another problem is that the things that the Mind imagines cannot be viewed as objects, any more than our dreams are to be found separate from us. The Mind *is* its creations, because ultimately, there is nothing other than it in existence. The reason I call this a ‘problem’ – that the Mind does not have an objective viewpoint of its creations, as we often imagine God having, and that it experiences things in a wholly undifferentiated manner (again, with no passing of time) – is because it’s too simple. In essence, the infinite creativity of this Mind is going to waste. We could almost say that it is bored. To solve this, it would need to make its creations themselves conscious. Such localised minds, existing with relative positions, would be able to experience things from different perspectives and exercise much finer power, and more importantly, through such localisations, the Mind would be able to participate in its creations more fully.

In addition, the consequences of spatial extent and relative positions must be dealt with. It is quite possible that one such consequence is the instability of creations. Mathematically, universes with four or more dimensions are less and less stable. If the Mind had infinite dimensions, its creations would last no time at all (and this might be the reason for the primordial non-existence of time). According to mathematical formulations, a three dimensional universe is the most stable. Well, how convenient! Furthermore, the Mind is not content with small prizes. It wants to use its creativity for the most complex universe it can possibly create: maximal creativity, maximal participation in it,

maximal beauty at every level.

There is a slight caveat here. The Mind is initially a single, undifferentiated whole, and as such, there is no suffering involved in its existence. But through creation, it invents space, and space entails the separation of matter in a relative way; thus, through creation, it imagines differences within itself, and then by creating localised minds, it cuts itself off from the undifferentiated consciousness that it would otherwise have. To create complexity, it must create space and thus differentiate itself. But in so doing, it creates the possibility of suffering. To be cut off from God is Hell. But this is the only way of creating complexity. God proceeds to differentiate itself in the extreme. This differentiation can also be called birth. It entails suffering, as does birth. Hell does not last forever, however. When the suffering is over, when the fire of Hell has died down, there is death, and the death leads to the opposite of differentiation: integration, or reunification. Death and rebirth effectively happen at the same time.

Now, this process of death and rebirth is the process by which complexity (or beauty, or creativity) in the universe increases; this process occurs at all levels. After the initial birth of the universe, space itself expands. We must think of space as the surface of a balloon that is being blown up – not the space inside the balloon. It is the fabric of the balloon itself that is stretching, making everything move farther apart from everything else – literally differentiating things as space itself expands. Matter coalesces to create stars, who live steady, stable lives for quite some time before undergoing catastrophic differentiation. But in the extreme violence of such a differentiation, new complexity is created: new elements are made and planets form. Eventually we get to the stage of life, in which the single planet gives rise to many forms of life, and it is in the cycles of life that we see very literal embodiments of the processes of birth and death – differentiation and reunification which are constantly happening. But it's not a cycle that simply repeats itself, since at the completion of its cycle, the complexity or beauty and the scope for creativity has increased; it is therefore a *spiral*.

The complexity evolves to the point where humans first enter the scene. *Homo sapiens* remained in northern Africa for around a hundred thousand years before it even contemplated leaving, and during this time it left barely a trace of its existence. Life would have been simple and slow-paced and it would have been community focused. There may have been singing and dancing; later there would have been story-telling. But this is not the endpoint of the Mind's intentions, because humans are certainly capable of more. Herein we see the pattern repeating itself: the hundred thousand years (at least) of stability represents a reluctance towards differentiation and separation, because such things do entail suffering. But eventually groups of humans migrated out of Africa, and as they separated, their cultures and languages diverged, and it is only through this separation of peoples and cultures from each other and from aspects of the world that the complexity and creativity of the Universe could grow.

To this end, the delusion of separateness that I have described crept into the mindsets of certain people. This is a point that it has taken me a long time to come to terms with: that even this fundamental delusion actually has a purpose. Originally, the people with this delusion were few. Most people would not understand it - "How can we possibly be separate individuals? We depend on the sun, the soil, the animals and on each other! I am a part of the world!" In fact, opposition to the new viewpoint would have been very difficult in times when language itself did not exist. In other words, through not having language and through being technologically primitive and so on, society itself opposed the new, minority view of separateness. But then society itself began to change – to change in ways that could subtly reinforce the radical new world view. And when world views and society begin to change simultaneously, the cascade is unstoppable – until the later

reunification of course. Eventually, the delusion of intrinsic identity became the normal world view, and it was the minority – notably, but not exclusively, the spiritual teachers who founded the major religions – who were trying to push against the tide of delusion to cause the reunion. They too have their purpose, since the reunion is indeed the goal.

The delusion was there to push against the boundaries and to trigger the changes to society that would bring forth new realms of complexity and creativity. The delusion is a story. A view. As soon as it has served its purpose, it must be discarded, and this is where we are today. Humanity has developed its creative faculties, its technology, its languages and its cultures to incredible degrees. When the delusion is removed and the society that supports it is removed concurrently, the tide will shift to unification, and we will settle into a new mode of being, far more advanced, more complex and more beautiful than what the first humans had.

This is also an emulation of the natural cycle: there is an initial, catastrophic differentiation that entails suffering – a growth of separateness – which emulates the birth and growth of a child. Then there is a period of stability, and then there is death, where the matter is reincorporated into the whole (a concept which religions have taken as a reunion with God). Human society as we know it is still in its growth phase, but the immense destruction that this inevitably causes has reached such extremes that it looks as though the stable phase ought to be following soon, and that is the purpose of the ideas in these writings – to make another contribution to making sure that this happens⁴⁴.

The spirals of separation and unification, triggered by dreams and stories, characterised by suffering on the one hand, and beauty on the other, constitute a fractal universe, for they occur at all scales and at all levels. This finds concord in religions, philosophies and science (although all of them have been variously corrupted by the delusion at various stages)^{xxv}.

Ultimately we can see that the entire universe should undergo a parallel reunification – a Big Crunch to mirror the Big Bang – but we cannot say how and when this will happen. And the spiral will continue, with the creation of a new universe. The spiral has been going on for eternity, insofar as it is meaningful to speak of it. We can only imagine what universes existed before our own – presumably at lower levels of complexity – and what will exist next. We could say that the Mind has been experimenting. We could say that it has been playing – that exercising its unparalleled creativity is a form of play, whose goal is to maximise the complexity and the beauty of its ‘creations’ or ‘dreams’.

Science and Religion

It is strange, perhaps ironic, that throughout the main text I feel I may have distanced, even angered, both the very scientific thinkers among you – who perhaps feel that the ideas would stand in the way of technological progress – and the very religious – who may find a soulless, freedom-less universe objectionable. This is strange because, especially of late, science and religion have been in a kind of opposition, so that ideas which anger both camps (possibly) are unusual. This is by no means intentional, and it is imperative that all parties are satisfied, because of the universal nature of our problems.

First, religion. It is easy to notice numerous similarities between the various world religions (and

44 Indeed, if this *is* a natural process, then it should be impossible to fail.

related philosophies), such as nearly identical moral laws, very similar practices such as praying and meditation, similar beliefs and even curious similarities in their stories, parables and mythologies, some of which we have covered in the mythos above. Since the religions emerged at very different times, in very different places, from very different people, it seems logical to conclude that they were all founded on very similar principles.

Suppose, then, that a mystic – a thinker, a philosopher – comes to a realisation: the realisation that the world is an undifferentiated and continuous process, and that belief in blame-able Individuals causes selfishness, greed, hatred and thereupon, suffering. This is a very difficult concept to grasp: the thousands of words you have (presumably) just read on the subject, I feel, are still not quite adequate to convey the concept concisely, precisely and accurately. The mystic needs a way of simplifying it to make it understandable and manageable for the masses. A neat set of non-selfish moral laws, like not hurting things or lying, is an obvious dumbing-down tactic. The undifferentiated, continuous universe can be characterised as an all-powerful God, from which everything originates. The lack of blame-able Individuals can be re-interpreted as the encouragement of unconditional forgiveness.

Of course, religions do differ. And this is precisely because of the differences in when, where and by whom the religion was founded, as well as how the founder interpreted and how they came upon this realisation, and how they then chose to present it to the masses. The action of time and the imperfect passing down of stories and ideas and the inaccuracy and ambiguity of language as well as probably various mistranslations then only add to the problem. But the main differences between religions are reflections of the fact that each founder was living in a very different society: Jesus' first-century Israel, Mohammed's seventh-century Arabia, Guru Nanak's fifteenth-century India, and so on, are all quite different. What was acceptable to the people of those times and places – and the ideology that they were previously locked in to – differ considerably. Yet the core principles and practices of religions still demonstrate the remarkable similarities which betray a common source idea.

If you are familiar with Eastern philosophies, you will probably find very clear parallels between them and the ideas presented in this essay. Indeed, the belief in the Individual is expressed by the Sanskrit word avidya, meaning delusion, in Hinduism and Buddhism; anatta is the truth of the non-existence of the Individual in Buddhism; anicca is the truth of impermanence. All Eastern philosophies view the universe as a continuous, and in fact cyclical, process, in which death means rebirth. The second noble truth of Buddhism is that the suffering in the world is caused by attachment and constant, insatiable cravings, rooted in an ignorance of anatta⁴⁵. But the Abrahamic religions also show signs of similar ideas: avidya could be likened to the Christian idea of Original Sin; anatta carries over in the form of the promotion of selfless acts and charity (zakat in Islam for example).

Belief in the personal soul, which is even present in Hinduism, may be a misinterpretation of the continuity of the universe. Or it may be just an explanatory device for demonstrating rebirth, albeit a misleading one.

As for science, remember that most or all of the arguments used in this and the previous essay have been scientific or at least compatible with all scientific findings. Remember that the Newtonian world view of impersonal masses with definite properties interacting in an absolute, uncaring

⁴⁵ I also happen to think that economic growth and the endless cycle of greed and longing for more fodder for the Individual that supports it is a direct manifestation of what they call samsara – the cycle of suffering.

backdrop of space was thoroughly debunked in the twentieth century by quantum physics and relativity, although by that time, Newtonian physics and the other findings that led to it and succeeded it had already had a considerable effect on producing the corresponding world view of a universe of Individuals, which drives modern society. The implication that we should halt technological, and therewith to a large extent scientific, progress because it is becoming unsustainable, should be reinterpreted: if the use of ‘resources’ is becoming so fast and careless that the natural world, which we live in, is threatened, and such that we will actually run out of these resources, then clearly the technological progress cannot continue. In other words, if our practices are unsustainable then it would be physically impossible to continue these practices – this ‘progress’ – anyway.

Scientific and technological advancement, which aren’t strictly necessary just for humans to survive, should be done out of our curiosity, our creativity – as a form of play, even. Ironically and controversially, many of the ills of the world that technology and science claim to be aiming to fix are caused by the conditions of modern life and our modern lifestyles in the first place, but there are indeed diseases and disabilities which cause much physical suffering and which science and medicine have proven very good at treating. So curiosity, creativity and compassion should be the motivators of science and technology – not an economic growth imperative. And this could also resolve many of the ethical dilemmas that come with science and technology. Morality goes out of the window when money has to be made and spent just so that the delicate financial system that drives the world doesn’t collapse and leave everyone in overcrowded developed countries unable to survive because there’s no power for their labour-saving technology and they don’t know how to make their own food because of how specialised their job is – a job they’re only doing because the new goods and services were needed for the same purpose of preventing this same disaster.

And so, it is not the conclusions of science which are in question here – not at all. It is not technology in and of itself which is an enemy here, either. It is merely the society in which it exists. The deluded world view, of separate Individuals, has corrupted society, and this has corrupted all of the beauty and wonder there ever was in science, technology, religion, philosophy and the natural world.

A less pessimistic point, which you may have noticed, is that there is here the implication that science and religion, at bottom, actually agree with each other, and this is borne out more specifically in the mythos that I described.

Reconciliation

If you’re wondering whether the mythos that I described is really ‘true’, and whether or not I actually believe in it, then you may have missed the point. This mythos is a story, and like other stories, it exists to induce a way of thinking, or to encourage a change to the dominant society. This neither makes it objectively true nor objectively false. It is worth ‘believing in it’ in so far as it is a useful way of intuiting what is going on with the universe. Though it is by no means perfect, I particularly like it because of how, with apparently little effort, it gives a coherent reason for *why*, ultimately, society is plagued with its suffering; it gives an explanation for evil, but it is also highly optimistic; and it ties together both scientific and religious arguments without being overcomplicated.

After all, if God is supposed to be benevolent, why would He allow such suffering to exist? A

common answer is to allow for free will; but in the mythos here, it is because suffering is an unavoidable sensation that localised points of God's consciousness experience when separation occurs, and separation must occur in order to raise the complexity and thereby the beauty of the universe. God's benevolence is therefore not in question. And as for free will, if anyone actually *does* possess it, it can only possibly be God Himself. In this mythos, there is no distinction between God and the Universe, and it is the Universe, almost by definition, that has ultimate causal power over everything – it is the 'most fundamental' of all the causes. Thus, we can see that it may not be the free will of *individuals* that creates evil in the world, which God for some reason approves of, but rather the freedom of God Himself to wield creativity and strive for a stable, beautiful world. If this mythos has any truth to it, our lack of PCE should not worry us, for we are inseparable parts of a Universe that directs itself – that is, everything – in a holistic and benevolent manner. And if this is indeed the case, we can easily see how painful it must be to deny our integration in the Universe – to assert our own personal, independent causal power – and that is the much deeper reason for why our society's obsession with doing this has turned it into a living hell.

It is my fervent hope that we are soon headed for the stable and more beautiful phase of the evolution of the Universe. And those who believe in it, regardless of their precise religious, spiritual or scientific affiliations, or lack thereof, exist to enact this transition. They are the drivers of the 'reunification' stage of the cycle, who, interestingly, have just as much purpose in the evolution of a beautiful world as those drivers of the destructive, differentiation stage of the process, but now, we might say, the process of differentiation has almost run its course in this system.

You might still be thinking - "This is all hippy stuff. It's spiritual nonsense, and only crazy people have delusions of making the world a better place. For one thing, the governments will always oppose it." And if you are thinking that, then you are basically correct, but what does it matter if it is hippy stuff; what does it matter if it has been tried before and has failed; what does it matter if we are crazy; and what does it matter if the governments do oppose it? Shall we forego the potential for happiness on such pessimistic grounds?

In their cynicism, many people distance themselves from anything sounding too radical, too compassionate or too spiritual. But there are two sides to this work: there is the practical side, the technical side – the fact that we urgently need, for quite visible and scientifically verifiable reasons, to change our mode of operation; lots of complex and technical issues need to be worked out; in a sense, it's a disease that needs to be cured. Many people are only interested in this side of things, and that is fine: at bottom, we are solving a problem. But to be concerned with this aspect alone would be to neglect the vast and profound spiritual dimension. Living things are suffering. Religious people might say that collectively, we have drifted about as far from God as we possibly can be. Things are so bad, it's almost as though we have all collectively entered Hell⁴⁶, but I think that deep down, even cynics want the world to be better – they just don't believe it can be. Everyone wants to be happy. Everyone shares this same desire, and this, more than anything, binds us together.

One does not have to be religious to tap into this 'spiritual' dimension. But many people shun it, believing it to be incompatible with the material world of science. The world view I have presented, with no discrete identity or freedom, may sound non-spiritual, but it is not, neither does this make it non-scientific. It is strange to believe that matter and spirit are somehow incompatible: in the way I

46 If you don't believe that things are really *that* bad, then you probably haven't researched it much; most people haven't, obviously. It is to save my own sanity, more than anything else, that I have chosen only to scratch the surface of the unutterable wrongness and corruption that pervades almost all aspects of our society.

have explained it, in which the Universe itself is what religious people call God, they are essentially the same thing.

You may wonder who I am to be writing on such enormous issues. I don't believe that one should need to be qualified to make the kind of broad account that I have – to condense so many issues into such little space. Indeed, when I first wrote this document I was only just finishing my further education, but this alone can by no means discredit the work. After all, what might one expect the author to be qualified in, given that I have covered topics relevant to physics, philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, economics *and* politics? The education system is (regrettably in my opinion) simply too specialised to qualify somebody in all of these fields.

I invite you to contact me with any comments, questions, suggestions and offers of help, so long as they are genuinely constructive and sincere.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Matthew Tisot for his invaluable feedback.

Justin Morgan.

feedback@corfizz.com

Appendix

Similar Works and Suggested Reading

The Ascent of Humanity by Charles Eisenstein is not so much suggested reading as required reading. It is a work that is vast not just in page count but in scope and insight. One can almost feel Eisenstein's energy and conviction firing at one from the pages. In extreme detail he describes how the view of the discrete and separate ego came to exist in the first place, how it has corrupted society and how we can counter it. He spends much more time discussing exactly how the ego-conception has evolved, and how it currently fuels the enormous crises that the world currently faces. His views go much further and he tackles many other controversial topics with unparalleled optimism and fearlessness. See www.ascentofhumanity.com

The Chaos Point by Ervin László is one of many works arguing that society is on the brink of total collapse due to innumerable structural flaws and insane practices. I have avoided this particular approach in my essays because I think that the claim of total societal collapse would add another layer of controversy to my already radical thinking, and because I realise that the need to transform the world is independent of whether or not the world as we know it is about to cave in. We should be able to recognise that our world needs radical upheaval even without claims of apocalypse, no matter how justifiable. Anyway, László describes the trends which could lead the world to ruin with the help of disturbing statistics and an army of like-minded thinkers who echo his views in a lengthy appendix. Unlike a lot of works that believe in the coming of global destruction, *The Chaos Point* talks about a lot more than just environmental problems. He recognises *all* of the numerous problems with the world – economic, social, ecological, cultural, political etc. (as does Eisenstein above, I might add). Additionally, he believes that 'breakdown' is not the only option open to the world. Like Eisenstein and I, he thinks the world can undergo the needed transition to a better world, which he calls 'breakthrough'. Also look at the work of The Club of Budapest, which László founded. Their documents are inspiring: <http://www.clubofbudapest.org/wvc-declaration.php>

The Venus Project, www.thevenusproject.com is a creation of Jacque Fresco – an engineer and architect not just of physical things, but also of new social forms, and therefore, my kind of architect. He envisions a new world of peace and prosperity in which the old thinking of the current world is irrelevant. His vision is of a technological utopia, something which may or may not be compatible with my own PEACE vision, but it is one example at least of how technological paradise could be obtained without the destruction and devastation our current world entails, and I think it is important for people to realise this possibility, to counter the notion that transforming the world would mean going back to more primitive ways of life. It needn't. In fact, I envision that PEACE could allow both to co-exist: simple lifestyles and green, techno-communities alike.

Walden Two by B. F. Skinner is a novel, and not a particularly enthralling one. But Skinner, a

psychologist, didn't write it to entertain; he wrote it to demonstrate how the use of his theory of behaviourism could be used to build a new kind of society. The theory behind this is explained in, for example, his *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. It should be obvious how his ideas tie in to my own. Regardless of whether his radical behaviourism is a good system, his attitude was more or less spot on (but see my comments in the main text): society creates the causes for how people act, and we can change society such that the innumerable ills of the world can be solved. Skinner knew this even in the 1940s, but this is no reason to believe that he was wrong.

Small is Beautiful and other works by E. F. Schumacher are insightful accounts of where our economics has failed us. Schumacher advocates 'intermediate scale' communities using intermediate scale technology – quite compatible indeed with the conception of intentional communities presented here.

These five works are almost exactly aligned with my own thinking. They recognise that the world is (and here I wrestle with the urge to lift the veil of politeness) *flawed*, recognise that something *can* be done about it, and recognise that total replacement of society is the only plausible answer.

A particularly promising movement to keep an eye on is that of Transition Towns, which began in the UK with the goal of transforming a particular region in the direction of local self-sufficiency, similar to the idea of community space that I present. It does come from a slightly different perspective, however, with an emphasis on preparing for the consequences of peak oil and climate change. But there is recognition of the desirability of this transformation, as well as its inevitability. Transition Towns has implemented local currencies with great success, and has garnered some support from local authorities. *The Transition Handbook* by Rob Hopkins is an excellent primer on the implementation of localisation transitions, and Hopkins himself has been engaging himself in these processes with great success in Totnes, Devon.

Worldchanging, edited by Alex Steffen, is a big book of many of those little, imperfect measures that I was talking about in the main text – ways that positive thinking about changing the world for the better have infiltrated reality, mostly in order to set up green initiatives. This work doesn't have quite the attitude that you'll find above; there seems to be an implication that society and the economy must remain intact, while sustainability, community and happiness somehow evolve on top, coalescing out of various green innovations. But as a compendium of how the world *can* be in better shape, and how people are already pioneering the technical means to implement various well-meaning changes, it's probably the best you'll find.

<http://directory.ic.org> has a searchable directory of intentional communities, as does the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) at <http://ecovillage.org/>

- i See the proposals of Jacque Fresco's 'resource-based economy', http://www.thevenusproject.com/resource_eco.htm as part of his 'Venus Project'.
- ii Not being educated in agriculture, I actually have no idea how much work it would be necessary for each person to do in order for all the members of a community space to be fed. The CIA World Factbook states that 40.2% of the world labour force of 3.131 billion people is engaged in agriculture. In other words, about 19% of the world population is providing all the world's food. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>. Of course, the matter is complicated by the fact that so many people in LEDCs are undernourished, but this is at least to some extent counteracted by the practices in developed countries: overconsumption of food as well as extreme wastage of food, and many aspects of agriculture that are very inefficient. There is also the consideration that the society I am describing may or may not be able to use the modern industrial methods of food production which are currently used to increase yields. And finally, there is the current madness in the world's population distributions. According to the same source, 27% of the world is under the age of 15 and 8% is 65 or over, and the population is growing in such a way that LEDCs have very young populations and MEDCs have very old populations. If the new society that we must develop is able to stop population growth and even out the age distribution, then sustainability becomes much easier. Notice, however, that there is an emphasis here on people only doing work that is actually needed for the survival of the community – a principle impossible in the current economic system, in which there needs to be as much work to do as possible so that everyone can have a job and earn as much money as they can.
- iii In truth, I do not know the extent to which certain technologies and industries are 'necessary', neither do I know the extent to which they – necessary or otherwise – would be pursued by people who have no economic or governmental incentive. If it were demonstrated experimentally that the lack of a certain technology, industry or chemical product were truly having a negative impact on health or happiness and that nobody were engaged in producing it, then I would suggest, as a last resort, that a group of people could invent an economic system purely for the purpose of providing it. If it's something like an X-ray machine, then once it's been made, the job is done; maintenance is easy, so long as someone skilled lives nearby. Thus, the temporary economic system can be immediately dissolved. As soon as a money system has served its purpose, it should be abandoned.
- iv http://www.cef.ie/environmental_info/eco_footprints.php
- v <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/tokyo-fprint.html>
- vi *Alternativen zur Förderung der regionalen Wirtschaftsentwicklung* by Linda Kochmann: <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~roehrigw/diplomarbeiten/kochmann/>
- vii <http://www.regiogeld.de>
- viii <http://www.timebanks.org/> or <http://www.timebanking.org/> for the UK
- ix http://www.lietaer.com/images/Stodder_Reciprocal_Exchange.pdf
- x <http://transitiontowns.org> and <http://transitionculture.org>
- xi One example of this sort of thing is happening in Argentina as a result of the economic problems: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/may/11/argentina.rorycarroll>
- xii <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/roehrigw/kennedy/english/>
- xiii <http://www.bioneers.org>
- xiv <http://www.clubofbudapest.org>
- xv Noted in, for example, the work of Marshall Sahlins, e.g. *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*, 2008. Other examples are given by John Zerzan in *Future Primitive*. An interesting example of a 'primitive' people that is still living is that of the Pirahã in Brazil, who have few personal possessions, a culture of sharing and an inability to understand money; see for example the studies made by Daniel Everett.
- xvi Exemplified and supported by Creative Commons, <http://www.creativecommons.org>
- xvii http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue3_12/barbrook/
- xviii See chapter 5 of the UNDP HDR 2005, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2005/>
- xix Most of the facts in this paragraph come from a similar, but shorter, 'inventory of ways in which the world is broken' in Ervin László's book, *Chaos Point*.
- xx The Stanford Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/pdfs/rc28/conference_2008/p273.pdf See also footnote 25 in Part Two.
- xxi The United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2006.
- xxii See for example the UNDP Human Development Report Summary 2003.
- xxiii UNDP HDR 2005 page 160.
- xxiv The International Labor Organization, as cited at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world->

factbook/docs/notesanddefs.html#2196

xxvOf note, it fits in well with the psychological model of Clare Graves, refined by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan in their Spiral Dynamics, which I learnt of in Ken Wilber's book *A Theory of Everything*.