

@ntibodies

Life, death and resistance in the
psyche of the superorganism



Paul Cudenecc

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I WOULD like to point out, before we go any further, what this booklet is not claiming to be.

It does not pretend to be an academic work. Neither does it claim to be in any way comprehensive. Conceived originally as an even shorter text, it should be merely viewed as a personal polemic backed up by a few quotations.

This booklet does not aim to preach at anyone or try to occupy any moral high ground. Its message emerges not from righteousness or smug complacency but from a lifetime of gnawing political, environmental and existential despair and a strong urge to somehow make sense of it all.

Many thanks to Joe and to Julie for their assistance.

This booklet is dedicated to Camp Titmore.

Paul Cudenecc

“Words do not express thoughts very well. They always become a little different immediately they are expressed, a little distorted, a little foolish. And yet it also pleases me and seems right that what is of value and wisdom to one man seems nonsense to another”. *Hermann Hesse*.¹

TERMITES AND SUPERORGANISMS

THE starting point of this journey of ideas is the concept of the superorganism.

It's a strange word and one that throws into question a lot of our assumptions about how life works.

An organism, a creature, seems to have quite distinct physical boundaries. It sticks together in a definite lump and is surrounded by some kind of empty space that separates it from other organisms, whether similar or dissimilar.

But the idea of a superorganism, an animal that consists of parts that aren't even physically connected, opens up a lot of intriguing possibilities.

In his 1937 book *The Soul of the White Ant*, South African biologist Eugène Marais reveals that his painstaking research has convinced him that a termitary, a community of termites, in fact amounts to one collectively-formed being.

He writes: "You must consider a termitary as a single animal, whose organs have not yet been fused together as in a human being. Some of the termites form the mouth and digestive system; others take the place of weapons of defence like claws or horns; others form the generative organs."²

He adds: "The insects themselves should always be thought of as the blood-stream and organs of a single animal."³

And Marais sees evidence of the same

phenomenon elsewhere in the natural world. For instance, describing marine creatures called Siphonophora, he explains: "The great peculiarity of these creatures is that every full-grown specimen is a composite animal composed of hundreds of individuals."⁴

Still more peculiar is Marais's suggestion that individual mammals are, in fact, examples of collective entities.

He writes: "The body of a mammal with its many vital organs can be looked upon as a community with specialized individuals grouped into organs, the whole community forming the composite animal."⁵

Some 70 years later, ideas challenging traditional concepts of where an individual animal begins and ends are now interesting a new generation of biologists, not least the researcher and author Rupert Sheldrake.

He writes: "We know animals have social groups, and that somehow the group as a whole is linked together so that it can function as if it were a superorganism... This is most clearly the case in the social insects, like the ants, termites, bees and wasps. It is plainly visible in a flock of birds turning and banking practically simultaneously, with none of them bumping into each other. And so it is with a school of fish swimming in close formation, but changing direction at any time, and responding rapidly to the approach of a predator."⁶



EVEN RATS FEED THEIR INVALIDS

SO THE arguments for the existence of superorganisms depend on the way animals behave, the extent to which they work together collectively rather than individually, and the efficiency with which they do so.

This was an area of intense research for another celebrated scientist, who also made a name for himself as a classical anarchist theorist.

Peter Kropotkin's seminal work *Mutual Aid* (first published in 1902) describes the benefits of collective behaviour across many species.

He writes: "Life in societies is no exception in the animal world; it is the rule, the law of Nature, and it reaches its fullest development with the higher vertebrates. Those species which live solitary, or in small families only, are relatively few, and their numbers are limited. Nay, it appears very probable that, apart from a few exceptions, those birds and mammals which are not gregarious now, were living in societies before man multiplied on the earth and waged a permanent war against them, or destroyed the sources from which they formerly derived food."⁷

Taking a stance against the right-wing neo-Darwinist theories current at the time – which assumed a permanent Hobbesian war for survival within nature – Kropotkin maintains that the real 'struggle for life' on the planet is not *between* competing individuals but rather *against* adversity, and in this battle the key weapon is co-operation.

He writes: "Even such harsh animals as the rats, which continually fight in our cellars, are sufficiently intelligent not to quarrel when they plunder our larders, but to aid one another in their plundering expeditions and migrations, and even to feed their invalids."⁸

And he explains: "Don't compete! – competition is always injurious to the species and you have plenty of resources to avoid it! That is the *tendency* of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the watchword that comes to us from the bush, the forest and the ocean. "Therefore combine – practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual and moral.' That is what

Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in their respective classes have done."⁹

A similar line was taken more recently by British scientist Kit Pedler.

In a book first published in 1979, he echoes Marais by comparing the communication and interaction between living creatures to that between the cells, organs and systems of a human body.

Says Pedler: "In the body, for example, each organ has a particular function within the whole. The kidney has the function of removing waste from the blood, and it is supported by the physiological activities of the rest of the body. It is not, in the absence of disease, attacked by the other body systems, it is supplied with a suitable milieu for its function. Similarly, in the ecosphere, the species to some extent protect each other by creating mutually suitable conditions. Obviously, there is competition and predation as well, but mutual aid and mutual provision underlies the whole."¹⁰

Although, in making his case for natural solidarity, Kropotkin includes mention of the behaviour of the very ants and termites that so intrigued Marais, he certainly does not regard them as representing the epitome of this phenomenon.

He does not see the instinctive collective behaviour of such insects as that of lesser beings, something likely to be left behind in the evolution of more complex or individually 'intelligent' animals.

He argues: "As to the intellectual faculty, while every Darwinist will agree with Darwin that it is the most powerful arm in the struggle for life, and the most powerful factor of further evolution, he also will admit that intelligence is an eminently social faculty.

"Language, imitation, and accumulated experience are so many elements of growing intelligence of which the unsociable animal is deprived. Therefore we find, at the top of each class of animals, the ants, the parrots and the monkeys, all combining the greatest sociability with the highest development of intelligence. The fittest are thus the most

sociable animals, and sociability appears as the chief factor of evolution, both directly, by securing the well-being of the species while

diminishing the waste of energy, and indirectly, by favouring the growth of intelligence.”¹¹



HE CANNOT EAT ALONE

HAVING established the importance of mutual aid among other animals, it is but a short step to apply it to human behaviour.

Kropotkin tells us: “Sociability and need of mutual aid and support are such inherent parts of human nature that at no time of history can we discover men living in small isolated families, fighting each other for the means of subsistence.”¹²

He continues: “The mutual-aid tendency in man has so remote an origin, and is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history.”¹³

Of course, Kropotkin’s ‘present time’ was not quite ours and we may well argue that there is sadly little evidence of a mutual-aid

mentality in the consumer societies of the wealthier parts of the modern world.

But his argument is essentially that such atomisation represents a departure from the norm, rather than humanity’s natural state of affairs, and he cites primitive ways of life to illustrate the underlying pattern of collective behaviour.

For example, he mentions: “If anything is given to a Hottentot, he at once divides it among all present – a habit which, as is known, so much struck Darwin among the Fuegians. He cannot eat alone, and, however hungry, he calls those who pass by to share his food.”¹⁴

And he adds: “When first meeting with primitive races, the Europeans usually make a caricature of their life; but when an intelligent

man has stayed among them for a longer time, he generally describes them as the ‘kindest’ or ‘the gentlest’ race on the earth.

“These very same words have been applied to the Ostyaks, the Samoyedes, the Eskimos, the Dayaks, the Aleoutes, the Papuas, and so on, by the highest authorities.

“I also remember having read them applied to the Tunguses, the Tchuktchis, the Sioux, and several others. The very frequency of that high commendation already speaks volumes

in itself.”¹⁵

Let he be accused of romanticising primitive peoples, Kropotkin explains: “The savage is not an ideal of virtue, nor is he an ideal of ‘savagery’. But the primitive man has one quality, elaborated and maintained by the very necessities of his hard struggle for life – he identifies his own existence with that of his tribe; and without that quality mankind never would have attained the level it has attained now.”¹⁶

ONE SINGLE LIFE-FORM

THE idea of what is ‘natural to humanity’ perhaps seems rather remote and abstract, particularly when we are talking about people whose lifestyles are so very different from our own.

It almost seems as if we are contemplating some worthy and elevated state of existence to which we can aspire but which in truth we will never get round to making a reality.

But if we take away the anthropological slant, we can see that the general propensity still forms an important part of our everyday lives, even if it has been much reduced in contemporary society.

All we are really talking about, in essence, is socialising – having friends, neighbours, sporting team-mates and so on.

We are also talking about that elusive feeling of belonging that we all value. It’s nice to walk down the street where we live and be greeted by people we know. It’s good to wander into a pub and have a chat with other regulars. It’s enjoyable to spend time with friends. It is not hard work, not some kind of altruistic self-sacrifice, but what most of us like doing.

This is what Kropotkin is referring to when he notes that it is “extremely difficult to say what brings animals together – the needs of mutual protection, or simply the pleasure of feeling surrounded by their congeners”.¹⁷

So, to recap, the idea of a superorganism is that individuals are merely parts of a larger entity. Meanwhile, the idea of mutual aid is that a tendency to co-operation is deeply rooted in nature, including humanity.

These concepts are obviously closely

intertwined – a profound and innate sense of solidarity is exactly what we would expect to find if an animal group or human community were in fact functioning as a biological superorganism.

And, in the knowledge that this phenomenon is universal, we might expand the theory still further to include larger groupings and eventually postulate a superorganism that embraces not just many species of animal, fish and insect, but also plants, chemicals, gases – in short, everything on the planet.

This is exactly what is meant by Gaia, a concept that has achieved widespread acceptance over the last few decades.

Who better to go to for a definition than James Lovelock, the scientist who launched the idea into the public imagination?

In the preface to the 2000 edition of his original 1979 book, he describes the Gaia theory as one “in which all life and all the material parts of the Earth’s surface make up a single system, a kind of mega-organism, and a living planet”.¹⁸

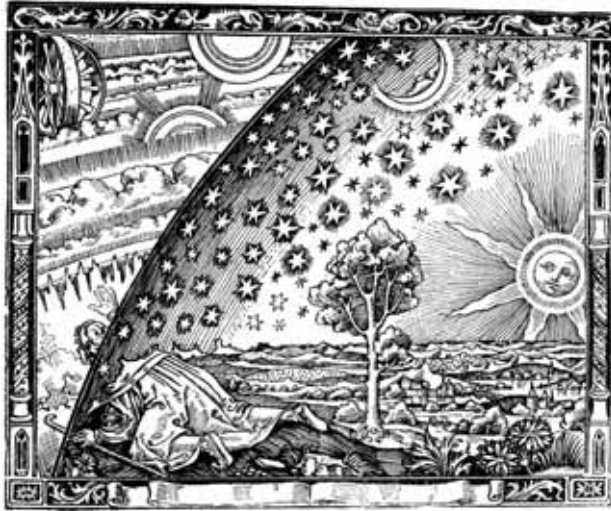
He adds: “Gaia is the superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks.”¹⁹

Pedler, whose exposition of the Gaia theory is more passionate and often more convincing than Lovelock’s, writes that he uses the name Gaia “to encompass the idea that the entire living pelt of our planet, its thin green rind of life, is actually one single life-form with senses, intelligence and the power to act.

“Stretching from man to the worm, from the fishes of the abyss to the yoghurt

bacterium, and from the moulds of decay to the birds riding the sky, I hold that there is but one single interwoven web of life and that our own kind was, until recently, an integral part of this single magnificent entity.”²⁰

This vision is not confined to the Earth, either. Pedler explicitly extends it to a universal level throughout his book and even the less holistic Lovelock concedes somewhat grudgingly that our planet is very much



ONE IS ALL AND ALL ARE ONE

THERE is, of course, nothing new in the notion that everything in the universe is one big living entity. It may well be the oldest human concept of all, taken for granted as a fact for hundreds of thousands of years.

Evidence of this primitive pantheism, the worship of nature as god, or god as nature, can be detected on every continent and in every era.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell, for instance, sees its influence behind ancient cannibalistic rituals in Asia.

“Psychologically,” he muses, “the effect of the enactment of such a rite is to shift the

dependent on external factors when he notes: “Life requires a constant energy flux from the sun to sustain it.”²¹

So the ultimate theoretical superorganism is, in fact, the entire universe, the whole of everything.

We have made a giant leap here. From the practical discussion of the habits of termites, we seem to have emerged into a positively spiritual terrain.

focus of the mind from the individual (who perishes) to the everlasting group. Magically, it is to reinforce the ever-living life in all lives, which appears to be many but is really one.”²²

Among native Americans the universal superorganism was hailed as the Great Spirit while other cultures have attached own-brand labels to the same philosophical product.

For writer Peter Marshall the key discovery is of “something all-pervasive in the universe, some invisible but palpable presence in all beings and things” and he traces a thread through Eastern religions to the medieval alchemists’ belief in an *anima mundi* (world

spirit).²³ Concur Henry Margenau: “A great variety of names have described this Universal Mind, among them Tao, Logos, Brahman, Atman, the Absolute, Mana, Holy Ghost, Weltgeist or simply God.”²⁴

It is certainly in Eastern culture that we find contemplation of the one-ness of the universe most central to the religious viewpoint.

Brahman, mentioned above, is the Hindu concept of the ultimate divine reality of the cosmos, from which all beings originate and to which they must return.

Campbell describes how Japanese Buddhists believe that all beings, no matter how separate they appear, are in fact united.²⁵ And he defines the aim of the Amida form of Buddhism in particular as to awaken oneself to “the reality of the truth of the Flowery Wreath, that one is all and all are one.”²⁶

Analysing the Indian tradition, he writes: “It is not that the divine is everywhere; it is that the divine is everything...It is of course true that in the popular religions of the Orient the gods are worshiped as though external to their devotees, and all the rules and rites of a covenanted relationship are observed.

Nevertheless, the ultimate realization, which the sages have celebrated, is that the god worshiped as though without is in reality a reflex of the same mystery as oneself.”²⁷

This realization leads on to a profound spiritual experience, he explains: “One is to leap beyond God-in-the-image-of-man, man-in-the-image-of-God, and the universe cognized by the mind. The mind itself, indeed, is to break and dissolve in the burning light of a realization both above and below, beyond and yet within, everything it has conceived: an experience of the ineffable, unimaginable nothing that is the mystery of all being and yet no mystery, since it is actually ourselves and what we are regarding every minute of the

SOUL-LIFE AND QUANTUM THEORY

THE Eckhart-Spinoza version of Christianity failed to turn the religious face of the West in a more easterly and holistic direction.

But that does not mean that this vision of cosmic unity, passed down from humanity’s infancy and arguably embedded in our very

whole duration of our lives.”²⁸

But it would be a mistake to assume that this philosophy is confined to Eastern civilization – present in the origins of Western civilization in ancient Greece, it even surfaces from time to time in Christian thought.

A prime example was the work of Meister Eckhart, the celebrated medieval mystic, who declared that “all creatures are one person, loving God by nature.”²⁹

Expanding on the theme, he said: “The inner consciousness strikes down to the very essence of the soul. Not that it is the soul itself, but it is rooted there and is in a measure the life of the soul, her intellectual life, the life, that is, in which a man is born God’s son, born into the eternal life, for this knowledge is timeless, unextended, without here and without now. In this life all things are the same thing and all things are held in common; all things are all in all, and all are one.”³⁰

Eckhart’s understanding of God, as nothing more or less than the universe itself and lacking any moral or personal aspect, was rather at odds with the Christian norm. “It must be borne in mind that God is without will, without love, without justice, without mercy, indeed, without divinity or anything we can ascribe to him or predicate of him or attribute to him,” he once argued.³¹ It is perhaps not surprising that he was later excommunicated.

Some 300 years later, 17th century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza managed to incorporate a similar viewpoint into his unorthodox version of Christianity with his theory “that God is not distinct from the world, but immanent within it.”³²

According to Roger Scruton: “Spinoza’s achievement was to show man and his world as an inextricable unity, and man himself as simultaneously master and servant of the fate which creates him.”³³

essence, has not resurfaced in European minds time and time again.

A particularly strong manifestation was in 19th and early 20th century Germany where, inspired by the greatness of Goethe, the likes of Gustav Theodor Fechner and then Wilhelm

Bölsche, with his book *Das Lieblesleben in der Natur* (Love in Nature), kept alive the concept of the universal psyche.³⁴

The same was true of the philosopher Fritz Mauthner, whose work helped develop the Weltanschauung of the great German-Jewish anarchist Gustav Landauer (1870-1919).

Turning Mauthner's theoretical possibility into a concrete proposition, Landauer comes to the conclusion that "the psyche [*das Seelenhafte*] in the human being is a function or manifestation of the infinite universe".³⁵

Landauer calls for a spiritual renewal and declares: "We must finally realize once again that we do not just perceive parts of the world but that we are ourselves parts of the world. He who could completely understand the flower would understand the universe. All right: let us return completely into ourselves, then we shall have found universe incarnate."³⁶

And again: "We have been satisfied until now to transform the universe into the human spirit, or better, into the human intellect; let us now transform ourselves into the universal spirit."³⁷

Elsewhere Landauer spells out his bold metaphysical position quite plainly: "Human beings all reach back over thousands of years as human beings, but they also existed before they were human beings, before the earth existed, back into infinity."³⁸

The idea of spiritual unity with the cosmos is probably latent in any philosophy built around the embrace of nature, but it is not always explicitly expressed.

One exception is the Victorian English naturalist, journalist and author Richard Jefferies, particularly in the pages of *The Story of My Heart*, first published in 1883.

He tells of his desire for an enlarged 'soul-life' and his conviction that "a great life – an entire civilization – lies just outside the pale of common thought" and explains: "Such life is different from any yet imagined. A nexus of ideas exists of which nothing is known – a

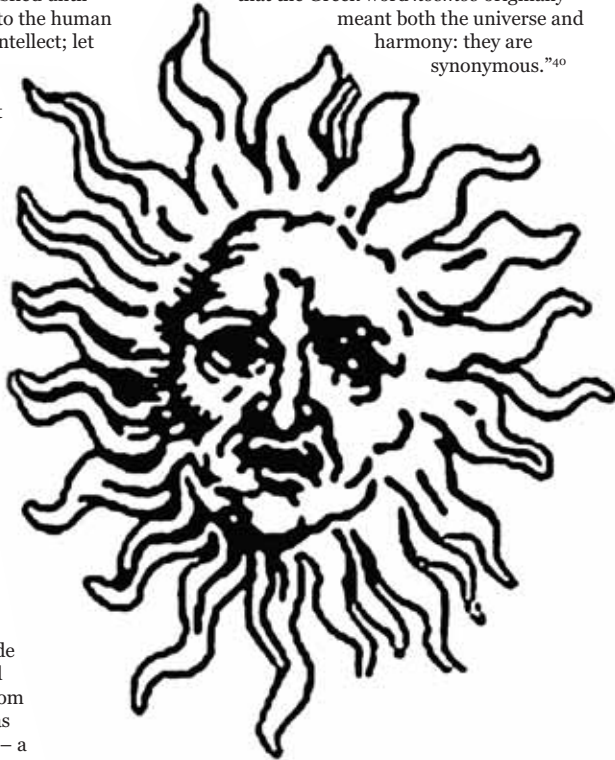
vast system of ideas – a cosmos of thought. There is an Entity, a Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognized."³⁹

Since the 1960s, this sort of thinking has been mostly associated with the New Age sub-culture, though not always voiced with the passion and clarity of Landauer or Jefferies.

It also surfaces in eco-minded works of fiction such as James Cameron's film *Avatar*, in which the inhabitants of a distant planet physically plug into each other and their Earth Mother.

Marshall expounds his own personal version of 'a new philosophy for a new era' in a tome published at the start of the millennium: "Ultimately, holistic thinking recognizes that all things come from the One and proceed to the One. All is One and One is All. There is unity in diversity throughout the universe; indeed, the greater the diversity, the more overall the harmony. It comes as no surprise

that the Greek word *kosmos* originally meant both the universe and harmony: they are synonymous."⁴⁰



He continues: "Ultimate Reality is the groundless ground of Being and non-Being, the primordial continuum, the mother of all. It is prior to nature and the source of all energy and life."⁴¹

Contemporary author Eckhart Tolle provides an interesting link between related thought systems from different eras – and not simply on the basis of his adopted forename.

In his 2006 work *A New Earth*, he writes: "Since time immemorial, flowers, crystals, precious stones and birds have held special significance for the human spirit. Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness."⁴²

Later in the same work, he affirms that "all things in existence, from microbes to human beings to galaxies, are not really separate things or entities, but form part of a web of interconnected multidimensional processes."⁴³

The terminology in this latter quotation reflects the fact that what were once seen as hopelessly unworldly notions are now also being espoused by scientists.

Scruton picks up on this while writing about Spinoza's philosophy: "There is a modern equivalent of Spinoza's monism in the view that all transformations in the world are transformations of a single stuff – matter for the Newtonians, energy for the followers of Planck and Einstein."⁴⁴

He summarises: "The individual person is not, it seems, an individual at all. Nor is anything else."⁴⁵

Margenau defines holism as "the view that all living systems tend to form highly integrated and indivisible entities".⁴⁶

David Lorimer explains the concept in terms of forms. He says: "Forms are dynamic energy patterns whose boundaries are created by velocity. Individual self-consciousness, by analogy, might be said to arise out of unitive consciousness and erect protective barriers around itself; nevertheless, as an open system, it remains semi-permeable and can interact with other individual selves as open systems. When, however, unitive consciousness is experienced, the boundaries dissolve and there dawns the realization that one's ground is the unitive consciousness field out of which other individual self-consciousnesses also arise: the many arise out of the One and are linked to each other through participation in



that One."⁴⁷

Elucidating his own theories of connectedness, Sheldrake discusses the aspect of quantum theory called quantum 'non-locality', which is also known as 'non-separability' or 'entanglement'.

He writes: "According to quantum theory, when a quantum system (such as an atom) breaks up into parts, these parts remain 'entangled' with each other in such a way that a change in one is instantaneously coupled to a change in another, even though they may be many miles apart. For example, when a pair of photons are emitted from the same atom, their polarization is undetermined, although one is obliged to have a polarization opposite to the other. As soon as the polarization of one is measured, the other has the opposite polarization instantaneously. Albert Einstein was deeply unhappy about this aspect of quantum theory precisely because it appeared to allow a 'spooky action at a distance'. But experiments have shown that quantum non-locality is indeed a fundamental feature of reality."⁴⁸

So if all matter originally diverged from the Big Bang or whatever begun the universe, is it likewise still 'entangled'? Is All really One?

If so, where does this leave us, as individuals?

A FLASH WITHIN THE STREAM OF PSYCHE

“IF EVERYTHING exists in God, in what sense does the world contain individual things, and in what sense am *I* an individual, with a nature and destiny which are mine?”⁴⁹

That is Scruton’s precis of the metaphysical question posed by Spinoza in the third part of his *Ethics* and, divine reference aside, it sums up nicely the point we have now reached.

Unfortunately, not all the answers provided over the centuries are entirely helpful.

The Eastern religions, for instance, tend to tell us that individuals simply do not exist and that, indeed, nothing really does at all, as we saw with Campbell’s ‘ineffable, unimaginable no-thing’ that is the ultimate purpose of a spiritual journey.

Here we will work on the assumption that

we are real, and live in a real world – what we want to know is what kind of reality we are living.

Meister Eckhart took the position that “all creatures are one person” on the basis of “the difference between the light of nature and in time and the light of that nature beyond time in eternal glory”,⁵⁰ but that does not really help in practical terms.

For the psychologist Carl Jung: “Man as an individual is a very suspicious phenomenon whose right to exist could be questioned by the biologist, since from that point of view he is significant only as a collective creature or as a particle in the mass.”⁵¹

Pedler describes how his view of his own existence changed completely from the



moment he realised the universe was ‘a swirling mass of atoms’ of which we formed just a tiny part.

He says: “From this time on, it has been impossible for me to maintain the idea that my skin limits my individuality. My body only allows my thoughts to move about, my hands to make things and my senses and experience to travel the planet I live on. But as I move, the matter of the universe moves through me as easily as the wind through the branches of trees.”⁵²

He also provides an explanation of how he thinks this might work.

“And yet, you may argue, we are *not* a part of any other creature or entity,” he concedes. “We are obviously individuals, separate from Gaia. We have individual brains which direct the activities of individual physical bodies limited by skin. Beyond the skin, there is space and then beyond the space the skin of another individual and so on. We also believe that we have choice, freewill and the capacity to act. We need to believe this view of things to get about the everyday world of tools and cities.

“As a hesitant *Gaian*, if I may coin the word, I see individuality as a temporary separation from the fabric of the universal life process. Imagine a flexible sheet of infinite extent. All plants, animals and humans emerge from the sheet as if someone had pushed a finger against the reverse side and made it bulge. The bulge becomes a sphere

with a thin neck still attached. Then the neck becomes almost infinitely thin and the now individual life in the sphere is born and free for just a lifetime. At death, the sphere contracts down on to the surface of the sheet, flattens and flows out again into the whole until there is finally no trace of its previous existence.

“Imagine this process going on in both directions, millions and millions of times every second as the life process ebbs and flows between the separate and the conjugate. There is continuous change, motion and balance to produce stability and it is only we who imagine, falsely, that we are building a separate permanence.”⁵³

Margenau adopts a similar position, suggesting that “each of us is the Universal Mind but afflicted with limitations that obscure all but a tiny fraction of its aspects and properties.”⁵⁴

Landauer describes the individual as “a flash within the stream of psyche, which one calls according to the context ‘human race’, ‘species’ or ‘universe’.”

He adds that “it is time for the insight that there is no individual, but only unities and communities. It is not true that collective names designate only a sum of individuals: on the contrary, individuals are only manifestations and points of reference, electric sparks of something grand and whole.”⁵⁵

HIGHER THAN IMMORTALITY

THE idea that individuals do not exist is potentially quite upsetting for those of us who value our personal freedom and our ability to think for ourselves. Even the act of reading these words and pondering over the issues raised constitutes a statement of individual intent and existence.

However, there is a corollary to the hypothetical non-reality of individuals that makes the whole package a more attractive proposition.

Campbell recounts an anecdote about the Taoist sage Chuang Tzu, who lived around 300BC, and his cheerful reaction to his wife’s death. He is said to have told people: “When she died, I was in despair, as any man well might be. But soon, pondering on what had

happened, I told myself that in death no strange new fate befalls us. In the beginning we lack not life only, but form; not form only, but spirit. We are blent in the one great featureless, undistinguishable mass. Then a time came when the mass evolved spirit, spirit evolved form, form evolved life. And now life in its turn has evolved death.”⁵⁶

Eckhart makes the same point when he declares: “In my eternal mode of birth I have always been, am now, and shall eternally remain.”⁵⁷

And Charles B Maurer explains how Mauthner also addresses the “interesting implications” of his theories regarding individuality and comes to the conclusion that “death becomes a relative concept, life an

enduring unity”⁵⁸ and that “the death of the individual is then only a phase in the life of the organism”.⁵⁹

If individuals don’t really exist in the first place, then they can never really die.

As a part of the whole, as part of nature, we possess immortality if only we could see it.

“A tree is an extension of the earth,” states Pedler. “A tree is part of the sun, because the rays of the sun are its life. A tree does not end at its roots. It is an organ of Gaia. The tree is Gaia and Gaia is the tree. It is living earth. A man is not a man, he is an extension of the earth. A man and a woman are part of the sun because the rays of the sun are their life. A tree, a man and a woman are the same because they are an extension of the earth. When they are alive, they are together because they are the same. When they die they go on together, because they are still the same.”⁶⁰

Tolle also uses a tree, or rather a sapling that fails to grow into one, to illustrate his case. He writes: “We could say that the totality – Life – *wants* the sapling to become a tree, but the sapling doesn’t see itself as separate from life and so wants nothing for itself. It is one with what Life wants. That’s why it isn’t worried or stressed. And if it has to die prematurely, it dies with ease. It is as surrendered in death as it is in life. It senses, no matter how obscurely, its rootedness in Being, the formless and eternal one Life.”⁶¹

Jefferies experiences a mystic revelation of his immortality. “Recognizing my own inner consciousness, the psyche, so clearly, death did not seem to me to affect the personality,” he writes. “In dissolution there was no bridgeless chasm, no unfathomable gulf of separation; the spirit did not immediately become inaccessible, leaping at a bound to an immeasurable distance. Look at another person while living; the soul is not visible, only the body which it animates. Therefore, merely because after death the soul is not visible is no demonstration that it does not still live. The condition of being unseen is the same condition which occurs while the body is living, so that intrinsically there is nothing exceptional, or supernatural, in the life of the soul after death.

“Resting by the tumulus, the spirit of the man who had been interred there was to me really alive, and very close. This was quite natural, as natural and simple as the grass



waving in the wind, the bees humming, and the larks’ songs. Only by the strongest effort of the mind could I understand the idea of extinction; that was supernatural, requiring a miracle; the immortality of the soul natural, like the earth. Listening to the sighing of the grass I felt immortality as I felt the beauty of the summer morning, and I thought beyond immortality, of other conditions, more beautiful than existence, higher than immortality.”⁶²

Jung expresses the same feeling when he writes of the importance of psychic energy: “This is our immortality, the link through which man feels inextinguishably one with the continuity of all life. The life of the psyche is the life of mankind. Welling up from the depths of the unconscious, its springs gush forth from the root of the whole human race, since the individual is, biologically speaking, only a twig broken off from the mother and transplanted.”⁶³

INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS THERE CANNOT BE

THE great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy takes a slightly different slant when he argues that there is no need for us to fear death, as we do not exist in a fixed frame of identity throughout our lives in any case.

He explains: “Our body is not one, and that which recognizes this changing body to be one and ours is not continuous in point of time, but is merely a series of changing states of consciousness, and we have already lost both our body and our consciousness many times; we lose our body constantly, and we lose our consciousness every day, when we fall asleep, and every day and hour we feel in ourselves the alteration of this consciousness and we do not fear it in the least.”⁶⁴

And at the same time he deploys the inevitability of death, and the shadow it can cast over life, as an argument against seeking satisfaction in one’s life as an individual – a quest doomed to failure by our physical mortality.

He says: “The sole aim of life, as it first presents itself to man, is the happiness of himself as an individual, but individual happiness there cannot be; if there were anything resembling individual happiness in life, then that life in which alone happiness can exist, the life of the individual, is borne irresistibly, by every movement, by every breath, towards suffering, towards evil, towards death, towards annihilation. And this is so self-evident and so plain that every thinking man, old or young, learned or unlearned, will see it.”⁶⁵

As well as shedding light on the necessary limitations of our individual physical existences, the notion of immortality within the whole can also lead us to see death as liberation.

Declares Tolle: “When forms around you die or death approaches, your sense of Beingness, of I Am, is freed from its entanglement with form: Spirit is released from its imprisonment in matter. You realize your essential identity as formless, as an all-pervasive Presence, of Being prior to all forms, all identifications. You realize your true identity as consciousness itself, rather than what consciousness had identified with.”⁶⁶

Jung describes the yearning for death felt

by the archetypal hero, psychologically present in us all: “Always he imagines his worst enemy in front of him, yet he carries the enemy within himself – a deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in his own source, to be sucked down to the realm of the Mothers. His life is a constant struggle against extinction, a violent yet fleeting deliverance from ever-lurking night. This death is no external enemy, it is his own inner longing for the stillness and profound peace of all-knowing non-existence, for all-seeing sleep in the ocean of coming-to-be and passing away. Even in his highest strivings for harmony and balance, for the profundities of philosophy and the raptures of the artist, he seeks death, immobility, satiety, rest.”⁶⁷

Our current civilization has a strange relationship to death. While the high incidence of suicide (of both the quick and slow variety) points to a widespread longing for Jung’s ‘profound peace’, our own mortality is a reality we tend to avoid confronting.

With so much of our being invested in our own specific individuality – our personal history, our personal family, our friends, our work, our possessions and so on – we find it hard to accept that it will one day surrender itself completely to the whole, like a raindrop falling into the ocean.

Our religions provide a version of death in which our precious individuality remains intact thereafter and in which we can even re-engage with other individuals to whom we have become attached during our physical lifetimes.

For most people, losing their individuality on their death would amount to the same thing as being completely extinguished.

What this tells us is that, even if we are all just small temporary parts of a greater unity, we are not generally aware of this and thus find it no consolation that this unity possesses an immortality in which we share.

While physically it cannot be possible for us to cease to be connected to something which constitutes our very essence, mentally it would seem that we have become predominantly separated from the great one-ness of the cosmos.

How exactly has this come about?

SEPARATED FROM THE EARTH

“IT HAS taken me all of my life so far to realize that the single great obstacle in the way of survival and an extended human vision is the industrial society itself, and its expropriation and suppression of the most sensitive and creative qualities of the mind.”⁶⁸

Thus writes Pedler in his inspiring evocation of the spirit of Gaia. He sees the very trappings of modern existence, from cars to washing machines, as barriers between us and our true identity with the natural whole: “They are symbols of despair and failure: surrogates for achievement, which encourage us to live on the outside of our senses and actually diminish the quality of life.”⁶⁹

American eco-philosopher John Zerzan states: “The more technicized and artificial the world becomes, and as the natural world is evacuated, there’s an obvious sense of being alienated from a natural embeddedness.”⁷⁰

It hardly seems necessary to spell out the ways in which high-tech civilization contributes to our divorce from nature. Cocooned in moving steel cages and in brick or concrete prisons, barely aware of the existence of a world beyond the consumer comforts we are trained to treasure, cut off from the source of our nourishment, living our lives second-hand through manufactured images pumped into our brains to align our imagination with the demands of the vast, all-devouring machine on which we have become pathologically dependent – one would say our separation could hardly be more complete if one was not dreadfully aware of the horrors that could yet lie in store for future generations.

The Invisible Committee, authors of provocative French political pamphlet *The Coming Insurrection*, point to Reebok’s ‘I am what I am’ marketing slogan as the epitome of this malaise. It is, they say, “not simply a lie, a simple advertising campaign, but a *military* campaign, a war cry directed against everything that exists *between* beings, against everything that circulates indistinctly, everything that invisibly links them, everything that prevents complete desolation, against everything that makes us *exist*, and ensures that the whole world doesn’t everywhere have the look and feel of a



highway, an amusement park or a new town: pure boredom, passionless but well-ordered empty, frozen space, where nothing moves apart from registered bodies, molecular automobiles and ideal commodities.”⁷¹

However, this process did not begin with the internet or the mobile phone and what we are experiencing now is the culmination of many years of progressive deterioration and separation.

A century ago, for instance, Landauer was aware of the way industrial society was destroying the collective spirit, or *Geist*, that connects us to the whole. “The most obvious sign of the absence of *Geist* was for Landauer the plight of the industrial workers. Separated from the earth and its products and spiritually isolated from each other despite the closeness of their living conditions, they become victims of alcohol, disease, and poverty. The relationship between worker and employer becomes completely dehumanized through capitalism, technology, and the state.”⁷²

Comments Zerzan: “Science, the model of progress, has imprisoned and interrogated nature, while technology has sentenced it (and humanity) to forced labor. From the original dividing of the self that is civilization, to Descartes’ splitting of the mind from the rest of objects (including the body), to our arid, high-tech present – a movement indeed wondrous.”⁷³

THE SPIRIT EXTINGUISHED

FOR some thinkers, the passing of the Middle Ages represented an ominous step towards the abyss for western civilization.

Writes Maurer: “Landauer viewed the development of individualism, one of the most significant features of the Renaissance, as a factor that ran counter to *Geist* and undermined its hold upon medieval life... Since that time Europe has been involved in a constant struggle to reattain a level of stability such as marked the Middle Ages. This struggle is a long-lasting revolution against dogmatism for the reestablishment of *Geist* as the fundamental principle of human life.”⁷⁴

Kropotkin shares this view. He explains: “The mediaeval cities were not organized upon some preconceived plan in obedience to the will of an outside legislator. Each of them was a natural growth in the full sense of the word – an always varying result of struggle between various forces which adjusted and re-adjusted themselves in conformity with their relative energies, the chances of their conflicts, and the support they found in their surroundings.”⁷⁵

He says of the medieval guild: “It had its own self-jurisdiction, its own military force, its own general assemblies, its own traditions of struggles, glory, and independence, its own relations with other guilds of the same trade in other cities: it had, in a word, a full organic life which could only result from the integrality of the vital functions.”⁷⁶

With the end of the medieval federations, he says, came the start of the central state – the rule of a despot supposedly acting ‘in the interests of the people.

“And, with this new direction of mind and this new belief in one man’s power, the old federalist principle faded away, and the very

creative genius of the masses died out.”⁷⁷

He adds: “The absorption of all social functions by the State necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled narrow-minded individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations towards each other.”⁷⁸

So the tyranny of central control, of the state, destroys the living superorganism of a healthy human society. It cuts out the connections between individuals and extinguishes the collective spirit, the *Geist*, that binds them together and enables them to function as nature intended.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Kropotkin also identifies the family unit as contributing to the gradual process of separation and alienation.

He writes: “Far from being a primitive form of organization, the family is a very late product of human evolution. As far as we can go back in the palaeo-ethnology of mankind, we find men living in societies – in tribes similar to those of the higher mammals; and an extremely slow and long evolution was required to bring these societies to the gentile, or clan organization, which, in its turn, had to undergo another, also very long evolution, before the first germs of family, polygamous or monogamous, could appear. Societies, bands or tribes – not families – were thus the primitive form of organization of mankind and its earliest ancestors.”⁷⁹

He describes the negative effect of this break-down of communal life at a stage when “the separate patriarchal family had slowly but steadily developed within the clans, and in the long run it evidently meant the individual accumulation of wealth and power, and the hereditary transmission of both”.⁸⁰

THE BARRIER OF RELIGION

OTHERS look to the field of religion for clues as to how humanity’s separation from nature, indeed from its very own nature, occurred.

Campbell pinpoints the difference between Eastern and Western creation myths: “In the Indian version it is the god himself that

divides and becomes not man alone but all creation; so that everything is a manifestation of that single inhabiting divine substance: there is no other; whereas in the Bible, God and man, from the beginning, are distinct. Man is made in the image of God, indeed, and

the breath of God has been breathed into his nostrils; yet his being, his self is not that of God, nor is it one with the universe.”⁸¹

He stresses that man’s separation is an integral theme of the dominant Western thought system: “On the one hand: the power of God who is great, against whom all such merely human categories break as mercy, justice, goodness and love; and, on the other: the titanic builder of the City of Man, who has stolen heavenly fire, courageous and willing to bring upon himself the responsibility of his own decisions. These are the two discordant great themes of what may be termed the orthodox Occidental mythological structure: the poles of experience of an ego set apart from nature, maturing values of its own, which are not those of the given world, yet still projecting on the universe a notion of anthropomorphic fatherhood...”⁸²

The blame is not all laid at the door of the Judeo-Christian tradition, however. Campbell suggests that a switch from moon to sun worship, symbolised in Egypt by the replacement of the bull by the lion as principal object of veneration in around 2630BC, was significant.

“An age had passed: that of the bull. Another had dawned: that of the lion. The mythology of the lunar bull was henceforth to be overlaid, and not alone in Egypt, by a solar mythology of the lion. The lunar light waxes and wanes. That of the sun is forever bright. Darkness inhabits the moon, where its play is symbolic of that of death in life here on earth, whereas darkness attacks the sun from without and is thrown off daily in defeat by a force that is never dark. The moon is the lord of growth, the waters, the womb, and the mysteries of time; the sun, of the brilliance of the intellect, sheer light, and eternal laws that never change.”⁸³

He also highlights the replacement of goddess with god as the main deity, reflecting a switch from matriarchy to patriarchy: “And with the progressive devaluation of the mother-goddess in favor of the father, which everywhere accompanied the maturation of the dynastic state and patriarchy but was

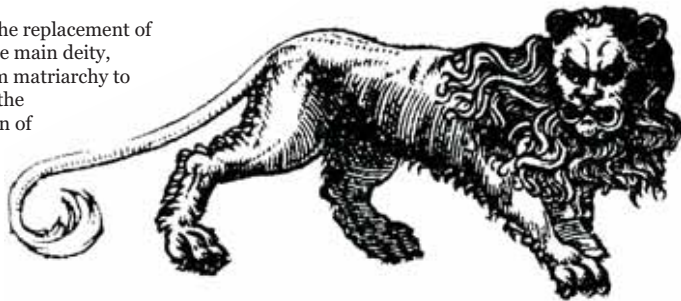
carried further in Southwest Asia than anywhere else (culminating in the mythology of the Old Testament, where there is no mother-goddess whatsoever), a sense of essential separation from the supreme value symbol became in time the characteristic religious sentiment of the entire Near East. And the rising ziggurats, striving to reach upward in tendance, while at the same time offering to the heavenly powers a ladder by which to come graciously down to the cut-off race of man, were the earliest signals of this spiritual break.”⁸⁴

Zerzan sees religious artifice of any kind as a barrier to genuine spiritual connection, identifying the shaman as the precursor of organised religion.

He says: “This original specialist became the regulator of group emotions, and as the shaman’s potency increased, there was a corresponding decrease in the psychic vitality of the rest of the group.”⁸⁵

And he writes elsewhere: “Ritual, as shamanic practice, may also be considered as regression from that state in which all shared a consciousness we would now classify as extrasensory. When specialists alone claim access to such perceptual heights as may have once been communal, further backward moves in division of labor are facilitated or enhanced. The way back to bliss through ritual is a virtually universal mythic theme, promising the dissolution of measurable time, among other joys. This theme of ritual points to an absence that it falsely claims to fill, as does symbolic culture in general.”⁸⁶

Jung writes: “I am therefore of the opinion that, in general, psychic energy or libido creates the God-image by making use of archetypal patterns, and that man in



consequence worships the psychic force active within him as something divine.”⁸⁷

In this way, the construct of religion comes

ALIENATION AND THE EGO

RELIGION is not the only artifice that obscures our view of the universe, as Zerzan for one is at pains to point out. He traces our separation back to the beginnings of agriculture, domestication and symbolic thought.

He writes: “It is our fall from a simplicity and fullness of life directly experienced, from the sensuous moment of knowing, which leaves a gap that the symbolic can never bridge. This is what is always being covered over by layers of cultural consolations, civilized detouring that never recovers lost wholeness.”⁸⁸

He declares: “Symbolic culture inhibits human communication by blocking and otherwise suppressing channels of sensory awareness”⁸⁹ and adds: “Culture has led us to betray our own aboriginal spirit and wholeness, into an ever-worsening realm of synthetic, isolating, impoverished estrangement.”⁹⁰

Zerzan includes language as part of this alienating symbolic culture: “Verbal communication is part of the movement away from a face-to-face social reality, making feasible physical separateness... Communication outside civilization involved all the senses, a condition linked to the key gatherer-hunter traits of openness and sharing. Literacy ushered us into the society of divided and reduced senses, and we take this sensory deprivation for granted as if it were a natural state, just as we take literacy for granted.”⁹¹

Tolle also sees mental abstraction as separation, arguing: “When you live in a world deadened by mental abstraction, you don’t

between humans and their direct access to the greater unity of nature of which they form part.

sense the aliveness of the universe anymore. Most people don’t inhabit a living reality, but a conceptualized one.”⁹²

And, like Zerzan, he identifies danger in the use of language: “Words and concepts split life into separate segments that have no reality in themselves. We could even say that the notion ‘my life’ is the original delusion of separateness, the source of ego. If I and life are two, if I am separate from life, then I am separate from all things, all beings, all people. But how could I be separate from life? What ‘I’ could there be apart from life, apart from Being? It is utterly impossible. So there is no such thing as ‘my life’ and I don’t *have* a life. I *am* life. I and life are one.”⁹³

Tolle points the finger at the ego itself: “Ego arises when your sense of Beingness, of ‘I Am’, which is formless consciousness, gets mixed up with form. This is the meaning of identification. This is forgetfulness of Being, the primary error, the illusion of absolute separateness that turns reality into a nightmare.”⁹⁴

At this juncture, we seem to have arrived back at the point where we discussing the non-existence of the individual in the context of a universal entity.

It is clear that our mental separation from this whole has been progressive and multi-faceted over many thousands of years.

That’s not to say, of course, that we haven’t often been aware of something amiss and felt a strong urge to connect to something bigger than our individual selves. The problem is, though, that this often just makes things a whole lot worse.

IDENTITY IN WHAT WE ARE NOT

IT IS undoubtedly true that the individual human being is today more isolated than at any stage of our history. Most of us feel quite separate from our neighbours and fellow citizens, let alone the cosmos.

The more atomized the society we live in and the more cut off from the whole we become, the greater the sense of pain and loss that forces us to try and create some kind of identity out of this void.



Sometimes this effort is focused solely on ourselves – not on how we feel inside but how we imagine we are perceived by others.

We might dress a certain way, act a certain way in order to be ‘accepted’ by those around us. We’re only fooling ourselves, for we are not really accepted into anything at all, except the narcissistic condition of viewing the outside world as a mirror in which to gaze at our own reflection.

The ego can be extended beyond our own person to include significant others. Some couples find meaning in a close relationship to the extent that they are psychologically dependent on one another and effectively turn their backs on the rest of the world.

Children can be included within the fold, making a kind of collective entity out of the nuclear family, on a temporary basis.

Sometimes we specifically seek acceptance from a certain section of our community – others who dress the same way, listen to the same music, drive the same model of car, follow the same football team.

There is nothing wrong with this, in itself. It’s important to join in with others in all aspects of our daily lives and the feeling of belonging that this engenders must be beneficial to the mental health of all those involved.

The trouble is, though, that on its own this type of connection is fatally flawed. At its heart, it represents an extension of the very sense of isolation and separation that makes it so desperately sought-after.

This kind of identity is based on opposition to something else that lies beyond that collective unit. Lacking its own natural sense of self, it defines itself primarily in terms of what it is not.

Rather than moving beyond the limitations of the ego, we simply extend it further out into the world around us.

Rather than opening up to the vastness of the universe, we close in on ourselves, on our chosen collectivity.

We have already encountered Kropotkin’s view of the unnaturalness of the family as primary human unit and how it led to “the individual accumulation of wealth and power, and the hereditary transmission of both”.⁹⁵

There is something inherently selfish about a family, something that looks inward to a restricted and self-serving outlook rather than outward to the greater picture.

This criticism is sometimes extended to tribal communities, whose rejection of outsiders can indeed form a shadow side to the internal solidarity that so appealed to Kropotkin and others.

But a tribe provides a big enough space in which to live and develop and at the same time is small enough to have a very human identity – no abstraction is needed to bind it together and, importantly, no external ‘other’ in opposition to which it can define its sense of being.

The same cannot be said for another form of collective identity that has proved very attractive for lost, separated, individuals in search of something to feel a part of – nationalism and, by extension, racialism.

The Invisible Committee observe: “The Frenchman, more than anyone else, is the embodiment of the dispossessed, the destitute. His hatred of foreigners is based on his hatred of himself as a *foreigner*... We have arrived at a point of privation where the only way to feel French is to curse the immigrants and those who are *more visibly foreign*. In

this country, the immigrants assume a curious position of sovereignty: *if they weren’t here, the French might stop existing*.”⁹⁶

As well as separating humans from each other under the pretence of bringing them together, nationalism and patriotism also play a key role in creating an attitude of submission to the state, presented as a practical incarnation of ‘the nation’.

Once people allow themselves to fall for this cheap conjurer’s trick and surrender control of their own existence to this phoney deity, they lose the vital force of their collective spirit – their Geist, in Landauer’s

terms.

Writes Landauer: “The state, with its police and all its laws and its contrivances for property rights, exists for the people as a miserable replacement for *Geist* and for organizations with specific purposes; and now the people are supposed to exist for the sake of the state, which pretends to be some sort of ideal structure and a purpose in itself, to be *Geist*... Earlier there were corporate groups, clans, guilds, fraternities, communities, and they all interrelated to form society. Today there is coercion, the letter of the law, the state.”⁹⁷

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

NATION-STATES thus not only form no part of the connection to the whole which we are attempting to explore, but they also stand in direct opposition to it.

But does this mean there is no place for any kind of cultural identity – whether supranational, national or regional?

This was certainly an area of contention that much exercised the mind of Landauer, who regarded a ‘Volk’ as very much part of the organic structure of human society.

With his concurrent belief in a universal collective identity, he drew a careful line between rejoicing in his own cultural heritage and letting it assume too great a significance.

He wrote as part of his contribution to a Zionist compilation: “Strong emphasis on one’s own nationality, even when it does not lead to chauvinism, is weakness.”⁹⁸

This is the key here – the ‘strong emphasis’ placed on a particular collective identity which allows it to overshadow other connections.

Landauer once wrote that as a German, a South German and a Jew, he belonged to three ‘nations’ at the same time.⁹⁹

The same is true for all of us. The football fan should be able to feel a part of his own club’s support without losing track of the fact that he is bonded to rival fans in other aspects of his life – cultural, social or economic.

Likewise, the healthiest forms of nationalism are those which incorporate an internationalist outlook – Scottish, Quebecois or Basque nationalism spring to mind as examples, or the anti-imperialist nationalism of the exploited Third World.

There is still the inherent danger that if they achieve their aims they will end up creating a state of their own and thus killing off their animating spirit, but in the stage of liberatory struggle, at least, this kind of urge to self-determination cannot be viewed as harmful.

The important thing to bear in mind is that



we are all connected to each other and the universe in a myriad of ways.

The various identities we share with others do not neatly radiate out from the individual, via the family, to the community, region, nation and planet, but are much more complex and overlapping.

It is only by remaining aware of this at all times that we can avoid the pitfalls of associating too closely with one particular collective identity over all the others or of regarding one of our identities as more valid than someone else's.

It is this sense of a wider belonging, and thus responsibility, which provides us with an ethical dimension to our lives.

And ethics, defined in this way, are an important way of assessing whether any particular form of collective identity is a healthy one.

Pedler, for instance, argues that the dominant industrial system can itself be seen as a kind of organism, as much as any traditional human society.

He explains: "So we now have an emergent robot state, which I have called the cybernarchy. It is as if a new mega-individual has evolved somewhere in the gap between political leaders and people, and it is pursuing a course of self-perpetuation regardless of any other consideration. This mega-individual is a feltwork of flesh and micro-chips, looking after itself at the expense of people."¹⁰⁰

From our ethical point of view – determining whether a particular collective entity embraces and enhances the health of the whole – this robot state is obviously not a good thing.

But sometimes the situation is not so immediately clear-cut. Tolle, for example,

comes up with a strange example of what it means to connect with the greater essence of things.

He writes: "I have met teachers, artists, nurses, doctors, scientists, social workers, waiters, hairdressers, business owners, and salespeople who perform their work admirably without any self-seeking, fully responding to whatever the moment requires of them. They are one with what they do, one with the Now, one with the people or the task they serve."¹⁰¹

The implications of this statement are alarming. Does he not think it matters if his scientists are, for instance, testing branded cosmetics on animals or developing toxic chemicals?

Is it of no account to him if his business owners are selling cluster bombs to drop on innocent men, women and children who happen to have got in the way of imperial conquest?

Is it relevant if his salespeople are selling pointless goods, produced by slave labour, to people who can't really afford them?

Is it not important to Tolle who it is that these individuals 'serve', whether the 'task' that so consumes them is in the interests of the planet or of a destructive global corporation?

From what he writes elsewhere, it clearly is. And yet he has fallen into the trap, on this occasion, of regarding all connection to others as just as positive as connection to the whole.

This is the trap that leads others to promote the welfare of their own family to the detriment of the wider community, to espouse nationalism to the detriment of humanity, or, indeed, to pursue the short-term interests of humanity to the detriment of the long-term future of the natural world.

MYSTERIOUS AND IRRESISTIBLE POWER

WE HAVE already looked at the general idea of being part of a Cosmic Whole, as reflected in various strands of religious, social and scientific thought.

We have looked at the idea of immortality as the other side of the coin to the theoretical non-existence of the separate individual.

We then went on to view ways in which people have become separated from the awareness of belonging to a bigger organism and the dangers of desperate attempts to plug themselves back in again by identifying with phoney collectivities.

These fake organisms, of which nation-states are a prime example, attempt to solve individual alienation by fabricating an identity defined in opposition to another part of the whole, with the result that the holistic overview remains lost and the individual's sense of dislocation is certainly not resolved and is probably even deepened.

It would now be useful to look at how this connection between individuals, apparently such a core part of our existence, is seen by its proponents as functioning.

Marshall sets out the theoretical basis: "Living systems, it is now clear, do not form hierarchies but rather networks at different levels. An ecosystem is a network of organisms, in which each organism forms a node, with each node itself a network of organs and so on."¹⁰²

But if living creatures, including humans, form these networks, what is it that actually links them together? What connects the

nodes?

For Landauer it is Geist, his invisible spirit or principle. He writes: "A level of great culture is reached when manifold, exclusive and independent communal organizations exist contemporaneously, all impregnated with a uniform *Geist*, which does not reside in the organizations nor arise from them, but which holds sway over them as an independent and self-evident force. In other words, a level of great culture develops when the unifying principle in the diversity of organizational forms and supra-individual structures is not an external bond of force, but a *Geist* inherent in the individuals, directing their attention beyond earthly and material interests."¹⁰³

Jung adopts a similar tone when he refers to "that mysterious and irresistible power which comes from the feeling of being part of the whole".¹⁰⁴

Marais came to the conclusion that something of that kind was operating within the termite communities. He experimented with dividing termitaries in two with steel plates, so the insects could neither see nor contact each other, and found to his amazement that they still continued building matching structures on each side. He remarks that "the functioning of the community or group-psyche of the termitary is just as wonderful and mysterious to a human being, with a very different kind of psyche, as telepathy or other functions of the human mind which border on the supernatural."¹⁰⁵

CUCKOOS AND MORPHIC FIELDS

SHELDRAKE cites Marais's work in setting out his theory of morphic fields that provide the invisible connections between apparently separate individual living creatures.

He adds: "If the behaviour of social insects is coordinated by a kind of field so far unrecognized by biology and physics, experiments with social insects could tell us something about the properties and nature of such fields, which may well be at work at all levels of social organization, including our

own."¹⁰⁶

Writing of the links between beings, he says: "I propose that these bonds are not just metaphorical but real connections. They continue to link individuals together even when they are separated, beyond the range of sensory communication. These connections at a distance could be channels for telepathy."¹⁰⁷

Sheldrake says his morphic fields, enabling telepathic communication, would explain the closely co-ordinated movements of a school of



fish or a flock of birds.

He refers to naturalist Edward Selous's studies of the behaviour of birds over a period of 30 years. Like Marais with his termites, Selous became convinced the flocks' collective behaviour could not be explained in terms of normal sensory communication: "I ask how, without some process of thought transference so rapid as to amount practically to simultaneous collective thinking, are these things to be explained?"¹⁰⁸

Sheldrake proposes that morphic fields could account for animals' well-documented homing instincts and suggests that humans, too, had the same innate ability in our more connected past.

He tells of Tupaia, a dispossessed high chief from Tahiti. "Captain James Cook met him in 1769 on his first great voyage of exploration, and invited him to travel on board the *Endeavour*. During a journey of over 6,000 miles, via the Society Islands, around New Zealand, along the Australian coast and ending in Java, Tupaia was able to point towards Tahiti at any time, despite the distance involved and the ship's circuitous route between latitudes 48°S and 4°N.

"By contrast, civilized peoples, and especially modern urban people, have so many artificial aids to navigation, such as signposts, maps and compasses – and now satellite global positioning systems – that a sense of direction is no longer essential to survival."¹⁰⁹

He also addresses the way information might be passed between successive generations of creatures, focusing on the curious example of the cuckoo.

"European cuckoos, raised by birds of other species, do not know their parents," he explains. "In any case, the older cuckoos leave for southern Africa in July or August before the new generation is ready to go. About four weeks later, the young cuckoos find their own way to their ancestral feeding grounds in Africa, unaided and unaccompanied."¹¹⁰

So how do they know where to go? "One of the features of morphic fields is that they have an inherent memory. This

memory is transmitted by a process called morphic resonance, which causes a given organism, such as a migrating bird, to resonate with previous migrating birds of the same kind. Thus when a young cuckoo sets off from England towards Africa, it draws upon a collective memory of its ancestors. This memory, inherent in the morphic field of its migratory path, guides it as it goes, giving it a memory of directions in which to fly, and an instinctive recognition of landmarks, feeding grounds and resting places. This collective memory also enables it to recognize when it has arrived at its destination, the ancestral winter home. Natural selection would strongly favour birds that were sensitive to this ancestral migratory field and migrated in accordance with it. Those that were not in tune with it would probably not survive."¹¹¹

It is important to note that Sheldrake is not ascribing this behaviour to simple genetically-programmed instinct. He argues instead that "animal behaviour can evolve rapidly, as if a collective memory is building up through morphic resonance".¹¹²

Citing some examples, he writes: "The best known involves a series of experiments in which subsequent generations of rats learned how to escape from a water maze. As time went on, rats in laboratories all over the world were able to do this quicker and quicker."¹¹³



TELEPATHY WITHIN THE EXTENDED MIND

THERE is no known scientific explanation for rats being able to learn from the experiences of fellow creatures living on the other side of the world. But by proposing telepathy or ESP as a possibility, for humans and animals alike, Sheldrake is in distinguished academic company.

Notes Zerzan: "Researchers such as Zohar (1982) consider faculties of telepathy and precognition to have been sacrificed for the sake of evolution into symbolic life. If this sounds far-fetched, the sober positivist Freud (1932) viewed telepathy as quite possibly 'the original archaic means through which individuals understand one another'."¹¹⁴

Sheldrake details numerous examples of what, at face value, can only be some kind of telepathic communication between creatures of the same and different species.

Whether it is pet animals or spouses 'knowing' their loved ones are about to make a move for home, even though many miles away, or the almost universally observed fact that people will, more often than not, look around if you stare at them from behind, he finds that these connections are a definite fact of life, whatever explanation we may care to offer for them.

Sheldrake suggests that our thinking and feeling is not in fact carried out by our individual brain, contained within our individual head, but by an extended mind not limited to our physical person.

He declares: "Above all, the recognition that our minds extend beyond our brains liberates us. We are no longer imprisoned within the narrow compass of our skulls, our minds separated and isolated from each other. We are no longer alienated from our bodies, alienated from our environment, and alienated from other species. We are interconnected."¹¹⁵

Lorimer makes the same case, arguing that our consciousness does not reside in our brain at all, but in a separate collective psyche, and says "telepathy, clairvoyance and psychometry open up the life experience of other people to the mind of the sensitive, indicating that on one level our minds are not as separate as common sense would suggest".¹¹⁶



He also echoes Sheldrake's theory of some kind of collective 'field': "Although we are inseparable from the Field, which constitutes our underlying identity as revealed in unitive consciousness, we are nevertheless distinct in form and may have the sensory illusion that we are in fact quite independent."¹¹⁷

Lorimer describes the case of a woman who had a near-death experience in which she felt that everybody existed in a vast "sea or soup of each other's energy residue and thought waves".

He adds: "The only picture within which the above account makes sense is one of an interconnected web of creation, a holographic mesh in which the parts are related to the Whole and through the Whole to each other by empathetic resonance. It must be the sort of Whole in which we and the rest of creation live and move and have our being, a consciousness-field in which we are interdependent strands. It is precisely this oneness and connectedness with the rest of humanity and creation that is the basis of our responsibility: if we were not connected, there could be no possible feedback loop of the kind described above, no tuning in to the memory and consciousness of other forms of life."¹¹⁸

The use of the word 'responsibility' is interesting here. It necessarily follows that if we are part of a bigger entity, then we should be acting in the interests of that entity as a whole and not merely in those of our limited individual form.

This is the same ethical dimension that is missing from identities that are little more than an extension of the ego.

Let's now examine how some people manage to tune in to the collective context of their personal responsibility.

For it is all very well to theorise that we are all parts of a greater organic whole, but tapping into that elusive feeling, achieving what Indians term *moksa*, or release from delusion, is another matter entirely.

ECSTASY OF EXQUISITE ENJOYMENT

“TO ACHIEVE the interior act, one must assemble all one’s powers, as it were, into one corner of one soul, where, secreted from images and forms, one is able to work,” teaches Meister Eckhart.

“We must sink into oblivion and ignorance. In this silence, this quiet, the Word is heard. There is no better method of approaching this Word than in silence, in quiet: we hear it and know it aright in unknowing. To one who knows nothing, it is clearly revealed.”¹¹⁹

Says Tolle: “When you contemplate the unfathomable depth of space or listen to the silence in the early hours just before sunrise, something within you resonates with it as if in recognition. You then sense the vast depth of space as your own depth, and you know that precious stillness that has no form to be more deeply who you are than any of the things that make up the content of your life.”¹²⁰

“From earth and sea and sun, from night, the stars, from day, the trees, the hills, from my own soul – from these I think,” writes Jefferies.¹²¹

He describes how he was brought to a mystical spiritual level on the Downs in the summer: “Sometimes on lying down on the sward I first looked up at the sky, gazing for a long time till I could see deep into the azure and my eyes were full of the colour; then I turned my face to the grass and thyme, placing my hands at each side of my face so as to shut out everything and hide myself. Having drunk deeply of the heaven above and felt the most glorious beauty of the day, and remembering the old, old, sea, which (as it seemed to me) was but just yonder at the edge, I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt down deep into the earth under, and high above into the sky, and farther still to the sun and stars. Still farther beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness of being came to

seem like part of the whole.”¹²²

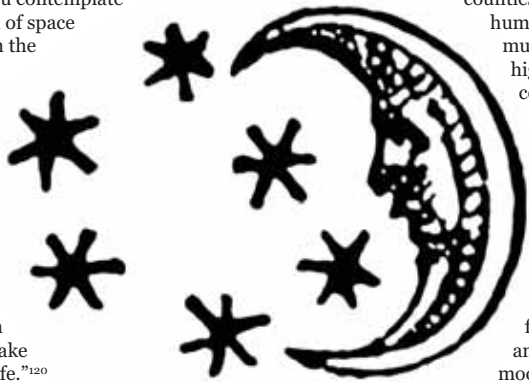
Later he writes: “I was sensitive to all things, to the earth under, and the star-hollow round about; to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me. Sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire visible universe filled me.”¹²³

While Jefferies found the answer in nature and Eckhart in silence, countless generations of humans have turned to music as the door to a higher state of consciousness.

Writes Campbell: “There were a number of harps found among the suttee-burials of the royal tombs of Ur that bore as ornament the figure of the dead and resurrected moon-bull, Tammuz, with lapis-lazuli beard.

For the inaudible ‘music of the spheres’, which is the hum of the cosmos in being, becomes audible through music; it is the harmony, the meaning, of the social order; and the harmony of the soul itself discovers therein its accord. This idea is basic to Confucian music, to Indian music as well; it was, of course, the Pythagorean belief; and it was a fundamental thought, also, of our own Middle Ages: whence the continuous chanting of the monks, who were diligently practicing in accord with the choir of the angels.”¹²⁴

“It is difficult to define this *je ne sais quoi* which suddenly erupts; it is *duende*, it is soul,” writes Marshall. “Those who have experienced it often describe it as if it were a creative energy which does not come from them but through them. It is as if some greater force is using you as a channel. You are no longer playing music; music is playing you. You are singing a deep song; you have soul.”¹²⁵



THE ARTIST AND THE FATE OF ALL

IN OUR civilization, we tend to rely on specialists to help us bridge the gulf between mundane individual experience and a greater whole – not just musicians, but also artists, poets and writers.

But with that privileged cultural role also comes responsibility.

Maurer describes Landauer’s thoughts on the matter: “In the ability to combine sense experience with the awareness of self as a manifestation of the universe Landauer recognized the true artistic spirit. It must never be forgotten that the difference between the artist and the masses is one of awareness, not of essence; for the artist, like everyone else, is the product of his *Volk*. Every individual is as much a part of the universal psyche as any other, but most people are not conscious of the relationship. The artist has the power in his creative ability to awaken this consciousness in others.”¹²⁶

Writes Landauer himself: “It was individuals, inwardly mighty ones, representatives of the *Volk*, who gave birth to *Geist* in the *Volk*; now it lives in inspired individuals, who consume themselves in their might, who are without *Volk*: isolated thinkers, poets, and artists who without support, as if uprooted, seem to stand on air... All the concentration, all the form that lives within them, powerfully painful, often stronger and larger than their body and soul can bear, the innumerable figures and the color and swarming and thronging of rhythm and harmony; all that – listen you artists! – is stifled *Volk*, is living *Volk*, that has gathered within you, that is buried within you and will arise from within you.”¹²⁷

For Landauer, artists were parts of the organic human whole that were able to

channel the life force itself and might resuscitate the moribund, disconnected society in which he found himself living.

He declares: “We are poets; and we want to eradicate the science-swindlers, the Marxists, the cold, hollow, spiritless men, so that poetic vision, artistically motivated creating, enthusiasm, and prophecy find the places where from now on they must work, create, build; in life, with human bodies, for communal life, work, and cooperation of groups, communities, peoples...”¹²⁸

Landauer also discovers an apparent paradox: “In order not to be an individual, alone in the universe and God-forsaken, I recognize the universe and thereby give up my individuality; but only so as to feel myself as the universe into which I am absorbed.”¹²⁹

The French writer Albert Camus explores the same double aspect of the artist’s role as an individual.

He explains: “To me art is not a solitary delight. It is a means of stirring the greatest number of men by providing them with a privileged image of our common joys and woes. Hence it forces the artist not to isolate himself; it subjects him to the humblest and most universal truth. And the man who, as often happens, chose the path of art because he was aware of his difference soon learns that he can nourish his art, and his difference, solely by admitting his resemblance to all. The artist fashions himself in that ceaseless oscillation from himself to others, midway between the beauty he cannot do without and the community from which he cannot tear himself.”¹³⁰

And he argues that “at the very moment when the artist chooses to share the fate of all he asserts the individual he is.”¹³¹

A GAIAN NERVOUS SYSTEM

WE REACH an important point here. We have heard that the individual may not even really exist and that the core importance is to feel a connection with the whole.

But in trying to find out how this connection can be made, we find that a

specific personal sensitivity and mental strength is required and thus, for all the talk of collective organisms and communality, a sense of individuality is crucial.

Kropotkin, for one, is in no doubt about this. He writes: “It will probably be remarked

that mutual aid, even thought it may represent one of the factors of evolution, covers nevertheless one aspect only of human relations; that by the side of this current, powerful though it may be, there is, and always has been, the other current – the self-assertion of the individual, not only in its efforts to maintain personal or caste superiority, economical, political and spiritual, but also in its much more important although less evident function of breaking through the bonds, always prone to become crystallized, which the tribe, the village community, the city, and the State impose upon the individual. In other words, there is the self-assertion of the individual taken as a progressive element.”¹³²

Camus likewise argues that individual rebellion, on a political level, is in fact operating to the benefit of the whole: “Only he who is uncompromising as to his rights maintains the sense of duty. The great citizens of a country are not those who bend their knee before authority but rather those who, against authority if need be, are adamant as to the honour and freedom of that country.”¹³³

Seen in more general terms, the freedom of an individual appears as an aspect of the flexibility and diversity that maintains the balance of the overall whole.

Pedler, for instance argues that “stability within Gaia, or within one of her parts such as an ecosystem, is partly maintained by species diversity”.¹³⁴

Lovelock also describes the way that diversity results in a stronger and more stable ecosystem and comments that it “seems likely that the biosphere diversified rapidly as it evolved”.¹³⁵

In other words, the existence of individual species and individual members of those species is part of a deliberate strategy of diversification by the parent organism, whether we see that as Gaia or the entire universe.

We do not exist as individuals randomly, because of some kind of



break-down or mistake on behalf of the greater entity to which we owe our existence, but because this entity functions best by splitting itself into diverse parts.

Marais, in his observation of baboons, discerns a crucial break from the behaviour of other mammals - let alone birds, fish or insects - in that individuals were able to adapt to different environments rather than follow inherited patterns of behaviour.

He writes of this important psychological change: “The first and most important step is to wipe out the inherited or race memory. Unless this happens there can be no change in environment. Not only must the race memory be destroyed, but even the possibility of its being inherited must disappear from the psyche – or the change will be useless.

“Instead of race memory a psyche must be developed which enables every individual to acquire his own causal memory of his environment. It is this change in the baboons which has given them an advantage which every one who is familiar with them will concede.”¹³⁶

The same obviously applies to the human race and means that with their flexibility and capacity for autonomous action, human individuals have a special responsibility to play in shaping the evolution and direction of the whole.

Asks Lovelock: “If we are a part of Gaia it becomes interesting to ask: ‘To what extent is our collective intelligence also a part of Gaia? Do we as a species constitute a Gaian nervous system and a brain which can consciously anticipate environmental changes?’”¹³⁷

But there is a downside to this new role, as Marais points out. He refers to “serious psychological disorders” caused by the inhibition and sudden release of the old animal psyche. And he warns: “The baboon and man paid an exorbitant price for their new type of psyche – a price which is bound surely but slowly to bring about their natural extermination.”¹³⁸

FREE TO BE ANTIBODIES

LOVELOCK, like many others, is all too aware of the menace presented by humanity’s rampant individualism and mental disconnection from the whole.

However, he disappointingly fails to see through the obvious implications of his notion that humanity could represent some kind of planetary nervous system.

Recognizing that we form part of Gaia and thus of nature, he regards everything that happens on Earth as intrinsically natural, including the likes of nuclear power and pollution and repeatedly attacks environmental objections to them.

He writes, for instance: “To grass, beetles, and even farmers, the cow’s dung is not pollution but a valued gift. In a sensible world, industrial waste would not be banned but put to good use. The negative, unconstructive response of prohibition by law seems as idiotic as legislating against the emission of dung from cows.”¹³⁹

Again and again, Lovelock takes the view that Gaia will sort out any problems, even man-made ones, and we don’t need to lift a finger to do anything about it.

One example he cites is the way in which the planet once reacted to the arrival of oxygen in the atmosphere, which was, he says, essentially ‘poisonous’ to the existing biosphere. He concludes: “Ingenuity triumphed and the danger was overcome, not in the human way by restoring the old order, but in the flexible Gaian way by adapting to change and converting a murderous intruder into a powerful friend.”¹⁴⁰

This argument, first published in 1979, still appears in the 2000 edition of his famous book, albeit with a note admitting that it had turned out to be a little inaccurate: “We now think that oxygen did not appear suddenly but grew from mere traces at the start of life to its present day abundance. This gave time for adaptation.”¹⁴¹

He seems bizarrely oblivious to the fact that this revelation completely undermines his whole argument!

Regardless of that eccentricity, the main point that Lovelock so obviously misses is that if man-made problems, such as pollution, are

completely natural and all part of Gaia’s mysterious ways, then so are man-made solutions.

This does not just mean the anti-pollution legislation that, for whatever reason, he so vehemently opposes, but any other form of human opposition to environmental destruction, ranging from voting for environmentally-conscious politicians through to carrying out direct action sabotage on the offending industries. It’s all part of human life and thus all part of the workings of Gaia.

Indeed if the health of the planet is really threatened by the ill effects of man-made activity, as we know it is, then what other Gaian element but humanity is best placed to bring an end to the damage and begin a global healing process?

And the means by which humanity will achieve this can only be through its individuals, evolved to possess the will and flexibility to try and shape the world for better as well as for worse.

The whole point of nature giving us personal freedom and individuality is to give us the choice as to whether we want to go along with the status quo, accept the direction our species or planetary superorganism is taking, or whether we want to try and change it. We, as human beings, can act as the antennae that sense danger, the control mechanisms that prevent disaster for the whole.

The fact that there are some human beings who are working in the opposite direction makes no difference to the role we have to play – in fact, it makes it even more important that we do so, rather than just sit back and wait for some other part of our planet to make things right, as Lovelock so insidiously recommends.

When a healthy human body comes under attack from antigens - harmful substances such as bacteria, fungi, parasites, viruses or chemicals – it doesn’t just lie back and allow itself to be killed off.

Its immune system, if it has not been compromised by ill health, produces antibodies specifically designed to fight that particular threat.

Some human beings and their activities are

acting as antigens, threatening the health of our species and our planetary superorganism. Other humans, in whom a sense of individual

freedom is combined with a responsibility for the well-being of the whole, must therefore take on the role of antibodies.



OUR NATURE OBSTRUCTED

“IN MUCH the same way as the malignant cells of cancer invade and destroy the normal tissue of the body, so do the affairs and processes of the toymaker technocrats invade and destroy the balanced and stable earth organism,”¹⁴² writes Pedler, in a passage that indicates why his Gaian work is less publicised than Lovelock’s.

And he warns of the dire consequences of us not taking seriously our responsibility for the well-being of the whole: “I have used the myth of the goddess Gaia to express the idea that we are an integral part of a single, intelligent life-form which acts like an individual. I have tried to show how it is that we can never separate ourselves from this life-form, despite our delusions of dominance and control, because should we succeed in doing so, we would be committing an irreversible act of mass suicide: as if an arm tried to exist separately from the body.”¹⁴³

But concern for the environment is not the only sphere of action which must, inevitably and logically, form part of a socio-political

immune system for Gaia.

We have already seen how co-operation is a fundamental principle of life itself and therefore of healthy human societies.

In order for humanity to fulfil its potential, and become a positive asset to the planet rather than an unpleasant disease, our societies must be able to function in the way they are meant to function.

The destruction of organic human communities is itself part of the illness afflicting the whole of Gaia and cannot be separated from it.

The Earth’s immune system is not working because the natural flows of energy in our societies have been blocked by impediments.

If our society is not based on mutual aid – on generally helping each other rather than blindly following what we wrongly perceive to be in our own personal interest – then it is not an authentic human society and will not behave in the way that an authentic society has evolved to behave.

We see all too clearly today that the

promotion of greed (under the guise of ‘enterprise’ or ‘wealth creation’) is the driving force behind the environmental destruction being wrought.

We live in a society that promotes and rewards selfish behaviour and which discourages solidarity on even the lowest level.

All power must be seen to ultimately derive from the state, the most pernicious of those fake collectivities we discussed earlier.

Resources are forcibly extracted from populations in the form of taxation and then partly restored to them in the form of ‘funding’ that must always be seen to be some kind of gift from authority.

No kind of independence from this central structure can be allowed, no corner of humanity can be exempt from its demands and its rules.

This is nothing short of a calamity. In the same way as an acorn will not grow into an oak tree if it is confined indoors in a flower pot, so can the human collective organism never become what it is meant to be if it is not able to draw upon the full strength of its inborn resources.

All layers of authority, particularly states and governments, block the emergence of human collective genius, block our vital flexibility, block the ways in which our species could emerge as a healing force despite the damage we have inflicted.

There is more than one meaning to democracy. On one hand it can be the narrow, limited and phoney exercise of seeming to allow the population control of its own affairs by persuading it to ritually surrender its sovereignty to ‘representatives’ selected from among the ruling elite.

On the other hand it can be the manner in

which a collective sense of purpose, a collective response, is drawn from the depths of a community and allowed to steer that community in the direction which the whole organism feels is the right one.

The first type of democracy, an intrinsic part of the state’s dictatorship, is one of the ways in which the second type of democracy is put out of action.

Not only does the very structure of our society destroy the collective identity, the morphic field, the Geist that makes humans communities amount to so much more than the sum of the individuals they contain, but it also sets out to deliberately prevent this sorry state of affairs from ever changing.

Contemporary human society is so diseased that it actively disables its own immune system. The very antibodies which could save the ailing superorganism are categorised as the enemy within, as criminal threats to the state in its devious guise as a genuine collective whole.

“What the mind likes to be is free and prohibition of this freedom is called obstruction to the nature,”¹⁴⁴ declares a third century AD Taoist text and the freedom of the human species to be its natural self is obstructed by entities which physically prevent democracy, the conscience of the whole.

So as well as fighting against physical injury to the living flesh of our planet, and seeking to dismantle the unnatural structure of a society which prevents us from accessing our own collective powers of self-healing, we find ourselves necessarily engaged in a war of resistance against the forces of reaction and repression whose narrow interests lie in maintaining our deadly descent into disaster.

NO LIMITS TO RESISTANCE

BECAUSE the impulse to solidarity and freedom comes naturally to human beings, and emerges powerfully in generation after generation, the forces of repression must constantly deploy their powers to prevent it challenging their tyranny.

From the brutal use of military might to put down popular uprisings over the centuries, through the bans on workers ‘combining’ in

trade unions in the 19th century, to the criminalisation of dissent so prevalent today, a permanent struggle is taking place.

If everything was functioning as it should, this would not be necessary. The sensitive antennae of the human race would transmit subtle messages through our communities that would modify our behaviour, genuine democracy would prevail and conflict would

not be necessary.

But as things are, it is simply not possible for even a majority of a population to alter the course steered, in their own interests, by the few who have seized unaccountable power and are prepared to use any means to hold onto it.

This is not a pleasant reality to have to confront and, as Zerzan points out, many well-meaning people are in complete denial over how dire the situation has become, both for democracy and for the planet.

He says: "This denial is not going to be changed by little reforms, and the planet is not going to be saved by recycling. To think it will is just silly. Or no, it's not silly, it's criminal. We have to face what's going on. Once we've faced reality then we can together figure out how to change it, how to completely transform it."¹⁴⁵

Fellow environmentalist Derrick Jensen writes: "Begging government and industry to stop destroying the planet and to stop killing people the world over is never going to work. It can't."¹⁴⁶

But how then do we resist these malevolent forces? What does resistance involve? How far can we take this? The answer has to be that we must take it as far as we have to, in order to overcome the obstructions placed in our way.

Because the flow of information is generally controlled by states and their business partners, dissidents have created their own media, notably on the internet.

Because the conventional democratic process is so easily exhausted without any noticeable effect on the machineries of destruction, radicals take to the streets to get their message across.

Because dissent is criminalised by the state and protesters are intimidated with everything from surveillance to outright physical violence,

others find covert direct action a useful avenue.

Because the state employs thousands of people to monitor, infiltrate and disrupt its opponents, many of them have taken to operating in autonomous 'affinity groups' rather than larger visible organisations.

Every time the levels of repression move up a notch, so must the levels of resistance, otherwise the antibodies have failed in their job. There is no obvious end to this process. If some means of dissent are blocked, other forms acquire immediate moral legitimacy.

Is there anybody who would argue that the armed French resistance against the Nazi occupation was not a proportionate and necessary response?

Is there any cause more compelling than the survival of the planet and the liberty of the human immune system to perform its natural function?

Explains Pedler: "If the capacity for responsibility is expropriated by a non-representative state, then it follows that violent revolution must take place, since there is no other way of changing the situation."¹⁴⁷



WE MUST BE WHAT WE MUST BE

"If a man reckons the unconscious as part of his personality, then one must admit that he is in fact raging against himself," writes Jung.

"But, in so far as the symbolism thrown up by his suffering is archetypal and collective, it can be taken as a sign that he is no longer suffering from himself, but rather from the spirit of the age. He is suffering from an

objective, impersonal cause, from his collective unconscious which he has in common with all men."¹⁴⁸

Says Tolstoy: "The anguish of suffering is only that pain which men experience on their attempt to break that chain of love to their ancestors, to their descendants, to their contemporaries, which unites the life of a man

with the life of the world."¹⁴⁹

Are we coming close now to understanding why so many of our lives are mired in despair and how we can conquer that darkness and live as we know we should be living?

Argues Lorimer: "A worldview which fragments reality necessarily disconnects people from their context and leads directly to a lack of meaning. Conversely, a world-view which connects life, matter and consciousness to an underlying process reinstates the sense of meaning and overcomes fragmentation."¹⁵⁰

Camus, writing in the resistance newspaper *Combat* on August 25 1944, revels in the joy that has been instilled by the long and arduous struggle against oppression in which he and his comrades have been engaged: "United in the same suffering for four years, we still are united in the same intoxication; we have won our solidarity. And we are suddenly astonished to see during this dazzling night that for four years we have never been alone. We have lived the years of fraternity."¹⁵¹

Did the collective intoxication of the resistance fighters come about despite the fact that individuals among them faced death and indeed were killed? Or did it come about because of this?

Tolstoy writes: "Death, to the man who should live only for others, could not seem to be a cessation of happiness and life, because the happiness and the life of other beings is not only not interrupted with the life of a man who saves them, but is frequently augmented and heightened by the sacrifice of his life."¹⁵²

"A free man thinks of nothing less than of death," declares Spinoza.¹⁵³

Once we no longer fear our own mortality, secure in the knowledge that our true life lies on a deeper plane than that of our temporary individual form, then our strength knows no bounds.

Lao Tzu says in the *Tao Te Ching*: "I have heard it said that one who excels in safeguarding his own life does not meet with rhinoceros or tiger when travelling on land nor is he touched by weapons when charging into an army. There is nowhere for the rhinoceros to pitch its horn; there is nowhere for the tiger to place its claws; there is nowhere for the weapon to lodge its blade. Why is this so? Because for him there is no realm of death."¹⁵⁴

Any of us can reach this state of mind, as it is our natural condition before we were spiritually cut off from the Whole, from the collective unconscious, from Gaia, from the soul of the superorganism.

Kropotkin sees what we term 'heroism' as being something basic to human psychology, although it is not always realised: "Unless men are maddened in the battlefield, they 'cannot stand it' to hear appeals for help, and not to respond to them. The hero goes; and what the hero does, *all* feel that they ought to have done as well. The sophisms of the brain cannot resist the mutual-aid feeling, because this feeling has been nurtured by thousands of years of human social life and hundreds of thousands of years of pre-human life in societies."¹⁵⁵

All we have to do to access our true human nature, our destined role as antibodies protecting the greater life-form, is to remove the mental blocks that stand in our way – all the trappings of ego, all the attachments to fake identities that blind and mislead us.

"Anyone who would be what he ought to be must stop being what he is," writes Meister Eckhart.¹⁵⁶

"A man does not live for happiness, but for the task he chooses. For the sake of that task everything, really everything, must be borne," advises Landauer in a stirring letter to a fellow anarchist.¹⁵⁷

He asks, elsewhere: "What is so important about life? We soon die, we all die, we do not live at all. Nothing lives except what we make of ourselves, what we undertake with ourselves; achievements live; not the creature, only the creator. Nothing lives but the deed of honest hands and the workings of pure, genuine, *Geist*."¹⁵⁸

And, of course, just as the collective spirit surfaces in the will and the actions of an individual part of the whole, so the individuals who allow their true nature to work within them will feed back energy into the collective and help amplify it still further.

The Invisible Committee argues: "Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by *resonance*. Something that is constituted here resonates within the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there. A body that resonates does so according to its own mode. An insurrection is

not like a plague or a forest fire – a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density. To the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable.¹⁵⁹

Landauer terms this resonance or music *Wahn* - a kind of human aspiration, an inspiration to move forward. He explains: “*Wahn* is not only every goal, every ideal, every belief in a sense of purpose of life and the world: *Wahn* is every banner followed by mankind; every drumbeat leading mankind into danger; every alliance that unites mankind and creates from a sum of individuals a new structure, an organism. *Wahn* is the greatest thing mankind has; there is always something of love in it: love is *Geist* and *Geist* is love: and love and *Geist* are *Wahn*.”¹⁶⁰

It is this willingness to follow the drumbeat into danger, to cast aside our individual fears and resonate with the whole, that is so crucial both for our own sense of authenticity and for the common good.

Too often we hide from the responsibility this entails, from the confrontation and personal risk involved – sometimes, as Zerzan set out, under the excuse of being ‘nice’. This, he says, is the perfect enemy of tactical or analytical thinking: “Be agreeable; don’t let having radical ideas make waves in your personal behavior. Accept the pre-packaged methods and limits of the daily strangulation. Ingrained deference, the conditioned response to ‘play by the rules’ – authority’s rules – this is the real Fifth Column, the one within us.”¹⁶¹

This hiding, this backing out of our responsibilities, is highly dangerous to our psychological development, as Jung stresses.

“Flight from life does not exempt us from the law of age and death,” he warns. “The neurotic who tries to wiggle out of the necessity of living wins nothing and only burdens himself with a constant foretaste of aging and dying, which must appear especially cruel on account of the total emptiness and meaninglessness of his life. If it is not possible for the libido to strive forwards, to lead a life that willingly accepts all dangers and ultimate decay, then it strikes back along the other road

and sinks into its own depths...”¹⁶²

We are used to seeing depicted in fictional form a willingness to take risks, even to sacrifice oneself for the protection of whole. In the film *Avatar* mentioned earlier, for instance, the threatened planet is saved by the determination of every living creature to hurl itself at the enemy forces, regardless of the individual danger.

But when it comes to real life - our own little personal lives with jobs, families, friends and comfortable routines - we seem to need reminding that we have a serious duty to perform.

This duty is not an optional extra but our very *raison d’être* – we are the antibodies that have to defend the health of our superorganism. If we do not act as we know, deep down, we should, then our whole existence becomes nothing but an empty sham, a failure on the most fundamental biological level.

As Zerzan says, in a conversation with Jensen: “We didn’t make this culture. We didn’t turn the world into the battleground and cemetery it has become. We didn’t turn human relations into the parody they have become. But now it is our responsibility to overcome what our culture has created. Maybe you could say that now we must be what we must be to overcome it.”¹⁶³



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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Joseph CAMPBELL (1904-1987) was an American author and expert in comparative mythology and comparative religion. The works of German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche had a profound effect on his thinking. Film director George Lucas has said Campbell's work inspired his 1977 sci-fi classic *Star Wars*.

Albert CAMUS (1913-1960) was a French Algerian author, philosopher, and journalist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He was a key philosopher of the 20th-century and his most famous work is the novel *L'Étranger*. Often thought of as an existentialist, he in fact rejected that label and had serious differences with its leading proponent Jean-Paul Sartre. He died in a car crash at the age of 46.

Meister ECKHART (c. 1260-1328) was German theologian, philosopher and mystic Eckhart von Hochheim. Tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII, he apparently died before the verdict was declared, but no record of his death or burial has ever been discovered. His hand is often seen behind the influential 14th century anonymous *Theologia Germanica* which circulated after his disappearance.

The INVISIBLE COMMITTEE are an anonymous group of contributors who penned *The Coming Insurrection*, a French booklet predicting the imminent collapse of capitalist culture, first published in 2007. In 2008 a group of French radicals, who became known as the Tarnac Nine, were arrested on charges of sabotaging high-speed railway lines, with the French state claiming they were the authors of the widely-distributed and influential pamphlet.

Richard JEFFERIES (1848-1887) was an English journalist and nature writer, noted for his depiction of English rural life, who also wrote *After London* (1885) an early work of post-apocalyptic science fiction. He struggled with poverty and tuberculosis and died in Goring, Sussex, at the age of 38.

Derrick JENSEN (born 1960) is an American author and environmental activist who has published several books questioning and critiquing contemporary society and its values, including *A Language Older Than Words*, *The Culture of Make Believe*, and *Endgame*.

Carl JUNG (1875-1961) was a celebrated Swiss psychiatrist, an influential thinker and the founder of analytical psychology. He also explored Eastern and Western philosophy, alchemy, astrology, sociology, as well as literature and the arts. He is perhaps best known for his theory of the collective unconscious.

Peter KROPOTKIN (1842-1921) was a Russian geographer, zoologist and anarchist. His many books, pamphlets and articles include *The Conquest of Bread and Fields*, *Factories and Workshops*, as well as *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. He was also a contributor to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* Eleventh Edition.

LAO-TZU (c500BC) was an ancient Chinese philosopher and central figure in Taoism. He is traditionally regarded as the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, though this is often disputed and many insist he was not even a single person, but a collective designation for a school of thought represented by various historical figures, with his name meaning simply Old Master.

Gustav LANDAUER (1870-1919) was a leading German-Jewish anarchist theorist and is also known for his study and translations of William Shakespeare's works into German. Following the collapse of the 1918 Bavarian Revolution and the recapture of Munich by the German army and Freikorps units, Landauer was arrested and then stoned to death by soldiers in Stadelheim Prison.

David LORIMER is a contemporary Scottish writer, lecturer and editor who, after a career as a merchant banker, became a teacher of



philosophy and modern languages at Winchester College in Hampshire. He has translated and edited books about the Bulgarian sage Peter Deunov and is a member of the International Futures Forum.

James LOVELOCK (born 1919) is an English scientist and author famed for proposing the Gaia theory. He has stirred controversy by openly supporting nuclear power, declaring in 2005: "I am a Green, and I entreat my friends in the movement to drop their wrongheaded objection to nuclear energy".

Eugène MARAIS (1871-1936) was a South African lawyer, naturalist, poet and writer. Embittered by the horrors of the Boer War, Marais refused to translate his works into English and as a result they remained almost unknown outside of southern Africa. A morphine addict and depressive, he committed suicide at the age of 65.

Henry MARGENAU (1901-1997) was a German-American physicist and philosopher who became Professor Emeritus of Physics and Natural Philosophy at Yale University. His scientific research included microwave theory and spectral line broadening and his written works include *The Nature of Physical Reality* and *The Miracle of Existence*.

Peter MARSHALL (born 1946) is an English philosopher, historian, biographer, travel writer and poet. He has written fifteen books, translated into fourteen different languages. Sussex-born Marshall has written on subjects including anarchism, ecology, alchemy and archaeology and has been described by *Resurgence* magazine as one of the 25 'visionary voices' who shaped the new world view in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Charles B MAURER published his biography of Gustav Landauer in 1971. At the time he was library director at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, USA. Educated at the University of Michigan and Northwestern University, he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at the University of Munich in 1960-61.



Fritz MAUTHNER (1849-1923) was a German-speaking Bohemian philosopher and writer and a major influence on Gustav Landauer. He is best known for his *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, which was published in three parts in 1901 and 1902.

Kit PEDLER (1927-1981) was an English scientist and author, who also penned science fiction and became the unofficial scientific adviser to the *Doctor Who* TV series in the 1960s, helping create the Cybermen as a warning of the threat posed by technology. He also co-wrote two series of *Doomwatch* for the BBC in the early 1970s.

Rupert SHELDRAKE (born 1942) is an English biochemist and plant physiologist who advances his own theory of morphic resonance and writes and researches on areas including animal and plant development and behaviour, memory, telepathy, perception and cognition in general.

Baruch de SPINOZA (1632-1677) was a Dutch philosopher of Portuguese Jewish origin, whose importance was not recognised until years after his death. Shunned by both

Jewish and Roman Catholic establishments, he died at the age of 44 of a lung disease probably caused by fine glass dust from his trade as a lens grinder.

Eckhart TOLLE (born 1948) is a German-born author, public speaker and teacher on spirituality, who now lives in Canada. Originally Ulrich Leonard Tolle, he changed his forename to Eckhart because of his admiration for Meister Eckhart and left Germany after feeling depressed by the "pain in the energy field of the country", especially when playing in bombed-out buildings as a child.

Leo TOLSTOY (1828-1910), or Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, was a great Russian

novelist and thinker, who wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, as well as novellas such as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*. His views on non-violent resistance had a major influence on both Gandhi and Martin Luther King. He died of pneumonia at a railway station in 1910 after leaving home in the middle of winter at the age of 82.

John ZERZAN (born 1943) is an American anarchist and primitivist philosopher and author. His works criticize agricultural civilization and challenge domestication, language, symbolic thought and the concept of time. He has long been associated with *Green Anarchy*, a journal of anarcho-primitivist and insurrectionary anarchist thought.





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'Every time the levels of repression move up a notch, so must the levels of resistance, otherwise the antibodies have failed in their job. There is no obvious end to this process. If some means of dissent are blocked, other forms acquire immediate moral legitimacy. Is there anybody who would argue that the armed French resistance against the Nazi occupation was not a proportionate and necessary response? Is there any cause more compelling than the survival of the planet and the capacity of the human immune system to perform its natural function?'

