

A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF CIVILIZATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Civilized culture is killing the planet. At present, we are facing the largest extinction event in 65 million years and the cause, according to most scholars, is “patently” human. My question, however, is not whether the mass destruction of the biosphere is the result of an unfortunate and misguided particularity within civilization (e.g., over consumption, driving too much, etc.), but rather: Is it the case that civilization, by its very nature, entails the destruction of the natural world and of both human and non-human communities?

In the vein of a fairly recent movement in scholarship, my answer is a resounding “yes.” Taking a cue from one the foremost voices of this recent movement, Derrick Jensen, I’ll briefly trace the genesis and justification of the following premise: “Civilization is not and can never be sustainable,” as well as the philosophical fallout of what this may mean for us today. Employing the thought and method of certain strands of phenomenology, I first examine how it is that civilization appears in our collective everydayness and how certain movements within this appearance give way to its replication, continuation, and (largely) unquestioned legitimacy. From there, I move to incorporate the insight of Theodor Adorno and other critical theorists, uncovering the finer ideological strands that tie us to civilization. From the arguments outlined by Jensen, John Zerzan, and others, I make a case for the active rejection and dismantling of civilization, ultimately attempting to articulate a philosophically based strategy of resistance.

DEDICATION

To my parents, John and Martha Brinson,

My friends and their incredible patience;

Especially, Steve, Jordan, Bradford, Erik, Kate, and Stella;

Sammy, and;

Alexandros Grigoropoulos, the child whose murder by Greek police sparked the incendiary possibility of insurrection in the hearts of those who wish to move from protest to resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

When Heidegger set upon the question of the meaning of Being, what had seemed so obvious and tacitly understood was, instead, obscured, concealed, and utterly baffling upon further reflection. “Being” had assumed a very specific place within certain currents of western philosophy, though its mass proliferation into the everyday discourse of philosopher and layman alike hid any sort of explicit meaning or understanding of “Being.” Whether or not we may agree with the analysis of Heidegger on the question of Being, the point is that in the exposure of what seems so obvious and given we are thrust into a space of re-evaluation, reflection, and thinking.

In the “everyday” of our experience there is a kind of pre-reflective and assumed “pseudo-totality” that constitutes a particular sense of normality. As such, interruptions in this perceived order tend to uncover and make-noticed what had previously been unquestioned or unnoticed, that is, a kind of “gap” in the field that, in a sense, surrounds intentionality is simultaneously noticed and “filled.” But this filling does not necessarily require one to reconstruct the perceived “totality” of what is experienced (and thus return to “normality”), rather, it reveals aspects about the everyday (or beyond) and imparts, if only slightly, a “deeper” and more fundamental understanding of being-in-the-world. A revealing of this sort marks a departure from the taken-for-granted and, by way of reflection, a critical re-assessment of what is known as the everyday.

An account of what rests in the obviousness of the everyday—what is so obvious as to escape reflection—requires a particular kind of “revealing.” The scope of this text is to take to task the phenomenon of civilization, revealing its structure, meaning, and being and what this

may mean for us today. From its origins in domestication and systematized division of labor roughly 10,000 years ago, civilization has increasingly held and defined a dominant place in the conceptual and ideological enframing of everyday individual/collective experience.¹ Civilization, though, is not a mere thing within or on a horizon of perception, but rather, it may in part be understood as a fundamental hermeneutical lens through which our interpretation and understanding is decisively shaped (Though, dialectically, civilization-as-interpretative lens gains its thrust, as will argue, through physical, material instantiation.). As such, it has enjoyed a relatively categorical and unqualified justification founded in its seemingly pre-reflective givenness in experience—a givenness largely constituted by civilization's appearance as an inevitable, ahistorical totality. Furthermore, in this tacit justification a normative weight is attached to the project of civilization. This weight is made explicit in ideologically informed constructions of concepts like “progress,” “advancement” (“advanced”), “developed,” and even “nature” to some extent. Each of these concepts has, in some way, been appropriated to bolster, expand, and lend moral legitimacy to the overall project of civilization. Though, as some have remarked, “it is a weird and peculiar world where the growing destruction of the earth is touted as ‘progress,’ an advance for humanity.”² It is in the midst of this well documented destruction of the earth that I find reason to rethink *everything* about the way we humans live.

My question, however, is not whether the mass destruction of the biosphere is the result of an unfortunate and misguided particularity within civilization (e.g., over consumption, driving too much, etc.), but rather: Is it the case that civilization, through its very nature, entails the

¹ My use of Heidegger's “enframing,” here, is intentional and shall be expounded in Chapter 3.

² David Brown, introduction to *Elements of Refusal*, by John Zerzan, 2nd rev. ed. (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1999), 9.

destruction of the natural world and of both human and non-human communities? In the vein of a fairly recent movement in scholarship, my answer is a resounding “yes.” Taking a cue from one the foremost voices of this recent movement, Derrick Jensen, I’ll briefly trace the genesis and justification of the following premise: “Civilization is not and can never be sustainable.”³

Figuring out what this may mean for those of us situated in civilization is, like civilization, complex. It requires assuming, in part, the structure and conventions of that which is to be critiqued, that is, a kind of immanent critique not dissimilar to that employed by the Frankfurt School. In affirming civilization’s inherent unsustainability—and not just its inability to sustain itself but also, and correlatively, its active and systematic destruction of the possibility for the sustaining of other non-civilized communities (ecosystems, indigenous peoples, etc.)—an entire other strata of questions and new directions is opened up. By exploring our experiential relationship with civilization, that is, the attempt to understand civilization as it effects and shapes our being-in-the-world, we can, perhaps, chart these new directions.

In order to move closer to that understanding, I begin Chapter One by offering a brief survey of the contemporary global ecological crisis. In this way, the reader may be reminded of what exactly is at stake. I hesitated to include descriptions of the earth’s destruction, but as the ideas in other sections developed it became apparent that the physical, biological reality of our situation (though repeated and widespread amongst varying media contingents) is often, in a sense, forgotten. In our everyday life we hear news of extinction, catastrophic global warming, and so forth, though because it does not seem to intrude on our everyday, the reports and the real yet seemingly abstract and distant contents of the reports, are replaced by other, ostensibly more

³ Derrick Jensen, *Endgame* (2 Vols. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), ix.

immediate concerns (e.g., going to work, feeding oneself or ones children, or obsessing over the most recent celebrity breakup). Moving towards the close of the first chapter, I pose the question regarding the sustainability of civilization as such.

Chapter Two addresses this question through a historical accounting of sorts. Here, the concern has less to do with contemporary case studies and events and, instead, moves to clarify what exactly is meant by “civilization.” Drawing from the insight of philosophers (Plato, Adorno and Horkheimer, et al.), anthropologists (Jared Diamond, Stanley Diamond, Marshall Sahlins, and Lewis Mumford), and contemporary critics (John Zerzan, Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith, et al.) I outline a few commensurable working definitions of civilization. By uncovering some of the foundational elements that, historically, have come to define what we call civilization, an adequate framework for delving into the finer philosophical points of this dominant way of being is set.

Chapters Three and Four are the heart, philosophically, of argumentation and serve as the grounds for the proposed *active* rejection and dismantling of civilization in Chapter 5. I begin Chapter Three by coming back to Chapter One and asking, in a phenomenological sense, how is it that we experience, perceive, and interpret the events described in Chapter One. Throughout the chapter, this questioning develops into the more specific concern regarding civilization. A treatment of civilization-as-given, as well as the origins of such givenness, substantiates the closing injections of criticism through a loose phenomenological standpoint.

Moving to Chapter Four, a discussion of experience continues, though it is now primarily in the hands of the Frankfurt school and critical theory in general. Despite the majority of theorists on either the phenomenological side or the side of critical theory holding a kind of

general disagreement, I have found similarities that I think, given the possibility of future analyses, hold much promise.⁴ Principally, the section is guided by the work of Theodor Adorno. From Adorno’s “negative dialectics,” the analysis first moves into a critique of civilized ideology, equivalency, and the fallout from these concepts via Adorno’s notion of “nonidentity.” From there, I turn to Heidegger and his work on technology, examining this defining element of civilization, albeit in a critical light. At the end of Chapter Four I return to a few foundational elements of civilization mentioned in Chapter Two, namely domestication and the division of labor. Through the analysis of Zerzan, Adorno and Horkheimer, and Paul Shepard I argue that these founding elements are largely, if not entirely, to blame for the current crises—social inequality, ecological devastation, and the general alienation of human-to-human and human-to-nonhuman.

The conclusion, suggested throughout the text, is a general rejection of civilization. This rejection, however, is not merely (passively) philosophical. Instead, I argue, this rejection necessarily implies *active* resistance. Examining the general attitude and scope of contemporary environmentalism, its tendency to reinforce some of the same ideological mechanisms of those who destroy the planet, I offer, through the voices of a movement known as “Deep Green Resistance,” a philosophical grounding for a strategy of resistance.

This text, no doubt, will prove controversial. It’s status as “philosophical” may even be in question given the breadth of anthropological and sociological analysis as well as the influence from a traditionally “non-academic” source like Derrick Jensen. But it is precisely the work of

⁴ There has recently been a few texts pairing the philosophies of Heidegger and Adorno, but the “field” seems extremely small. The most in depth analysis I’ve seen comes from a collection of essays edited by Iain Macdonald (University of Montreal) and Krzysztof Ziarek (University of Buffalo). Iain Macdonald, Krzysztof Ziarek, eds. *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008.

folks like Jensen who, in rendering some of these “heavier” philosophical ideas accessible to general public, strikes a blow at the institutionalized inequality present in so many echelons of academia. The attitude of those who would take seriously the conclusions of this work, or the work of Zerzan, Jensen, and others, is, as I argue in my conclusion, purely pragmatic. It is a concern, by any means, to ensure that the planet is not destroyed at the hands of man.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The recent surge of interest in matters of ecology, environment, nature, call it what you will, has largely been the result of reactions to certain scientific facts and observations. While I don't wish to go too in-depth in particular facts, I will, for the sake of adding some context, mention a few problems that have been instrumental in my even beginning this work. My reasons for including a treatment of scientific facts regarding the state of the planet serve to illustrate what is also a central point in the overall argument. Namely, even as these facts have been widely available, distributed, and mentioned many times elsewhere, their weight and importance tends to escape us in everyday life. Thus, including just a few facts here, then showing the implications (philosophical and otherwise) further on, the reader may be reminded of the material-biological reality and direction of the biosphere. To note, I will not be including a direct discussion on global warming. Though, in my eyes, this is certainly one of the direst threats facing life on this planet, the context I am presenting can do well without discussing it. Notwithstanding, there is still an amazing contingency of individuals who deny the prospects of anthropogenic climate change and I do not wish to be immediately written off by this strange group of people.⁵

To begin, it has been noted by a number of prominent paleontologists, biologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and others, that the world is currently in the throws of its sixth

⁵ Indeed, just a few days ago (March 15, 2011) the U.S. House Republicans voted against a measure that would acknowledge the prospect of human-induced climate change, effectively denying the possibility altogether. This follows days after a house panel voted to strip the E.P.A. of its ability to regulate greenhouse gases. Lucy Madison, "House Republicans Reject Climate Change Science," *CBS News*, March 16, 2011, accessed March 26, 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20043909-503544.html.

“mass-extinction”—the largest extinction in 65 million years. This “sixth extinction,” aptly named by some as the “Anthropocene” extinction,⁶ has its epochal inertia somewhere around 11,000 years ago, i.e., the beginning of agriculture and thus, in part, civilization. Another defining thrust is given at the onset of the industrial revolution. However, many have cited the beginning of this extinction not with the advent of civilization, but with the arrival of humans as such in certain lands (i.e., the “Pleistocene Overkill Hypothesis”). But this hypothesis, while still debated in many circles, often betrays its scientific conclusions by making unwarranted conjectures into the philosophical realm.⁷ The stark difference between the first period of extinction and the second, which I think we may classify as the lead-in and coming-to-be of industrialism, rests in the fact that activity by primitive (non-civilized) humans in the first could never have been capable of putting the entire planet at risk. Humans in the second period, however, are entirely capable of destroying most everything on this planet and, for some reason or another, seem to be actualizing this capability (albeit, perhaps unknowingly).⁸ This is not to suggest a difference in cognitive abilities between primitive and contemporary humans (indeed,

⁶ See also, “Holocene” or “Holocene-Anthropocene”

⁷ The camp promoting the theory regarding overhunting has (despite a great deal of evidence), in recent times, been challenged on a number of grounds and I entertain it here because, often, it serves as some odd argument that condemns the nature of agentive human beings (or agency itself) as necessarily disposed to destroy their surroundings; hence, a justification for current human and nonhuman exploitation. This, of course, disavows the prior 188,000 years of the human species. Of additional interest, the timeline of human arrival (the so-called “clovis” culture) on the North American continent, which was thought to coincide with the extinction of large megafauna, has been cast into doubt by recent findings in Texas. Researchers from Texas A&M, based on the finding of tools that 1) are markedly different than those used by the clovis people and 2) pre-date the assumed arrival by at least 2500 years. Alok Jha, “Humans Arrive in North America 2,500 Years Earlier Than Thought,” *The Guardian*, March 24, 2011, accessed March 26, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/mar/24/humans-north-america-stone-tools>.

⁸ Derrick Jensen, working from the arguments made by Eugene S. Hunn (University of Washington, professor of anthropology), makes a similar argument, ironically concluding that “if you truly believe that humans are ‘thoroughly superior predators’ who always will destroy their habitat (and the habitat of others), and if you believe that the civilized are more destructive because, well, the civilized are better at everything... and if you care the slightest about the natural world, you need to get rid of all humans before they destroy it all.” Jensen, *Engage*, 541-544.

there were virtually no differences in regards to cognitive capacity⁹), but rather a difference in technique, scope, and ways of perceiving and understanding the world. Additionally, the behavioral trend for modern humans, according to many scholars, solidified somewhere around 50,000 years ago.¹⁰ This, coupled with other evidence, begs the question from those who would argue for humans “inherently destructive nature”: How do you account for the other 99 percent of *Homo Sapien Sapien*’s history and our not so distant relatives ability to manage a way of living that was wholly sustainable, that is, not predicated on mass destruction?

In any case, by understanding some of the implications of human activity—of civilization—in the contemporary world, we can begin to grasp the urgency and importance of the topic of this text. Moreover, we may be reminded of what is at stake.

Niles Eldredge, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History and professor of biology at the City University of New York, classifies the current mass extinction as a “patently human-caused event” that is reducible to four major factors: “transformation of the landscape,” “overexploitation of species,” “pollution,” and “the introduction of alien species.”¹¹

While the exact meaning of these factors has, at times, been disputed, it gives a general understanding of what is happening. Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson has put the rate of extinction

⁹ Thomas Wynn and Fredric Coolidge, “Working Memory, its Executive Functions, and the Emergence of Modern Thinking,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 15, no. 1 (2005): 5-26. Here, Wynn and Coolidge propose that the origin of modern thinking arises somewhere between 60,000 and 130,000 years ago with modifications, of course, coming into play only recently with language and increasingly abstract thought. We can also pull from recent archaeological evidence of *Homo Erectus*’ apparent “seafaring capabilities” 700,000 to 800,000 years ago to close the popularized gap between “stupid caveman” and refined, modern “civilized” folks. Jon M. Erlandson, “Anatomically Modern Humans, Maritime Voyaging, and the Pleistocene Colonization of The Americas,” in *The first Americans: the Pleistocene colonization of the New World*, ed. Nina G. Jablonski, (San Francisco, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 68.

¹⁰ Christopher Henshilwood and Curtis W. Marean, “The Origin of Modern Human Behavior,” *Current Anthropology* 44, no. 5 (2003): 627-651.

¹¹ Niles Eldredge, “The Sixth-Extinction,” June 2001, ActionBioscience (American Institute for Biological Sciences) <http://www.actionbioscience.org/newfrontiers/eldredge2.html>.

at around 27,000 species per year.¹² Eldredge, similarly, has argued that the rate of species extinction is currently hovering around 30,000 per year.¹³ If we consider the background “normal” extinction rate, calculated via fossil records, to be around one species per year for every million species that exists, then the current levels of extinction are astronomically alarming.¹⁴ And, again, to put it in other terms, according to a report issued by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (An association consisting of around 1,000 organizations and “thousands of participating scientists”), “One in four mammal species, one in eight bird species and one in three amphibian species” are currently threatened with extinction.¹⁵

The point to be illustrated here is two-fold. First, the factors that lead to the extinction of species are based on the “cutting off,” if you will, of one or more of three fundamental necessities that sustain most life on this planet. Though before listing these three factors I will ask that the reader think about the following question: What is, in fact, required for life to be sustained on this planet? The response to this question may be relevant for the following chapter, gauging our somewhat immediate pre-reflective understandings of the surrounding world. If the answers were “food, clothing, and shelter” then there is, in regards to the next step I will make, a point to be made about the way we humans see ourselves and relate to the biological-reality of

¹² Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (New York, NY: Harvard University Press and W.W. Norton, 1999), 280.

¹³ Niles Eldredge, *Life in the Balance: Humanity and the Biodiversity Crisis* (New York, NY: Nevrumont, 1998), vii.

¹⁴ To note, even species lucky enough to have been considered at risk for extinction face worse prospects than originally thought. According to University of Colorado study in 2008, the risk of many of these species has been greatly underestimated because of a mathematical error in the method used to determine such rates. Some species are now thought to be facing up to a “100-fold” increase in risk. (University of Colorado at Boulder. *Species Extinction Threat Underestimated Due To Math Glitch*. ScienceDaily 3 July 2008. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/07/080702132238.htm>.)

¹⁵ *Species Extinction Threat Underestimated Due To Math Glitch*. ScienceDaily 3 July 2008. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/07/080702132238.htm>.

the world. “Food, clothing, and shelter,” while necessary in some sense (especially for humans), are not exactly the primary objects of focus. We need to consider the matter in a more fundamental sense. What is it that makes possible food, clothing, and shelter? My answer to this question, and the answers of others seeking ways of how we may respond to the above facts of extinction and human activity, I think, may be based around the following factors: clean air, clean water, and a healthy landbase, i.e., one that is capable of sustaining dynamic and biodiverse forms of life.

Secondly, it follows that when one or more of these factors are removed or rendered inaccessible by or to particular forms of life (also remembering that all three are heavily interrelated), then those forms of life are then subject to being destroyed. They cannot survive without all three. It is also reasonable, then, to suppose that humans are not exempt from these processes, that is, we are not exempt from extinction.

An indicator of just how rapid humans are extinguishing the means to life would be the rate and scale of deforestation on any particular continent. However, the facts seem much more shocking when given in global terms. Overall, the world is losing, on average, 13 million hectares (a bit over 32 million acres) of forest each year.¹⁶ In even more shocking terms, that equates to around 36 football fields of forest being slashed down every minute. By some accounts, “The United States has lost 95 percent of its original forests, Nigeria 99 percent. Countries with less than 10 percent of their old-growth forests left by the end of the twentieth century include Argentina, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, and Sweden. Countries

¹⁶ Manny Mogato, “U.N. Calls on Asian nations to end Deforestation.” *Reuters*, Ed. Carmel Crimmins and Roger Crabb. June 20, 2008 <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSMAN18800220080620> [accessed December 31, 2010].

such as Australia, Honduras, Malaysia, and Zaire had lost about 80 percent.”¹⁷ Given that over 80% of the world's biodiversity may be found in forests, the destruction of these habitats should be, at the least, alarming (we could also add that these sorts of forests are vital for the overall atmospheric health of the planet as well).¹⁸ And to note, simply replanting tracts of forest, while certainly better than nothing, can never replace the biodiversity that had been built up over hundreds and, sometimes thousands, of years.

The chief cause and instigator in the *mass* de-nuding of forests across the globe may be attributed to any section of industrial or post-industrial society. Whether it's clearing forests for further “development,” turning the forest into the 2X4 framing for shabby suburban houses, land for cattle and other livestock, or simply paper and cardboard, the persistent, ever increasing, clearing of every land is absolutely unsustainable. As Jared Diamond has observed, “The process through which past societies have undermined themselves by damaging their environments fall into eight categories,” the first, he explains, being “deforestation and habitat destruction.”¹⁹ However, the question remains: Is mass deforestation not the ultimate consequence of civilization as such? Certainly, we find in one of civilization's oldest texts, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a detailed account of deforestation. Gilgamesh, along with his companion, Enkidu, pursues “Humbaba the terrible” (a god who is the guardian of the cedar forest) declaring that he shall kill the guardian and “cut down the cedar.”²⁰

¹⁷ Terry Glavin, *The Sixth Extinction: Journeys Among the Lost and Left Behind* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 202.

¹⁸ For a more in depth look at deforestation, I would suggest Derrick Jensen and George Draffen's “Strangely Like War: The Global Assault on Forests.” Chelsea Green: White River junction, VT. 2003.

¹⁹ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

²⁰ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 20.

By any means conceived, can the success of civilization be predicated on anything but the cutting down of large tracts of forest? One may reply by citing the use of other more durable products, metals, plastics, and the like, as taking the place timber. However, these industries—the mining and drilling industries—bring an entirely new host of destructive possibilities and actualities. Deforestation is only a stop along the way of most mines.

Given the above, the question must be asked, “Does civilization, by its nature, require the theoretically infinite consumption, and thus, destruction, of the biosphere?” or simply, “Is, or can, civilization ever be sustainable?” If it can be shown that, on a theoretical level, civilization—even in its most ideal sense—requires and is predicated on the mass destruction of the natural world, then the conclusion of abandonment—of abandoning the project of civilization—is undeniable. However, simply showing that this is the invariable consequence or “ends” of civilization is clearly not enough. If our experience tells us otherwise, if the “threat” of destruction that comes with maintaining civilization is not apparent, then the task would be to analyze the structures of our experience in order to uncover and illuminate the truth of our situation. However, I should first explain what is meant by “civilization.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS MEANT BY CIVILIZATION?²¹

There are a number of definitions that have been given throughout the course of history, most of which include an implicit justification for the concept they are defining. So rather than unquestioningly assume these definitions, I think it may be appropriate to first explore the etymological genesis of the term “civilization” and from there move to a few definitions whose premises, I believe, are demonstrably accurate.

The term “civilization” can be traced through a number of words back to the latin word *civitatis*, meaning “city-state” (with this term finding its conceptual root in the greek *polis*). There are a few things to be noted here. First, there is the implied reference to some notion of a “city,” which further implies a society whose way of life is characterized, fundamentally, by its sedentariness. Secondly, is a reference to a state-based form of governance. Within both of these, there are a number of generative qualities to be mentioned that make up what we know as civilization. However, before getting to those qualities, I would like to offer up a few definitions. The first is that given by famed utilitarian philosopher John Stewart Mill. While he claims to not conflate it with a kind of “improvement,” Mill defines civilization in terms of what he perceives as its opposite, “savagery” or “rudeness or barbarism.” “In savage life,” he declares, “there is no commerce, no manufactures, no agriculture, or next to none: a country rich in the fruits of agriculture: commerce, and manufactures, we call civilized.” He goes on to declare that “In savage communities each person shifts for himself; except in war (and even then very

²¹ This section is largely a summation of the thoughts and definitions given by a diverse set of thinkers. As such, it should not be taken as “original” research, per se. Rather, it may serve to signpost and provide clarity to the rest of the paper and the constant reference to civilization.

imperfectly), we seldom see any joint operation carried on by the union of many; nor do savages, in general, find much pleasure in each other's society."²² While Mill's account of what is other than civilization, i.e., "savagery, has been thoroughly discredited amongst contemporary anthropologists, it still remains as a dominant cultural narrative. And despite his meager hedging, Mill clearly privileges and implicitly invokes a kind of "improvement" when describing the civilized. I think a more appropriate (and perhaps less problematic) definition is offered by author and environmental activist Derrick Jensen. Civilization, he explains, can be understood as "a complex of stories, institutions, and artifacts—that both leads to and emerges from the growth of cities...with cities being defined...as people living more or less permanently in one place in densities high enough to require the routine importation of food and other necessities of life."²³ Jensen goes on to explain that the establishment of the city and state-based governance—the city-state—means the "funneling of resources" from "an increasingly exploited countryside" back to the "center's" of the city-state.²⁴

Nearly 2400 years ago Plato acknowledged the same pattern in his discussion of the ideal "polis" in *The Republic*. A city, Plato argues, "will be more or less impossible to locate...in a place where it won't need imports."²⁵ Thus, through either trade or brute force, the materials and means to life must be extracted from surrounding areas.²⁶ The inevitable consequence here, then,

²² John Stuart Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* Vol. 1 (London: Savill and Edwards, 1860) 161-162, http://books.google.com/books?id=klwLAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA411&dq=john+stewart+mill+dissertations+and+discussions&hl=en&ei=XvawTYvwIIf40gHt_rCKCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²³ Jensen, *Endgame*, 17.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 370e.

²⁶ As a side note, the typical German translation for "grocer" or "grocery" store, *Lebensmittel*, is, literally, "means to life. (Not that German necessarily has much to do with Plato, unless, of course you ask Heidegger, in which case

is the running into (to put it lightly) of certain people who perhaps will not be willing to have their way of life pillaged for the sake of another (I would argue that the same could be said about nonhuman animals as well). Throughout the latter part of Book II, Plato describes the fundamental intricacies of a city, noting the necessity of divisions of labor, growth of the population, and in the appropriation of “outside” resources, the “origin of war.”²⁷ The “origin of war,” based on the *need* for imported resources was clear enough to Plato, but I think Jensen does a great job in fleshing out what, exactly, this means. He argues:

Traditional communities do not often voluntarily give up or sell the resources on which their communities are based until their communities have been destroyed. They also do not willingly allow their landbases to be damaged so that other resources—gold, oil, and so on—can be extracted. It follows that those who want the resources will do what they can to destroy traditional communities.²⁸

But it is the division of labor that, by many accounts, is one of the defining and fundamental elements of civilization. I recently came across an old text published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in which (then) dean of the College of Engineering at Cornell University, Dexter S. Kimball, describes the division of labor as “The great fundamental principle of all civilizations.” He goes on to add that civilization is *only* made possible with the “wide use of division of labor,” and is one of the “methods that has enabled the

German and Greek are apparently the two most likely languages in which Being may be made apparent via language.)

²⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 373e.

²⁸ Jensen, *Endgame*, “Premise Two,” ix. Also, see Chapter Three on “The Genesis of Civilization’s Being Given.” This argument will be returned to in Chapter 3 under “The Genesis of Civilizations Being Given.”

engineer to subdue nature and build up civilization” (To note, this text was transcribed from a speech Kimball gave at a dinner in honor of Herbert Hoover.).²⁹

I think the definition of the division of labor offered by philosopher John Zerzan is to the point and can serve as a reference throughout the rest of this text: In two parts, he describes the division of labor as, “1. The breakdown into specific, circumscribed tasks for maximum efficiency of output which constitutes manufacture [sic]; cardinal aspect of production. 2. The fragmenting or reduction of human activity into separated toil that is the practical root of alienation; that basic specialization which makes civilization appear and develop.”³⁰ This organizing principle was primary in ancient Sumeria, Greece, and Egypt, and remains the case in contemporary civilized society.

There are, however, a few more fundamental features of civilization. One of the most striking is that of agriculture. Agriculture, coupled with and made possible by the division labor, is, argues Zerzan, “the indispensable basis of civilization.”³¹ The general opinion within anthropological research, it seems, also concedes that agriculture or “domestication” plays a leading role in the formation of “civilization.” Jared Diamond has proposed that agriculture likely took hold as human communities sought to mitigate the decrease of available food sources in times of drought. However, it would seem that the necessity of this transition may not be a kind of absolute rule, given the account of Richard Lee, Professor emeritus of anthropology at

²⁹ Dexter S. Kimball, “The American Engineering Council,” in *American Association for the Advancement of Science* 53 no. 1358 (1921): 399-402, accessed March 26, 2011, http://books.google.com/books?id=Cj0LAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA73&dq=science+dexter+s.+kimball&hl=en&ei=GHOOTejRJJe3tweY6MGjDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CEsQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=science%20dexter%20s.%20kimball&f=false.

³⁰ John Zerzan, *Future Primitive: and Other Essays* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1994), 147. Granted, this definition includes the normative pairing of the division of labor with the “practical root of alienation,” and is thus not entirely appropriate for this section. However, it is to be kept in mind as we approach Chapter Four.

³¹ John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*, 2nd rev. ed. (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1999), 73.

the University of Toronto. Zerzan recalls Lee's observation of “the Hazda of Tanzania, Filipino Tasaday, !Kung of Botswana, [and] the Kalahari Desert !Kung San...[as] easily surviving a serious, several years' drought while neighboring farmers starved.”³² Granted, these examples are hedged with circumstances whose specifics may or may not be similar to those roughly 10,000 years ago, they do add reason to reconsider the “inevitability” of agriculture.

In any case, the shift to agriculture gave way to the further and more rigid stratification of society through the opening up of productionism in areas specific to an, more or less, urban setting. Here, then, also is the advent of an institutionalized economy. This, perhaps, is what led Lewis Mumford to call agriculture the beginning of “manufactured scarcity.”³³ As people became increasingly specialized in particular production tasks, the ability or know-how to gather or grow food for oneself diminished (not to mention the fact that those within cities are often too concerned with particular jobs or other niceties of city life) and a deep reliance was formed on those who could grow food or owned land to grow food. Thus, immediate relations of unequal power begin to arise between those who own the means of production, i.e., land, and those who do not.³⁴ This analysis, while typical of any Marxist or anarchist, is clear enough, but there are additional implications to the “adoption” of civilized life.

From Jensen's definition of civilization, feminist Lierre Keith adds depth; explaining that the need to import resources essentially means that resources in one particular area, presumably the immediate area of, and surrounding, the city, have been used up—that there is no longer the

³² Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*, 75.

³³ Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power*, 321.

³⁴ I should point out here that, historically, there is not one civilization that has arisen without institutional slavery (to my knowledge). Also, in contrast to the descriptions of most non-civilized people groups who appear to have no formalized system of ownership (granted, certain territorial domains), the advent of an agrarian society solidified the notion that one, somehow, can “own” land. Perhaps it was a cascading effect dawned by the domestication of animals and then, radically, other people.

possibility, for whatever reason (soil depletion, species loss, erosion, “development,” etc.), for a particular tract of land to support existing populations.³⁵

Historically, civilizations have predicated their existence along the lines of infinite expansion, going from one place to the next extracting resources in each location until its no longer possible. There exists, in this process, a kind of “macro-thinking” when considering civilization. That is, the purveyors of civilization go on extracting various resources as if these resources are of infinite abundance. However, there is simultaneously the “micro-thought” of scarcity (mentioned by Mumford) which provides the basis of exchange within civilization—an institutionalized economics, necessarily backed (as even Plato admitted) by a class of specialized soldiers, police, and the like. Scarcity is seen as a reality along the same lines of expansion. How is it, then, that these two seemingly incompatible ways of thinking about life have shaped the state of the world today? I can only reckon it as a strange kind of cognitive dissonance, but perhaps there are other reasons.

Though it is certainly the case, insofar as the being of civilization requires continued growth predicated, necessarily, within a theoretical, abstract, and illusory “infinite,” that the finite, material, Real, biological world that it is situated within, will continue to be ravished. The present scale at which civilizations continue to expand and consume has had, as I tried to show in Chapter One, disastrous effects on the planets inhabitants. But again, how is it possible to conceive a system principled by an infinite, though resting within the finite? Ronnie Hawkins has framed the situation in the following way by paralleling the “economic rationality” alluded to

³⁵ Lierre Keith and Cameron Murphey, speaking in Eugene, Oregon on March 4, 2011 at the “Public Interest Environmental Law Conference.” Video of this presentation can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMRXT4Rg1p0> (accessed March 26, 2011).

above, with the economist's favorite template—a set of Cartesian axes. And just as Descartes privileged the disembodied cogito, so too did his mathematics. Hawkins argues, that “built into this conceptual model is the assumption that, theoretically, any process can proceed on and on and on forever, and that any quantity can grow and grow and grow forever. When this type of thinking is applied to the real world, it implies that new subdivisions may expand outward from population centers indefinitely....” She goes on to add that it is precisely this “Cartesian illusion of infinitude [that] undergirds the rationalist belief in perpetual economic ‘growth,’” and the odd pairing of this theory with “the actual world without much difficulty.”³⁶ To get at an understanding of how the world perhaps has come to be seen in this light, we turn now to the insight of philosophy, though particularly, a philosophy that is known for its focus on our actual, embodied, being-in-the-world.

³⁶ Ronnie Hawkins, “Extending Plumwood’s Critique of Rationalism Through Imagery and Metaphor,” *Ethics and the Environment* vol. 14, no. 2. (2009): 108.

CHAPTER THREE: PHENOMENOLOGY OF CIVILIZATION

In much of the current discourse surrounding “environmental issues,” there is the tendency to suggest that we may somehow stave off environmental catastrophe—that ecological crisis has not yet arrived and there is still time to avert such crisis. This discourse assumes, 1) that crisis is not yet present, 2) that the collective “we” (inclusive of governing and economic structures) can, in fact, change to “avert” this crisis, and 3) that the present standards and ways of being, which may be generally named as “civilized,” can continue with a slight tweaking, i.e., that they are compatible with a sustainable future.³⁷ The task of the following sections is to examine in greater detail these assumptions, especially regarding the compatibility of civilization and a sustainable future. The first section will explore how it is that we experience, interpret, and perceive ecological crisis (relative to the descriptions outlined in Chapter One) as presented via the natural sciences. I will also examine the functioning, formation, and maintenance of certain interpretative structures. Following that, I will attempt to outline that which is actually “doing” the forming and maintaining, paying special attention to the notion of the modes of givenness of things in the world as well what the notion of “world” may entail. Here, further insight into assumption (1) will be given by examining some of the ontological suppositions held by the dominant view. As a method heralding a “radical” understanding of experience, perception, and

³⁷ To clarify, I would like to delineate between two commensurable ways of considering this “crisis.” The first, given Chapter One, situates us within an already existing crisis, i.e., mass extinction. The second, however, acknowledges that if the current devastation is not halted, then the prospect of a complete biospheric collapse is virtually unavoidable.

thinking, elements from the various strata of the phenomenological tradition will be given precedence throughout this chapter.

My assumption in pursuing a phenomenological understanding of civilization is two-fold. First, the above mentioned facts—especially those concerning extinction—pose a fundamental threat not only to particular “beings,” but also to any notion of Being that is not largely determined, ordered, and administered. At stake is the limiting of the possibility of Being’s unhindered and free “presencing” through and within beings. In a more direct sense, the context in which beings may actually *be*—where they are open and free from being ordered into, as Heidegger put it, “standing reserve”—is being systematically destroyed. Accordingly, the question, if one accepts the premise that sentient life needs clean air, clean water, and a thriving land-base, and further, that the built-imperative for the continual expansion of civilization threatens these three elements, is “Why do we continue to allow such activity to take place?” Part of the reason, I think, is that many of us have no clue that such destruction is even happening (or that it’s on such enormous scale so as to be experientially invisible), nor do we consider that this destruction might actually be a requisite part of civilization as such.

Indeed, as many have pointed out, “From the point of view of everyday life, all threats are not equal.”³⁸ We do not necessarily react to the threat of being mugged the same way we react to the threat of the destruction of the oceans. We perceive them differently. Different threats speak to us—our being-in-the-world—in different ways. Though the problem, again, is why some of the direst threats facing human and nonhuman communities are ignored or even sometimes denied outright and, when or if they are acknowledged, that there is often a complete aversion to

³⁸ Kirkman, *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy*. p. 20.

pressing the historical genesis of such threats. “The problem” treads the waters of a phenomenological/existential ontology: Is our understanding of “Being” one that is so impoverished as to discount the possibility of non-being? Civilizations, as I noted earlier, assume a model of infinite growth and, in doing so, are much like the individual who, being so (unknowingly) caught up in the everyday—what Heidegger would call “inauthentic being”—forgets or “flees” the prospects of his finitude and the acknowledgment that, indeed, one day he too will die.

My second, and perhaps more important, reason in assuming, loosely, a phenomenological method is the issue of interpretation, particularly though, of how we perceive, interpret, and understand experience and Being from our situatedness within civilization. It is in the exploration of this issue that I think some direction regarding the pragmatic concerns of “what now?” will be most apparent as well as an understanding of the general shape of the current discourse regarding crisis.

Opening our interpretation or understanding of “civilization” as a problem presents difficulties, as it is so fundamentally close and, in many cases, constitutive of our experiential content that it easily escapes reflection or consideration as “problem.” In a phenomenological sense, civilization as that which occupies the directedness or aboutness—the intentional “thing”—of consciousness cannot make itself apparent or “present” without considerable and deliberate effort (And even then, its apprehension by consciousness is never “total,” yet its general essence can, I think, be grasped.) What’s more, in this closeness civilization holds, rather undeservedly, a kind of tacit justification. The task of the last section is to uncover this closeness

and justification. It is in the uncovering of civilization as problem that responses to the question of “what now?” may be most responsibly dealt with.

Situated Meaning, Significance, and Experience

The facts I have included thus far, while striking in one sense, are “read”—they are understood in one sense—but they are not experienced. Or, they are experienced in some sense, but only intermittently before the “everyday” stakes its claim. This problem of experience is the most direct corollary to the problem of perception regarding the destruction of the biosphere. Per this problem of perception, which makes inroads into the way certain events, statements, and experiences are interpreted, civilization, as a seemingly omnipresent force—a totality of sorts—may be seen as constitutive of a highly rigid, yet concealed, hermeneutical lens.

For example, where a member of the West Papuan Kamoro tribe may, without much reflection, see the vast expanses of jungle as home (to both themselves and other beings), the civilized settler perhaps, in a similar mode, sees land-value, possibilities for “development,” and “resources.” The case of the settler is curious because, while both he and the tribesman may be viewing the same area, the settler’s intentional gaze is turned, perhaps immediately, towards an elaborate abstract idealization informed by the inner logic of a particular history that would, necessarily, be the breadth of settler/civilized society. Not only is the ontology different between the primitive and the civilized, but also, this differentiation may be traced back to the very interpretative structure that gave rise to one ontology or the other.³⁹

³⁹To note, I am not using “primitive” in any sort of pejorative manner. Of course, in civilized discourse it has often taken on the meaning of denigration, but that it is expected as what is “other” than civilization is almost always, without question, deemed inferior or undesirable.

Civilization—its history, structure, and institutions—acts as a mediating and dividing “force” between “the things themselves,” inserting the disembodied logic of expansion and appropriation into an overall interpretative schema. Without this interpretative schema the settler, the purveyor of civilization, would not be as such. That is, the appearance of the jungle or mountain, while an open space that affords the fluid presencing and absencing of Being into varying possibilities for both humans and nonhumans, affords, for the settler, a limited set of abstractions: property, “resources” to funnel back to civilization, and other similarities derived from the needs of a particular civilization. The interpretative structure most according to civilization involves what is immediate and in-itself (but not known in-itself) being swept up into abstraction, divorced from an embodied context, and reduced and confined to civilizations predetermined use-value. The built-in ontology of civilization, like one of its founding elements, the division of labor, is to fragment and alienate beings and possible modes of Being—to create an ever deepening chasm between lived experience and represented shells or corpses—of such experience. But if we can see that this is the case, it seems to follow that we can reinterpret certain theoretical abstract statements into our own embodied context. Indeed, this is what must be done.

The observations of extinction and the correlation to (most of) humankind’s activities over the past 10,000 years or so, especially in the past few hundred years, are descriptions cast in the form of statements describing an “objective” condition of the world, a condition understood as independent of any kind of abstract representation. Though, getting at this objective condition requires, in a way, that we frame the content representationally. This is obvious enough; how else but by representation can we make sense of claims that extend beyond our immediate

visuospatial frame of reference? In relating to the facts presented in the previous two chapters, it becomes somewhat problematic in translating these facts into an immediate meaningfulness apparent in my own being-in-the-world. I say “problematic” because it seems that if these facts are indeed as dire as I’ve indicated, the response from people “in the know” has been amazingly insufficient. There is a “proportional gap,” so to speak, between our responses to such facts and the depth of the facts themselves. I think part of this “gap” may be due in large part (though not in total) to an inability to interpret and perceive the objective nature of these facts as having to do with the everyday world that we experience. Accordingly, it seems likely that this inability may be attributed to the framing—the situatedness—of what is called objective. In uncovering the way in which the notion of objectivity is constituted, I think we may gain a firmer grip on the inner workings that make possible such a gap between the facts presented and our responses to such facts.

To begin, Husserl’s analysis of the “scientific attitude” (a part of the more general “natural attitude”) offers a way of getting to the bottom of how we understand the objective. According to Husserl, one working within the scientific attitude is prone to grasp the aspects included in a description in an objectivistic way (not necessarily “objective”), divorcing the content of the lived experience of an object of description and, instead, imposing abstract theoretical formulations.⁴⁰ In this, qualitative features are typically trumped by the abstract and quantitative, thus making way for the kind of causal determinacy found in some scientific platforms (usually, those appropriated into a political-economic schema). Aside from Husserl (and for the sake of the overall context of this text), I think it may be helpful to understand the

⁴⁰ To note, we must keep in mind that Husserl’s analysis cannot be applied, absolutely, to contemporary scientific communities. Today, these communities are far more varying in their general philosophical suppositions.

scope of the attitude described as being directed toward the achievement of predictability (especially when situated within the political-economic; the more predictable the outcome, the greater the profit, power, and dominance). The *privileging* of quantitative abstraction, or the privileging of any theoretical abstraction for that matter, is, in part, the target of a phenomenological investigation.

In the epilogue to *The Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology II*, Husserl describes a “transcendental intersubjectivity...in which the real world is constituted as Objective, as being for ‘everybody.’”⁴¹ Paraphrasing Husserl's conclusion, David Abram remarks that the prevalent notion of objectivity is “a theoretical construction, an unwarranted idealization of intersubjective experience.”⁴² The fundamental element of the “objective” is, according to the phenomenologists, found in the agreement and interaction between perspectives.⁴³ The “solidity” and consistency that we experience and attribute to the world is, then, on account of our “continual encounter with others, with other embodied subjects, other centers of experience.”⁴⁴ But, clearly, if our understanding of the objective is situated in this way, how then do we explain the apparent mass denial of the reality of facts that directly imply the extinction of thousands of species and, correlatively, the possible extinction of those interpreting such facts?

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology II*, trans. Richard Rozcewicz and André Schuwer (Netherlands: Kluwer, 2002), 421. I should note here Adorno's criticism of Husserl's alleged “constitutive subjectivity” and ask that, for the moment, we bracket that criticism and instead turn to the basic, pre-reflective, phenomenon of our being-with what is other.

⁴² David Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1996), 38.

⁴³ I want to be sure to distinguish this “agreement” between perspectives from the agreement of what would otherwise be characterized as a kind of *ad populum* fallacy.

⁴⁴ Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 39.

I think part of the answer may be found in Heidegger's notion of *das Man* (or "the They," "The One," or just "One"). *Das Man* is the designation applied to those who we encounter in the everyday. They are, as Heidegger points out, who we encounter in public transportation, when we read the newspaper, and I would add, when watching the television (particularly in the descriptions of others given by news anchors and other "reporters"). Heidegger is quick to point out that *das Man* is "nothing definite," yet it is in this "inconspicuousness and unascertainability" that "the they unfolds its true dictatorship" and "prescribes the kind of being of everydayness."⁴⁵ Thus, as Heidegger goes on to explain, there is a hold and a claim by *das Man* that governs, in some sense, the norms of what is acceptable and what is not. In this way, when we hear of some environmental catastrophe on the news, say the recent BP oil spill, we are immediately hindered in our response by the norm of *das Man*. We cannot act or judge in a manner that is appropriate to the catastrophe. Instead, after the nightly news has covered the bit on the oil spill, the broadcast moves along, unflinchingly, into the latest celebrity break-up or scandal. Here, response to catastrophe is muzzled and the depth of the situation seemingly paired, as a matter of priority, with one of the most inane obsessions of contemporary civilized life. The truth of the situation and the responses appropriate to such situations, whether oil spill, deforestation, extinction and so forth is concealed by the imposing norm of *das Man* and the general everydayness that we often find ourselves in. As Heidegger puts it, the "public-ness" constituted by *das Man* "controls every way in which the world and *Dasein* are interpreted."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John and Edward Robinson Macquarrie (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1962), 164.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 165.

But there is also a deeper aspect of the interpretation of these facts, especially when we consider individuals who seem to grasp the meaningfulness of such facts in a way that is directly relevant to an embodied material reality—one that the perceiver comprehends as being situated within, as being a part of. As I mentioned earlier, part of the task of this section is to examine how scientific facts are experienced—to examine how an apparently non-normative statement is translated into a meaningful and value-laden experience. So when I tell my friend Steve that X amount of species are going extinct every year because of human activity, he, without much hesitation, replies something to effect of “Oh, that's awful.” Now, this response could just be characteristic of the company I keep, but the point is to illustrate that we can think of instances where individuals respond in normative ways to statements that carry no normative signposts.

To answer the question of why Steve and others would have this or a similar reaction, I think an appeal may be made to a fundamental level of what, in Heidegger's understanding, is a defining element of our humanness: our *implicit* concern with “Being.” Here, Heidegger's concept of “*Dasein*,” as that being for which “being is an issue,” plays an integral role in how we may approach an experience of the truth and implications of certain scientific claims.⁴⁷ While being qua being is perhaps an issue for humans, it is only in the context of a lived material world that Being may “appear” or beings may actually “be.”⁴⁸ This is not to discount any notion of, say, “spiritual” aspects of being, only that, as far as we can experience, perceive, and know, the understanding of our being is informed by an embodied and, necessarily, material, perspective.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

⁴⁸ The objection may be made that certain beings have and, theoretically, could sustain an existence outside of the planet. This objection is irrelevant to this discussion. Though, there is Heidegger's insistence that even if we did manage to escape the planet, we would always have our “world.”

When we describe something pertaining to experience or perception, our description is imbued with terms that invoke a particular sense—what is heard, seen, felt, smelled, tasted, and so forth. The context where these descriptions gain sense, meaning or are in any way rendered intelligible, as I've already noted, includes the access to clean air, clean water, and land that can support a biologically diverse population. If these elements, which are constitutive of the context in which “Being,” in its most unfettered sense is made possible, are restricted, then the ability for beings to be is, in one sense, also restricted. Though, more troublesome are the increased strictures placed on the possibilities of such beings through their subjection to an increasingly narrowed “revealing” and monolithic sense of Being as such—perhaps what Heidegger describes as “challenging forth.”

In acknowledging the possibility of such restriction, we also at the same time, acknowledge the converse of Being, that is, non-being or not-being. As Being is of issue for us, the same also applies (or ought to apply) to that of the possibility of non-being. As Paul Tillich remarks, “Our ultimate concern,” that which we surrender to and is the fundamental mark of “care” in our existence that supersedes all “preliminary concerns,” “is that which determines our being or not-being.”⁴⁹ While the term “being” as understood by Tillich relates to “the whole of human reality, the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence,” the context in which this being is conceived, again, cannot be divorced the material-biological, embodied reality that makes even the most unassuming consideration of Being possible (nor, despite Tillich’s silence on the issue, should this notion of Being be reserved solely in the context of humans). In recognizing the aspect of non-being to being, there is, also, the recognition of vulnerability—the

⁴⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1*, Vol. 1. 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 14.

fragility and finitude—that characterizes all life. As we both perceive and are the “things” of perception, that is, to perceive we are also situated within a horizon of perception (ourselves or other⁵⁰) in the world, this vulnerability is made even clearer. As Robert Kirkman has put it, echoing the sentiment of Merleau-Ponty, “Vulnerability is the price of perception.”⁵¹

If the “threat of non-being” is “implied in existence”⁵² as the counterpart, in some sense, of Being, the task at hand, again, is to reflect on the immediacy and magnitude of this threat as it may be revealed in certain scientific, objective statements. And while it may seem odd to differentiate between varieties of orientation toward non-being (that is, whether we or others “pass into” non-being through either catastrophic climate change, a lack of fertile land, and so forth), especially if we consider Heidegger's dictum that we are all “beings-toward-death,” the redeeming factor in this distinguishing may be found in the notions of care, meaning, and involvement with the world and beings in the world. That is, how our life may be oriented toward death in one way as opposed to another is differentiated between qualitative degrees of involvement. For example, we could, on one hand, live our entire lives in relative isolation in, say, a window-less prison or, on the other hand, in and amidst the vibrant and diverse ecosystem of the Australian Gondwana rainforests. Perhaps that is not the clearest example, but the point here is this: despite the fact that we and other inhabitants of this planet will die (and indeed the planet itself being engulfed by the Sun), it does not follow that our qualitative involvement—our

⁵⁰ This takes on some strange implications in the contemporary setting of the mass infrastructure of technological surveillance, google earth, and the like...Perhaps a strange twist on the notion of Big Brother (how “intentional” could this perception be?).

⁵¹ Robert Kirkman, “A Little Knowledge of Dangerous Things: Human Vulnerability in a Changing Climate,” in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling in the Landscapes on Thought*, ed. Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick (Albany, N.Y.: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2007), 21.

⁵² Tillich, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1*, 64.

care and concern—ought to be so diminished as to constrain and limit the open possibilities for Being’s presencing in our lives and the lives of others (humans or nonhumans).

If individuals/groups conduct themselves according to how they experience the world, as R.D. Laing and others have argued, and if this experience is the experience of a totality of objects whose being is significant only insofar as a calculated use value, then it follows that the behavior of such individuals or institutions will be governed, *fundamentally*, by an understanding (in whatever form; pre-ontologically, implicitly, explicitly, etc.) of Being that is idealist and irrevocably delusional regarding the material world. This delusion is clear in light of the remarks of Chapter Two regarding the tendency of civilization to predicate its existence along the lines of, theoretically, infinite expansion/consumption within the strictures of a clearly finite biological-world. In the same way that the denial or refusal to acknowledge ones own finitude results in a kind of “inauthentic” being or the being of the everyday (Heidegger)⁵³, the refusal to acknowledge the finitude of the earth also produces a way of being that conceals the truth of what the everyday of civilization implies and requires, i.e., “endless” growth and consumption at the expense of being and countless beings (both human and non-human).

Our understanding is rooted, necessarily, in the interpretative structures of our being. That is, the make up of our experiential horizons (as Gadamer would have it) or the sum total of our historical-being, is constitutive to some extent of the way we interpret our being in the world as well as the “world” as such. It is not, however, necessarily determinate of the truth-content of certain interpretations and conclusions. To reflect on our understanding—trying to understand our understanding—shifts our being from everyday “thrownness” and into something seemingly

53 We could also cite Sartre’s notion of “bad-faith” in a similar sense.

much more critical and holistic. This is, perhaps, especially true when we begin to consider the finitude and fragility of others and ourselves.

To return to the aspect of environmental discourse I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that supposes environmental catastrophe may be “prevented,” it may be argued that this sort of talk is mistaken if it can be shown that “catastrophe” is precisely what we are involved in. The prevalence of speaking or thinking about ecological crisis as if it has not “arrived,” may be explained by noting that one’s everyday experience doesn’t seem to confirm some of the more daunting globally-scaled statistics regarding the destruction of the biosphere. When we walk outside, the threat of, say, climate change or an oil spill, does not present itself in or on our horizon of experience in the same way that a more “immediate” threat is experienced (unless, of course, one happens to be in the middle of a melting glacier, an oil-drenched beach, or the like). We can point back to an explanation of this type of perception in Heidegger’s *das Man*, though to illustrate this interpretative phenomenon further, Slavoj Žižek offers the following insight.

Speaking from what looks like a landfill/dump of discarded household and industrial items, Žižek describes this process: When we read something of the impending and possible “doom” scenario, and then we step outside and see; immediately, our experience is of “not what things you see behind me,” gesturing towards the mounds of waste, but “nice things... nice trees, birds singing and so on.” So even though we have read the bits about ecological destruction and so forth, our experienced reality in that moment of stepping out is not one of comprehending the possible total annihilation of such an experience. We are utterly incapable, to some extent, Žižek argues, to conceive of this sort of destruction. As Žižek says, it is *almost* unimaginable. We are involved in what he and other psychoanalysts call the “logic of disavowal” (“I know very well,

but nevertheless...”) wherein we may know that the maintenance of civilization is, in the end, catastrophic for the earth and civilization itself, yet we continue to act in the world as if we do not know because this “end” is in some sense inconceivable.⁵⁴ But this is not to argue that the situation is indeed absolutely “inconceivable,” only that in the failure to properly negotiate the theoretical perspective from and with a limited, necessarily, embodied perspective, such catastrophe *seems* impossible.

Kirkman describes a similar process, noting that in the objectivist language used in the presentation of many ecological threats or catastrophes, we are given, by way of our everyday experience, what he calls “plausible deniability.” Speaking on the threats presented by climate change, Kirkman argues that, “the processes that drive the climate seem remote from us in time and space, and so we go about our lives attending to what seem to us to be more immediate and pressing threats...”⁵⁵ These more immediate threats are those that, in some way, touch on our being in the everyday. Thus, if in the everyday the threats alluded to by certain scientific findings bear, seemingly, no relevance in my daily business, I hardly have reason or occasion to reflect on their depth and implications, nor will I likely recognize and qualify what, in any other sense, would be understood as crisis. Again, this “plausible deniability” thrives only in the failure to “ride the cusp,” as N. Katherine Hayles has put it, of the ego-allocentric positions (i.e., the considering, simultaneously, of wide reaching theoretical findings and one’s embodied perspective). This, of course, brings up the question of why this failure occurs at all. This

⁵⁴ Slavoj Zizek speaking in the documentary, “The Examined Life.” Astra Taylor, director. *The Examined Life*. 35 mm film. Canada: Zeitgeist, 2008.

⁵⁵ Kirkman, “A Little Knowledge of Dangerous Things: Human Vulnerability in a Changing Climate,” 20.

question will be dealt with in the following sub-section and then again, in a more robust sense in Chapter Four.

By maintaining that a crisis may be averted and that it is not the present state of affairs, our interpretation of the present will defer what qualifies as crisis from the material-biological world to the idealist-economic-civilized “world.” This, again, has to do with the structures of interpretation, intersubjectively situated, that impart or recognize the meaning of the being of the world; in this case, either as material, physical, embodied, and finite, or as idealist, economic, disembodied, and infinite. Though if the position that ecological catastrophe has not yet arrived would still like to be maintained, the burden of proof must then rest on a definition of catastrophe that is far greater in scope and magnitude than heretofore established. However, the mass extinction of various species, the sterilization of the oceans, and the deforesting of entire continents seems hard to top.

The Given and the World

If the above is any indication, our interpretations of certain events, as well as the perceived “situation” from which we interpret, is largely governed by our particular ontological understandings. It is unimportant whether the ontology is explicitly outlined by those interpreting, only that it is recognized that there are certain backgrounded notions that predicate existential and ontological qualities to our understanding of the world. It is, for most of us, civilization that forms the backgrounding or the “enframing” of our involvement and understanding in and of the world. It constitutes and mediates our direction and relation with nearly every facet of our experience with the world. The mechanisms of production, division of

labor and so forth, are present in everything from our food, our clothing, the places we live, the way we communicate, our jobs (or the notion of “job” itself)—almost every part of our lives is mediated and enframed by the products and institutions of civilization.⁵⁶ Heidegger describes enframing as the way that we shape the world around us (primarily in the use technology and, correlatively/dialectically, the way technology “uses” us) and, as such, this turns to the way we interpret certain occurrences and events within the “frame.” Indeed, the “frame” in our experience is concealed as “frame” and instead, takes on the status of the everyday, which in turn, appears as an ahistorical, natural totality whose being, thus, seems impervious to questioning. Within this everyday our involvement with the world—with others—may be considered, then, markedly “civilized.” It may also be argued that through this perception the interpretation and experienced meaning of certain experiences is often, but not determinately, hedged with the implied intersubjective cultural meanings and values of the context (civilization).

I've appealed in the above sections to the “external” world, the earth, though in the early conceptions of a phenomenological method, the “phenomenological reduction” or the “bracketing” (*epoché*) of the external world was said to open up the space for shedding naïve philosophical beliefs and scientific or cultural constructions and, instead, focus on how certain ideas/things are “presented” in consciousness. The reduction, insofar as Eugen Fink and Husserl explain it, does not involve the rejection/denial of certain things (nor their explicit affirmation), but instead, calls us to question what we assume in the everyday. Husserl and Fink described the

⁵⁶To note, John Zerzan has made this point, more or less, in much of his work.

being of this “everyday” as “the-captivation-in-an-acceptedness,” that is, the “acceptedness” of the unexamined everyday that we are somehow held “captive” to.⁵⁷

The “given,” once one has bracketed the validity and traditional foundations of all other knowledge, is, traditionally, consciousness. Here, the insight by Husserl and others (namely, Brentano) is that consciousness is typically understood as having a kind of “intentional structure.” “Intentionality” can be described as consciousness *of* or *about* something (with consciousness including perception, interpretation, judgment, thinking, etc.). The “things” that consciousness may be directed towards, then, must always trace back to a referencing of “world” (That is, by virtue of their “appearing” or being shown *somewhere* and, additionally, being perceived *from* somewhere. This is what also gives rise to the intersubjective basis of objectivity.).⁵⁸ There are at least three things to note here. First, “things” in the phenomenological sense are not the inanimate physical objects of everyday discourse, but rather, may be understood as that which is experienced, perceived, thought, sensed, and so on. The “thing” may be a physical material thing, but it also includes ideas of temporality, spatial relations, love, and really any-*thing* that is the “of” or “about.” Secondly and similarly, the “world” includes “not just the physical environment, but the social and cultural world, which may include things that do not exist in a physical way.”⁵⁹ Thus, it is noted that in the disclosure of consciousness [(inter)subjectivity] via phenomenological reduction, there is already “world”

⁵⁷ Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: the Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, trans. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 41.

⁵⁸ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

as pre-given.⁶⁰ But this “world,” as given or pre-given, is not the object of intentionality, necessarily, though it may be “seen” by noting that one, in fact, is seeing “from somewhere.”⁶¹ And, as Gadamer has pointed out, “there is such a thing as givenness that is not itself the object of intentional acts.”⁶² The reduction, then, does not involve the Cartesian prioritization of the isolated subject—the *res cogitans*—(as it directly appeals to the non-constituted “given” world) but rather, as Dan Zahavi puts it, it allows us to “make those intentional threads that attach us to the world visible by slacking them slightly.”⁶³ We may again note that this includes at least a nuanced understanding of “world.” The third part to notice here, as Heidegger observed, is that in the “reduction,” the apprehension of beings in the world leads us “to the understanding of the being of this being” and not, as Husserl may have had it, to a *constitutive* apprehension of such beings. In other words, the being of a being does not rest in my attributing (constituting) being to a being. Instead, the being of a being persists regardless of my perceiving it or not.

So as we “slack the threads” in the reduction and begin to see and understand things in ways that may part from our everyday understanding of such things, we are forced to reckon with some understanding of these “threads” and, thus, the “world”—the context of the “things” of intentionality. This involves, then, the initial bracketing of the validity of what our theoretical understanding of “world” may be and, instead, move to account for its appearance as the given or the backgrounding of intentional things. It has already been noted that there are both socio-

⁶⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), 238. Discussing Husserl's reassessment of “world”: “Merely superseding the validity of the objective sciences was no longer enough, for even in a perfect “epoché”—bracketing the being posited by scientific knowledge—the world still remains valid as something pre-given.”

⁶¹ Shaun Gallagher, *Body Schema and Intentionality*. In “The Body and the Self” Ed. José Luis Bermúdez, Marcel, A.J., and Eilan, Naomi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 234.

⁶² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 237.

⁶³ Zahavi, *Phenomenology*, 665.

culture and natural-physical “environmental” aspects in considering the world, but to elaborate, it must also be noted that in our understanding of each of these (or as a non-totalizing “whole”) both aspects are intimately intertwined. However, given that an almost undeniable case has been made for consciousness as embodied (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gallagher, Zahavi, et. al.), I think we may argue for an understanding of the world that permits for a “primacy” of the natural. This does not mean a turn to naturalism as such, but it does recognize the material aspects involved in consciousness and the primacy of the “world” whose invariable essence is material, i.e., that which transcends and makes possible the context of certain social and cultural aspects of the world. Here, we needn't appeal, necessarily, to any overtly theoretical understanding of world, scientific or not, though what may be helpful is to uncover what can be considered the “pre-theoretical” aspects given in reflection (phenomenological or otherwise).

These pre-theoretical aspects have been noted already, except they have not been qualified as such, they are (again): breathable (clean) air, clean water, and a landbase that may be considered “healthy” in the widest sense. These three elements have an immediate appearance in my understanding as being the fundamental “threads” that “attach” me to the world and as such, they are immediately meaningful.⁶⁴ They are the invariable components of the essence of my embodied existence. Through my lived experience I cannot, by any means of bracketing, deny the quality of these elements as intrinsic to existence. They are, in a sense, the self-evident axioms of existence. To state the patently obvious: imagine the absence of one of these elements

⁶⁴ However, I suspect, given the first exposition of these elements in Chapter One, that they often do not come to be seen as so immediate. Instead, it may be more accurate to suggest that the necessity of these elements in my existence come when there is a profound “lack” of their availability. For instance, if I am particularly thirsty but there is nothing to quench my thirst, my entire focus is oriented in getting water and this focus will not subside until I obtain it. In this case, “the obtaining of water” becomes (in a more dire situation) a contingent factor for my being or non-being. This may be contrasted with something perhaps more trivial, say, a longing to watch the Simpsons. Though this longing (hopefully) does not have to do with my being or non-being.

in as “absolute” a sense as possible. To then predicate “life” as compatible with the absence of one of these elements would be impossible. I am, of course, attached through many other mediums, but a reduction of those mediums and a consideration of their embodied context, requires that I acknowledge the primacy of the above three elements. I do not need to know the structural scientific differences in any of these elements for their existence to have significance and meaning. These elements, then, capture an understanding of what is, properly speaking, “given.” I have clarified our understanding of “world” mostly in terms of its ontic qualities, but these qualities are also what make possible its ontological conception. Thus, we may understand the world in either an ontic or ontological sense, or in the play between the two as the conclusion of a properly eidetic, yet not necessarily idealist, reduction.

A large problem of this work arises here and rests in positing the primacy—the (pre)givenness—of the “natural” (ontic) world from within the frame of what is civilized, i.e., the socio-culture world. To diffuse this problem, I will try to clarify and distinguish the use of the terms “pre-given” and “given.” The natural world, as I’ve explained, makes possible the cultural world. The social-cultural world—the “lifeworld”—for nearly all humans, is “colonized,” to borrow Habermas’s terminology, by the civilized. Here, the civilized, as I’ve said, mediates cultural, social, and natural experience, perception, sensing, and thus, understanding. Through this mediation/colonization there is, then, the tendency to understand civilization, in a very fundamental sense, as “given.” Though civilization may be construed in one sense as given, it may in another more fundamental sense, be viewed as “phenomenon” (in the sense that Heidegger explained it). “As that which shows itself in itself, the manifest”⁶⁵, civilization is not

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 51.

“shown” in a direct sense, but is, rather, that which opens up the horizon and possibilities for “beings as such to appear” (Though, to note, the “opening up” involved with civilization is not to be taken as a kind of fluid “openness.” Its “possibilities” are, as I described earlier, largely confined, administered, and controlled.)⁶⁶ The being of civilization, then, is considered upon first glance, “hidden.” What is seen at first is not “civilization” as such, but rather, the collective “things” of civilization.

However, the being of those beings that civilization makes possible comes at the expense of the ability and possibility of other beings to “be,” as I’ve been saying. In this, the understanding of civilization as phenomenon must also include the corollary understanding of what I would like to call “anti-phenomenon,” as its horizontal “offspring” threatens to undermine that which made their “being” possible in the first place, that is, the “context” mentioned earlier. And it is here where civilization must cede its claim as what is fundamentally given to that which facilitated its being in the first place: the biosphere, the ecosphere, call it what you will—the earth. In this light, the earth is both the pre-given phenomenon of the “given” of civilization but also, in some sense, the “true” and most “absolute” given of what makes beings possible.

However, I still have not examined why it is the case, from the standpoint of everyday life, that civilization is seen as more fundamental—more given—than what I’ve alluded to in the above. How is it that an ontological understanding of the world, from the civilized standpoint, is conceived at the neglect and, in a natural-material sense, expense of the ontic? It seems disingenuous to any “thorough” quest for uncovering the meaning of the being of civilization if

⁶⁶ Michael E. Zimmerman, “Heidegger’s Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism” in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (New York: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2003). Zimmerman is not directly correlating civilization, but rather, giving an interpretation of “phenomenon” as such.

we disregard the ontical nature of such understanding. That is, as it has been argued, we cannot bracket the validity of our embeddedness in the natural-material world. Why, then, do the promoters and progenitors of civilization, continue to act and argue as if this embeddedness could be escaped or doesn't exist at all? To answer, the following section will attempt to sketch out the typical scenario in which the civilized have, traditionally, staked their claim and what this means for how we see or do not see the being of civilization.

The Genesis of Civilization's Being Given

Premise 2: Traditional communities do not often voluntarily give up or sell the resources on which their communities are based until their communities have been destroyed. They also do not willingly allow their landbases to be damaged so that other resources—gold, oil, and so on—can be extracted. It follows that those who want the resources will do what they can to destroy traditional communities.

—Derrick Jensen, Endgame

The being of civilization, often perceived as given, is not ahistorical, though its permeation into the everyday attitude appeals implicitly to such a status. Consider the degree to which institutions, those of a particular brand of social construction, i.e., laws, credit, property, money, etc. function as “directing” forces in everyday life. So as not to give these particular institutions undue worth or to naïvely condemn them, let's be clear on the fundamental reason as to why these institutions hold sway: In a word, they claim a monopoly on the right to control and distribute the material-biological means to sustaining life (as it concerns both humans and non-humans), bolstering (in the case of humans) this monopoly with an elaborate system of social reward and punishment. In a sense, civilized institutions hold hostage the material means to life and, in doing so, take on the appearance as necessary, justified, and thus as a “given” inevitable part of life. But the authoritative force of these institutions is less in their ability hold the

appearance of free standing justification (that is, apart from the referencing of conditions that have been a result of the activity of such institutions to begin with) and more with their ability to maintain and control the means to life.⁶⁷

There is a dialectical aspect to note regarding the civilizing process. Namely, in being situated within civilization, the institutions that facilitate this civilizing are, in essence, designed to perpetuate and further a particular way of being by explicitly encouraging the replication of this way of being and destroying or limiting others. And by “encouraging” I mean, “forcefully ensuring.” This is clear enough, but an illustration of this perpetuation/replication may be found in briefly mentioning a few aspects of the global food system (amongst other pervasive systems).

Only a few companies control the majority of food and food production in the world. Their methods of production are demonstrably unsustainable (deforestation, oceanic dead-zones, top-soil depletion, a “make-or-break” reliance on petroleum, etc.). However, in drawing out how this particular way of being is systematically replicated and perpetuated, an appeal may be made to the earlier mentions of objectivity and its intersubjective roots. If the possibilities for conceiving and then enacting a way of feeding oneself (apart from the dominant industrialized system) are destroyed or the conditions for such conceiving/enacting are radically impaired, the impression is then given that the dominant system is the *only*—that is, objective—possibility for feeding oneself, no matter if it is unsustainable (likely, denial or a refusal to acknowledge this unsustainability will marginalize any critique by appealing to the “objective” “here and now” of feeding oneself, or maintaining profit margins and keeping jobs). The destruction of possibilities,

⁶⁷ Max Weber's definition of the state bears considerable relevance here: “A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory.” The use of force, then, is the reductive element in defining the ultimate thrust and force of civilized power. For what is a civilization but the state, and the state but an appendage of the economy, all reinforced by the threat of physical coercion?

in the sense used here, means the physical and actual destruction or limiting of the ability to deviate from industrial food production. Whether through the depletion of soil such that only by way of industrial chemicals will anything grow, the paving over of mass tracts of land (or being situated in an area that simply cannot sustain life without an industrial infrastructure, e.g., much of the west and south west U.S.), the social conditions such that only the rich or moderately well-off may afford sustainably grown food, or to cite a foundational structure of civilization mentioned earlier, a well regulated division of labor such that only “experts” are permitted or have the know-how to grow food (this brings the further problem of the hegemony of particular agricultural methods), the shift away from the everyday given of the grocery store—of industrial food production—is rendered almost unthinkable for most us.

The realm of the unthinkable, or even the “construction” of the unthinkable (as paradoxical as that sounds), is precisely where the driving forces of civilization stake their claim. By pushing non-civilized “systems”—ways of thinking or being—into this realm of the unthinkable, there is a twofold (at least) reaction. The first, as I mention above, is the claim to objectivity. The second, and perhaps more important aspect, is the act of forgetting. As a “thing” is made unthinkable or ways of being similarly so, these things and this “being” are also, in some sense, forgotten. Its ability to be reckoned as a possible way of being is, like the thousands of nonhuman species every year, virtually extinct.

To abstract this process, we may say that through the limiting or forced exclusion of certain possibilities, a claim on the objective truth of a created situation is made. This is precisely the method of domination that, historically, has been employed by civilized empires in their appropriation of the land and “resources”—the homes—of “primitive” and indigenous people

groups. The example of Louisiana based mining company Freeport-McMoRan and their activities in the Indonesian province of West Papua serves to illustrate this point.

The West Papuan tribes of the Amungme and Kamoro have, historically, relied on the waters and landbase surrounding the site of the Grasberg mine, the worlds largest gold mine and the third largest copper mine. It is also one of the largest open pit mines in the world. The activity required to sustain mining operations at Grasberg has led to the systematic destruction of the surrounding ecosystem.^{68, 69} The dumping of what is known as “tailings,” a toxic waste product from processed ore (an illegal practice in almost all “developed” countries), has destroyed somewhere around 89 square miles of the lowland ecosystem surrounding the Ajkwa River.⁷⁰ As such, the possibilities of the Amungme and Kamoro for maintaining a traditional way of life are on the chopping block, so to speak, of Freeport-McMoRan and other company stakeholders. But this limiting, according the Freeport CEO Jim Bob Moffet, is no limiting at all. In fact, with the creation of jobs and Freeport-funded schools, the “natives” Moffet, argues are far better off. Here, we can certainly recall the perceptual differences between primitive and settler mentioned earlier.

This “bettering” is a classic argument that has been employed by occupying forces, colonizers, and the like for centuries. After the way of living of certain cultures has been destroyed—typically by cutting off their traditional means of survival—the indigenous, or what’s left of them, are coerced into assimilation. There is nothing voluntary about the situation created

⁶⁸ Robert Bryce, “Written in Stone,” *Austin Chronicle*, September 23, 2005, accessed January 5th, 2011, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=oid%3A292538>.

⁶⁹ Jane Perlez and Raymond Bonner, “Below a Mountain of Wealth, a River of Waste,” *New York Times*, December 27, 2005, accessed January 5th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/international/asia/27gold.html?pagewanted=1& r=2>

⁷⁰ These “tailings,” to note, are the result of dumpings that in every “first-world” country would be considered illegal.

by the world's colonizers. Civilization is and has been the systematic constraining of perceptions and understandings that resist idealism, abstraction, rigidly senseless hierarchy, and a fetishizing of “work” and “development.” In the course of history, there is not one civilization that has arisen without the “aid” of slavery, an overly exploited landbase, and the general impetus to forcibly impose the rigid strictures of a stratified society. Not one. All have been formed and maintained through systematic violence against both human and nonhuman communities.⁷¹ The burden of proof for this claim rests with those who would wish to deny it. If there's any doubt that the method of civilized expansion does not function or has not functioned historically in a similar manner (in *every* case), recall the european settlement of North and South America, the ancient conquests of Rome, or the warring kingdoms of the ancient mid-east. In every instance, it has followed the same trajectory.

Legitimation

“People only want all this stuff [Big Macs, Coke, Oprah, etc.] after their own culture has been destroyed.”

–Derrick Jensen, Endgame⁷²

The products and institutions of civilization are the “evidence,” at least *prima facie*, for the justification of civilization. These justifications are explicit appeals, at least when the “defense” is situated within civilization, to our everyday experience. Most especially, and in a radically reductive sense, the appeals are made to food, water, and housing (these are further compounded by appeals to certain “advanced” technology, with “advanced” being synonymous with “good” whilst somehow also maintaining the alleged neutrality of technology as such). I

⁷¹ Premise three of Jensen's *Endgame*: “Our way of living—industrial civilization—is based on, requires, and would collapse very quickly without persistent and widespread violence.”

⁷² Jensen, *Endgame*, 45.

aim to show that the legitimation assumed by the civilized ethos is resolutely circular yet steeped in a genesis-like mythos. This myth, then, not only tends to be self-referential but, also, progressively self-serving, that is, it feeds back into itself in order to expand, replicate, and justify itself. For the following argument, I will focus on analyzing civilized justifications from a loose phenomenological standpoint, that is, by bracketing the assumed validity of everyday justifications and, instead, move toward a more eidetic understanding of what it is that would qualify or undermine the given justifications. This is all assuming, of course, that one is actually seeking a justification.

Part of “the problem of civilization” is that it is difficult to even conceptualize civilization as a problem. Admittedly, when I had first heard of folks like John Zerzan and Derrick Jensen pinpointing most of the world’s problems on civilization as such, I dismissed the analysis. Having avoided actually reading the work of Zerzan or Jensen, I went on thinking that civilization has “given” us so many great things—that it had redeeming factors that could far outweigh the harm being described by those who would condemn civilization. This, in my experience, has been the normal reaction of one who first hears a general indictment of civilization as the root of the most significant problems. “How will we feed ourselves?” or “How will we get clean water?” are often the first responses of those (including myself when I first encountered the analysis) that recoil at the notion of rejecting civilization. Though consider, for a moment, what these replies say, implicitly, about the perceived claims of civilization. They are an appeal to two of the most fundamental elements of our existence. The understanding, or perceived “baseline-truth,” from which these questions are launched can be stated as follows:

1. Without civilization, there is no food.

2. Without civilization, there is no water.

The means to live, then, is perceived as ultimately resting within the grips of civilization. In some cases, these statements are correct (e.g., the southwest U.S. or areas in which the business of civilization has destroyed what formerly sustained life), but when they are employed as justification for the continued being/trajectory of civilization, they are remarkably shortsighted. To explain this shortsightedness, I've used the following analogy: Suppose you have a whole chocolate cake. Now, just before you and your friends start to dig into this cake I come along and take it away. After some time has passed, I return, but only with one slice of cake. However, I've dressed it with, say, a raspberry glaze and for good measure, a cherry on top. You and your friends receive the slice with excitement, joy, and thanks, though forgetting, in the meantime, that just a few moments earlier I took the whole cake away.

Perhaps this analogy is oversimplified, but it seems to get the point across. In more concrete terms, it is to explain that when we rejoice over the prospect of, for example, getting cleaner water through our taps because of some new filtration system at the utility company, we neglect why it is, in the first place, that our water is unfit for drinking—why it is I can't go to the stream, lake, or spring by my house and freely drink of it (or even swim in many cases). The reason, if its not already abundantly clear, is that a civilized infrastructure (especially, of the industrial or post-industrial type), necessarily, privileges its being over that from which it derives its being, i.e., the biosphere, and, thus, will create and foster conditions such that the contamination of water or the erosion/destruction of top-soils is accepted as inevitable. All this to say (again) that it is only after the means to a way of life, unmediated by civilization, have been destroyed (by civilization) does the desire and excitement over the civilized institutions flourish.

This, then, is what is meant by the circular or self-referential character of civilization's being justified; it creates the conditions from which it derives its justification.

I return now to the notion of context mentioned in the earlier part of this section. We may, I think, understand that the civilizing process is a means of constructing context. This civilized context, however, is still set within the larger context of the biosphere and it is by way of description, namely in the form of statements (1) and (2) above, that the appeal is made for the privileging of a civilized context and the forgetting or disavowal of the larger context. Donn Welton's insight that “we can get at the notion of context by treating patterns of how signs are used in descriptions as indications of how we cognitively approach or grasp an environment with which we are involved,” and, clarifying further, that “Actions can ‘constitute’ the determinations of things apart from speech: placing a rock in front of an open door “unfolds” its significance as a door stop....” offers a way of looking at how the justifications for civilization actually function. I think it is fair to argue that as we experience the grocery store, the tap,^{73,74} and other institutions that constitute the referent for the above statements (and their repetitious patterning), the significance of these institutions is initially “unfolded” as necessary and invariable parts of our being in the world. It is not, as further reflection would have it, the actual earth, particular ecosystems, or other species that are experienced or perceived as fundamental to consciousness or the possibility of our being in the world.

The observations of Swedish philosopher Helena Norberg-Hodge shed light on the above arguments with a bit more “concreteness.” Her work serves to make visible the connection

⁷³ Donn Welton, “World as Horizon,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 229.

⁷⁴ Yes, the tap, as the most obvious part of a larger system that administers water, may be reckoned as an institution. Unless, of course, one has a private well or something similar (though even then, one is subject to other forces that may pollute the source—be it air or aquifer).

between the actual physical colonization of a people and the colonization of consciousness—the life-world. After spending more than thirty years with the people of the Himalayan province of Ladakh, Norberg-Hodge describes their transition from a community “almost totally isolated from the forces of modernization,” to a people facing “what can best be described as a cultural inferiority complex.” She explains that, after the region had opened up to foreign tourists around 1975 (primarily because of a road built by the Indian military leading into Ladakh about a decade earlier), the ensuing “development” had drastically affected the Ladakhi’s self-perception. One of the most illustrative examples described by Norberg-Hodge involves a story of a young Ladakhi named Tsewang. Norberg-Hodge recalls:

In 1975, I was shown around the remote village of Hemis Shukpachan.... I asked Tsewang to show me the houses where the poor people lived. Tsewang looked perplexed a moment, then responded, “We don’t have any poor people here.”

Eight years later I overheard Tsewang talking to some tourists. “If you could only help us Ladakhis,” he was saying, “we’re so poor.”

She goes on to describe how the influx of tourists brought western-styled movies (not “westerns”), dress, values, and religions. An entire ideology quietly descended on the Ladakhi people, particularly the youth.⁷⁵

When we talk about the “redeeming factors” of civilization—those that function to legitimate civilization as such—there is, as I’ve said, a forgetting of what created the conditions such that the present conditions would be preferable. The seed of this forgetting can be traced to the (still) reigning mythos regarding a “state-of-nature” along with a preoccupation to wrest the

⁷⁵ Helen Norberg-Hodge, “The Pressure to Modernize and Globalize,” in *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), 568-576.

means of life from those who control it and, further, the petty cultural artifacts that serve, in conjunction to the previous two factors, as distractions from the ongoing destruction of the biosphere and social relations. Mythos, preoccupation, and distraction are the primary forms that serve to misplace, misdirect, appropriate, and placate the desire for what is other than civilization, even going so far, as I've tried to show, as to render the possibility of uncivilized life seemingly inconceivable. Again, the analysis turns back to the aspect of the problem regarding perception. Perception, from the vantage of the everyday of civilization, compounded by the above three factors, is unlikely to yield an interpretation of one's situatedness or the situation of the entire culture, in any sort of holistically critical light. Indeed, there is barely any room to reflect on one's situation between appeasing the forces that lay claim to the means to live.

Though, as this section is concerned with uncovering the arguments or possible reasons for legitimizing civilization, I will turn now to the intersection of phenomenology and that discipline which is normally reserved for legitimation, justification, and so forth; epistemology. For this, a preliminary note may be made of Merleau-Ponty's remarks on knowledge and phenomenology:

To return to the things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.⁷⁶

⁷⁶Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), ix.

That “which precedes knowledge” and “scientific schematization” is the sense of phenomenon that is characterized, as Neil Evernden explains, by its “primordial givenness.”⁷⁷ It is phenomenon unnamed and unclassified. Thus, it is this ambiguous sense of phenomenon in which, relative to epistemic claims, we must consult “the things themselves.” To inquire into the truthfulness of a particular epistemic claim, or really any claim at all (implicit or otherwise), is to delve into the realm of justification. Though, as Zahavi has noted, “...the only justification obtainable and the only justification required is one that is internal to the world of experience and to its intersubjective practices.”⁷⁸ Indeed, there seems to be almost universal intersubjective agreement regarding civilization’s being justified, but what, aside from what has already been mentioned, gives sway to this justification? What I am concerned with here is not just whether or not the arguments for civilization are justified or unjustified (as not all declarations, beliefs, or actions must carry positive justification) but also, whether the reasons given in justification are such that we can or cannot make a *positive* case for or against the legitimacy of civilization. To reiterate the issue of this sub-section, if civilization is to be indicted as illegitimate I must show that its claims to legitimacy are either false, unwarranted, or incoherent and then, further, viable positive reasons against civilization (which, for the most part, have already been mentioned).

I have described civilization's being accepted as a legitimate and inevitable force via a sequence of colonizations, consciously and otherwise. In a contemporary setting, the acceptance of civilization comes less directly from direct imperial conquests, of which the current context is of course a product, but rather, is accepted as the pre-reflective backgrounding of perceptual

⁷⁷ Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 110.

⁷⁸ Zahavi, *Phenomenology*, 676.

horizons (similar to the “captivation-in-acceptedness” mentioned earlier by Fink and Husserl). But it is the justification of civilization that brings this kind of acceptedness under more scrutiny.

Here, statements (1) and (2) can again be referenced as the speech acts that intend to provide positive justification and, consequently, legitimation to civilization. The speakers statements, obviously enough, are rooted in his or her experience or perception of civilization. The trick then, in uncovering the truthfulness of the claim or proposition is to “interrogate in terms of [the claims/propositions] meaning and then its reference.”⁷⁹ Thus, to inquire into the truthfulness of the claim of “Civilization is legitimate and justified because of X,” is to inquire into the meaning of civilization and the criterion used for justification/legitimation. At its most reductive element, the criterion focuses on the basic means to living. The “defeater” for this criterion, then, would be to show that civilization is actually contrary to the basic means to living. As I believe it has already been sufficiently demonstrated that civilization is contrary to these basic means—that its invariable essence is the idealism of infinite expansion and, thus, unsustainability—I will conclude this section. Arguments pertaining to the enjoyments and alleged enriching artifacts offered by civilization are irrelevant here when seen in the above light.

Returning now to assumption (2) outlined in the introduction of this chapter (That the collective “we” can avert the “oncoming” crisis) it may be argued that, if the falseness of (1) can be recognized, that is, that crisis is indeed present as I have argued, then the discourse changes entirely. There is, then, no “changing-of-the-course” to preserve current standards and ways of being (Assumption 3) as these standards, by any ontological or teleological reckoning come at the eventual expense of all that is other. By assuming the truth of (1), the action that would

⁷⁹ Donn Welton, “World as Horizon” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 227.

proceed from (2) is already dead in the water. Assumption (2), consequently, bears no relevance to environmental discourse and any action that proceeds from the overall schema of all three assumptions is, at best, useless and, at worst, counter to efforts that would seek to stave off further harm and a deepening of the crisis (more on this schema can be found in Chapter Five).

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to describe the roots of the current ecological crisis so that it may be clear what is and is not relevant or correct in responding to events of deforestation, atmospheric degradation, and extinction. Most action/discourse regarding environmental destruction is framed with the backgrounding “given” of civilization and, as such, fails to identify the source of their problems. For reasons having to do with experience, interpretative structures, and perception in general, this frame often rests unquestioned. I have attempted, in the traditional spirit of phenomenology, to maintain a certain descriptive stance, yet it seems that one cannot help but reach certain normative conclusions. These sorts of conclusions, however, I believe are warranted and in order to elaborate a bit more on their relevance, I turn now to the field of Critical Theory and, loosely, what has come to be known as civilization critique.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT OF CIVILIZATION VIA CRITICAL THEORY

Ultimately, the previous section can be qualified not only as the addressing of a problem of perception, but also and more importantly as a description of consciousness-in-civilization. Humanity continues to undercut its own and others species means to life largely because it has no clue that such “undercutting” is even happening or that there are actual consequences for this way of being. This culture, the global-civilized culture, has great difficulty in perceiving the destruction that is, quite literally, everywhere.⁸⁰ In some sense, the thoroughly civilized consciousness is impenetrable to anything that would seek to question the validity of its epistemic and ontological conceptions. Operatively, this consciousness deals almost entirely with the highly abstract, ideal, symbolic, and quantifiable. This way of understanding and approaching being-in-the-world, if the critique of naturalism by Husserl and others is correct, is excessively short-sighted. However, where Husserl and other phenomenologists seemed to have stopped short of the possible social and critical implications of their work, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school offer insight that, rather potently, addresses consciousness and experience as it is lived in the midst of destruction, oppression, and domination. Indeed, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and others argue that such destruction, oppression, and domination persists and is maintained primarily via consciousness and that it is in an analysis of the dialectic between institutions (social, political, economic, etc.) and consciousness that the grounds for a truly

⁸⁰ See Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature*.

emancipatory project may be formed. And though the previous section of this work has focused on the material conditions of the earth, it is not to be taken in the way that Marx “inverted” Hegel, i.e., that the ground of suffering is *absolutely* material. Though neither is it absolutely “spiritual.” The genesis of suffering, instead, may be found in examining the interplay—the dialectic—of particular modes of consciousness and material conditions.

The cornerstone to uncovering this suffering as it is presented, maintained, and replicated via consciousness rests in an analysis of experience. As many of the phenomenologists dealt rigorously with the possibilities and structures of experience, the same may be said of the critical theorists. However, it is Theodor Adorno’s work in the arena of experience, most notably from his *Negative Dialectics* and then, less “formally” in *Minima Moralia*, that I think, coupled with the above analysis, will lead deeper and more fruitful insight into constructive responses regarding the general destruction of the earth.

Adorno’s Negative Dialectics

Adorno’s negative dialectic has been described as “the theoretical foundation of the sort of reflexivity—the critical stance—required by critical theory. In the negative dialectic we are offered ways by which, for instance, we might question ‘the given’ or recognize distortions of experience.”⁸¹ Hence, as the previous chapter dealt heavily with the notion of civilization-as-given, it may again be shown how this is possible (yet from a different angle) and in what ways we may evaluate our contemporary situation. In the first part of his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argues against (among other things) the conceptions of experience set out by Kant and others.

⁸¹ Brian O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of a Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2004), viiii.

Though it is in his critique of Kant that the continuity between the thought of Adorno and the early phenomenologists can be seen. Both Husserl and Adorno, having rejected the phenomena-noumena schematic of Kantian philosophy, set out to reevaluate the (once again) surreptitious elements, structure, and contents of experience. But where Husserl and the phenomenologists cling to the “things themselves,” Adorno shrugs this concept of the thing for what he terms the “nonidentical” (*das Nichtidentische*). The two notions are remarkably similar (despite Adorno’s own protest to the contrary), though, I think the theoretical backing of the nonidentical and its application to a philosophically based social critique comes a bit closer in concretely applying such critique.

First, it may be helpful here to briefly touch on one particular, albeit major, Adornian critique of the alleged purely descriptive enterprise of phenomenology: When we give a rational account of experience or give any account of experience whatsoever, no matter what our alleged methodology, the accounting cannot be severed from a normative claim about the world. That is, no matter the format, descriptions include implicitly or explicitly a claim on how the world should be. Thus, either by omission (implicitly) or directing statements (explicitly) a normative claim is made. The claim may be ambiguous or concealed in some way, but it is not wholly absent. This sort of critique, obviously enough, extends, beyond phenomenology, though it may also serve to draw out the critical possibilities within phenomenology that, largely, seem to have been neglected or denied.

In any case, it is the *rational* accounting of experience that is the target and “axis” of Adorno’s theoretical formulations and critique, and a key part to his overall philosophical approach. Still holding to the rightness of a transcendental philosophy, Adorno’s negative

dialectic borrows principally from the endeavors of Kant and Hegel by way of a heavy handed emphasis on the relationship between experience and rationality. But rationality, Adorno argues, is not a stagnant immovable structure of consciousness. It is, rather, susceptible to versions that are more or less specific to, or the product of, various epochs. In its most basic conception, forms of rationality arise by different understandings of experience. Thus, germane to the discussion and critique of civilization, the task is to understand rationality as it is in “civilized” accounts of experience, that is, perhaps, discerning a distinct “civilized rationality.” To note, Adorno’s critique of rationality is restricted for the most part to its appearance in modernity through contemporary society. Regarding this relationship between rationality in modernity, Brian O’Connor remarks: “Modernity, for Adorno, is marked by a dominating version of rationality that, isomorphic with the economic structure of society, informs all critical enquiry and ensures that the enquiry falls short.”⁸² The “version” of rationality dominant in modernity thus renders the possibility of a critique that would thoroughly question the actual project of enlightenment or the contemporary globalized society highly unlikely and perhaps even unthinkable (As I explained in Chapter 3, contemporary conditions of the everyday offer up virtually no occasion for such a thorough critique or questioning.). Though the critique of rationality offered by Adorno is not, I will demonstrate, applicable just to modernity. Instead, it may be levied against the entire history and project of civilization as such. Though before, further foundational remarks leading to the application of such a critique are necessary.

a. (Non)Identity

⁸² O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic*, 3.

The consequence of dismantling the “pure-objectivity” of science (discussed earlier) is that certain claims appealing to the totality of the object examined must be rescinded as the notion of “totality” is rendered conceptually incoherent and impossible. Adorno’s account of experience echoes this sentiment. For him, part of experience is, ideally, the interaction of subject and object (terms used as a matter of convention and not, necessarily, held as radically distinct entities) whereby, in the interaction, the subject resists imposing a totalizing claim of identity or conceptualization onto the object.⁸³ To make the claim of conceptualized identity—an epistemic claim at its root (informed by certain ontological suppositions)—is, for Adorno, unwarranted as it presupposes the subject as constitutive of the object, forgetting that the subject “is from the outset an object as well.”⁸⁴ Here, Adorno marks his turn from the alleged “positive” dialectics of Hegel and Marx (wherein a “positive” sense of identity is achieved regarding the object) and into the negative. Thus, where positive identity had reigned, it is now seen as an unwarranted construction and, in its place fits the notion of nonidentity. “Dialectics,” Adorno contends, “is the consistent sense of nonidentity.”⁸⁵ Nonidentity is what arises initially in the contradicting forces typical of any dialectic (Hegelian, Marxist, or otherwise). But in the temptation of “synthesis,” of identity, thought or consciousness is carried away from itself, alienated, from the object of concern. In this alienation and establishment of a particular

⁸³ Here, also, “subject” is, as we are considering the “imposition” of identity, restricted to most likely mean “human.” However, I don’t want to confine the use of this term throughout this text to be taken as necessarily synonymous with “human.” That is, I would ask that, where applicable and appropriate, the reader extend the notion of subject to nonhumans as well.

⁸⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1999), 183. Fully: “An object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject, whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well. Not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject. To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject.”

⁸⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. 5.

conceptual total identity there is the built-in tendency to, by assuming such totality, seek dominion over the object. The tendency towards domination may be explained as follows: When we assume the total being of a particular thing (person, non-human animal, ecosystem, etc.) we then close ourselves off to that things own possibilities. What would, perhaps, transgress the ideal totalized identity is suppressed, often times forcefully. This has been the case, historically, with women, slavery, racism, and the like. Each group has been *systematically* oppressed based on an identity that is a closed, totalized fiction, forcefully limiting the flourishing and possibilities of such individuals/classes. On the other side of the coin, those who are in a position to bestow such identity (typically males, typically white) attribute to themselves (implicitly) the power of constitution in regards to the other, thus setting the grounds for the ordering, commanding, and abuse of the other. This “identity thinking” as Adorno calls it, encourages and gives form to a rationality that, as he and Horkheimer pointed out nearly two decades prior to *Negative Dialectics*, is *inherently* oppressive.⁸⁶

Indeed, it is “identity,” Adorno argues, that is “the primal form of ideology.”⁸⁷ Though it is the notion of a “constitutive consciousness,” i.e., constitutive subjectivity, that gives rise to both identity thinking and ideology itself; “The critique of ideology” is then, “a critique of the constitutive consciousness itself” (what Adorno and Horkheimer have also taken to calling “bourgeois subjectivism”).⁸⁸ The turn towards a synthetic-like conceptual identity, an outcome reached only by assigning constitutive priority to the subject, must therefore be resisted and, instead, the more primitive sense that grounds all dialectics—the nonidentical—must be, in some

⁸⁶ See “Instrumental rationality.” Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1989). This concept will be attended to in later sections.

⁸⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 148. Ideology will be defined in the following section.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

sense, embraced. I ought to note here the very odd sense that characterizes negative dialectics: The forgoing of identity thinking is understood, initially, by assuming the framework in which identity thinking actually maintains its presence. It is an immanent critique of sorts. Through language, definitions, concepts, or philosophy itself, the thing or the object is forced under the imposing framework of total identity. But it is only through the employment of such concepts or philosophies (slightly tweaked), that the things nonidentity “appears.” Though it appears, Adorno notes, as “contradiction...under the aspect of identity.”⁸⁹ Thus, the method of this entire paper, its arguments, assume, in part, the framework and conventions of what it has set to critique, i.e., civilization.

The nonidentical is, then, the “hinge” of the negative dialectic—“negative,” because in the face of traditional dialectics synthesis is presented as positive identity. But the nonidentical is not necessarily the opposite of identity, rather, it is the true “secret *telos* of identification.”⁹⁰ Identity thinking chases the sense of nonidentity but in doing so, becomes implicated in the straits of ideology. But what kind of ideology is Adorno speaking of here? What is this ideology guided by and what keeps it afloat? How is this relevant to a discussion of civilization?

Ideology: Equivalency and Instrumental Reason

Ideology may be understood as a form of thinking that distorts, eludes, and conceals an objective conception or, at the least, the principles for evaluating such objectivity of certain

⁸⁹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 149.

political, social, and, in the case at hand, ecological realities.⁹¹ In classical Marxism, ideology has been understood as the promotion of a “false consciousness” wherein the subjects of a particular political establishment are led by that establishment in the development of a belief system that at once is the legitimation for the dominant class as well as the site of further truth claims emanating from such legitimation. As such, ideology may be characterized as fundamentally epistemological in nature. That is, a particular ideology serves both as the site of a base set of foundational truth claims as well as the production site for further truth claims. These claims, as traditional definitions have it, arise from the material-social conditions of a particular society and seek to legitimate whatever conditions happen to favor and further the dominant status-quo. They are imposed sometimes outright and directly, though, more often subtly as something akin to a rhythm with expectations and a general feeling of togetherness where discord is almost inconceivable. Thus, certain antagonisms between various pockets of society (traditionally in terms of class) tend to become neutralized, more or less, through the force of ideology, typically through what some have called “ideological state apparatuses”⁹² (Althusser). Under particular ideological prescriptions, domination, exploitation, and repression all come to appear as natural, inevitable, and ahistorical—they are the expected rhythmic tides of ideology that often conceal (i.e., neutralize) the root antagonism. Indeed, the existence of oppressive conditions is frequently denied (even by those who may experience the brunt of domination) and appeal is made to the abundance of “opportunity.”

⁹¹ Though “ecological,” in this sense, ought to be seen as highly redundant considering its encompassing and making possible the reality of the social, political, cultural, etc.

⁹² This includes not only the courts, military, and police—whose base function is, arguably, in the protection and promotion of private capital—but also the immediate institutions of capital, i.e., industry.

Though getting back to the epistemological elements of ideology, new kinds of antagonisms are arising—this time regarding the truth content and knowable landscape of a global material-reality: On the one hand there is the elaborate idealism of economic structures (here, we may even limit ourselves to capitalism—even with its recent heavy dose of state intervention, an act that some theorists have argued goes to show the extent to which “capitalism” and hegemonic force will ensure and maintain the status-quo) whose consequences have very real effects on the economic realities of people, but also on the earth itself. Thus, on the other hand, is the ecological/biological reality of the earth—an objectively real, material platform whose existence, as I’ve been arguing, paves the way for the (im)possibility of capitalist economics as well as the possibilities, in any knowable sense, of “being” as such. To note, there is a point of contention being made recently over the charge of the ontological similarity between communism and capitalism. This point, however, is not to debate the differences/similarities between capitalism or communism, but rather, productionist economics as such.

The ideology which is at the heart of identitarian thought is one of equivalency. That is, it is a form of consciousness dominated by the imposition of quantitative abstractions onto objects as a definitive feature of their being. Only in this abstract quantitative bestowal is it possible to equivocate qualitatively different things. It is precisely this qualitative difference in objects/subjects which, as the products of mass industrialism colonize further and further aspects of everyday life, becomes more opaque and gives rise to the sense that the present state of affairs is natural, ahistorical, and in no need of justification. Again, as it was described earlier, the conditions created by civilization itself serve to legitimate, replicate, and further the being of civilization while at the same time rendering the possibility of critical reflection ever more

unlikely. Abstract quantification in regards to the equivalency of qualitatively dissimilar objects is the direct outcome of identity thinking, i.e., in order for equivalency to take place, the totalizing claim to the things identity (taken a conceptual whole) must be assumed.⁹³

The ideology of equivalency is, then, further than the reaches of any particular political thought (or *political* thought in general), a fundament of civilized society and, indeed, the keystone in the ideology of civilization. It is the underlying force to the myth of scarcity (the principle “value” maker in the exchange society) imposed, most radically in capitalism, by the civilizing impulse. But it is the case, presently, that this mythos of scarcity has exceeded its mythological character and now comes to constitute a primary, ontologically-objective, reality the world over. By destroying entire populations of plant and animal life, ecosystems, and taking hold of what is left, modern industry in its quest for infinite economic, and thus social, domination threatens the possibility of a resurging abundance—an abundance that has characterized the majority of sentient life’s being on this planet. Again, in the myth-turned-reality of scarcity is the imposition of conditions that would justify further oppressive conditions, casting civilization in a quasi-religious salvific light (“Only *more* civilization can save us from civilization.”) and neglect critical reflection.

Adorno saw contemporary society as a highly sophisticated system that is administered and organized according to principles of commodity exchange, i.e., equivalency. Characteristically, a society based on principles of commodity exchange tends to subsume *every* possible entity under the logic of such exchange. All the while, the antinomies of such principles are systematically concealed from everyday experience. In terms of value, exchange-as-instrumentalization in

⁹³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 7. To note, in DOE, the arguments regarding equivocation are largely confined to bourgeois society.

civilized society (never mind the “contemporary” qualifier) takes the place of what would normally be perceived as having value or being-valued. The ends of reducing qualitative aspects of an object into quantitative terms serves only, in the exchange society, for further and further exchange. Its ends are the “endless” exchange of everything, including sentient life, including human life, i.e., “labor.” As Zerzan has put it, “civilization,” with all of its surface level pluralities, “is fundamentally hostile to qualitative difference.” If the global economic system accepted the primacy of the qualitative it would, in effect, dissolve. I should note here that I think there’s a strong case to be made for understanding “qualitative” as what is physically and materially embodied and what is quantitative as essentially disembodied and abstract.

But the ideology of equivalency is only one side of the coin. The other is the version of rationality touched on briefly above. Instrumental reason is the guiding force of the logic of equivalency. It is a kind of pseudo-teleological form of thought that finds its origin in specific material/historical/social contexts where the focus of thought is oriented in the *means* of achieving a particular end (This context, in its widest sense, is civilization). Though more specifically, while there is an “end” in mind, this “end” is not subject to critical reflection—it is seen as “given,” self-evident, or simply “off-limits” to critical reflection. The connection between the “naturalization” of ideological claims and instrumental reason is clear in this understanding. That is, if certain ideologically informed knowledge claims involve a claim on what is real, they, simultaneously, include the limiting or dismissal of the possibilities of other, say, non-ideological claims. The myth of progress serves as an excellent example of the functioning of what I have described.

Progress

When the notion of progress is invoked in say, a State of the Union address, the question that ought to follow is: Progress toward what? What is it that we're really trying to get at? Of course these questions are not usually entertained. Somehow, the notion of progress itself is satisfactory. However, if this question happens to be touched on, the answers are typically something in the order of "jobs," "security," or even more ominous, "growth." These answers are acceptable within the reigning ideology, but they are dim-witted when paired into a larger context. Any further questioning about the "why" of jobs is considered nonsensical. They suppose that a life spent paying to live is in some sense a good way to live. That it is, philosophically speaking, the "good life." Paying to live or begging to not be exploited are seen as ahistorical "facts of life" and thus beyond questioning. Every civilized edifice plays the same conversation-stopping game: "This is it, get used to it." It is almost inconceivable to the thoroughly civilized consciousness—a false consciousness—that one should *not* have to do such things or that one could ever think about not doing such things. Indeed, the claim of civilizations inevitability to continue along its current trajectory arrogantly stakes a totalizing, ordering, and, thus, dominating claim on the future.

We can understand progress perhaps in the same way that some have taken to characterizing existence as a kind of movement in "becoming." Surely the postmodern crowd will at least entertain this idea. Though this idea is as bankrupt as the philosophies that would seek, as Zerzan has put it, to "exile" us from "presence"—from the immediacy of lived experience. The notion of becoming never culminates in anything (yet goes on supposing that it will) and is thus a philosophy most aptly fit for any person or culture with a hard-lined "death

urge.” The Freudian “death-drive” (*Thanatos*)—the opposing force to unmediated desire, *eros*—that Herbert Marcuse described as a drive within civilization to “relieve tension,” characterizes the civilized consciousness as a blind groping in the darkness for what relieves itself of conditions that are self-imposed.⁹⁴ If a system that presupposes the usefulness of all things as a means to some end, yet cannot define that end except with other means, it ought to be considered absolutely nonsensical, perhaps even pathological. This, possibly, is what Freud meant when he observed that with the advent of civilization—the repression of desire—also came the “mechanism of neuroses.” Remarking on this insight of Freud, it may also be the case that, Zerzan argues, “Since this repression and its constant maintenance are essential to civilization, universal civilization brings universal neurosis.”⁹⁵ This notion of inherent repression has been echoed time and again by the few that have cast a critical light on civilization as such. Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer judged that the entire “history of civilization...is the history of renunciation.”⁹⁶ As a culture built on a myth of progress, its most cogent expression of renunciation is that of the present. This is especially so if the price of this “progress” is the annihilation of thousands of species and a life, so far as it regards humans, that is calculated, administered, controlled, and bound to an impoverished, alienated existence.

In any case, instrumental reason and identity are the formative ingredients to what perhaps brought the alleged and apparent split between humans and nature (as well as the concept of nature in the first place). By naming the entities outside of human construction, “nature,” the impulse towards domination was sealed. At once, the natural world—what is

⁹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974), 29.

⁹⁵ John Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008), 106.

⁹⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 55.

“other” than civilization—becomes *purely* a part of the status functions of civilized instrumentation. The world and its inhabitants are, then, what Heidegger termed “standing-reserve”—entities prepared and readied for the sole use of humans. To be clear, I’m not arguing that there is no difference between civilization and say, a pine flatwood ecosystem—clearly there is. Nor am I arguing that there is no nature (those debates have gotten nowhere and nothing except perhaps tenure for a few academics). But rather, in the construction of a conceptual totality like nature, the impulse to dominate and reduce to instrumental-value is an invariable outcome of such a construction. “What men want to learn from nature,” argue Adorno and Horkheimer, “is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men.” We can assume the conceptual term “nature” responsibly by keeping in mind the notion of nonidentity.

While the ideology of equivalency and its handmaiden, instrumental rationality, may be the primary grounds for civilizations establishment and replication, it is in the moderns (Bacon, Galileo, Newton, Leibniz, et. al.) and the precursive thought to industrialization, where this oppressive pair really becomes apparent. Finding a path in the metaphysics of Locke (especially those regarding property) and then further, the theories of Adam Smith, the ideology of equivalency, mediated through industrial business, rapidly set-upon the natural world. But, as folks like Zerzan have pointed out, our current state of affairs is not simply some miscarriage of reason that occurred in the lead to industrialization, but is, rather, the culminating ends of civilization as such. In contemporary society, the ideology of equivalency is running aground into objective realities of ecology. Whether climate change, deforestation, massive global losses in bio-diversity, oceanic dead-zones and acidification, and so forth, the fantasy of ideology continues to be revealed.

If ideology as “false consciousness” is the tendency in thought and action to distort experience or the content of experience to then give rise to a kind of epistemic “production center,” then getting at the bottom of uncovering ideology requires a deeper examining of the contents of experience and the being of the objects of experience and how it is that a “distortion” or concealing actually happens. I’ve already discussed the notion of context and the missteps of identity thinking and equivalency, but the thrust of these arguments has largely been focused in the realm of epistemology. What is needed now is a turn to the kind of ontology that supports or is assumed in ideology. I approach the bridge between ideology and ontology with the following, albeit contested (Rorty), premise: the knowledge claims that are bolstered by the reigning ideology are ultimately derived from ontological understandings (again, unstated or not). They concern the being of entities that are both the object of civilization and the grounds of civilization. Thus, I think it is appropriate that we turn again to the phenomenological tradition, particularly that of Heidegger and his work regarding technology.

Heidegger and Technology

Higher Man is a tragedy. With his graves he leaves behind the earth a battlefield and a wasteland. He has drawn plant and animal, the sea and mountain into his decline. He has painted the face of the world with blood, deformed and mutilated it.

--Oswald Spengler⁹⁷

Civilization, whether in a contemporary setting or in its beginning stages, can be characterized as thoroughly and definitively technological.⁹⁸ This definition is not to associate

⁹⁷ Oswald Spengler, *Früzeit der Weltgeschichte*, #20, p. 9. Quoted in John Zerzan’s *Twilight of the Machines*, p. 105 [Quoted from John Farrenkopf’s *Prophet of Decline* (Baton Rouge, 2001), p. 224.]. The influence of Spengler’s analysis of technology and civilization has been noted by many scholars to have played a formative role in Heidegger’s thinking.

particular *kinds* of technology to what is civilized, but rather, to note that its being is in the “essence of technology.” But what does this mean?

For Heidegger, the essence of technology “is nothing technological,” that is, it has not to do with particular kinds of technology, specific instruments, or tools. Instead, the technological is a way of thinking about and approaching things in the world. For him, the task of uncovering the essence of the Real (we may also say “object” in the sense that Adorno used it) is something that we humans have always tended towards, yet go about in different ways. One of these ways is technological. It is a mode of “revealing.” A revealing of what though? Heidegger traces the Greek word for revealing, *alētheia*, to its translation by the Romans, *veritas*, i.e., truth, and concludes that technology is a way of revealing the truth of the Real. Ultimately though, Heidegger’s expedition into technology is rooted in a desire to understand and illuminate humans’ relation to Being. Loosely painting the context of contemporary humans, he observes that “everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it.”⁹⁹ His remarks seem to echo the opening statements of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*: “Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains.”¹⁰⁰ “Everywhere” may be synonymous with the everyday. Our “everyday” is bound up in the technological, the civilized, and we must, if that is the case, begin again to look at how the specifically technological understanding affects our notions of being, non-being, and from that understanding gain an even firmer grip on what it is

⁹⁸ This has been one of the primary themes throughout the work of John Zerzan. As such, much of the analysis within this sub-section and those that follow is owed to his work on the subject. My attempt here is to not only present his analysis, but also to further it and argue in its favor.

⁹⁹ Martin Heidegger “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* trans. Maurice Cranston (New York, NY: Penguin, 1968), 2.

we call civilization. Indeed the “Question Concerning Technology” is a large footnote to the question concerning the meaning of Being and thus also to the confrontation of non-being.

Understanding the “revealing” nature of technology stems, in Heidegger, from a close examination of technology as “contrivance,” as instrumental. Within the instrumental, the immediate invocation is of ends and means. And while the popular definition of technology as a neutral tool, as an entity to be manipulated and used to manipulate, involves a kind of means and ends conception, this definition is shortsighted and incorrect according to Heidegger. Indeed, Heidegger warns that in regarding technology as neutral we become absolutely “blind to the essence of technology.” Instead, technology is instrumental insofar as it is a *means* of revealing, of “bringing-forth” (*Poiēsis*) the space in which “truth happens.” Here, we may be reminded of the inescapable normativity in all statements/descriptions (i.e., revealing) described by Adorno and note that the technological carries within itself a concealed normativity. But the particular brand of revealing prescribed by technology is in bringing-forth that which “does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us...”¹⁰¹ Thus, unlike *physis* (nature), which is also a bringing-forth (yet it is from itself), technology requires its objects to yield before it—to become “unconcealed,” as it were, from without.

Where we can tie the knot between technology and civilization, via Heidegger, is in the notion of enframing (*Ge-stell*), the essence of technology. I mentioned at the beginning of this paper the tendency for civilization to “enframe” the interpretation and understanding of the contents of experience, experience itself, and the world in general, without delving into the full breadth of what it means to enframe. First of all, the word “enframe,” clearly enough, invokes

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, QCT, 13.

the notion of a “framework,” or the framing of a thing, and so forth. But in Heidegger’s usage, this is only partly right. Enframing, aside from being the framing of things, is more fundamentally, another specific kind of revealing. To get at the rest of the meaning we can look at a breakdown of the German prefix *ge* and suffix *stell*. According to most scholars, the prefix *ge* of *Ge-stell* “denotes a totalizing” of sorts (e.g., Heidegger points out that where *Berg* is taken to mean mountain, *Gebirg* “signifies an entire mountain range.”) that, in this case, when coupled with the verb *Stellen* (“to set or put in place, to arrange, to regulate...to set upon.”) moves past the mere framing of a thing, particularly and singularly, and into the *active* framing of things in totality.¹⁰² The totality in question, for our purposes, is civilization—the technological society and its “setting-upon” of the world. All things, of nature or otherwise, are subsumed into the instrumentality and equivalency of civilization under the revealing auspices of technology. This revealing is described by Heidegger as having “the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging forth.” He explains:

...challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew. Unlocking transforming, storing distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing. *But the revealing never simply comes to an end.*¹⁰³

Heidegger follows up by noting that the challenging also “does not run off into the indeterminate.” But this claim remains unsubstantiated, especially when viewed from an understanding of civilization that acknowledges the idealist premise of infinite growth. Indeed

¹⁰² Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1995), 100.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, QCT, 16.

civilization sets its trajectory towards an indeterminate version of “progression,” scurrying about trying to regulate, secure, and order all things and, in doing so, may be cast to the most unsuspecting and insidious version of nihilism.

In his discussion of “passive nihilism” John Zerzan argues that the myths of progress, of technology—of civilization—carry within themselves “an enfeebling ethos of meaninglessness and indifference.”¹⁰⁴ As “Technology mediates between individuals and nature, ultimately abolishing both,” the religion of efficiency, i.e., instrumental rationality, sacrifices in almost every case, moral or ethical concerns.¹⁰⁵ Quite literally, civilization (whose essence is wholly technological) carries a mythic and insatiable “end” that seeks only to challenge forth the real to “[reveal] itself as standing reserve.”¹⁰⁶

Before moving on, I should note that Heidegger’s use of enframing is held almost entirely within the context of a discussion of so-called modern technology. While there is a clear difference between a wooden bridge and an industrial dam, the industrial dam (or industrialization as such) is a culminating effect of the built-in ontology of civilization itself. The dichotomy between the technology of the ancients and the moderns is held together only by considering the context of such technology, i.e., civilization, as neutral. This as Heidegger and others have shown is untenable. There is a very particular way in which the revealing of the world takes place within civilization. The way or process, to reiterate is Enframing. When we include the notion of civilization, the essence of modern technology, Enframing becomes a leading characteristic throughout the ancient, middle, modern, and contemporary epochs.

¹⁰⁴ Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2002), 109.

¹⁰⁵ Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, QCT, 23.

Enframing as “the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” is the outcome of the setting-upon of the real by civilization in its ever-present need for further and further expansion. In short, Enframing is the determinant outcome of civilized being. If civilization, as Jensen described it, is characterized by the growth of cities that “require the routine importation of food and other necessities of life” it follows then (as Jensen points out) that importations are *required* by cities because the surrounding ecosystem has been thoroughly rid of its means to support that city. That is, the surrounding ecosystem has already been relieved of its potential to support the kind of activity, locally, in a city. Its contents, conceived as resources, have all been “unconcealed” and converted into the “standing-reserve,” i.e., the undifferentiated energy potential for the use of humans. And although Heidegger was skeptical about the prospect of humans being turned into standing reserve, that is precisely the history of the expansion of civilization, e.g., slavery. If a human community has stood in the way of a particular civilization's access to some “vital” resource, it has been the case, that civilizations will take, through whatever means necessary, those resources (destroying, in the process, the previous communities' traditional way of being).

Hence, we arrive at a globalized techno-civilization whose progenitors have unapologetically pursued the “ends” of progress. And it is through the means of “an implacable, universalizing system of capital and technology,” Zerzan observes, that the agents of such a state have “absorbed nearly all opposition” and “overwhelm[ed] resistance.”¹⁰⁷ The system, as I touched on earlier, encourages “a sense of futility that approaches nihilism” and “is now

¹⁰⁷ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, 87.

accepted as an inevitable response to modernity.”¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, in his essay *The Word of Nietzsche*, even defined nihilism as “the fundamental movement of the history of the West.” It is “the world-historical movement of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, in the same sense that many who claim to have no ideology are bound to the most insidious form of ideology, the hallmark of nihilism Heidegger points out, is its disavowal by those by most captured by it. Ideology, then, with nihilism as its underlying counterpart, characterizes the current global situation as a totalizing, inevitable process, guided and “justified” by the revealing auspices of Enframing. We may draw a connection here between the totalizing aspect of enframing and the same tendency in identity thinking described by Adorno.

Ge-stell, as “the framework that both constitutes and institutes order,” is then, in the same sense of ideology, the active production site of claims and understandings that are self-defining, self-legitimizing, and self-replicating.¹¹⁰ To illustrate how the revealing in enframing brings itself into “its own manifoldly interlocking paths” we may turn to Heidegger’s example of the forester:

The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper, which is then delivered to newspapers and illustrated magazines. The latter, in their turn, set public opinion to swallowing what is printed, so that a set configuration of opinion becomes available on demand.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 62-63.

¹¹⁰ Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 100.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, QCT, 18.

The setting upon of forests, the challenging-of its being as potential for paper, lumber, and the like, is a concrete example of the instrumentality and totalizing conceptual identities that make possible the interlocking of enframing and, thus, the illusion of progress. But the fundament of the interlocking in enframing, the active process throughout, is guided further by a notion of abstract exchange, i.e., equivalency. To illustrate at least one other aspect of this interlocking self-perpetuation, we can take note of the often repeated luddite-like claim that the problems to be fixed by technology are always problems created by technology in the first place. Freud saw this over eighty years ago, declaring “in whatever way we may define the concept of civilization, it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering *are part of that very civilization*” (my italics).¹¹² To count on this way of revealing of being in the world (the technological or the civilized) when its revealing denies the corollary aspect of non-being—of the “oblivion of Being,” as Heidegger would put it in *The Turning*—is, then, undoubtedly pathological.

Civilization as Pathological¹¹³

The pathological, like the ideological, is founded and maintained through distortions of the real revealed in experience. The turning away from non-being finds its roots in the pathology that is ideology and it is in this general civilized ideology that “Man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of Enframing that he does not apprehend Enframing as a claim, that he fails to see himself as the one spoken to, and hence also fails in every way to hear

¹¹² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 58.

¹¹³ Title of John Zerzan’s 2002 work, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization*

in what respect he ek-sists (sic)...”¹¹⁴ The “exile” from presence described by Zerzan may, with the insight of Heidegger, be more appropriately understood as an exile from Being and, thus, into non-being. And it is into this exile that the pathological being of alienation, estrangement, domination, fragmentation, and general oppressive states lay claim and deepen their supposed inevitability.

From Domestication to Alienation

In the section regarding Adorno’s notion of nonidentity, it was argued that the imposition of positive conceptual identity results, ultimately, in the alienation of one from the object. In more concrete terms, this alienation takes the form of domination via the subjective imposition of an assumed, imaginary totalizing identity that, in turn, “cuts” off the possibilities of being for any being(s) or confines it to instrumental use. But what was our first step toward this alienation? Robin Fox, founder of the Rutgers anthropology department, argues that “the first great act of alienation” occurred with the ushering in of the polis, the city-state.¹¹⁵ In this section, we may go back to examine some of the elements covered in Chapter 2, albeit this time with a more critical eye. The founding elements of the city-state, as I’ve been arguing, carry particular implicit claims of how the world ought to be. As such, their modes of being will tend in some way, as Heidegger argues, to reveal Being and, even if in a nuanced way, the meaning of being and status of beings. Our task, though, as I’ve been edging at, rests in determining if civilizations mode of being, of revealing, rests ultimately in the concealing or denying of non-being. If it is the case, and I think a great deal of evidence as been presented thus far, that civilization, civilized consciousness, and

¹¹⁴ Heidegger, QCT, 27.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Zerzan’s *Against Civilization*, 90.

so forth deny the prospect of being-toward-death, finitude, and non-being, then it can only be that a civilized conception of Being and an understanding of beings is, in the strictures of a finite material reality, greatly impoverished. In the following, I aim to show that it is not simply a matter of where civilization has gone wrong, that it has simply taken a misstep, rather, it is the case that, like technology, civilization is irredeemably condemned by its own nature to tend towards the destruction of itself and the beings in and around it. Starting with the notion of domestication, moving then towards division of labor, and throughout other fundamentals of civilized society, I will argue that the fundamental aspects of what makes up civilization culminate in and require the alienation of individuals/communities from each other, from non-humans, and from the open possibilities of Being itself.

a. Domestication

Children are not yet fools, but we shall turn them into emblems like ourselves, with high I.Q.'s if possible.

R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience¹¹⁶

The idea of man in European history is expressed in the way in which is distinguished from the animal. Animal irrationality is adduced as proof of human dignity.

Adorno and Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment¹¹⁷

While the polis may have been the first “great” act of alienation, there were certainly other, perhaps more subtle and gradual acts or trends that have led to the current state. For instance, the trend towards domestication. Domestication, the taming of the wild and the bending

¹¹⁶ R.D. Laing, *Politics of Experience* (New York: Ballantine, 1967), 58.

¹¹⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 245.

of what is Other to anthropogenic utility, has been identified by Zerzan, Richard Heinberg, Jared Diamond, Stanley Diamond (no relation to Jared), Sahlins, and a host of other anthropologists, philosophers, and academics as *a* pivotal first step (likely unknowingly) toward civilized society. “In the ideology of farming,” (farming as an “outgrowth” or formalized system of domestication) Paul Shepard observes, “wild things are enemies of the tame; the wild Other is not the context but the opponent of ‘my’ domain.” We see, here, a marked parallel between the thinking of domestication, i.e., taming, and the identity thinking described by Adorno. Assuming the use-value of an animal or plant as a mere accordance to human want also assumes (or falsely “constitutes”) the being of that object in total and thus, as discussed above, sets the stage for its domination. Even further, Shepard argues, is the phenomenon that through “A select and altered little group of animals, filtered through the bottleneck of domestication, came in human experience to represent the whole of animals value to people.”¹¹⁸ Our experience or, rather, our interpretation of experience, is then, as I’ve pointed out earlier, an integral point of the promotion and maintenance of false consciousness. As our typical everyday experience within civilization is comprised of an aggregate sum of domesticated beings and habitats, our experience with these beings and habitats (as things of instrumental value) loses a certain reciprocity between subject and object that many have argued is essential to a robust and non-ideological interpretation of experience (Adorno). Instead of reciprocity, where the nonidentity of the Other, and thus the dignity of the Other, may be kept in mind, in domestication the experiential relationship is one of coercion. In this light, Perhaps, we may even call domestication the first setting-upon and

¹¹⁸ Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1982), 38-9.

challenging forth of nature.¹¹⁹ Renowned anthropologist Marshall Sahlins as even declared domestication as a “technique of appropriation.” It is, possibly, a first move towards a thoroughly technological society (concurrent with the division of labor which shall be dealt with following this section).¹²⁰

Indeed, as Shepard has argued: there is a “psychology of domestication”—a particular rationality, consciousness, or way of approaching the world. The shift into an agrarian society, necessarily, means a shift in the meaning of the being of land and surroundings. It is, again, a fundamental shift in ontology, perception, and thus experience of the world and Other. The changes in animals via domestication, changes, in turn, the way humans look at animals. But this relationship is not entirely one-sided. The further domestication extends, the further humans, then, seem also to undergo a domestication of sorts. By noting the features most prevalent and valued in the domestication of animals, a parallel may be drawn to their being as instrumental, and the being of contemporary humans.¹²¹ The noted and desired features of domesticated animals “include plumper and more rounded features, greater docility and submissiveness, reduced mobility, simplification of complex behaviors (such as courtship), the broadening or generalizing of signals to which social responses are given (such as following behavior), reduced hardiness, and less specialized environmental and nutritional requirements.”¹²² But it is the culmination of these effects that, Shepard argues, leads to “infantilization.” He explains:

The style conveyed as a metaphor by the wild animal is altered [in domestication] to literal model and metonymic subordinate: life is

¹¹⁹ This is despite Heidegger’s argument that the farmer does not “challenge-forth” the earth.

¹²⁰ Marshall Sahlins, *The Original Affluent Society*, in “Against Civilization” ed. John Zerzan (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2005), 35.

¹²¹ We may even say the same for plants. The ultimate goal in the domestication of plants and animals is increased production and efficiency. Hence, the hyper domestication of highly technologized genetic engineering.

¹²² Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness*, 38.

inevitable physical deformity and limitation, mindless frolic and alarms, bluntness, following and being herded, being fertile when called upon, representing nature at a new, cruder level.¹²³

Thus, via domestication, we come at a picture of life not dissimilar to the “state of nature” described by Hobbes or other apologists for civilization.¹²⁴ It promotes the idea that without civilization, “life is inevitable physical deformity and limitation.” We then accept this inevitability and, like the domesticated animal continue about our daily lives “following and being herded.” But our ways of framing these situations of following and being herded, namely via linguistic and aesthetic devices (e.g., “newspeak” in the case of linguistic hedging or fashions and architecture in the case of aesthetics), obscure and conceal the reality of the situation. So in a two-fold manner, the myth of what is uncivilized, being propped up by domestication, seeks to justify civilization and, simultaneously (by an appeal to the “naturalness” of the myth), the oppressive conditions for its furtherance. On a philosophical level, there is absolutely no epistemic justification or warrant for the premise being assumed in traditional defenses of civilizations (or attacks on nature, if you prefer). Perhaps it is the case that this entire myth has been bolstered by a rather crude naturalistic fallacy. The “ought” of domestication and civilized being is supported by the fictional “is” of the myth. But again, as I pointed out earlier, the myth of things like scarcity is increasingly being willed into material reality.

The desired features of domesticated animals, their infantilizing effect, are the same means/ends of the domination of humans in civilization. As Zerzan has argued, it is “not just the taming of animals and plants,” that domestication begets, “but also the taming of human instincts

¹²³ Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness*, 38.

¹²⁴ Perhaps it is unnecessary to note, but the “state of nature” described most famously by Hobbes, but repeated by many others, seems to have been thoroughly discredited by mainstream anthropology (even in its most metaphorical interpretations).

and freedoms.”¹²⁵ Similarly, Zerzan observes, as domesticated animals are almost entirely dependent upon humans to be cared for, we humans are also have been “made increasingly dependent and infantilized by the progress of civilization” (recall the earlier section, “The Genesis of Civilization’s Being Given”).¹²⁶ The autonomy of the individual or community decreases in tandem with the increase or spread of domestication. The domesticating impulse of some humans is not dissimilar to those who have colonized human communities in every part of the living world. By destroying one community’s means to live, a colonizer may then enforce his way of being as the only possible way of being.

The first parallel in Shepard’s definition may be to note the global percentage increase in obesity. This is clear enough, folks are getting fatter, less healthy, and less active.

However, the second point in Shepard’s description to parallel with the human community—submissiveness and docility—may be noted in societies inability to successfully resist and, to some extent, perceive the varying movements and manipulations of power (i.e., a tendency toward submissiveness and docility) whose concentrations are, contrary to Derrida and others, nameable, discernible, and real. This point is a bit more complex to draw out, but nonetheless it is worthwhile and a keystone in understanding how we perceive and experience civilization as a totalized, universal, ahistorical, unchangeable fact of life (i.e., that “resistance is futile”).

The docility and submissiveness of certain human communities is most evident in so-called first world countries. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, forcefully argued that the status-quo, throughout history, has promoted, encouraged, and even “ensured” the docility of those to

¹²⁵ Zerzan, *Against Civilization*, 2.

¹²⁶ Zerzan, *Against Civilization*, 3.

be controlled and manipulated. However, according to Foucault it wasn't until the mid 18th century, the heyday of Enlightenment, that the merger of mechanization and docility join to form the fundament of the horrific epoch of industrialism. "The body," argues Foucault, as an "object and target of power" finds its genesis in the twin "registers" of "submission and use" and "functioning and explanation" aptly formulized and set by enlightenment thinkers....

Domestication, at its base, can be appropriately classified as a method of systematic control. But the movement for further control over the means to live and lives in general is taken to further heights in the systematic division of labor. Indeed, division of labor proceeds concurrently with domestication.

b. Division of Labor

The dividing and organizing of individuals into specialized centers of production with tasks that are, ideally, singular in nature is a basic description of what we may call the division of labor or specialization.¹²⁷ To divide into specialty necessarily paves the way for social stratification, for hierarchy. Whether priests, press (pundits), government officials, experts of every imaginable field lay claim to the fundamental aspects of being in the world. If "domestication involved the initiation of production," it was in a fully regimented and administered division of labor that, Zerzan argues, "completed [the] foundations of social stratification."¹²⁸ Indeed, as Zerzan points out, modern life is impossible without the division of labor. It is thus, he declares, that if one wishes to question or do away with civilization, one must also question or do away with another of its most fundamental structures of organization,

¹²⁷ For a more robust definition, see Zerzan in Chapter 2 of this text.

¹²⁸ Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*, 77.

division of labor.¹²⁹ Specialization is a constitutive factor, phenomenologically speaking, of the contemporary life-world. The everyday and the context of experience are always, within civilization, reckoned from the standpoint of one held within interlocking specialties. It is what makes possible civilization in the sense that its active promotion maintains and expands civilization as such. So as not to get too far into purely anthropological explanations, I should note here that there are philosophical underpinnings, metaphysical and ontological assumptions, bound up within such an institution. Similar to the discussion of technology in general, division of labor prescribes a particular way of being, understanding, and approaching the world.

Thus, for a philosophical discussion of division of labor, its meaning and its being, it seems appropriate that we begin with its first detailing in western philosophy: Plato's *Republic*. The first mention comes as a commentary made by Socrates on the nature of man. Individuals, he argues, differ greatly in their natures and thus some are "suited" for some tasks and others for other tasks.¹³⁰ This foundational passage, as many have pointed out, serves as the justification later made for the tripartite division of society. In Socrates explanation, as Stanley Diamond has put it, "it is imagined that the identity of the individual is exhausted by the single occupation in which he engages. The occupational status, so to speak, becomes the man, just as his class position is, in a wider sense, said to be determined by his nature."¹³¹ Thus, we come in civilization to define an individual based on their work. This is evident in almost every social gathering and meeting of strangers; "Hi, nice to meet you" and so forth until, the defining question appears: "So, what is it that you *do*?" We create social divisions based on occupation.

¹²⁹ Interview with Zerzan, conducted by Jensen. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization*.

¹³⁰ Plato, *The Republic* 370.

¹³¹ Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974), 181.

The notion of “self” in civilization is based on work and, more radically, the work that furthers civilization. Indeed, so deep is the stake of bourgeois subjectivism that in our jobs, we presume somehow to “*make a living.*” To conceive of ones being in this way, necessarily rearranges ones interaction with the Other (whether, human, non-human, ecosystem, and so forth).

Philosophically, what this means is that, much like Hegel or Marx supposed, in our work we become able to realize the self—the master/slave dialectic continues on, yet the masters disavow their status and the slaves stand by the seeming inevitability of their situation. But where it was the arrangements of labor that had Marx and others so preoccupied, what we ought to be looking at is production itself. An analysis of the means of production, granted, may tell us much about our immediate situation, but it does not necessarily answer the question of production itself, i.e., production for what, for whom, or to what ends?¹³² For most (and this is especially evident in the work of enlightenment thinkers and Marx), it is a belief that through production, with production being synonymous with progress, we may be led to greater emancipation, greater freedom.

Considering its philosophical roots in Plato’s text, it may be agreed, as Adorno and Horkheimer observed, that even “Philosophy believes that the division of labor exists to serve mankind, and that progress leads to freedom.”¹³³ Dispelling this myth of a progress-in-and-towards-freedom requires only that we briefly survey the breadth of what guides this thinking towards “progress.” This is a complicated task, but with some groundwork already laid down in

¹³² I would add here, however, that water, land, even air at this point, can be drawn into the argument regarding collective ownership of the means of production. Though further, we ought challenge the notion of ownership itself in regards to water, land, or air as well as the activities that impinge or require the pollution of these elements.

¹³³ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 243.

the realm of technology—a fundamental piece in our conceiving of not just “freedom,” but the human situation in general—the following should not be too difficult.

Stanley Diamond remarks that “the division of labor is...an expression of the socially available technology.”¹³⁴ The division of labor, then, may be seen primarily as a movement of technology, mirroring its changes and innovations and, similarly, maintaining, perhaps even reinforcing, the kind of rationality and revealing that the technological entails. Indeed, in specialization (especially of the sort involved with industrialization), the human is a source of undifferentiated energy, a replaceable piece of equipment in the machinery of productionism. As Heidegger has pointed out, the further technology pushes into mechanization and industrialism, the more at risk becomes the revealing of Being. This “push”, however, is only possible through the division of labor (compounded with the above noted features of technology). The rationality of production is held, as I discussed earlier, in instrumentalization and an ideology of equivalency. Division of labor, then, subsumes this rationality and ideology, but does so on the following basis: that trade exists, that an economic structure, complete with institutions and people to enforce its order, exists. The sort of trade or economy in which specialization becomes the primary force, namely on account of its efficiency, is one of “mass” scale. That is, one that requires imports. Socrates and his interlocutors agreed when it came to the need of imports in the city, but they also made it clear that the need for imports directly correlates to the need for slaves, as well as an army (given that the city will, by design, expand).¹³⁵

However, under Heidegger’s criticism of Plato and Aristotle’s metaphysics as “productionist,” the explanations given by these eminent philosophers may be understood in a

¹³⁴ Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, 181.

¹³⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, 369b-373e.

more critical light. By a productionist metaphysic, it is meant that “for an entity ‘to be’ ...it must be produced.”¹³⁶ Granted, as Heidegger and many others have pointed out, production for the ancient Greeks was of a very different sort than industrial technology. Though nevertheless, according to Heidegger, the underlying metaphysic and ontology of the ancient Greeks was the genesis for modern technology.¹³⁷ In Zimmerman’s words, “The technological understanding of being, the view that all things are nothing but raw material for the *ceaseless* process of production and consumption, is merely the final stage in the history of productionist metaphysics” (my italics).¹³⁸

In a context whereby ever-increasing production is needed to survive, it follows that stricter and more mechanized divisions will continue to permeate society and the individual. This is the double side of the division of labor; production as well consumption is necessary. Here, we come to view the individual and her being in the specialized and stratified society. The division and fragmentation of the individual, as many have pointed out, is indeed a direct result of the divisions and subsequent antagonisms of a constructed social inequality. It reduces man, argues Herbert Marcuse, down to a “one dimensional” subject; easily manipulated, submissive, and docile in the face of ever increasing pressures to conform and remain uncritical. Understanding specialization as technology, the following remarks by Marcuse illuminate our situation:

“domination perpetuates and extends itself not only through technology but *as* technology, and the latter provides the great legitimation of the expanding political power, which absorbs all

¹³⁶ Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 3.

¹³⁷ Heidegger: “The limitless domination of modern technology in every corner of this planet is only the late consequence of very old technical interpretation of the world, which interpretation is usually called metaphysics.” Quoted from Zimmerman’s *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity*. p. 166 [Heidegger’s Collected Works, (52:91)].

¹³⁸ Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity*, xv.

spheres of culture.” He goes on to add that through this technological way of being, we are provided with “the great rationalization of the unfreedom of man,” and confronted with the “‘technical’ impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one’s own life.” However, the insidiousness with which this “unfreedom” is born and continued is concealed by the alleged “comforts of life” and the assumed goodness of increased/increasing production.¹³⁹ It is the case, however, that what is construed as a comfort of life is, instead, the instruments through which antagonism’s and docility are furthered. Be it the television, the automobile, the computer, air *conditioning*, and so forth, each alleged comfort and utility further stultifies, alienates, and divides the individual.

The increased divisions between human and human (which must also imply a division between nature and nonhuman) is a result of the specialization in labor. The face of the Other that Levinas has so beautifully reminded us of—a founding movement in empathy and ethics—is mediated so as to be obscured or entirely absent. And though Levinas restricted his analysis to human-human interaction, I think it would be just to apply this analysis to non-humans as well.

c. Domestication, Divided Labor, Divided Cognition

To take a contemporary example of the divisions between people, the alienation from both self and Other, and the underlying push towards domestication, I think it may be helpful to briefly look at the phenomenon of internet based social networks. These institutions, under the auspices of “Face-book,” the bastion of contemporary social achievement (or at least one is led to think), is neither the integration of the face-to-face nor “book,” in the sense that it may contain substantial information about anything (not saying all books do, necessarily, contain substantial

¹³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 158.

information). Instead, the “face” presented is one carefully chosen according to certain fashions, a photo wherein the idealization of “a good time” was likely reinforced by a photographers beckoning: “okay, everybody smile!” and the “book” is the careful combination of a formatted questionnaire and sound-bite “status updates.”

Indeed, Facebook and similar other social network websites may, according to Lady Greenfield, a professor of synaptic pharmacology at Lincoln college (Oxford) and director of the Royal Institution (“the oldest independent research body in the world”), be responsible for the future “infantilization” of an entire generation. She explains that the typical child’s experiences with sites like Facebook “are devoid of cohesive narrative and long-term significance. As a consequence, the mid-21st century mind might almost be infantilised, characterised by short attention spans, sensationalism, inability to empathise and a shaky sense of identity.”¹⁴⁰ Her hypothesis of this infantilization is rooted in a larger cognitive and social schema that she describes as involving a “marked preference for the here-and-now, where the immediacy of an experience trumps any regard for the consequences.”¹⁴¹ And though Greenfield says this may be characteristic of the mid 21st century mind, it would follow, given the current ecological crisis, that the tendency to disregard consequences, obsess over sensationalism, and the shrugging of empathetic engagement, is in fact characteristic of much of the contemporary consciousness.

Is this not the exact parallel of productionism and civilization in general? The dialectic of technology, wherein humanity’s own creations reach back into our being and decisively shape—domesticate—our further actions and creations is evident with each passing day. Actions are

¹⁴⁰ Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*. “Facebook and Bebo risk 'infantilising' the human mind” Feb. 24, 2009. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/feb/24/social-networking-site-changing-childrens-brains>) (accessed March 15, 2011).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

being taken that seem so necessary now, (e.g., drilling for oil, increasing production efficiency, or simply perpetuating the growth of the global economy) and, indeed, are necessary within the civilized context, yet these very actions cut off the possibilities for the being of entire species and perhaps, as some have suggested, even our own. The ethical implications of this cognitively reinforced way of being are daunting. If neither empathy nor a concern for consequences is present in one's ethical deliberations, what else is left to determine what *ought* to be done?

Just as Facebook is the substitution for the face-to-face, so to is the general trajectory of civilization/technology a substitution of the Real for the non-real. We may be more specific and say the substitution of the “ontologically objective” for the “ontologically subjective” (Searle).

This critique of the short-sightedness involved with civilization, its rationality and obsession with abstract quantification and equivalency, has been covered by a number of academics. At the forefront of such a critique is eco-feminist Val Plumwood. With the comments on rationality already made, we may take Plumwood's insight into the poverty of the dominant systems “rationality” and the further commentary offered by Ronnie Hawkins, and, perhaps, draw nearer to etching out possibilities for ways of being that do not require the wholesale slaughter of ecosystems, their inhabitants, or the general impoverishment of the human condition. In doing so, the reinforcement of the dominant systems implicit ontological, epistemic, and rational commitments on a cognitive level (not dissimilar to the example of Facebook) will be made clear.

Plumwood describes the ecological crisis “as involving a centric and self-enclosed form of reason that simultaneously relies on and disavows its material base.”¹⁴² That this is the form of

¹⁴² Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

civilized rationality and ideology discussed earlier is clear. In step with the critique of instrumental reason offered by Adorno and Horkheimer, Plumwood's analysis requires that we reject the promise of emancipation and progress from the reason heralded by eminent enlightenment thinkers and, instead, reevaluate the rationality of traditional and dominant "rationalism." Rationality, then, as way of approaching and making sense of the world, must, Plumwood claims, take into account our material and embodied existence in the world or, as she puts it, our "ecological embeddedness." The coherency or rationality regarding such ecological rationality takes the material-biological world as its primary truth-qualifier. This, then, is opposed to the traditional rationalist appeals to formal logic and abstract systematization—referents that, in a global economic context, have proven disastrous for the biosphere and many of its inhabitants. As Plumwood and Hawkins suggest (and as was mentioned at the beginning of this text), there is a deep contrast to be drawn between "economic rationality" and ecological rationality. It is the ecological rationality proposed by Plumwood and Hawkins—the way of making sense of the world by paying attention to the world, the way things feel, and a recognition of the realness and corporeality of the biosphere—that, contrary to the instrumental reason of civilization, must be the guiding force in the *truly* emancipatory project of liberating ourselves and the earth from civilization.

CHAPTER FIVE: REDEMPTION¹⁴³

“The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in [the] face of despair,” writes Adorno, “is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.”¹⁴⁴ Adorno writes this towards the end of his text, *Minima Moralia*—a text whose subheading reads: “Reflections from a Damaged Life.” Indeed, if the situation is as stark as many have described it, all we have to offer is a reflection from a life situated within the continuing destruction of both the life-world and the material-biological world (upon which the former is derived). It may be argued then, given the above reflections of civilization as, *fundamentally*, a movement towards non-being—towards destruction—that its possibilities regarding redemption are nil. In *all* of its manifestations, civilization has failed to prescribe anything less than the wholesale destruction and division of the earth and its inhabitants. As Jensen declared, “Civilization is not and can never be sustainable.”

An indictment of civilization, however, is not a mere plea for its philosophical rejection (perhaps in the style of Robert Paul Wolff’s “philosophical anarchism”). While this is a first step, it is only part of the process toward what would be presented as holding redemptive possibility, that is, a way of being that is not predicated on the destruction and division of oneself and the natural world. Rather, in its fullest sense, this rejection implies the need for *active*

¹⁴³ This chapter is largely a footnote to an emerging form of thought known as “Deep Green Resistance.” The arguments presented can be found, more or less, throughout the works of Zerzan, Jensen, Lierre Keith, and others. I have imparted some new ideas (I hope), but the primary point is to present the Deep Green position/critique as the necessary conclusion to the rest of the analysis.

¹⁴⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1984), 267.

reconciliation—a kind of praxis, if you will, that seeks in every instance further reconciliation and recognition of what is Other (however, still maintaining the aspect of nonidentity described by Adorno). This goal, then, is the proper response in the Kantian and critical theorist tradition of a movement towards further emancipation and liberation. Though what might this praxis look like? Where does it start and what ends may we say are truly emancipatory? How might we get there?

First, if, as I attempted to show in Chapter One, that the processes of civilization do indeed threaten the possibilities of life on the planet—that *all* is at stake—then it follows, as a matter of active response, that *all* options towards averting a kind of total biospheric collapse ought to be on the table, so to speak. As Zerzan advised, “When everything is at stake, *all* must be confronted and superseded.” We can conceive of this reconciliation between human and human, human and non-human animal, and humans and the earth, not as a mystical, religious-like effort, but rather, as a fundamental rearranging of certain ways of being in the world, certain ways of approaching, interpreting, and understanding ones being amongst others. Our dwelling on the earth is always permeated with the being of what is other (Heidegger’s *Mitsein*) and hitherto, the relationship to such beings (again, whether human or not) has been in appropriation and domination. A shift in this way of being is absolutely necessary in the sense that, as I’ve been saying, if such reconciliation is forgone so too are the possibilities for the existence of not only an innumerable amount of non-human species, but also, perhaps the human species itself. But this praxis ought not be reckoned as just a new theoretical exposition to be entered as one competing idea amongst thousands, rather, its hearkening is in the tradition of a *practical*

wisdom, of *phronesis*. Here, our concern is directly with our acting and being in the world, not merely with attempting to describe or explain it.

Where to Start?

I'd like to pick up from the end of the previous chapter and expound a bit more on the positive contribution of adopting an ecological rationality. This sort of rationality, as noted above, rests on the rather self-evident premise that cognition is embodied, that is, that our thinking is intimately intertwined with the material and sensuous being of the earth and our bodies. This being, in turn, requires (as I've said) certain physical elements for its continued existence. My thinking, my behavior—each is correlative to an embodied state. If I have been deprived of food for a number of days, my penchant towards critical thought (or the immediate possibility of exercising such thought) will be exceptionally diminished. I participate in the world at every moment as one entirely immersed within the processes of a material world. To even talk about what may be “immaterial” (indeed, to talk at all), requires a particular materially bound context that makes possible the conceiving (or perhaps, in some cases, the recognition) of the immaterial, or the ideal. If it is otherwise, there is no evidence in experience, science, or elsewhere to make such a claim.¹⁴⁵ This, then, has been the thesis of this work (and perhaps, to some extent, of Zerzan, Jensen, Plumwood, Hawkins, et. al.); that the primacy of the subjective in the form of economics, the authority of the state (indeed, institutionalized authority as such),

¹⁴⁵ As David Abram has observed: “Without this body, without this tongue or these ears, you could neither speak nor hear another’s voice. Nor could you have anything to speak about, or even to reflect on, or to thing, since without any contact, any encounter, without any glimmer of sensory experience, there could be nothing to question or to know. The living body is thus the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge.” *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 45.

etc., which, by material force finds its genesis and possibility, neglects that which made its being possible in the first place and, by such neglect, is ruinous to the existence of itself and others.

Our first step, then, towards an emancipatory praxis is to reevaluate how we make sense of the world—to perhaps embrace something like the so-called “land ethic” of Aldo Leopold. It is contrary to the care we exhibit in life (by virtue of our very existence) to act in a way that would, under the auspices of “goodness” and the promotion of “life,” undermine the very possibilities of such existence. However, the adopting of a different rationality involves, correlatively, the adoption of entirely new ontological paradigm—one that mirrors, informs, and is informed by the above sense of rationality.

For this insight, I think we ought to pay attention to a few remarks made by Merleau-Ponty in his posthumously published notes, *The Visible and Invisible*. Here, Merleau-Ponty develops what has been called an “ontology of the flesh.” Metaphorically applying the notion of flesh to describe “an ‘element’ of Being,” Merleau-Ponty contends that we may understand our being in the world (a corporeal, Real world) as consisting of a constant “intercorporeity” wherein we and the sentient or non-sentient “flesh of the world” are, in a sense, intertwined. More specifically, in regards to our perception of the world and being in the world, he contends that as we recognize our perceiving in the world, we also must recognize our possibility of being perceived. It is this notion that, as I pointed out much earlier, leads Robert Kirkman into describing our being in the world as highly vulnerable, with this vulnerability often being somewhat concealed from experience. However, this vulnerability—the “fragility of the real”—is made clear, as Merleau-Ponty had it, when we understand the merging, colliding, and intertwining of our flesh and the flesh of the world—the fundamentals of perception—and uncover

the realness of “the belongingness of each experience to the same world...as *possibilities of the same world*.”¹⁴⁶

Here, I think we can begin to delineate a way of understanding the world that, like Adorno, begins to hand over ontological primacy to the object and the overall context of ourselves and the object. Our understanding of the world is one that implicitly recognizes the sharedness of the world. We needn't etch out all of the peculiarities that differentiate species, nor pose an overarching stance regarding “superiorities.” Those discussions are, for our purposes now, irrelevant. What does matter, however, is that we recognize that the world is shared and neither we, nor other species, can conceivably escape this shared biological reality. And it is here where the brief exposition of possible theoretical foundations of a non-dominative and reconciliatory way of being shall give way to some of the more concrete manifestations of such being—bringing them from possibility to actuality.

But this task, certainly, is easier said than done. We can resolve to adopt these notions in our personal everyday interactions, but to adopt them solely as a matter of lifestyle misses the point entirely. Instead, what we ought to be asking is: what kinds of responses are appropriate given our situation?

For the following, I had originally intended to examine specific contemporary mainstream approaches to environmental destruction, pointing out their general inadequacy and inappropriateness for addressing the ecological crisis. Instead, I'll examine some of the more general problems in the popular approach.

¹⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press, 1968.), 41.

Not only are the current popular “green” movements often subject to severe ideological hijacking (that the state or certain economic entities tend to co-op certain image-friendly environmental campaigns), but also, in the participants insistence that such “above-ground” methods are the *only* acceptable means to address ecological crisis, the tendency is to unknowingly reinforce patterns of destruction and domination. I don’t mean to put it lightly, but it’s like a game. Environmental activists continue to challenge certain rules and conventions of the game, but they fail to challenge the game itself (The game here, being analogous to civilization). There are, as I argued earlier, certain unquestionable structures that are simply given within our horizon of experience. Many activists are baffled when after countless petitions have been submitted, they’ve peacefully marched, held signs, and otherwise exhausted the *predetermined* means for expressing disagreement with the decision maker’s policies, that the destruction of the natural world continues (I certainly was when I first took note of the destruction). But this is precisely the problem: the movement towards sustainability, as I’ve been arguing, runs counter to the very foundations of a state structure—of civilization. It is thus, that any actions typically held within predetermined boundaries must be submitted for reevaluation and, then, insofar as they may aid in the formation of a truly sustainable world, be reincorporated according to their effectiveness.

A Philosophy of Resistance

By the sheer magnitude of the problem, an acceptance of predetermined boundaries—moral, legal, ethical, religious, etc.—is undeniably a privileging of the dead over the living. What I mean is this: these predetermined principles and boundaries for “action” as well as the structure

that they're situated in and emit from, assume that we take their being and continuance as primary and given, and that we take what is to be changed as a kind of dependent variable. In this case, the dependent variable treated by the proponents of civilization as well as mainstream environmentalists is the biosphere. This is implicit in their action and ideology, not as a matter of explicit philosophy. Jensen has pointed this out and notes that this sort of thinking—that which, at any cost, seeks to save civilization—is “entirely backwards.” Instead, he argues, “We need to do *whatever* it takes to save life on the planet.”¹⁴⁷ Hence, I would like to offer the following as a brief philosophical exposition and defense of this “by an means necessary” approach.

To counter the internal logic of civilization, i.e., equivalency, domination, destruction, oppression, and so forth, there must be a developed strategy with an internal logic of its own; one that, as a first principle, reverses the ideological and thus experiential schema of civilization-as-given and the natural world-as-variable. This logic, then, by implication, rejects solutions whose “ends” rest within institutions (state, economic, or otherwise) that, by their nature, promote and rely on the destruction of the natural world and the domination and division of people. These so-called “solutions” include changes in personal consumer habits, a reliance on technological fixes (see Chapter 3 on Heidegger and Technology), as well as any general petitions for state/economic reform. The prevalence of these alleged solutions, however, might be accounted for by noting the general contemporary political climate and the implicit philosophical presumptions within such a climate.

¹⁴⁷ Derrick Jensen, *End:Civ.* “When we see solutions, all the so-called solutions, to global warming the thing they all have in common is that they take industrial civilization as the given and they take the natural world as the dependent variable—its all about saving civilization. That’s entirely backwards. What it should be is: We need to do whatever it takes to save life on the planet.”

Thus, in the following I will briefly comment on some of the unstated philosophical premises of mainstream, perhaps we may call it “liberal,” responses to environmental crisis (to note, this extends to both “right” and “left,” politically).¹⁴⁸ In doing so, my hope is that in the exposure of the falsity of this thinking (as an ends), the scope, tactically and philosophically speaking, will be opened up to explore routes of resistance that are cogent to the desired goal, i.e., clichés aside, save the planet. To begin, we may note the general liberal understanding regarding the process of social and political change. At its fundamental level, the liberal ideology understands change as emitting from the individual “where the idea,” Cameron Murphey explains, “is that social change happens step by step, person by person...and in this way society is seen as some fluid collection of individuals where the sum of these individuals still equals its parts.”¹⁴⁹ Essentially, this thinking, from its subjectivist roots, leads to conceiving of the means of change, *in total*, as “an idealistic process—meaning that it happens in the mind.” Granted, there certainly does need to be a change regarding individual consciousness, moving away from ideology and so forth, but it is not to be taken as a *primary* end, Murphey explains. Yet it is taken as a primary end in the liberal tradition. I think we can draw an interesting parallel here to Adorno’s criticism of constitutive, i.e., bourgeois, subjectivity: The liberal, supposing that simply and solely changing one’s mind or attitude constitutes, correlatively, the necessary change in the world, forgets the objective circumstances that constituted the problem (as well as the subject) in the first place. As Marx had argued that the point of philosophy is to change

¹⁴⁸ This analysis is owed in large part to a series of recent (2011) talks led by Derrick Jensen, Lierre Keith, and Aric McBay on what they have been calling “Deep Green Resistance.”

¹⁴⁹ Lierre Keith and Cameron Murphey, speaking in Eugene, Oregon on March 4, 2011 at the “Public Interest Environmental Law Conference” on “The Failure and Future of Environmentalism.” Video of this presentation can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMRXT4Rg1p0>.

reality, the liberal argues that we must change ourselves. Thus, goes the liberal argument, that if enough people can make this inner change, then it will inevitably change external circumstances. Internal/external philosophical problems aside; I think it's much more useful to consider if such a tactic, solely considered, has ever worked in struggles for liberation. The answer, historically, is a resounding "no." To illustrate, Lierre Keith parallels the history of colonialism and indigenous people with the ideals of the contemporary "alternativist" environmental ideology (The idea that by living differently, i.e., "green," people will naturally be attracted to adopt a different way of life.). She explains that if this liberal model of "personal example-as-political strategy," was indeed an effective method at creating change (and not just a feel-good, religious-like purism), then those who encounter communities that seem to embody the ideal most, i.e., those living sustainably and in ostensible harmony with the earth, will likely want to adopt such a way of living. The go-to example, indeed the often-cited inspiration for such an ideal, is, for the most part, indigenous tribes. But, as Keith explains, in the history of colonizers and invaders into indigenous lands "the face-to-face example of an egalitarian sustainable culture has never once changed the invaders. It has never once brought on an epiphany amongst the invaders." She adds, "The dominant culture will not change because it sees the non-violent values that we embody and it will not change because it beholds our beautiful free-range compost pile."¹⁵⁰ The difference is between liberal ideal and material reality. Again, to stress: changing oneself is necessary, but it is not the ends of change.

The focus, considering what's at stake, must extend beyond the illusion of the isolated subject, beyond the notion of a singular self and an identity that is based on what one consumes.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

We are reminded of Gandhi's famous line—the dogma of contemporary liberals—to “Be the change that you want to see in the world.” This becomes problematic if one does change one's consciousness, yet the objective material reality still stays the same.¹⁵¹ That is, if I have resolved to approach the world with a kind of ecological rationality yet, en masse, the world continues to be destroyed, my response betrays the purpose of my resolve in the first place. On the other hand, we could argue that a truly ecological rationality is, indeed, one that looks beyond personal change and into the shared world.

Observing the ridiculousness of most mainstream solutions to the environmental crisis, the anonymous author(s) of *The Coming Insurrection* comment: “They tell us, ‘everyone must do their part,’ if we want to save our beautiful model of civilization. We have to consume a little less *to be able to keep consuming*. We have to produce organically *to keep producing*. We have to control ourselves *to go on controlling*.”¹⁵² The logic of the political and economic apparatus requires that it cede nothing that would invite its own collapse;¹⁵³ hence, their frenzied encouragement of solutions that do nothing but reinforce the reigning order of further consumption. Indeed, the problem is the political, the *polis*, the city-state as such. As Zerzan has put it, “no amount of re-shuffling the deck,” i.e., the substitution of some politicians for others, some institutions for others, or some products for others can change the “insatiable hunger” of civilizations drive to consume, appropriate, and dominate.¹⁵⁴ He cautions further:

¹⁵¹ This certainly seems to describe our contemporary situation: With television programs devoted to “eco-friendly living,” nearly every corporation trying to promote itself as “green,” and bio-fueled war planes, people seem to have become “eco-conscious,” yet destruction of the natural world continues at an ever accelerating rate with no signs of voluntarily slowing down.

¹⁵² The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2009), 78.

¹⁵³ We may be reminded here of Fredrick Douglass' famous dictum that “Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

¹⁵⁴ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, 123.

Clinging to politics is one way of avoiding the confrontation with devouring logic of civilization, holding instead with the accepted assumptions and definitions. Leaving it all behind is the opposite: a truly qualitative change, a fundamental paradigm shift.¹⁵⁵

Thus, our responses, while perhaps appropriating certain elements of the political, ought not hold as “ends” the purely political. But how, then, shall responses be structured? Where might we find a solution?

“Our predicament,” writes Zerzan, “points us toward a solution.”¹⁵⁶ The predicament here, is this: The planet is being systematically destroyed and we can either accept the continued destruction of the natural world and its inhabitants as inevitable or; we can recognize that this way of being—civilization—despite its appearance as inevitable, is subject to collapse and that this collapse *will* happen either one of two ways.¹⁵⁷ The first: Civilization, like others before it, will exhaust the necessary means to life. However, in this case the exhaustion is not localized, rather, it is a kind of global phenomenon. That is, it will destroy the immediate possibilities for the regeneration of bio-diverse life on the planet. The second: A collapse is brought on by internal forces, who recognize that to go on destroying everything is counter to the interest of most sentient and non-sentient life on the planet. This second view of collapse also accepts that the natural world is, presently, not beyond the possibility for redemption of sorts—for regeneration. In short, the second view holds that “the sooner civilization comes down...the

¹⁵⁵ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, vii.

¹⁵⁶ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, 124.

¹⁵⁷ The description that follows has been outlined by a number of theorists and should not be taken as a notion that I, personally, have developed.

more life will remain afterwards to support humans and non-humans.”¹⁵⁸ It is in this second view where we may find the appropriate grounds to act. “We realize,” as Zerzan pleads, “that true revolt is inspired by the realization that it is *not* impossible to bring the disaster to a halt.”¹⁵⁹

“True revolt,” then, rejects the inevitability of civilizations continuance as well as all myths symptomatic of civilized ideology, i.e., equivalency, progress, endless consumption, and the general privileging (confusing?) of the ideal with the Real. A philosophy of resistance must be grounded, primarily, in materiality.¹⁶⁰

The possibility of the active dismantling of civilization carries with it an implicit premise regarding the promotion of civilization; namely, that those interested in its promotion and continuation are autonomous agents capable of deciding whether or not to continue destroying the earth. As I argued earlier, some of these individuals (and also those who perhaps do not hold such a stake in civilizations continuance) are often beset with certain ideological understandings that constrain an ability to see the destruction inherent in civilization. This, however, does not exempt them from any measure of resistance, forceful or not. But, to be clear, a philosophy of resistance to civilization, if its guiding principle is the ensuring of a livable planet (livable for both humans and non-humans), isn’t concerned with matters of justice or retribution. It is, rather,

¹⁵⁸ Jensen, *Engame*, 305. To note, Jensen includes the caveat, “whether or not we help it crash.” See also, premise seven: “The longer we wait for civilization to crash—or the longer we wait before we ourselves bring it down—the messier will be the crash, and the worse things will be for those humans and nonhumans who live during it, and for those who come after.”

¹⁵⁹ Zerzan, *Twilight of the Machines*, 125.

¹⁶⁰ Jensen, *Endgame*. Premise sixteen: “The material world is primary. This does not mean that the spirit does not exist, nor that the material world is all there is. It means that spirit mixes with flesh. It means also that real world actions have real world consequences. It means we cannot rely on Jesus, Santa Claus, the Great Mother, or even the Easter Bunny to get us out of this mess. It means this mess really is a mess, and not just the movement of God’s eyebrows. It means we have to face this mess ourselves. It means that for the time we are here on Earth—whether or not we end up somewhere else after we die, and whether we are condemned or privileged to live here—the Earth is the point. It is primary. It is our home. It is everything. It is silly to think or act or be as though this world is not real and primary. It is silly and pathetic to not live our lives as though our lives are real.”

pragmatically concerned with the creation or bringing about of conditions such that the planets destruction *by individuals who could otherwise not engage in such destruction* is rendered impossible. The agency of those destroying is the primary difference from other more “natural” mass extinctions. And it is the fact of agency in all of this that affords the *possibility* of resistance and, thus, a way of being that is other than civilized.

The concern and attitude of a philosophy of resistance is necessarily pragmatic. If it were otherwise, the principle acknowledging the possibility of the destruction of most life on the planet could not be the guiding standard. Instead, the guiding standard would have to be a significantly abstract moral precept, one that must be privileged over the possibility of absolute destruction. Starting from the ground of an abstract moral precept, one’s “ends” become a submitted to the abstraction, i.e., the abstract becomes the ends to which material action is submitted. The concern is no longer for the material, feeling present—the Real—but rather, the upholding and maintaining of the “purity” of the abstraction. This sort morality, if applied to the analysis of civilization presented (or really any entity that perhaps threatens the objects of care and concern) is a contradiction against what it would claim as the object of concern—against what, necessarily, would be the genesis of such morality. That is, of course, unless one conceives of the general situation as fundamentally disembodied and immaterial. At that point, the morality as abstraction, like a Platonic form of sorts, has betrayed nothing but itself.

In any case, the internal logic of a philosophy of resistance to civilization—one that opts for the active dismantling of civilization—is, as I’ve said, outward looking and materially grounded. As such, it will be the case that conflict should come to define a primary relational terrain between those wishing to promote civilization and those wishing to destroy it. Not only is

it a conflict between two incommensurable ontologies, but also, as Zerzan argues, from the anti-civilization perspective it is between “two materialities.” One of productionism and one of liberation.¹⁶¹ But this conflict, being immanent to civilization, is very different than traditional conflicts. Typically, the tendency is to confine conflicts against a particular state or states within the narrative of revolution. The story is usually the same: one group, through a drawn out series of events, takes, at the apex of insurrection, the power of the other, maintaining, for the most part a similar hierarchical power structure. The American revolution, the French, the Russian, and even the recent “democratic” revolutions in the mid-east and north Africa, follow this pattern. And to reiterate, each conflict or overthrow, power has ceded only by the oppositions threat of force, use of force, or the inability of the reigning power to exercise their claimed monopoly on force (e.g., The Egyptian military’s unwillingness to follow orders from Mubarak).

But, as I’ve argued, the problem is not with who, particularly, is in power. Rather, it is that such power (made possible only through civilization) exists at all.¹⁶² Thus the challenge to such power is not to be found in traditional revolution. It may be revolutionary, but its ends are not in revolution. Instead, what may be a viable and philosophically substantiated course of resistance may be found in the very early stages of revolution, that is, in insurrection. Instead of the goal of replacing certain governments or economic institutions—of falsely assuming that the

¹⁶¹ Before one lobbies the traditional criticism of the “liberating” aspects of work, I suggest taking note of the notorious sign above Auschwitz: *Arbeit macht Frei* (“Work makes you free”). I would add to that the analysis of the Invisible Committee: “The sentimental confusion that surrounds the question of work can be explained thus: the notion of work has always included two contradictory *dimensions*: a dimension of *exploitation* and a dimension of *participation*. Exploitation of individual and collective labor power through the private or social appropriation of surplus value; participation in a common effort through the relations linking those who cooperate in the universe of production. These two dimensions are perversely confused in the notion of work, which explains workers’ indifference, at the end of the day, to both Marxist rhetoric—which denies the dimension of participation—and managerial rhetoric—which denies the dimension of exploitation.” *The Coming Insurrection*, 45.

¹⁶² Analogously, there is an innate problem with the power of being able, at the push of a button (or through other agentive means), to destroy the world over.

world needs “running”—at the “apex” of insurrection, resistance ought to be applied towards the *possibility* of that apex ever holding sway. That is, in the context of bringing down civilization, to foster conditions such that a return to what is civilized is rendered nearly impossible.

To return again to the notion of an internal logic of resistance, I would like to argue for a concept I’ll call “pure insurrection.” In order to bring this concept’s relevance to bear, we may contrast it with what philosopher Paul Virilio has called “pure war.”¹⁶³ Pure war, according to Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, describes a global condition in which the difference between war and peace is rendered increasingly indistinguishable, if not entirely absent. Harkening back to Plato, Virilio and Lotringer trace the organization of modern warfare to the organization of the city as such. They explain that it is not so much in the “battle” itself that is the business of war, but in the preparation of war—the design and purposefulness of the city, its economy and so forth. Hence, when we apply this analysis in a contemporary context (as Virilio and Lotringer do) we find that the interconnections between economies, concentrated within cities, not only work to make possible the “war-machine” as such, but the increasing interconnectedness also alters the traditional terrain of warfare itself. The traditional “theater” of war that had characterized most “civilized” warfare vanishes amidst the complexity and economic interconnectedness and, in doing so, envelops the world over as a grounds, means, and possible instrument of warfare. Down to the “passive” individual, explains Virilio and Lotringer, the context of war is situated in the fabric of the everyday. Not to mention, part of what makes this notion of “pure war” so daunting, is a recognition of the sheer power—capable of the destruction

¹⁶³ I should note that 25 years after the original publication of “Pure War,” Virilio, playing on the moral intonations of the “pure” in pure war, suggested that given the proliferation of war into civilian life and the post 9/11 era, we ought to name this phenomenon “impure war.”

of the world in the most absolute sense—that rests within the technological-military-industrial-complex.

If we can take this notion of “pure war” and explain it as an active *condition* that not only serves to proliferate and “advance” the current conditions, but also mask and conceal the war upon which it relies—to make such war “abstracted” from its horrific reality—then, I think it is perhaps also possible to outline a philosophy of resistance whose aims are likewise directed towards a general self-maintaining condition. Though, of course, the differences between those struggling against the condition of pure war and those (unknowingly or not) who wish to maintain it are astronomical.

The condition—the “ends” of a resistance movement against civilization—defined negatively, is what is not civilization. It is a negation of civilized being, institutions, and so forth, and in this way, a positive affirmation of what civilization seeks to destroy; namely, as it has been shown, the material-biological conditions that make life possible for humans and non-humans. In a more positive sense, and without mythologizing or romanticizing, we can take insight from those groups whose way of living has been characterized as, more or less, “primitive.” Indeed, as anthropologist and ethnographer Pierre Clastres points out, the history of primitive peoples—of those with no State and, thus, no civilization—is “the history of their struggle against the State.”¹⁶⁴ Pure insurrection, then, by refusing the apex of revolution and state-based organization, resists at every level possible, the thrusts of civilization. This applies further to a condition of what may be called post-collapse (if ever applicable). Now that we have

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State* (New York: MIT Press and Zone Books, 2007), 218.

outlined the ends of a pure insurrection, the question of “How and in what sense, philosophically, might or ought such conditions arise?,” may be attended to.

As the administration of pure war rearranges the terrain of traditional conflict, so too must a resistance organize itself according to varying shifts in spatial conceptualization—a spatiality that recognizes the depth beneath the veneer of civilization’s spectacles. To this point, and that of Plato, the invisible committee has observed: “The armed forces don’t simply adapt themselves to the metropolis, they produce it,” i.e., one seeking to actively resist civilization must understand that, especially in a contemporary setting, civilization is largely a militarized context. This is, additionally, what removes the idealist and abstract “ends” from the insurrectionist’s repertoire; by refusing the media-state spectacle, the tactics of “protest zones,” and other prescribed bounds of resistance, the insurrectionist can penetrate deeper into effective, that is, pragmatic, means of resistance. The goal is not to “symbolize” one’s opposition, it is, rather, *to oppose* as such. The strategic, in every case, takes precedence over the symbolic. Pure insurrection, in this sense, is a philosophy of an almost pure pragmatism rooted in acting. And it is this sort of acting, I conclude, that is needed if we wish to take the critique of civilization seriously.

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