

**A New Global Humanism Beyond the Age of Agriculture: Pan-Humanism**

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This essay outlines beginning premises of a philosophy beyond prescriptive narrative. It assumes sculptor Jeffrey Rubinoff's premise that we have reached the End of the Age of Agriculture, then departs from his argument for 'A New Humanism Beyond Prescriptive Narrative.'

Rubinoff asserts that the "... End of the Age of Agriculture is highly consequential and requires a deeply thoughtful and thorough re-examination of the essential assumptions of our institutions and their evolutionary direction. ... A philosophy based on our evidentiary knowledge of evolution and our consequential place in nature can provide a basis for the development of the order of consciousness necessary to overcome the virulent metaphorical forms of tribalism such as racism, nationalism and religion."

Rubinoff states that "...Tribalism—metaphorically transformed and self-inflated by myths of monopolized divine favour—thrived through the Age of Agriculture by prescriptive narrative." He contends that "...overcoming this socially atavistic, dangerous reliance [on prescriptive narrative] is exigent given the advent of nuclear weapons..."

## 1. Introduction

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanity witnessed the culmination of the central dynamic of the age of agriculture—the mass production of the materials and means of human life—in the mass production of human death. The ending of the age of agriculture presents humankind with an opportunity, born of existential necessity, to accomplish a new, pan-global *humanism*: a system of values addressed to our own nature. Humanist values aim to achieve what is good for humankind, to promote its wellbeing and flourishing. Oddly enough, for a species that often is said to be naturally selfish, we have generally ruled ourselves by systems of values oriented on things external to ourselves, such as God's commands or plans for us, or the advancement of our ethnic or political group—at the expense of its enemies, or achieving the health of the ecosystem. There is generally a place for human wellbeing somewhere in these systems of values, but only as an aspect of achieving the other goals that are their primary concern. Only rarely have we even considered values which seek our own good, our own wellbeing, our own flourishing, our own destiny, as their *central* goal. This essay will propose that we adopt just such values, values that aim at the

good of *all* human beings as an end in itself, not merely as a means to some other goal. It will propose that we accept responsibility for ourselves. In other words, this essay will propose and promote *pan-humanism*.

Pan-humanist values will seek the realization of what is good for human beings, and in this sense will define our destiny in terms of the fulfillment of our own nature. But what is our nature, and what destiny might fulfill it? Our need for knowledge of ourselves, for a self-awareness that is at once both an idea of what we are and an ideal of what we can become, is blindingly clear. But is this knowledge possible? Can there be *one* true idea of us, when there are so *many* ideas of us and our place in the world? The ideas we do have clearly do not agree. They describe for us different origins and different destinies. These disparities between our self-images have long been engines of suspicion and aggression, driving us through cycles of continuous warfare with each other, until we spiraled to the brink of destruction in the middle of the last century. Terrified by the nuclear fire we had unleashed, and the global holocaust it threatened, we took one small step back from the brink of self-destruction. We looked back, only to discover our ancient anathemas still threatening us with environmental destruction, pestilence, plague, overpopulation, famine—and always wars, and the rumors of yet more wars.

And so we stand today, still at the edge of the nuclear precipice, and still struggling to stay a step ahead of our deadly serious problems, forestalling them but not solving them—all the while caught in a divisive argument about which of the many images of human essence and destiny must prevail. We have no world war, or even any immediate threat of world war, and in that sense we have peace at the global level—but only a precarious peace-by-default, the unintended side-effect of arming ourselves with weapons so powerful that we dare not use them—most of us, anyway. Meanwhile many organized armed struggles continue at the local level, as if we have a passion for meting out violence and death to our own kind that is irrepressible, continuously smoldering and threatening to break out in new conflagrations. This peace by default, in which we retain the posture of war even though acts of war are relatively few by historical standards, we may designate as quasi-peace.

Perhaps, then, when it comes to the core of a new humanism, namely the essence of the human species, we may assume this much is clear: we are imperfect. We are a flawed product, a fallen species, a form of life desperate for salvation. Until we come to grips with our imperfection, can we have any idea of what we are, much less any hope for what we might become? If we may be honest among ourselves, imperfection is an apt concept, but one far too polite to capture our

failure: it is not merely that we fall short of perfection, but rather that we have discovered the true depths of evil in our own hearts and minds. The worst terrors that we can imagine, such as slow torture and death, have been realized by us, made real and embodied in action, not once, but over and over again, continuously through our history. We need to come to grips with our own evil. In the midst of our precarious and paradoxical quasi-peace, we must heed the ancient maxim, "Know thyself!" For we are capable of goodness that is just as pure as our evil, just as intense, and just as real. And as we take the measure of ourselves, what we must face up to is our internal certainty that it is precisely our freedom to define ourselves that is the basis of our unlimited potential for good and evil. It is precisely because we freely and deliberately create both good and evil that both our greatest horrors and our greatest hopes have a human face.

Freedom is the paradox at the heart of our paradoxical quasi-peace. Freedom is paradoxical because we are part of the natural world, but our best understanding of the natural world says that it is bound by chains of causal necessity. Yet, as Immanuel Kant said, "...it is as impossible for the subtlest philosophy as it is for the commonest reasoning to argue freedom away" (Kant 1785, p. 75). And, indeed, science does attribute to the human organism degrees of freedom unknown to simpler physical systems—which includes everything else we have ever observed except the universe itself. Because of our big brains and our enormous sensitivity to the world around us, we are self-organizing chaotic systems, unpredictable by any scientific means (Foss 1992). Furthermore, at the quantum level science reveals that the causal necessity we see at the macroscopic level of daily life is an illusion, a nearly flawless veil over the underlying randomness of the microscopic world of the electron and photon. Far from condemning our manifest perception of freedom, science verifies and underwrites it, since our nervous systems are composed of neurons, threshold devices triggered by the behavior of electrons (and hence photons) in the quantum domain.

In addition, science explains how our natural organs of perception and thought create our manifest image of the world and ourselves, and to this extent science legitimates the information it provides us. So let us accept our manifest freedom within the manifest world as a working assumption, and let us admit at the outset that our quest to discover our own human nature will show us that the question of what we are is inseparable from the question of what we ought to be. Our idea of our self is intertwined with our ideals for ourselves. We are what we aim to be. So the new humanism we seek, the system of values we need to guide us through these precarious times, must tell us what we are by virtue of what we should be.

This assumption, which may be seen as the threshold of our new humanism, is not solely a manifest fact, but is a possibility which we will inevitably realize, and which we must therefore face up to as a moral responsibility. It embraces both fact and value. In metaphorical terms, it is not an immovable rock at the foundation of a credo, but a door that may be opened and through which we, humankind as a whole, may move into the future. We may thus view human freedom as the first item of the manifest, the list of possibilities onboard our new vessel intended for all of humankind, Pan-Humanism.

Door 1: Humans are manifestly free.

### 1.1 Legends of the Fall

The problem of evil is the heart of religion, which seeks to provide a theory of our existence that brings its manifest facts into harmony with its hypothetical—and hopefully realizable—meaning. It is here that we find the oldest accounts of human nature, and its capacity for good and evil. In the ancient legend of the Garden of Eden shared by the then newly-emerging monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (among others), there was a time when human beings lived unreflectively, like the other animals, with a fixed nature that was in harmony with the natural world in which it was embedded. But God also gave us freedom, and in defiance of his explicit commands we chose to taste the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God got mad, cursed us, and threw us out of the garden. We were cursed to constant work for our food, clothing, and shelter, to suffer physical pain, and finally to die and return to the Earth from which we were made. It was our rebelliousness, our perverse—if entirely understandable—misuse of our precious freedom that brought suffering and evil into the world. This theme of our responsibility for our own suffering, if not that of the whole world, begins much earlier, among the polytheistic religions that prevailed for most of human history up to the last few millennia. In the legend of Prometheus, we are the children of a rebellious god, who were given fire by our rebel creator in order to defend ourselves from the other gods when they decided to exterminate us.

The fire of Prometheus signifies the intelligence and technology that distinguishes us from other animals, and enables us to continue to defy the gods—at least for now.<sup>1</sup> In this aspect, our

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<sup>1</sup> It is no accident, I suggest, that one of the common names for Satan, God's adversary, is Lucifer, which means maker of fire. Fire is arguably the first technology of the primates, that which set them apart from all other animals, and which even today is essential to human technology.

religious accounts of our nature agree with our historical and scientific accounts. We are rebellious at our core, our freedom dividing us from the rest of the natural world like a metaphysical dichotomy. We are big-brained creatures, with busy hands and crafty brains. We are social animals, who live and think not just for ourselves, but for our social group, our kinspeople, our tribe. We communicate with each other continuously, and as explicated in some detail by my colleague, Gerald Swatez (2009), our group intelligence transcends that of its individual members in both time and space, which in turn enhances the powers of thought and action of its members. This dialectical relationship between the group and its members creates a new evolutionary level in which *ideas* evolve and are either selected or rejected by nature. The creation of agriculture was perhaps the most transformative product of the evolution of ideas within ongoing human intelligence, for agriculture begat civilization itself. With agriculture came the need to protect the territory of one's own tribe against the elements, weeds, marauding animals—and other tribes. And so as agriculture begat civilization, civilization in turn begat warfare: the large scale organization of violence and death to defend or advance the interests of one's own group against other human beings. In this way, human evil is explained, and war joins plague, famine, and death to bring the number of the apocalyptic horsemen to four.

From the biological perspective, human beings are among the many social species, all of which must embody a tension between competitive and cooperative tactics in the struggle for existence. We struggle not only as individuals competing with other individuals for the necessities of life, but also as biological kinship groups bound within by love for each other and bound without by mutual hatred and suspicion for other groups. Our love for the members of our own tribe is proven by our willingness to fight and die in conflict with other tribes. Thus, there has emerged a third level of selection: cultural evolution. Our social groups have developed narratives—legends, creation myths, religions, arts, technologies, sciences—to support our own group in its struggles against others. Naturally, our evolving narratives are fully engaged in our tribal struggles, hence are inherently divisive: each narrative identifies humanity with its own group, and denigrates other groups to a lesser status. Social scientists often observe that the very concept of humanity for a given group is itself defined as group membership: only our own tribe is truly human, is truly loved by gods or God, is truly honorable, trustworthy, rational, or clean. And so, the process of evolution which gave birth to us has in turn given birth to tribal instincts and cultures that perpetuate human suffering and evil. Thus hatred is just the opposite side of love: human evil has the same source as human goodness, and science echoes religion in placing that

source deep in human nature itself. Is this not what we see—or part of what we see—when we look within? And if we can see this evil within ourselves, can we also see our better nature as well?

## 1.2 The Quest for Human Nature

The Burgess Shale<sup>2</sup> is not a human artifact, but the artwork of nature itself. The images in these rocks are not theories, but manifest realities, realities that can be seen by our natural senses and grasped by our natural intelligence. An artist's works, whether the artist is nature itself or a human artist, do not require explanation in order to communicate their content, though that content can sometimes also be explained in theoretical terms. Jeff Rubinoff has kindly given me personal introductions to many of his artworks, and explained some of the theoretical underpinnings of those works. Insofar as I understand his theory of his series on the Burgess Shale, to a human being who has some experience of the world, the images are clearly organic, obviously the product of life and its forces. And yet, these are images, literal imprints, of life-forms that are strange and enigmatic.

As he stated to me: “Nature, by the passage of time and by the genetic sculpting of life has created a history that is a crushingly honest and constantly probing the future. It is thus simultaneously innocent and guilty of the most destructive crimes that lead to the most magnificent creations. Without life there is no witness to this awesome and terrifying creative unfolding of the universe.”<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand we see an obvious kinship between these forms and our own bodily structures. Unlike the structures of tools and machines, the Burgess fossils do not have straight edges or distinct boundaries between different functional elements, like the boundary between a wheel and an axle, or between the handle and the blades of a pair of scissors. Biological structures

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<sup>2</sup> Researchers say that the ancestors of virtually all life forms on Earth, existing and extinct, can be found in the Burgess Shale, and therefore are a key to understanding the past, and at the same time helping us understand what might occur in the future. Many of the specimens are early ancestors of later, more complex forms, from algae to the chordates (a major group of animals that includes human primates). Others, however, appear unrelated to any current living forms and their later disappearance presents an intriguing mystery. The Burgess Shale site is so important that it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, ensuring its future protection. In 1984 the Burgess Shale was integrated into The Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks UNESCO World Heritage Site which includes Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay National Parks and Assiniboine, Hamber and Robson Provincial Parks.”

<http://www.burgess-shale.bc.ca/discover-burgess-shale/burgess-shale-fossils-and-their-importance>

<sup>3</sup> From a conversation on the introduction to Rubinoff's Series 6 in November 2009

manifest a disrespect for conceptual boundaries, with elements that stretch or shrink, twist out of and blend into each other, as living matter evolves, pounded into shape by the hammers of death like monsters in a science fiction thriller. There is a palpable grotesqueness, like the insides of an animal exposed to the light, like the skeleton that walks inside our flesh and the skull that smiles inside our face. We recognize our kinship with the Burgess life forms even as they alienate us with strangeness. There is Opabinia with its five eyes and elephantine trunk; there are crustaceans with fins, vertebrates with shells; and the organism so strange we call it Hallucigenia.

These naturally occurring sculptures speak to us of the origins of life, of our origins. Life, these fossils tell us, burgeons, overflows, invades, intrudes, improvises, elaborates, experiments, exploits, hides, seeks, attacks, defends, attracts, repels, loves and hates. Just how these fossilized remnants speak to us is not entirely clear. Of course, they do not literally speak, but communicate with us via a deeper pathway prior to the word.

Before the word there was the face and the living sculpture of the body. Like other social animals, our faces and bodies express our emotional states, our pains and joys, our beliefs and doubts. A finger jerked back with an involuntary cry of pain warns our fellows of the thorns next to the berries; a scrunched up face tells them that the fruit is sour; an angry look tells them to keep their distance. Woe to the child that cannot tell the difference between a smile and a frown, not only on the faces of other humans, but on the face of the dog or the cat. This ability to read faces, gestures, and tones of voice naturally permits us to look at the rest of reality and sometimes see or hear meaning. The sun smiles upon us, the rain clouds scowl, the winds shriek, and thunder is an ancient and powerful voice. These words (it can go without saying) express the realities of sun, rain, wind, and thunder in the conceptual framework of current English, but only as a means of indicating the perceptible realities themselves. The words derive their meaning as tags for these perceptual contents, that is, their *manifest* content. These contents are pre-verbal, pre-conceptual, hence universal among humankind. In fact, their meaning extends not merely to all human beings, but to seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, creatures everywhere. Manifest meaning is therefore not only the bottom line content for all human communication, but also our channel of communication and sympathy with all sentient life.

Door 2: The humanly manifest, that which is accessible to the senses of human beings, is the natural medium of communication for humankind.

Some of us are more gifted than others when it comes to seeing faces and hearing voices in the universe at large, and among these there are an even smaller group who are gifted at representing the faces and voices they see. These gifted people, these practitioners of the ancient technologies of communication, we now designate as artists. Among artists, those who specialize in non-linguistic or pre-linguistic communication we designate as painters, sculptors, musicians, photographers, cinematographers, etc. That these technologies speak to us and have meaning there can be no doubt, though what this meaning consists in and the ways in which it is communicated remain largely mysterious down to this day. Rubinoff's sculpture series on the Burgess Shale fossils provides us a doubly useful example. First, these sculptures exemplify the artistic phenomenon as human reality: something is experienced as having a meaning, and the artist reveals its face for other humans to see. Meaning is discovered and communicated without reliance on words or even conventions. Secondly, the meaning carved into the shale concerns our origins, and hence our human nature. We see ourselves in these sculptures, feel the bursting forth of life in animal bodies, are touched by its transience, are shocked by its turning to stone, and then dropped into a maze of metaphysics by its resurrection as shining steel. In this pre-verbal exchange of meaning one thing speaks loudest, and it is this: we are the magicians of meaning. Though we typically think of our science and technology as proof of our unique place in the natural order, underlying them is our ability to see the meaning and significance of things, to see the faces in the world around us.

Door 3: Art is the natural expressive medium of the manifest.

There can be little doubt that art was the first expression of human, and indeed pre-human, freedom. The first hominid artifacts were tools and weapons, brute necessities for survival. For hundreds of thousands of years—spans of time almost unimaginable to creatures as ephemeral as ourselves—our hominid ancestors copied the tools and weapons of their forebears precisely, without change or innovation. Art emerges as a transcendence of these necessities, as the production of decorations, sculptures, and paintings, that escape our natural bondage in the struggle for existence, and thus are the first moments of human freedom. First art and then religion sprung from the faces we see in the natural world, and most recently science emerged when we

learned to formulate questions in such a form that nature answers them. More and more now the destiny of this planet lies in our own hands and minds, and it is our own face that we wish to see and know. But we seem to have lost touch with ourselves, not because we don't see enough, but because we see too much.

## 2. Our Precarious but Promising Quasi-Peace

As we have noted, the invention of agriculture led to the creation of settled communities, cities, or in the Greek of the ancient philosophers, the *polis*. With the *polis* comes politics. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) described the logic of political life in terms so bleak that sensitive people cannot stand to listen to them, much less hear their blunt truth. As Hobbes sees it, the opposite of political life is the life of maximum freedom, where nothing is forbidden. But this "State of Nature," as Hobbes calls it, is the state of war of each person against every other person, and it results in a life that is, in Hobbes' unminced words, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes 1651). Hobbes recognizes that a pure state of nature has never existed in fact, though it has been approximated in some places and times, but nevertheless employs the concept as defining the complete absence of political organization, in order gain an insight. Reason dictates, he says, that we form groups for mutual protection and advantage. The core principle of these groupings is the surrendering of some our freedom: we agree to restrict the use of violence within the group to those who police and enforce the rules. Outside of the group the state of war remains between it and other people or groups.

Here we clearly see the political reflection of the evolutionary forces that created social animals in the first place—but with crucial differences. Whereas the evolution of social animals favors the kinship group united by genetics, Hobbes' political grouping favors any group united by shared interests for survival, prosperity and happiness. Moreover, its logic applies not only to individual humans, but to groups of them as well, so groups as well as individuals may join for common advantage. Since larger groups are stronger, the clear result is that political groupings tend to grow larger and larger. This tendency we may call the Hobbesian dynamic. Over a period of thousands of years the Hobbesian dynamic worked to produce larger and larger political entities. City states united to form countries, and countries united to form empires. A few centuries ago, these political entities spanned the habitable surfaces of the globe, and pressed upon each other at their borders. The wars between these groups grew larger, more violent, more

technological, more efficient, until in the middle of the last century nuclear weapons were invented. These weapons threaten two crucial social specializations that developed under the Hobbesian dynamic, namely the political and warrior classes. The political class, through its command of the instruments of coercion and violence, maintains order within the group and directs warfare outside of it. The warrior class consists of military specialists, officers with the expertise and technology to train and equip groups of younger men, the soldiers (who are not members of the warrior class), to wage war.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to nuclear weapons, both the political class and the warrior class could largely escape the casualties and destruction experienced by common soldiers and citizens, and so the personal motivation of these classes to wage war remained strong despite the intrinsic death, destruction and ugliness of warfare. Since the dawn of nuclear weapons, it has become impossible to shield leaders or warriors from the horrors of warfare, with the result that warfare in its original meaning, as a conflict unconstrained by any rules, has become irrational for them to pursue. Consequently, suspension of aggression—or at least its restriction in scope—has become the norm, and the number of deaths due to war has dropped precipitously since reaching its peak in the middle of the 1900s. Nevertheless, it would be premature to conclude that we have achieved true peace, much less that warfare has become obsolete (contrary to what the most optimistic among us may believe). As Hobbes himself accurately observed, “the nature of war consists not in actual fighting but in the known disposition thereto during all the time that there is no assurance to the contrary” (Hobbes 1651). We are, in Hobbes terms, still in a “posture of war” since our politicians and warriors have “their eyes fixed on one another—that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbors” (ibid). The cause of the current absence of warfare is merely the inability of the current disputants to strike an advantageous blow.

## 2.1 The Promise of Humanism

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<sup>4</sup> The political class is a recent specialization of the warrior class. From the beginning of agriculture up to relatively recent times, the warrior who achieved victory, and thus secured the claim to a body of land, also ruled that land and those who lived on it and by means of its agricultural production, as Pharaoh, Caesar, King, etc. The series of revolutions in the last two or three centuries in Europe and America that led to the formation of democratic states took political power from the warrior class, and invested it in a new political class, both classes being servants of the people, the demos, at least in theory and to a large extent in fact as well.

Our current break from fighting is really a standoff, not peace as such, but quasi-peace. Still, Hobbes provides us a conceptual window on the possibility of true peace: the formation of a global political entity—which we might call Panopolis—to control violence within the global human community. This would constitute true peace for humankind. This peace would not, in and of itself, entail the end of human violence, but rather the end of warfare. Panopolis would not be utopia. Violence would still occur, but only as crime or police actions against crime. Though murders would still occur, and perhaps even executions as well, mass-death by warfare, and in particular by nuclear weapons, would not. Warfare is not practiced within a political entity, but only when the political entity fails, as in the case of civil war. Panopolis would not necessarily be free of the evils that afflict polities, such as the abuse of its citizens by political leaders for personal gain or ideological motivations. It would not necessarily bestow the goods that benefit polities, such as the protection of human rights and the nurturing of freedom. However, history teaches us that violence directed by one state against another in the form of warfare goes hand-in-hand with violence directed by the state against its own citizens, and this fact, sad as it is in itself, has a bright side: it lets us dare think that a pan-global political entity, having no motive for war, will likewise have no motive to abuse its citizenry.

Are we capable of forming this global polity, a pan-tribal entity, a Panopolis which does not practice warfare and protects the rights of its citizens, that is, of all human beings? Before we can even address the question of forming this global entity, we must first be able to form the idea of Panopolis. We know that it is possible for nations to protect the rights of citizens, and that this protection can be a source of national prosperity and strength, since such nations have evolved. Hobbes himself envisioned the formation of the state not only in the pessimistic tones of controlling human violence, but also in the optimistic hues of providing the conditions necessary for establishing *justice*. While there is neither justice nor injustice in any animal's existence in a state of nature, within the polis both can and do occur. Hobbes's "contractarian" idea was that political entities are *free contracts* of human beings, which we create because we agree they promote our welfare and our ideals. Hobbes discusses at some length just what we should, and should not, agree to in the foundations of a political entity, and this discussion of justice is carried forward by other philosophers. John Locke (1632-1704) discussed the conditions under which the governed would consent to the power of those who govern, and his ideas became the basis of the American Declaration of Independence. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) proposed that we formulate a set of rules that could universally apply to all rational beings, and which treated all free and

rational beings, whether ruler or ruled, as valuable in themselves. Jumping ahead to the present era, John Rawls (1921-2002) developed an *ideal* contractarian theory which defines justice in terms of the minimal principles under which free humans unify in political entities.

Moving in parallel to these philosophical developments was a gradual increase of justice within actual political associations, as the divine right of kings is eventually supplanted by the democratic rights of peoples. We have gradually improved both our concepts of justice as well as its practical embodiments in real government. Since we have actually made these improvements, it follows that such improvements are possible. Once again, it is manifestly clear that we are free to do what we will, even to realize peace and justice.

Door 4: Humankind can establish Panopolis, a global political entity that brings an end to warfare between nations and protects the rights of all human beings.

We must admit, indeed embrace, the fact that our idea of ourselves in universal peace is something strange, something new, something never actually seen in reality but only in the minds of numberless human beings longing for peace and justice. We must admit that we have always defined ourselves in terms of our own group, which in turn is defined by its enemies. Nothing unites us like a common enemy. Can inveterate warriors like us form a group in which includes all of us, so no one is left outside as our enemies, and we have no one to fight? If the will to fight and even to kill is bred into our very genes, can we overcome this tendency to evil that is part of our nature? I believe that the answer to these questions is: yes! We are inveterate warriors, yes, but the will to fight, even though it may well be bred into our very bones, is not sufficient to explain the organized warfare of the last 6 or 7 thousand years. And even if we do not sew enmity, and hence struggle among ourselves, there remain many forces inimical to our existence that will provide struggle enough.

Organized violence has been part of the social organization of human beings from the very beginning, just as it is an aspect of all hominid social organization. Like many species, we intensify the pressures of natural selection by competing for survival not only with the elements and other organisms, but with other groups of humans as well. Since live in groups united by kinship, or genetic similarity, winning survival of those in our group at the expense of other human groups, advances our collection of genes by suppressing, or even extinguishing, the genes of other groups. This intensification of natural selection through intra-species violence has presumably been one

element in the rapid growth of our brains, eyes, hands, and the technologies to which they give rise. So, we who are the survivors of this process of organized group violence find ourselves naturally inclined to organized deadly violence towards each other. Organized deadly violence towards each other is written in our genes. As our social groupings enlarged through the age of agriculture, the scale of our violence increased, until we arrived at the two world wars of the last century, and then the resulting stand-off in which we now find ourselves. Could it be that we are genetically destined to endless war, and that real peace is not in our nature, hence unattainable?

Such a pessimistic conclusion cannot be definitively ruled out—but it likewise is by no means proven, either. It is precisely when we face this question, and others of its sort, that we must not merely remind ourselves that we are manifestly free, but truly realize that fact. We need to see Door 1. Our intelligence and our freedom are themselves products, at least in part, of the intensified selection pressure of our intra-species competition amongst ourselves. Our intelligence and freedom permit us to find a way out of our ever-escalating internal conflicts. Our minds were formed partly in the fires of human conflict, and partly in the warmth of human kindness. We can discover and sustain forms of social organization that do not organize deadly aggression as warfare. For thousands of years we have channeled the individual streams of human aggression into massive pools of violence that were used to achieve the good of one civilization at the bloody expense of another. But there is no necessity for us to do this. Our natural aggression can be channeled in ways that make us friends unto ourselves rather than our own worst enemy. If we must fight, we can fight against pestilence, disease, famine, poverty, and ignorance. There are enemies enough without creating more. There is no necessity for us to fight against ourselves. We can recognize ourselves as a pan-tribal entity, fighting together for the good of all: not just humankind, but life in general.

Traditional humanism, alas, has defined itself in the same divisive terms that constituted the political language of agriculturally based civilization. If for brevity's sake we bypass the earliest glimmerings of humanism and begin instead with the first self-styled humanists, those of 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, we cannot help but notice that these early humanists instinctively defined themselves in terms of their enemies: the Church of Rome, its European empire, and the feudal ideology and system that sustained it. In so doing, they unconsciously perpetuated the divisive narratives that made warfare synonymous with civilization. Though these humanists accepted the Christian faith, the Church rightly recognized them as enemies, treated humanism as a heresy, and drove it underground. If we take the case of Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) as paradigmatic of

the hundreds of humanists of that era,<sup>5</sup> we see the main elements of humanism both then and now, and see why the Church opposed it. Like his fellow humanists then and ever since, Pico exalted human freedom as the centerpiece of human nature, exhorted us to create universal peace, and to rule the Earth as our natural realm. Our freedom, Pico said, was the result of God's deliberate creation of us as the only life-form without an essential nature—other than the power to create our own essence. Peace could only be achieved by us as our own free creation, and since our power extended only within natural world, its destiny was our responsibility.

## 2.2 The Flowering and Faltering of Renaissance Humanism

There are historically just three core humanist convictions, 1) that we are free, 2) that we must seek universal peace, and 3) that we are responsible for ruling the Earth for the good of all. This trinity was interpreted by the Church as jointly exhorting man to turn away from God to seek his own destiny. This interpretation was corroborated by the fact that humanists realized that Europe was emerging from a dark age caused by Church's suppression of worldly knowledge, suppression of the classical sciences of man and nature, in order that people could devote themselves entirely to faith and the service of God. The *other-worldliness* of the Church had led humanity to neglect the things of this world, and so Pico and his humanist colleagues taught that people should resurrect the science, technology, medicine, economics, politics, jurisprudence, city-planning, architecture, and the arts of the classical age—before the rise of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman empire. The Church could hardly tolerate this humanist collaboration with its most ancient enemy, the paganism that pre-dated it and still prevailed in northern Europe—as well as in the so-called witchcraft traditions that still subsisted in the countryside and the undersides of the cities. And so the Church redoubled its efforts to suppress paganism, witchcraft, science, and humanism. The pope declared Pico's teachings "in part heretical, in part the flower of heresy." Pico himself died at the small age of 31 under suspicious circumstances, of arsenic poisoning, as tests of his exhumed body proved in 2007, probably the victim, directly or indirectly, of the pope's denunciation.

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<sup>5</sup> Here I follow Nicola Abbagnano (1901-1990) in identify these as including Carolus Bovilus (1475-1553), Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370-1444), Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Gianollo Manetti (1396-1459), Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Mateo Palmieri (1406-1475), Bartolomeo Sachi (1421-1481), Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), and like-minded thinkers of that age.

The humanists' enmity with the Church concerning the classical humanist arts and sciences was aggravated by their recognition of our bodily nature. The Church, in its other-worldliness, teaches that the flesh is weak and open to the temptations of Satan, whereas the spirit is good and godlike. In opposition to the asceticism that this engendered, humanists accepted the human body as an expression of the beauty of its divine origin. Thus medicine and human anatomy were necessary sciences (Andreas Vesalius 1514-1564 acted on this humanist principle). Even pleasure was a generally reliable indicator of bodily good, and was recognized to be good as such. Feasting and the cuisine arts were to be celebrated. The arts of the common people, in particular their poetry, music, and dancing were recognized as being just as legitimate as the fine arts of the nobles. By this time sculptors and painters had resumed the pagan artistic explorations of the human image, and began to show us our own faces, gestures, and forms as manifestly real objects of the natural realm. After nearly a millennium during which the human form was reduced to the iconic image of a cartoon face with eyes fixed on God, and fastened to the Earth by a shrunken body hidden in clothing, we once again see human beings laughing, crying, dancing, fighting, naked under the sun.<sup>6</sup>

18 The Church resisted this resurgence of pagan nudity and what it saw as the perverse human desire to expose the natural world to the light of day—and the light of the intellect. As we now know, its struggles were doomed to failure. Christ himself was a man, and the Church did recognize the legitimacy of venerating his holy body, so it could hardly reject the image of Christ naked—given a strategically placed drapery to defuse its immovable embarrassment over the organs of reproduction. But aside from decreeing fig-leaves on statues and paintings, little else was achieved. In the long run the arts and sciences developed just as the humanists proposed. Science, art, music, dancing, nudity, and fine cuisine are all now freely available in most of the modern world, with dedicated television channels for each among the hundreds made available by satellite or the internet. But the essential core of humanism was suppressed, and remains so to this day. The triplet idea that we are free, can freely transcend our flawed nature to realize universal peace, and must take responsibility for our destiny and the destiny of the planet still strikes most humans as

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<sup>6</sup> By this time, light itself, which illuminated our bodies and faces, making them visible, was identified with the light of reason which enabled us to understand the world we see both around us and in us—and both physical light and the light of the intellect were identified in turn with the divine. Seeing and knowing, then as now, were cognate concepts. As the philosopher William of Auvergne (c. 1180-1249) expressed it some two centuries before humanism flowered, "God is intellectual day." As obvious as that may seem today, it was a departure from the teachings of the church, which said that our physical senses were as fallen and as corrupt as our moral senses. Prior to this time, in the aptly named Dark Ages, observation, the basis of both science and realistic art, was ruled out at the outset..

defiant, as turning our backs on God, as a mark of the pride that goeth before a fall. People still seek super-human guidance, and are still enthralled by any sign or rumor of the super-natural. If people do not necessarily need the psychological support of super-natural religion, most still are so used to it that they cannot let it go. Could it be that the flaw of renaissance humanism lay in its defining itself in opposition to the Church, which all too easily becomes conflated with an animosity towards religion itself?

### 3. The Promise of Pan-Humanism

19 The optimism of renaissance humanism ignored the manifest flaws of human nature, and perhaps this is why the religious legends of the early fall of humankind were eventually, inevitably, echoed in the historical fall of early humanism. Europe, the cradle of early humanism, turned its eyes away from humankind and towards God, and marched on towards ever more violent wars fought over ever more abstract doctrines. If humanism is to succeed, if we are ever to recognize ourselves as a species, and achieve our own basic goods of world peace and wellbeing, humanism must come to grips with human evil. Religion, despite its flaws from the perspective of logic or science, does recognize the reality of human suffering as well as the suffering caused by humans themselves. While nature itself gives us famine, pestilence, and disease, human nature amplifies these natural evils with warfare and adds a fourth horseman to our ongoing apocalypse. Perhaps because religion starts by admitting evil along with the good, and balancing its pessimistic vision with its optimistic vision, it has been able to provide humankind at large with reassurance in its confusion and solace in its suffering. How many poor human souls in poverty, starvation, disease, and agonizing injustice have found relief in religion, and the strength to go on? Such solace and hope have not been forthcoming from humanism or its ally, natural science. While science has done far more than religion to improve the actual human condition, death, disease, and suffering are still inevitable, and science provides scant comfort when they come. Even worse, humanism fails to restore most persons' sense of the meaningfulness of their own existence when it is undermined by the irreparable injustice of suffering and death at the hands of their own kind.

Door 5: Humans can claim a right to choose their own conceptual frameworks.

20 Pan-humanism proposes a more inclusive vision of human nature than the optimism of renaissance humanism. Human nature, like nature in general, is far from perfect. Because both transcend good and evil, both can appear as either good or evil, presenting first one face to us and then the other. Pan-humanism recognizes religion as a human fact and as the normal cultural expression of what is often called human “spirituality,” which we may understand as the human need and capacity for a holistic understanding of reality that includes not only facts, but values as well. Spirituality gives the universe a face. If the world contained only facts, it would indeed be meaningless in the fundamental sense of having no significance for us. Suffering and joy transfuse the facts of this world with values, give them significance, and enable them to have meaning in a global sense. Beauty and awe are the aesthetic aspect of our perception of profound good and terrible power in nature or human nature. Ugliness and insipidness are their aesthetic opposites. So art must also be admitted as an essential part of human nature and the human vision, along with religion and science, as part of pan-humanism. There is no need to formulate the meaning and value of existence, much less to know with certainty what they are. To the contrary, pan-humanism must recognize that the artistic quest for beauty and the religious quest for meaning will themselves develop and grow as part of the growth and development of human nature.

20.1 By the same logic, conceptual frameworks cannot be restricted to the concept of spirituality. There are those who do not see meaning written into the structure of the universe at large. Many who take a purely scientific survey of nature see no evidence of any purpose or theme in the universe as a whole. Nevertheless, they freely choose to understand the universe in scientific terms, in which human beings are the only known source of meaning. Humans can conceive of themselves as the unintended product of blind forces, and nevertheless pursue meaningful existence in terms of science, socio-political theories, and actual human fears and desires. So the freedom envisioned through Door 4, the freedom of conceptual frameworks, may be viewed more broadly as the freedom to create and profess narratives of the origins and destinies of both nature and human nature.

20.2 Again, by the same logic, we must allow ourselves the right to evaluate humankind’s many conceptual frameworks in manifest terms. If some person’s conceptual framework (religion, political theory, etc.) is the basis of acts of violence (or threats of violence) towards other human beings (or other living things), this manifest aspect of that person’s thought is something which we must be allowed to evaluate, and thereby use as one aspect of our evaluation of their conceptual system. Likewise, if a theory or narrative is the basis of acts of kindness, this too may be seen by

other humans as a legitimate aspect of our evaluation of that theory or narrative. While we must admit that it is difficult to fully understand and appreciate conceptual frameworks different from our own, we must also allow that every human being can and does understand manifest realities such as violence or kindness. Both the facts described by a conceptual system, as well as the possibilities it prescribes as values or courses of action, are subject to this human freedom.

Door 6: Humans can claim the right to conceive and evaluate conceptual frameworks in manifest terms.

21 After a number of centuries of neglect by philosophy and the intelligentsia, humanism re-emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first redefinition of modern humanism in the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 states that "Religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life...through the interpretation of the total environing situation (theology or world view)," which defines religions in a manner close to that suggested above for pan-humanism. Unfortunately, the rest of the manifesto goes on to define a new religion, "religious humanism," which places man at its center: "Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its fulfillment in the here and now" (Bragg et al. 1933). It then goes on to deny the existence of the supernatural or the afterlife, in deference to the view "of the universe depicted by modern science" thus intensifying the tension between humanism and religion by orders of magnitude over that found in renaissance humanism. This definition of humanism as anti-religious and pro-science is maintained in the second Humanist Manifesto of 1973. It, too, begins in a conciliatory tone, saying, "In the best sense, religion may inspire dedication to the highest ethical ideals. The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine 'spiritual' experience and aspiration" (Kurtz and Wilson 1973). It then goes on, however, to say that "traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species," thus maintaining a concept of humanism that is anti-religious and pro-science.

Most recently, in 2003, the third Humanist Manifesto makes no reference to religion, though it again denies "supernaturalism" in the first sentence, and reasserts the commitment to science and a scientific view of nature and human nature: "Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing" (American Humanist Association 2003). Though to the modern intelligentsia these views may be

entirely reasonable and evidentially supported, they will not seem so to most of modern humankind. Sadly, this drastically reduces the chance that humanism thus formulated will work to “free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community” (ibid). Indeed, since human freedom is deemed an illusion by the modern scientific philosopher, the optimism of renaissance humanism seems to be replaced by submission to the bleak machinations of social forces.

### 3.1 Pan-Humanism as Method, Not Metaphysics

22 If humankind is to recognize itself as a species and join together to work for its own good, as well as the good of the larger natural world of which it is a part, it must move beyond divisive narratives that separate, rather than unite, it. The renaissance humanists accepted Christianity while rejecting the Church, while modern humanists accept science while rejecting religion altogether. Thus one metaphysical picture of the universe and mankind’s place in it is opposed to another metaphysical picture. The metaphysical doctrines are at the forefront, and are defined by contrast with others that are rejected as mistaken. The forms of these doctrines themselves change through time, thus demanding constant revision. These aspects of the intellectual evolution of humankind mirror the patterns of tribal identity that characterize the recorded history of human life—and strife—patterns which presumably are deeply rooted in our primate brain. The history of human ideas thus repeats the patterns of group identity and group conflict that typify political history, and which in fact plays an integral part of that history inasmuch as human warfare has been motivated in large part by ideological disagreements. Indeed, the very language of intellectual debate (from the Latin, *debattere*: to beat down) reveals tribal warfare dynamics manifest in our thoughts themselves: a philosophical doctrine is designated a “position”, the cognitive analogue of a territory, which is defined, outlined, or staked out to make its boundaries clear, and then defended from attacks by those holding other positions, while its supporters do their best to attack, undermine, or destroy other positions. Perhaps the very structure of intellectual debate divides us. If so, how can we possibly unify ourselves if the only way to do so is by intellectual warfare? History teaches us that cognitive warfare is causally integrated with physical warfare.

23 Pan-humanism takes the anti-metaphysicalism typified by David Hume (1711-1776) and expressed in modern positivism (see August Comte 1798-1857, and the Vienna Circle c. 1924-1936), and proposes that method has a deeper significance than metaphysics (see also Foss 2000,

especially chs. 3-5). From this point of view, manifest realities, those provided us by our natural senses, play a special role in human thought: all theories, metaphysical systems, political ideologies, theologies, etc. must be *keyed* to our manifest reality. A map is no good to us unless we understand how the scale of the map is related to the scale of manifest objects around us (this is usually explained in a “key” or “legend” appended to the map itself, which shows us how long a mile looks on the map, etc.), and understand where we are located on the map (usually indicated by a dot marked “You are here”). Likewise, a system of ideas is no good to us unless we understand how these ideas are keyed to our manifest world. Unless we know that sodium chloride is ordinary table salt, the concept of sodium chloride remains meaningless to us. Unless we know that capitalists are those who own land and factories, the concept of capital is no good to us. All of this, now that it is stated, is really common knowledge, and does not by itself help us move beyond the combative dynamics of human intellectual dialogue. In fact, it is only because a given person can be identified as a capitalist (or a sinner, or a polluter, or a foreigner,...) that others may be moved to attack him—and in this way ideology moves actual human history, including the sorry history of human aggression and warfare. But it does provide us the possibility of a method that allows us to avoid divisive dialogue: restrict our language as much as possible to the manifest.

24 The *manifest method*, to give it a name, is paradigmatically modeled in the non-linguistic arts mentioned in the first section of this essay: music, painting, and sculpture. In these forms of art, the artist shows something, rather than says something. Rubinoff’s series of sculptures on the Burgess Shale consist of a set of physical objects which he presents to us so that we can see them. Nothing need be said, and the objects speak for themselves. We can try to express what we see in words, and the artist may use words to help us see things he would like us to see in the objects themselves, but these words themselves always lie outside the artwork itself. What I am proposing is that this form of communication be adopted as the ideal method of pan-humanism. Perhaps the best way to communicate the ideas and ideals of humanism is to reveal their manifest content, rather than to engage in discussion and debate of humanist theory or metaphysics as such. Because human beings are instinctively territorial, new ideas that are presented to them are experienced as incursions into their own cognitive territory. If one is satisfied with one’s own ideas, then the immediate response is defensive, and the new ideas are repelled, debated, literally beaten down. If one is looking for new ideas, the strange new ideas may be welcomed. Either way, a territorial dynamic is evoked, and thereby the engines of human conflict are at work. On the other hand, one’s senses automatically accept the manifest realities they detect, and make them present in our

conscious minds. Of course, we are repelled by some things, which we call ugly, and attracted to beautiful things. If humanism contains beautiful ideas, then we should seek ways to present them as manifestly beautiful things, things accessible to all human beings regardless of their intellectual, historical, or geographical territory. This, I suggest, should be the method of pan-humanism.

### 3.3 In Conclusion: A Method for Pan-Humanism?

25 There can be little doubt that the images of artists have been agents of historical events. Though it is often said the pen is mightier than the sword, so we might also say that the painter's brush and the sculptor's tools were agents of human history long before the pen or the sword were invented. The images of Christ, for example, may well have produced more converts to Christianity than the sermons and debates of priests and theologians, by going around the border guards of the verbal intellect and directly entering the gates of perception. Does humanism consist of a set of theses about the kinship and shared interests of humankind, or rather of a set of images of human beings happily enjoying each other's presence? Does the horror we feel in a nuclear explosion consist of a set of verbal descriptions or rather in the image of an expanding ball of light and fire burning everyone and everything in its reach and leaving smoking corpses under a rising mushroom cloud? Supposing there is at least some truth to the idea that intellectual communication and conviction are caused by and embodied in manifest perception, then the challenge to humanism is to express its truth in manifest perception. Though we should never surrender our desire to develop humanist ideas through debate, we should also admit the necessity for the ideas to go beyond mere debate and become embodied as manifest realities.

26 It is not being suggested here that words themselves are not part of humanist method, nor that words cannot be effective in communication of humanist ideas and ideals. Words are essential to humanism since humans are deeply verbal animals. Language is part of what makes us human, part of what allows us to live in communities, and part of what makes it possible for us to envision a global human community. But words may be employed in various ways: they can command or plead, create or destroy, divide or unite. What is being suggested is that the communication of humanism include the language of depiction, the language of the artist, of the poet, of the novelist, of the explorer of strange lands. Human freedom can be described, even if its conceptual metaphysics leaves us lost in paradox. Human bondage can also be described, and its various forms delineated through words. The value and meaning of human freedom can be described, just

as they can be shown in graphic arts, or given physical form in the plastic arts. The beauty of the world is manifest in the earliest paintings known to us, such as those of the cave of Lascaux. In these paintings we see not only the beauty of the world but the human capacity to recognize beauty in the world. Noteworthy by its absence is the absence of the human form. Humanism may be understood as the project to find beauty in the human form, and then to realize that beauty. The search for human essence is not the search for a pre-established human essence, but the search of a free life-form for what it would like to be.

27 I have suggested elsewhere that the next step in our destiny is Terra's brain: the embodiment of planetary consciousness for our planet (Foss 2009a, 2009b). This idea is motivated in part by the manifest fact that we are *part* of the natural world, and that our existence emerges from the existence of other life forms on this planet. We big brained hominids could not exist without these other life forms. So while we are manifestly part of the natural order, we are also manifestly unique in that order, for we, and we alone, are aware of the history of life on this planet, its beauty, and the dangers it faces. We and we alone practice ever evolving arts and sciences that have transformed the face of the Earth itself. Only humankind produces buildings, music, clothing, jet planes, nuclear explosions, or pizzas. Only we are capable of caring not only for ourselves, but all conscious beings, all living things, and even the inanimate mountains, plains, continents, and oceans of our planet. Our unique capacities entail unique responsibilities. Our science and technology permits us to unite to work for the planet itself, by performing the functions of a nervous system: collection of information through observation, and action for the good of the whole on the basis of that information.

Door 7: Our more meaningful union with the natural world as the nervous system of the planet, "Terra's Brain," is a manifest possibility.

I have sketched this possibility from various perspectives as a worthy goal for our species, and one that we have been unconsciously directed towards by both our biological and cultural evolution. We can already see the formation of the network of communication that is beginning to link us together as big-brained social animals, in the first stages of the formation of an emerging global brain: but what will be the reality this brain confronts? It can be one of peace with each other and the life forms amongst which we find our place. In this essay I have tried to show how this image of ourselves is a natural outgrowth of humanism, and thereby provide an image of

ourselves to which we can turn as we slowly awaken from our dogmatic trances and begin to look for our true self. Although I think we should avail ourselves of science, I would also caution that current science, as one among many historically evolving conceptual frameworks, makes a better servant than a master. The humanist subservience to science is, I propose, a mistake that a truly universal humanism, *pan*-humanism, must avoid if it is to include all peoples and survive even after the age of science has passed. For parallel reasons, humanist subservience to religion must also be avoided. On the other hand blanket rejection of religion is, I propose, also a mistake. We should avail ourselves of the insights gained in our quest for forms of meaning and understanding that include reality as a whole, through all of time and space. Artistic expression of the manifest content of all of our human insights, whether based in religion, science, the humanities, or philosophy, should be employed as the naturally universal medium of communication among us all. And with my final words, let me now profess what might have been seen all along: the manifest world of daily human reality is both the alpha and the omega of Pan-Humanism.

#### **A Pan-Humanist Manifest: Seven Doors**

Door 1: Humans are manifestly free.

Door 2: The humanly manifest, that which is accessible to the senses of human beings, is the natural medium of communication for humankind.

Door 3: Art is the natural expressive medium of the manifest.

Door 4: Humankind can establish Panopolis, a global political entity that brings an end to warfare between nations and protects the rights of all human beings.

Door 5: Humans can claim a right to choose their own conceptual frameworks.

Door 6: Humans can claim the right to conceive and evaluate conceptual frameworks in manifest terms.

Door 7: Our more meaningful union with the natural world as the nervous system of the planet, "Terra's Brain," is a manifest possibility.

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