

Eugene Halton. 2019. "Indigenous Bodies, Civilized Selves, and the Escape from the Earth." In *Indigenous Sustainable Wisdom: First-Nation Know-how for Global Flourishing*. Edited by Darcia Narvaez, Four Arrows, Eugene Halton, Brian Collier, and Georges Enderle. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Synopsis of Indigenous Bodies, Civilized Selves, and the Escape from the Earth **Eugene Halton**

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Synopsis of Sections:

From the Philosophy of the Earth to Escape from the Earth: Up, Up, and Away!

I will show throughout this chapter that history needs to be understood as involving a problematic interplay between the long-term legacy of human evolution, still tempered into the human body today, and the shorter-term heritage of civilization from its beginnings to the present. Each of us lives in a tension between our indigenous bodies and our civilized selves, between *the philosophy of the earth* and that which I characterize as "*the philosophy of escape from the earth*." The standard story of civilization is one of linear upward progress, a story that I will contest with an alternative philosophy of history that I have developed, picturing history instead as a set of concentric circles.

One simple way to view the gap between first ways foragers and civilized and modern ways is through the opposed worldviews of *the philosophy of the earth* versus *the philosophy of escape from the earth*. Humans evolved into being over a couple of million years as foragers under the guidance of *the philosophy of the earth*. We evolved into humanity through the close attunement to circumambient life, an outlook folklorist and philosopher John Stuart-Glennie characterized as *panzoonism*, belief in the living powers of all things. In this sense we are children of the earth, forged from the combined practical and reverential attunement to it, as I put it in coining the term *sustainable wisdom* in 2013:

Though we may think ourselves modern, we retain Pleistocene bodies ... and Pleistocene needs, bodied into being over our longer two million year evolution. What Shepard termed "the sacred game," the dramatic interplay of predator and prey, reminds us of that older evolutionary story, wherein [humanity] emerges into being wide-eyed in wonder at circumambient life, a child of the earth foraging for edible, sensible, thinkable, and sustainable wisdom.¹

¹ See Eugene Halton, "Planet of the Degenerate Monkeys," in *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy*, ed. John Huss (Chicago, IL: Open Court Press, 2013), 279–292. See also my "Eden Inverted: On the Wild Self and the Contraction of Consciousness," *The Trumpeter* 23, no. 3 (2007): 45–77. For a discussion of panzoonism, see my *From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution: John Stuart-Glennie, Karl Jaspers, and a New Understanding of the Idea* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). In that book I resurrect the forgotten philosophy of history of folklorist John Stuart-Glennie, who was the first to develop a theory of the period of roughly 600 BCE when many of the world religions still present came into being from across different civilizations, a period he termed the moral

Through the domestication of plants and animals, and through permanent settlements progressively over the past ten thousand years, the rise of agriculture and civilization marked a radical transition toward a new outlook, one built on an idea of controlling nature toward human ends, but which I term *the philosophy of escape from the earth...*

The Contractions of Mind

Most philosophies of history since the Enlightenment assume progress. Hegel's dialectical model takes an idea as eventually giving rise to a counter-position, and a third "synthesis" as providing a resolution of those contrasts and a new, more comprehensive phase. Comte also took a three-part view of history, understanding it as a progression from an original theological or fictitious state, to a more abstract outlook of a metaphysical state, to a third and final scientific or positive state. I have devised a new philosophy of history with a different three-part approach to understanding human development, taking civilization not as a linear advance of progress, but rather as a progress in precision, paradoxically counteracted by a regression in mind: history as a contraction of mind...

I describe three stages in the contraction of mind: 1) *animate mind* as the evolved outlook of foraging life; 2) *anthropocentric mind* as representing the contracting transformation of consciousness produced by agriculturally-based civilization; 3) *mechanico-centric mind* as representing a further contraction from human-centered to a machine-centered consciousness, produced by the rise of modern civilization and the mechanical scientific worldview. Hence, this progressive contraction is marked by a turn from original practical and reverential attunement to the living earth in hunting and gathering societies, or *animate mind*, to a narrower focus of *anthropocentric mind* beginning with the development of early civilizations, where the human element became central and the wild devalued. And it moves to an even more narrow focus of *mechanico-centric mind*, expanding out of late medieval Europe and the development of modern science, where the machine became model of the ultimate, the objectivist filter through which the world is to be understood and made to fit. Far from controlling nature, humans have been consuming it in an unsustainable Malthusian-like trajectory whose limits are being reached in our time...

The Mechanical Worldview as Contraction

If civilization was the advent of anthropocentric mind, contracted from immersion in the wild habitat to a domesticated one marked by the figure of the human in buildings and beliefs, then the modern world represents a new phase of contracted consciousness, that of "mechanico-centric mind" as dominant worldview, and centered in the rational mechanical elements of mind and projections which represented them, beginning with the clock. Though manifest originally in the largely human bureaucratic machine that was civilization, a new configuration re-appeared in the late medieval period that would heighten the centrality of the non-human elements of the machine, exhibited first in the invention of the mechanical clock...

Max Weber suggests in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that it was as if with the advent of the reformation the virtue of ascetic rationality within the doors of

revolution. Stuart-Glennie distinguished his theory of panzoonism from E. B. Tyler's theory of animism, claiming that Tyler's term was misleading, implying a spirit inhabiting a thing from without, rather than the living power inherent in things themselves.

monastery had been let loose, and everyone had to practice ascetic rationality. Taking off from that metaphor, we might say that it was the mechanical clock and its discipline of uniform rational precision that exited those monastery walls...

Conclusion: Refinding the Philosophy of the Earth

Far from the “up, up, and away” story of unfettered progress, also known as our unsustainable world, the loss of the touch of the earth was part of *the progressive confinement of mind*. Unfettered progress has come with devastating consequences to *panzoa* (all life), increasingly manifest in dwindling wildlife, acidifying oceans, dying corals, shrinking resources of water, and many other indicators as we careen into a cascading manifestation of suicidal unsustainability.

In the modern era, technology has been invoked as a partner in the rise of democracy and means to new freedom and leisure, yet it was also a collaborator in genocidal imperialism, industrial dehumanization, modern totalitarianism, and capitalizing global biocide. The myth of the machine today, specifically of its scientific and technological institutions and ideological elements, is that its continued expansion will automatically be good for humanity, and that its continued development will inherently provide solutions, as though on their own rather than as projections of human purposes and human prejudices...

Optimistic Epilogue

So let's be optimistic, like the legendary climatologist and former NASA scientist James Lovelock, the founder of “the Gaia hypothesis,” the scientific idea that the earth is a self-regulating homeostatic system. When asked over 50 years ago, in 1965, by Shell Oil Company what the year 2000 would be like, he broke from the optimistic “up, up, and away” futuristic accounts of technology given by other experts and told Shell that the environment “will be worsening then to such an extent that it will seriously affect their business.” His concerns with the environment have continued into the present. In an interview in 2008, he predicted things would be getting very bad in 20 years (by 2028): ...