

Steve Schwartzberg

“One Body”

Based on a presentation to the Chicago Literary Club

13 February 2023

© Steven J Schwartzberg, 2023

I think there may be limits to our ability to replace our interpretations of this world with the truths of our shared spiritual sociality—the sociality that includes all our relations (all living beings)—at least I think there may be such limits on this side of eternity.¹ I also think that God is in all things and transcends all things. I think that each and all of us—by knowing that we are of creation—can deliberately participate as unique expressions of everything else in the universe in the whole that is always presencing itself to us at every moment of the now when time touches eternity. As Zhang Zai observed a thousand years ago: “Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.”²

I believe that we are not simply individuals, but part of a whole, and that in some sense the entirety of the whole is within each of us as we are entirely within it—that individuality is not the deepest truth of who we are and perhaps is not even

true at all. Certainly individualism is one of those myths—one of those interpretations of this world—that gets in the way of our feeling our spiritual sociality and resonating with its truths. Perhaps a better way of putting it, to repeat myself, is that we are each unique expressions of everything else in the universe and, as such, deeply interconnected, entangled, and united not in spite of our differences but because of them. The goodness of Heaven extends into and suffuses the natural world—God is in all things and transcends all things—in Him we live and move and have our being—or, starting from the other direction, the goodness of the natural world—our grandmother Earth—gives birth to all things, remains in all things, and regenerates all things. Her living presence is a universal truth in our lives and in life itself. She, too, is constitutive of the larger truth in whom we live and move and have our being. I think of this larger truth as God the Mother as readily as God the Father. Indeed, I think of the word “God” as conveying only a small part of Their oneness, diversity, and awe-inspiring wonderfulness. In either direction—from Earth to Heaven or from Heaven to Earth—each and all of us are “of creation” and can deliberately participate in the whole that is always presencing itself to us at every moment of the now when time touches eternity.

Here is another perspective on all of this from a Facebook friend of mine, Reidun Westvik Lauritzen, who posted the following invitation under the title: “It is Time”³

We cannot fix the planet.

We cannot save the oceans.

We can only allow nature to reveal
its own innate intelligence,
logic, interconnections
and regenerative cycles,
teaching us how to respect it as ourselves.

We are nature.

There is nothing to fix.

There is only tuning into our own nature,
systems, emotions, energy,
our common path.

By doing this, we open up the door into our
renewed collective imaginary,

experiencing it as
freedom, thriving and belonging.

It starts in this moment.

Not with heroes.

But with us.

You and I regenerating our own hearts,
enabling ourselves to
hold space
for friction, old and new,
the power structures falling apart,
and the emergence of the new self
on an individual, relational, collective
and planetary level.

The regeneration is already
mirroring itself
through all the layers
of the earth, our souls and purposes.

Invite yourself to join.

Welcome

I hope that these opening comments have resonated with a particular kind of attention that all of us are capable of—that particular kind of attention that the philosopher, doctor of psychiatry, and student of neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist, argues is associated with the right hemisphere of the brain: the attention that is directed toward the whole and toward relationships as the reality to be apprehended and appreciated rather than the kind of attention directed towards grasping particular parts of reality and manipulating and controlling them; the kind of attention that McGilchrist argues is associated with the left hemisphere of the brain. I am not a neuroscientist and read McGilchrist’s magisterial two volume work—*The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World*—more as a student of ethics, theology, and spirituality.⁴ As such, I appreciate the ways the approach that he claims is characteristic of the right hemisphere might be associated with what could be called an expressive femininity while the approach of the left hemisphere might be associated with what the philosopher Isabel Millar has described as an “instrumental masculinity.”⁵

I find thinking about gender in this way, rather than as a pure linguistic construct or some sort of simple reflection of biology, to be helpful as it underlines the need for balance and complementarity in relationships without specifying particular social roles for men or women. Such balance and complementarity—whether involving men and women, women and women, or men and men—is part, I think, of what can be involved in forming a body—a collective “we” or “us”—in which both expressive and instrumental roles are important. I also think there is a sacred masculinity that avoids patriarchy and that is, along with a sacred femininity, part of what should help to make men men and women women. The idea of balance and complementarity may also help all of us remember McGilchrist’s strong claim that the approach of the right hemisphere of the brain is generally more accurate than the approach of the left hemisphere as well as his cautionary observation that western civilization has again and again invested in technology and the pursuit of control—invested in the approach of the left hemisphere—and so contributed to what McGilchrist calls “The Unmaking of the World.” What that great poet of the People, John Trudell (Santee Dakota) calls “tech-‘no-logic’ civilization.”⁶

This civilization—the global offspring of western civilization—has come to reflect what I would suggest is a patriarchal masculinity run amok; one that is partially disguised by the many elite women who have adopted social roles from which they were traditionally excluded in this civilization while relatively few men have done

the reverse. Almost all of us, moreover, are, I think, being polarized and pixilated by the binary logic of our computers as these machines seek to get under our skin at our emotions, or at least are used for that purpose in the service of capitalism.

We make much of what machines can allegedly do for us in our pursuit of the idol of efficiency, we make little of what machines are doing to us, we make still less of how we might bring balance into our relationships with the machine world, and we almost completely ignore the greed and egotism of the degenerative variety of capitalism that is driving the process.

A system built upon trying to extend and protect the ego—to unleash self-interest in the service of a particular vision of the common good involving “development”—has generated both enormous wealth, especially for a few, and intense insecurity for many by taking with reckless abandon from the land that future generations are to live on and by eviscerating the knowledge of our ancestors and their ways in favor of the latest technology.⁷ In consequence of this assault on the land, countless lives among our relations, and even large numbers of entire species, have been destroyed. Blind to the unsustainability of the growth of our consumption of energy, and mistakenly imagining that our economic standard of living is the result of our ingenuity and technological development rather than realizing that this development depends on increasing energy consumption, we have burdened future

generations not only with a global climate crisis but also with the threat of global economic collapse and extreme scarcities.

Originating in the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne, drafted by the scholar John Mohawk (Seneca), and carefully reviewed and revised by the Haudenosaunee Council of Chiefs, the *Basic Call to Consciousness* of 1977 was a wake-up call to humanity: “The way of life known as ‘Western Civilization’ is on a death path, and its culture has no viable answers....The air is foul, the waters poisoned, the trees dying, the animals are disappearing. We think even the systems of weather are changing [remember this is from 1977!]..... The people who are living on this planet need to break with the narrow concept of human liberation and begin to see liberation as something that needs to be extended to the whole of the Natural World. What is needed is the liberation of all the things that support life—the air, the waters, the trees—all the things that support the sacred Web of Life.”⁸

Shared spiritual sociality—whether perceived in Confucian terms as forming one Body with Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things, or perceived in Indigenous terms as the unity and equality that exists among all our relations in the web of life, or perhaps even in Christian terms as harmony with the mystical Body of Christ (if that Body is understood as the community formed by all living beings created when all things were made through Him as described in the beginning of the

gospel of John), or in terms of really any perception of the living truth of our equal belonging—has implications for all peoples and for an America and a world that has yet to be, and that is still struggling to be, born.

Here is a Zen thinker, Kōshō Uchiyama's, take on the matter:

“The life that flows through each of us and through everything around us is actually all connected. To say that, of course, means that who I really am cannot be separated from all the things that surround me. Or, to put it another way, all sentient beings have their existence and live within my life. So needless to say, that includes even the fate of all mankind—that, too, lies within me. Therefore, just how mankind might truly live out its life becomes what I aim at as my direction. This aiming or living while moving in a certain direction is what is meant by vow. In other words, it is the motivation for living that is different for a bodhisattva. Ordinary people live thinking only about their own personal, narrow circumstances connected with their desires. In contrast to that, a bodhisattva, though undeniably still an ordinary human being like everyone else, lives by vow. Because of that, the significance of his or her life is not the same. For us as bodhisattvas, all aspects of life, including the fate of humanity itself,

live within us. It is with this in mind that we work to discover and manifest the most vital and alive posture that we can take in living out our life.”⁹

The original free and independent existence of the Native Nations of Turtle Island—the Native Nations of this continent—was far closer to the social values Christianity alleges it favors than the societies of Christendom and its successors have been. This is a simple factual statement. The theologian Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) makes some arguments along these lines in his book, *God is Red*, and I make some others in my forthcoming book, *Arguments over Genocide: The War of Words in the Congress and the Supreme Court over Cherokee Removal*.¹⁰ But, as far as I am concerned, it is not a controversial observation. What may be controversial is to suggest to Christians, in part on the basis of this observation, that the “Body of Christ” has been mostly misconceived within the Christian tradition as something consisting of Christians rather than as a cosmic reality with which all people may seek to be in harmony. This mystical Body, from my perspective, is constituted by the community formed by all living beings; by the entire web of life whose unity and diversity is well conveyed in the phrase “all our relations.” So many Christians believing that they were somehow enlarging the Body of Christ has been a large part of the ability of these Christians to engage in genocide while seeing themselves as benevolent; an ability that has

persisted among their secular successors in the name of expanding “civilization” or even extending “democracy.”

Whether there are sufficient intellectual and moral resources within the Christian tradition or its secular successors to do successful battle with this capacity to believe that one is being benevolent while committing genocide is an open question. The American social justice advocate and Sikh thinker Valarie Kaur has written a book, *See No Stranger*, in which she suggests that we should see every new individual we meet as a part of ourselves whom we do not yet know.¹¹ I think the Christian tradition is capable of something similar; capable of sustaining a vow that one should seek to serve Christ in everyone and seek to avoid judging lest we be judged. A Dominican theologian, Herbert McCabe, who has contributed to my thinking, once defined love as a gift of the space in which to expand; I would add, a gift of the space in which to become more of one’s true self (understanding our true self as a unique and embodied expression of everything else in the universe and understanding becoming more of one’s true self in terms of connecting more deeply the love within each of us to the love that pervades the universe). Such love is, McCabe noted, always a gift.¹²

Stealing space and depriving others of space is what the societies of Christendom and its successors have done for centuries. This the nature of imperialism, masked

somewhat in the case of the United States by its openness to immigrants from around the world. That the genocides and land thefts in which the United States has engaged are at odds with what Christians and their secular successors avow and should understand love to be would seem obvious but our vision has frequently been obscured by our misplaced faith that a culture and a politics of domination (as long as it was “ours”) could create or maintain or extend a worthwhile community. This is one of the greatest obstacles to liberation from the domination and dehumanization system that first imposed itself on Indigenous peoples and which is now ubiquitous on the planet in various forms; a system in which all of us confront a profound misunderstanding of who we are and a profound misapprehension of how we are connected.

The simple fact is that human spiritual sociality is not the creation of Christianity, or Islam, or Buddhism, or for that matter any religion. The adherents of all of them can participate in such spiritual sociality—at least to some extent—in the Body of Christ, the Ummah, the Sangha, and myriad other communities.¹³ Seeking to exclude anyone from this sociality, or imagining that it is a product of one’s religious identity and not ultimately a gift of the Creator or an expression of the truth of the universe, is a major step toward building a politics of domination. The first step in that direction is denying our unity and equality with all our relations.

Whether the adherents of the Christian tradition can find themselves anew within the global context that the Chinese philosopher Tu Weiming calls “spiritual humanism”—and so can help life overcome tech-“no-logic” civilization—remains to be seen.¹⁴ George Manuel (Secwepemc), chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (known today as the Assembly of First Nations), has written that it will be easier to think that Christianity “can take on a shape that more closely resembles the world around us when we receive a sign that the leaders of the church have joined in the dance of life. Perhaps when men no longer try to have ‘dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that liveth upon the earth,’ they will no longer try to have dominion over us. It will be much easier to be our brother’s keeper then.”¹⁵

The story of the genocide of the 1830s is the story of how the “Columbus Mentality”—as John Trudell puts it—came to determine American law, policy, and conduct in a decision to pursue domination that persists to this day.¹⁶ The assumptions and arguments of those who advocated this decision in the 1820s and 1830s are the same assumptions and arguments—although dressed up in less religious and more “polite” language—that continue to be offered up by the Supreme Court and by the advocates of “federal Indian law” in the present—the advocates of a “law” that is not made by the Native Nations but rather imposed upon them. This is the “law” that made possible the Trail of Tears and that

continues to facilitate extraordinary oppression and exploitation. This is the “law” whose apologists in the present, as in the 1830s, continue to claim (falsely) that they are acting in the “best interests”—or even simply “the interests”—of the Indigenous peoples. Here is Trudell’s succinct explanation as to the reason for their conduct: “So when Columbus got here, he got off the boat, and he said to the first people he saw, ‘Who are you?’ And the first people he saw said, ‘We’re human beings.’ And Columbus said, ‘Oh, Indians.’”¹⁷

It’s five hundred years later and they still can’t see us. We are still invisible. They don’t see us as human beings, but we’ve been saying to them all along that’s what we are. We are invisible to them because we are still the Human Beings, we’re still the People, but they will never call us that. They taught us to call ourselves Indians, now they’re teaching us to call ourselves Native Americans. It’s not who we are. We’re the People. They can’t see us as human beings. But they can’t see themselves as human beings. The invisibility is at every level, it’s not just that we’re tucked away out of sight. We’re the evidence of the crime. They can’t deal with the reality of who we are because then they have to deal with the reality of what they have done. If they deal with the reality of who we are, they have to deal with the reality of who they aren’t. So they have to fear us, not recognize us, not like us. The very fact of calling us Indians creates a

new identity for us, an identity that began with their arrival. Changing identity, creating a new perceptual reality, is another form of genocide. It's like severing a spiritual umbilical cord that reaches into the ancestral past. The history of the Indians begins with the arrival of the Europeans. The history of the People begins with the beginning of the history of the People. The history of the People is one of cooperation, collectivity, and living in balance. The history of the Indians is one of being attacked and genocide, rather than a history of peace and balance. The history of the People under attack, the Indians, in an evolutionary context, is not very long, it's only five hundred years. The objective of civilizing us is to make Indian history become our permanent reality. The necessary objective of Native people is to outlast this attack, however long it takes, to keep our identity alive.¹⁸

Those with the slightest doubt as to the accuracy of Trudell's account, need only consider the writings of Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, the court historian in mid-sixteenth century Spain and the Dominican theologian and activist Bartolomé de Las Casas' great rival in the debate within Spain over Spanish colonialism. According to Las Casas, "the *Natives* (of America) having their own lawful kings and princes, and a right to make laws for the good government of their respective dominions, *could not* be expelled out of them, *or deprived of what they possess, without doing*

violence to the laws of God, as well as the laws of nations.”¹⁹ Sepúlveda, in contrast, described the Indians of the New World harshly: “In prudence, talent, virtue, and humanity they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children to adults, women to men, as the wild and cruel to the most meek, as the prodigiously intemperate to the continent and temperate, that I have almost said, as monkeys to men.”²⁰ The idea that Las Casas knew better was beyond Sepúlveda’s imagination and would have seemed to him an affront to the dignity of the crown and of Spain: “Shall we doubt that those peoples, so uncivilized, so barbarous, so wicked, contaminated with so many evils and wicked religious practices, have been justly subjugated by an excellent, pious, and most just King, such as was Ferdinand and the Emperor Charles is now, and by a most civilized nation that is outstanding in every kind of virtue?”²¹ To the claim that wars of conquest were impeding the progress of Christianity because the Indians came to hate those who did them harm, Sepúlveda replied, “the madman also hates the doctor who cures him, and the unruly boy hates the teacher who punishes him, but this fact does not negate the usefulness of one nor the other, nor should it be abandoned.”²²

The central assumption of this “Columbus Mentality”—that those on the shore are not equals from whom one can learn in friendship but rather inferiors to be dominated and “taught” by those coming over by boat—was and remains incompatible with the Native Nations’ right to the free and independent existence

that they enjoyed before Columbus came and that they will enjoy again once the peoples of the world manage to turn from what Trudell calls “tech-‘no-logic’ civilization” to ways of living in balance with the land, with the planet’s ecosystem and environment, and with all our relations (all living beings). The “Columbus Mentality”—and its doctrine of “Christian discovery”—is like a disease unknown to Turtle Island and it is taking some time for the land and the Native peoples to develop immunity and, in conjunction with allies, effective responses.²³

There is a desperate need for orienting our conduct toward the reality of our shared sociality outside of our “civilization.” I believe that we all have, for those of you who know fish, something akin to the lateral line by which fish feel movement, vibration, and pressure gradients in the surrounding water—an organ that helps us navigate our shared emotional, socio-cultural, and spiritual space both as individuals and as collectivities. I will call this organ, for lack of a better term, our “heart”—though it should not be too closely connected with the pulsing object in all of our chests.²⁴ Even the microbiome we host—the foreign cells within our bodies—have something of a voice and a vote in the constitution of who we are, what we feel, and how we think.²⁵ Learning to use our spiritual lateral lines as Indigenous peoples have done for millennia to better navigate our shared spiritual space and to guide our interactions with all our relations is an urgent task if the culture and politics of domination in our civilization is to be overcome.

The radical reforms that the United States would have to undergo in order to really respect the national rights of the Native peoples are formidable. Every aspect of American life from property law to criminal justice to healthcare, and from economic organization to education to the ways the very meaning of the common good on this continent are conceived, would have to change. Above all, the adoption of such reforms would require the American people to put seemingly intangible principles such as honesty and spiritual responsibility and the value of trustworthy, reciprocal, and consensual conduct above convenience, expediency, and the “comfort” of being dominated by allegedly democratic, or at least allegedly economically “efficient,” authorities and institutions. Movement toward these reforms would require the American people to get more in touch with their own spiritual lateral lines so that such grandmother/grandfather teachings as those of the Anishinaabeg—the teachings surrounding love, truth, bravery, humility, wisdom, honesty, and respect—become deeply felt and the resonances of their reality can be sensed in the body politic and not merely be imagined intellectually. Sharing something of what his mentor conveyed, the law professor John Borrows (Anishinaabe) writes in *Law’s Indigenous Ethics* of his view that “There was but one abiding principle that guided all life and that was ‘to live in harmony with the world and within one’s being.’”²⁶

It is essential to reject the false universalism of Christendom and its secular successors—a false universalism that can be traced back to a series of fifteenth century papal bulls and the willingness of the newly emerging European national and imperial powers to deploy state violence to deny “full” humanity to the others of Europe—to Africans, Asians, the world’s Indigenous nations, and all other non-Europeans—and so to create the global order dominated by Europeans that persists to this day with its spurious conceptions of what is human and “universal.”

Perhaps the most famous of these papal bulls was *Inter Caetera* of 3 May 1493 in which Pope Alexander VI—in order “that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith”—somehow allegedly gave to Spain’s monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella: “the aforesaid countries and islands thus unknown and hitherto discovered by your envoys and to be discovered hereafter, provided however they at no time have been in the actual temporal possession of any Christian owner, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances of the same.”²⁷ The following day this bull was revised to include a specific line one hundred leagues west of the Azores and to grant to Spain exclusive rights to the west of that line.²⁸ Less well known, but equally important, was Pope Nicholas V’s grant to the King of Portugal in *Dum Diversas* of 18 June 1452—reiterated in *Romanus Pontifex* of 8 January 1455—awarding that monarch, Alfonso V, a monopoly of the African slave trade and

authorizing him: “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their [Alfonso’s and his successors’] use and profit.”²⁹ How can anything just be built on such a foundation? How can anything good for humanity as a whole be built on the false universalism of western civilization, to say nothing of anything good for all our relations? It is time for a radical rethinking that looks to other understandings of who we are and how we are related.

“Having everything taken away and yet remaining in everything that has been taken is a long way of saying that this is an unpayable debt,” observes the brilliant philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva: “‘Slave labor’ is the flesh and blood of capital because labor is nothing more than the transference of that which composes flesh and blood, the elemental components of everything, any and each possible and actual existent. Until our descriptions of existence take this as the point of departure, critical descriptions of the global political architecture will presume that everything that matters originated in and reflects post-Enlightenment white

Europe. Since anything can be traced back there, these descriptions will be unable to account for how much that which matters only does so because it is but the materialization of what has been extracted from everywhere else.”³⁰

A more accurate universalism, and a more accurate understanding of the human, is offered by the concept of Ubuntu in African philosophy. According to Panashe Chigumadzi, the author of *These Bones Will Rise Again* and a doctoral candidate at Harvard University, Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language. This difficulty Archbishop Desmond Tutu acknowledged in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*. The Kenyan theologian John Mbiti addressed the challenge in his earlier classic *African Religions and Philosophy*.

“Mbiti famously rendered Ubuntu’s philosophy of mutual personhood as an African humanist analogue to Enlightenment humanism’s ‘I think, therefore I am’ by translating ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ as —[and I hope you all appreciate the deep beauty and truth of this]—‘I am because we are.’ [...However,] Mbiti’s classic humanist translation of Ubuntu obscures the fact that, in contrast to the western conception of the human, the African conception of the person is a social being who is always becoming. Ubuntu holds that to be a

person, *umuntu*, among people, *Abantu*, one must continually uphold the personhood of others.”³¹

To be a deliberate part of the “we” that does not exclude, in other words—a deliberate part of creation—one must receive the gift of creation with gratitude and with a spirit of reciprocity that upholds the personhood of all. Put somewhat differently, we can embrace the truth that we are each unique expressions of everything else in the universe and are created to communicate abundant love as embodied ideas born of the love with which God extends God’s Self in creating the space and time in which all creation either reciprocates God’s love with spaciousness and grace toward *all* or else sustains the terms of this world—terms defined by a belief in scarcity and selfishness, and, above all, by feelings of fear and insecurity.

Sustaining the worst of the terms of this world, the imperial powers of Europe came to see those outside of Christendom—in the words of Pope Nicholas V’s bull as “Saracens” or “pagans” or “other enemies of Christ”—as devoid of personhood or at least as not “fully” human—with devastating consequences for other peoples and ultimately for the peoples of Europe as well when the arrogance, ignorance, hatred, and violence they put out into the world returned in the American Civil War, two world wars, a long cold war, and a “war on terror,” each of which also

involved still more suffering for non-European peoples. The eurochristian peoples—including the American people as a eurochristian people in this regard—themselves have suffered from secularizations of the old supremacist expansionism, such as Communism, fascism, and white supremacy. They have also suffered from the increasing denial of personhood within our civilization that is driven by a degenerative capitalism that is symptomatic of an increasingly disordered religiosity.

Communism, it might be noted, presented itself as a form of opposition to the old order while actually embracing the worst aspects of that order's adherence to a politics of domination.³² Its specific form of dominationist politics—often described as totalitarianism—deeply influenced the totalitarianism of fascism and Nazism as well.³³ This is an approach to politics that remains a powerful cautionary tale against using the tools of the dominant culture in any effort at liberation.

There is some truth to President Bill Clinton's claim, in his second inaugural address in 1997, that during the twentieth century the United States "became the world's mightiest industrial power, saved the world from tyranny in two world wars and a long cold war, and time and again reached across the globe to millions who, like us, longed for the blessings of liberty."³⁴ The problem with this claim is,

first, that it ignored the broader historical context in which these conflicts can all be seen as rooted in western imperialism's culture and politics of domination and its brutal approach to the non-European parts of the world; second, that it ignored the genocides and land thefts and slavery that are part of the foundation of the United States itself and its industrial power; and, third, that it assumed the relative "blessings of liberty" (on those occasions when they were in fact shared and not undermined by American actions) are to be celebrated as if they were part of the "End" of "History" rather than a detour from or a prelude to the recovery and widespread adoption of something closer to the original free and independent existence of the Native Nations—what my friend Peter d'Errico has described as an Indigenous nomos of the earth.³⁵

In *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, the anthropologist David Graeber and his colleague, the archaeologist David Wengrow, hold out hope for the ability of human societies to reject a politics of domination precisely because some Indigenous societies have done so successfully in the past.³⁶ Their view of these societies is not romanticized, and they recognize the incredible range and diversity of Indigenous experience. They reject the evolutionary schemes whereby there is a supposed progression from "simple" to "complex" societies, from egalitarian hunter-gatherers to hierarchical states, or even from small-scale societies to large-scale empires. Instead, they argue that these evolutionary schemes were

themselves developed by prideful Europeans as a defense mechanism against what Graeber and Wengrow demonstrate is a powerful Indigenous critique of Western societies and Western culture and Western religion. This critique, they argue, was a major contributing tributary flowing into the Enlightenment. And the Enlightenment, I would note, can be seen as the first great effort in modern times to pursue liberation with the tools of the dominant culture, including its spurious concepts of who is “fully” human.

Brother Gabriel Sagard’s early seventeenth century account of the Wendat (Huron), a work that became a bestseller in Europe cited by both Locke and Voltaire, is one of many that Graeber and Wengrow review. According to Sagard: “They [the Wendat] reciprocate hospitality and give such assistance to one another that the necessities of all are provided for without there being any indigent beggar in their towns and villages; and they considered it a very bad thing when they heard it said that there were in France a great many of these needy beggars, and thought this was for lack of charity in us, and blamed us for it severely.”³⁷ The Jesuit missionary Le Jeune wrote of the Montagnais-Naskapi in 1642: “They imagine that they ought by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of wild ass colts, rendering no homage to anyone whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our Captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his tongue’s end; for he is powerful

so far as he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself talking and haranguing, he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages.”³⁸

As Graeber and Wengrow note, when it comes “to questions of personal freedom, the equality of men and women, sexual mores or popular sovereignty—or even, for that matter, theories of depth psychology—indigenous American attitudes are likely to be far closer to the reader’s own than seventeenth-century European ones.”³⁹ Unfortunately, Graeber and Wengrow downplay East Asian influences on the Enlightenment, which were also substantial, as well as those positive contributions to the Enlightenment that were rooted in Christianity and Judaism. I have heard—perhaps it is apocryphal—that in debates in the University of Paris, in the Middle Ages, one had to present one’s opponent’s position to their satisfaction before proceeding to present one’s own response. Such roots of more democratic self-government should also be recuperated and nurtured. And the Enlightenment heritage as a whole should be reconsidered in the light of the world’s great spiritual traditions and the past few centuries of the experience of life on earth.⁴⁰

Graeber and Wengrow quickly pass over the sixteenth century which would have provided material that would have strengthened their argument, including the possibility that Sir Thomas More had seen the first of Bartolomé de Las Casas’ manuscripts on the New World in early 1516 and that this had helped form the

basis for More's *Utopia* later that year.⁴¹ They also could have emphasized that the Indigenous critique is ongoing and that the West is just beginning to realize what can be learned from the Native Nations.

The alternative of an embodied liberatory culture rooted in the traditions of Indigenous peoples around the world must first be seen to be perceived. This, in turn, requires a deliberate focus of attention—a willingness to look. The American revolutionary Benjamin Franklin saw something of the truth of the accomplishments of the peoples of the Native Nations in 1783:

“Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the Perfection of Civility; they think the same of theirs.... Having frequent Occasions to hold public Councils, they have acquired great Order and Decency in conducting them. The old men sit in the foremost Ranks, the Warriors in the next, and the Women and Children in the hindmost. The Business of the Women is to take exact notice of what passes, imprint it in their memories, for they have no Writing, and communicate it to their Children. They are the Records of the Council, and they preserve Tradition of the Stipulations in Treaties a hundred Years back, which when we compare with our Writings we always find exact. He that would speak, rises. The rest observe a profound Silence. When he has

finished and sits down, they leave him five or six Minutes to recollect, that if he has omitted any thing he intended to say, or has any thing to add, he may rise again and deliver it. To interrupt another, even in common Conversation, is reckoned highly indecent.”⁴²

The United States is composed not only of states—and other systems of domination—but also of a matrix of affinity among the American people formed in part by shared territoriality and shared democratic and Enlightenment-based narratives. That territoriality and those narratives—together with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—have helped sustain the American people’s existence. The distinction between the people and the state, and the superiority of the former to the latter, was stressed by the constitutional architect James Wilson in *Chisholm v. Georgia* in 1793: “The states, rather than the people, for whose sakes the states exist, are frequently the objects which attract and arrest our principal attention.... Is a toast asked? ‘The United states,’ instead of the ‘People of the United states,’ is the toast given. This is not politically correct. The toast is meant to present to view the first great object in the Union: it presents only the second. It presents only the artificial person, instead of the natural persons who spoke it into existence. A state I cheerfully fully admit, is the noblest work of Man. But, Man himself, free and honest, is, I speak as to this world, the noblest work of God.”⁴³

In terms of what my friend Steve Newcomb (Shawnee-Lenape) calls “the view from the shore” before the European invaders arrived, the “noblest work of Man” is the establishment of a socio-political order that does not require the sovereignty of states or a politics of domination to maintain itself and which facilitates the pursuit of inner and social peace.⁴⁴ The American experiment—as advocated and fought for by James Wilson and his allies—can be seen as a pale imitation of the Indigenous accomplishment.

We are obliged, if we truly want to be law-abiding, to respect the international laws and usages that prevailed among the Native Nations of Turtle Island before the European invaders arrived. We are obliged to care for the land as our grandmother Earth and to respect the unity and equality of all living beings in a beloved community for whom the “all” of which the founders of the United States spoke has been transformed into the “all” in the “*all our relations*” of whom the peoples of the Native Nations speak. That would be closer to the true constitutional legal order of this land of which the American Constitution is an inadequately-rooted expression that has so far failed to guarantee equal belonging to all.

We are spirit, being, energy, John Trudell notes—we are forms of the Earth—and as such we are part of that unity—we are all made up of the same stuff just arranged differently and have the same relationship to Sun, Sky, Universe.⁴⁵ When

we are aware of our identity as human beings we have the power that comes from this energy, but this energy can be and is being mined by those who obscure our identity, and seek to have us cooperate in the mining of our own being, leaving behind a toxic residue of our fears, doubts, and insecurities. Confused about our identity, we become vulnerable to being addicted to a perception of our own powerlessness and to seeking to consume material to comfort ourselves. This is the process of “civilization”—in service to the great god technology—which seeks to erase the memory from the human being of being a human being connected to spiritual reality. It leads to an overconsumption that has unbalanced our relations with all living beings. There is, Trudell reminds us with these insights, another path.

How we get from here to there, from where we are—always already gathered and simultaneously dispersed and interspersed—to a “beloved community” capable of being birthed from the womb of time into this world, is the great question.⁴⁶ As a social democrat for most of my life, who has, by temperament, traditionally looked to gradual and evolutionary reforms and to a path of “progress,” I must admit that this is no longer how I look at this question. The great example and hope in my thoughts these days is the nonviolent rise of Solidarnosc in Poland in 1980. In retrospect, the visit of Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979 was decisive. The millions of Poles who gathered in enormous crowds could see the Pope they

adored in direct contrast to the handful of communist bureaucrats on the reviewing stands and could feel a shared consensus; an awareness of their own strength and numbers. At that point the myth of that system of domination—the illusions that sustained it—began to evaporate. Within a year, the vast majority of the working class had joined a free trade union movement independent of the communist bureaucracy and its claims to authority and legitimacy. Can something like that happen here? I believe that it can. Indeed, I believe the claims to legitimacy of the order which began with the American Revolution have already begun to dissipate. It might be possible to conserve and strengthen the best of the traditions behind the American Revolution, and the best of what has been done over the centuries to try to make these traditions true to their best rhetoric. At least this might be done for a time so as to smooth the transition to what is coming, assuming that is possible. There is no known epidural for birthing new social orders.

Communism was an effort to seek the dismantling of the old order—to seek a vision of liberation—with the tools of the dominant culture: “As for us, we were never concerned with the Kantian-priestly and vegetarian-Quaker prattle about the ‘sacredness of human life,’” Leon Trotsky declared in 1920: “We were revolutionaries in opposition, and have remained revolutionaries in power. To make the individual sacred we must destroy the social order which crucifies him. And this problem can only be solved by blood and iron.”⁴⁷ If the Enlightenment

was less bloodthirsty, as a matter of its rhetoric, the American Revolution clearly did rely upon violence and upon the coercion of the law (and what was spuriously claimed to be the law). Particularly in regard to the Native Nations, and to those enslaved by the states, the brutality of the social order it established is beyond the human ability to fathom. It is essential that we seek to guide our conduct—to the extent humanely possible—without reliance on any such tools and with reliance, instead, on the power of the “good mind”—the “one mind”—not as abstract left-brain thinking in pursuit of domination and control, but rather as our communal thinking of the whole and its relationships—our awareness of the presencing of the whole of creation with which we can form a deliberate unity not by our efforts, but because we are already in harmony when we turn away from our egos and toward our true selves. Our shared spiritual sociality is always already both here and there—always already coming into the world.

When the poet, Czeslaw Milosz, well loved in Poland, visited the country after Solidarnosc had made that possible in the early 1980s, he found people in crowds quoting lines of his poetry to him everywhere he went. It seems fitting to me to quote one of his poems—A Felicitous Life—before a brief conclusion⁴⁸:

“His old age fell on years of abundant harvest.

There were no earthquakes, droughts or floods.

It seemed as if the turning of the seasons gained in constancy, Stars waxed strong and the sun increased its might.”

“Even in remote provinces no war was waged.

Generations grew up friendly to fellow men.

The rational nature of man was not a subject of derision.”

“It was bitter to say farewell to the earth so renewed.

He was envious and ashamed of his doubt,

Content that his lacerated memory would vanish with him.”

“Two days after his death a hurricane razed the coasts. Smoke came from volcanoes inactive for a hundred years. Lava sprawled over forests, vineyards, and towns. And war began with a battle on the islands.”

Perhaps the best we can do is to gather and share, with gratitude to the Creator and each other, in the years of abundant harvests. Perhaps we can do more. I do not claim to know—at least not on this side of eternity—but I do know what we are obliged to reach for because it has proved attainable within us and so may be attainable among us. And that is to form one Body with Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things—to realize the “beloved community” in which we are always already gathered—here, in this world.

¹ For a more radically hopeful stance, see Helen Schucman, *A Course in Miracles* third edition [originally three volumes in 1976] (Mill Valley, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 2007).

² Quoted in Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity* (New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilization, 2010), p. 243.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/reidunwl/posts/pfbid0oCEHqn2LCiqoMwmo5U6DA5UoqeqZpdQhVZ74CUhkuVrN731UNBNPzeroAgayKqYQl> (accessed 28 January 2023)

⁴ Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World* in two volumes (London: Perspectiva Press, 2021).

⁵ Isabel Millar, “Can we forget Foucault? Obscenity and the politics of seduction,” *Revista Guillermo de Ockham* Vol. 20, No. 2 (2022), pp. 351. See also Isabel Millar, *The Psychoanalysis of Artificial Intelligence* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

⁶ John Trudell, “What it Means to be a Human Being,” 15 March 2001, The Women’s Building, San Francisco, radio TUC (Time of Useful Consciousness) (two parts): http://www.radio4all.net/files/tuc@tucradio.org/44-2-JohnTrudellONE_2014.mp3. http://www.radio4all.net/files/tuc@tucradio.org/44-2-JohnTrudellTWO_2014.mp3 There is a transcript: https://ratical.org/many_worlds/JohnTrudell/HumanBeing.html#s2

⁷ My thinking on the ego has been influenced by a book of mystical spirituality in which belief in the existence of the ego is presented as the great antagonist of knowledge of who we really are: Schucman, *A Course in Miracles*, especially pp. 100-103. My thinking on tradition, and its importance to society as seen in the sociological tradition, has been influenced by Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). From a related angle, the cultural critic Philip Rieff has poignantly asked, what previous culture has ever attempted to see to it that no ego is hurt? This is, according to Rieff, the focus of “psychological” or “therapeutic” man for whom nothing is at stake beyond a sense of well-being with which to pursue “impulse release” and the psychological adjustments that facilitate it. Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* [1966] (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), pp. xii, 10, 21.

⁸ Akwesasne Notes, ed. *Basic Call to Consciousness* [1978] (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 2005), pp. 90-91. Peter P. d’Errico, *Federal Anti-Indian Law: The Legal Entrapment of Indigenous Peoples* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2022), p. 166.

⁹ Kōshō Uchiyama, *Opening the Hand of Thought: Approach to Zen* (Penguin Arcana, 1993), pp. 195-196.

¹⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* third edition (New York: Putnam, 2003), especially pp. 200-201. See also John Collier, *Indians of the Americas* abridged version (New York: Mentor Books, 1948), especially pp. 7-8. <https://ethicspress.com/products/arguments-over-genocide>

¹¹ Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* (New York: Random House, 2020).

¹² Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 1987), p. 108

¹³ See the related discussion in McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*, Vol. 2, pp. 1193-1304.

¹⁴ Tu Weiming, “Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse, 18 December 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya-jsyg6c_I (accessed 30 January 2020).

¹⁵ George Manuel, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* [1974] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), pp. 264-265. I am grateful to Peter d'Errico for introducing me to this work.

¹⁶ John Trudell, "What it Means to be a Human Being," 15 March 2001, The Women's Building, San Francisco, radio TUC (Time of Useful Consciousness) (two parts): http://www.radio4all.net/files/tuc@tucradio.org/44-2-JohnTrudellONE_2014.mp3. http://www.radio4all.net/files/tuc@tucradio.org/44-2-JohnTrudellTWO_2014.mp3 There is a transcript: https://ratical.org/many_worlds/JohnTrudell/HumanBeing.html#s2

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John Trudell, quoted in "Native Lives Matter," <https://www.facebook.com/nativelivesmatter1/posts/john-trudell-when-columbus-got-off-the-boatwhen-columbus-got-off-the-boat-he-ask/1683044438397154/> (accessed 14 November 2022)

¹⁹ Quoted in Samuel Wharton, *Plain Facts: Being an Examination Into the Rights of the Indian Nations of America, to their respective Countries* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1781), p. 4.

²⁰ Quoted in Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One* [1959] (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 84.

²¹ Quoted in Lawrence A. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), p. 134.

²² Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, twelve point response to Bartolomé de las Casas, text in Kris Lane, ed., *Defending the Conquest: Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's Defense and Discourse of the Western Conquests* tr. Timothy F. Johnson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), p. 51.

²³ In addition to Trudell's work, see Deloria, *God is Red*, especially pp. 295-296.

²⁴ I am indebted to Marilyn Charles for her concept of prosody, including the importance of the mother's heartbeat to the developing child in utero.

²⁵ See "How your gut bacteria influences your behaviour, emotions and thinking," on "Quirks and Quarks with Bob McDonald," CBC Radio, 22 March 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/quirks/july-27-2019-shopping-for-souvenirs-on-an-asteroid-new-cambrian-explosion-fossils-and-more-1.5065927/how-your-gut-bacteria-influences-your-behaviour-emotions-and-thinking-1.5065955> (accessed 17 October 2019).

²⁶ John Borrows, *Law's Indigenous Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), pp. 3-5.

²⁷ The Bull, *Inter Caetera*, 3 May 1493, in Frances Gardiner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies to 1648* (Washington, DC: The Carnegie Institute, 1917), pp. 61-62

²⁸ The Bull, *Inter Caetera*, 4 May 1493, in Davenport, ed., *European Treaties*, p. 71.

²⁹ The Bull, *Romans Pontifex*, 8 January 1455, in Davenport, ed., *European Treaties*, p. 23.

³⁰ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt: On the Antipolitical* (London: Sternberg Press, 2022), pp. 168-69.

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/31/white-south-africa-ubuntu-african-tutu> (accessed 27 January 2023)

³² Trotsky's succinct defense of totalitarianism is unrivaled on the antidemocratic left: "The foundations of the militarization of labor are those forms of State compulsion without which the replacement of capitalist economy by the Socialist will forever remain an empty sound. Why do we speak of *militarization*? Of course, this is only an analogy—but an analogy very rich in content. No social organization except the army has ever considered itself justified in subordinating citizens to itself in such a measure, and to control them by its will on all sides to such a degree, as the State of the proletarian dictatorship considers itself justified in doing, and does. Only the army—just because in its way it used to decide questions of the life or death of nations, States, and ruling classes—was endowed with powers of demanding from each and all complete submission to its problems, aims, regulations and orders." Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* [1920] with an introduction by Max Shachtman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 141.

³³ According to Georges Sorel, who admired Lenin, and who was admired in turn by Mussolini: "The bond which I pointed out in the beginning of this inquiry between Socialism and proletarian violence appears to us now in all its strength. It is to violence that Socialism owes those high ethical values by means of which it brings *salvation* to the modern world." Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* [1906] tr. ? (New York: The Free Press, 1950), p. 249. See also John P. Roche, *The History and Impact of Marxist-Leninist Organizational Theory* (Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1984) and Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

³⁴ Bill Clinton, inaugural address, 20 January 1997, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, William J. Clinton, 1997* in two volumes (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), Vol. 1, p. 44.

³⁵ Peter P. d'Errico, *Federal Anti-Indian Law: The Legal Entrapment of Indigenous Peoples* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2022), especially the "Call to Consciousness," pp. 164-87.

³⁶ David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

³⁷ Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, pp. 39-40.

³⁸ Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, p. 41.

³⁹ Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity* (New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilization, 2010), especially pp. 112-129. For an extensive and incisive critique of modern civilization grounded in the ideas of psychospiritual development conveyed in the Hindu classic, *The Mahabharata*, as well as in contemporary science, see Richard Sclove, *Escaping Maya's Palace: Decoding an Ancient Myth to Heal the Hidden Madness of Modern Civilization* (Boston: Karavelle Press, 2022). See also McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*.

⁴¹ See Victor N. Baptiste, *Bartolome de Las Casas and Thomas More's Utopia* (Culver City, CA: Labryinthos, 1990).

⁴² Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North-America," ca. 1783, Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Not Your Usual Founding Father: Selected Readings from Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 52-53.

⁴³ *Chisholm v. Georgia* 2 U.S. (2 Dall.) 419, 462-63 (1793).

⁴⁴ Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁵ The ideas in this paragraph are drawn from two video interviews with John Trudell, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=180vRsMmqNI>, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbclid=IwAR0jTFPGPeFnVbTAj4ICw77NFHu5SAb1QlcN_vkcTVlflqAcipz8C9XTqT4&v=5yuUQzN-G2w&feature=youtu.be (accessed 19 January 2021).

⁴⁶ My language here is indebted to Sefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021), p. 155.

⁴⁷ Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/czeslaw_milosz_2013_12.pdf (accessed 4 February 2023).