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The Human Condition

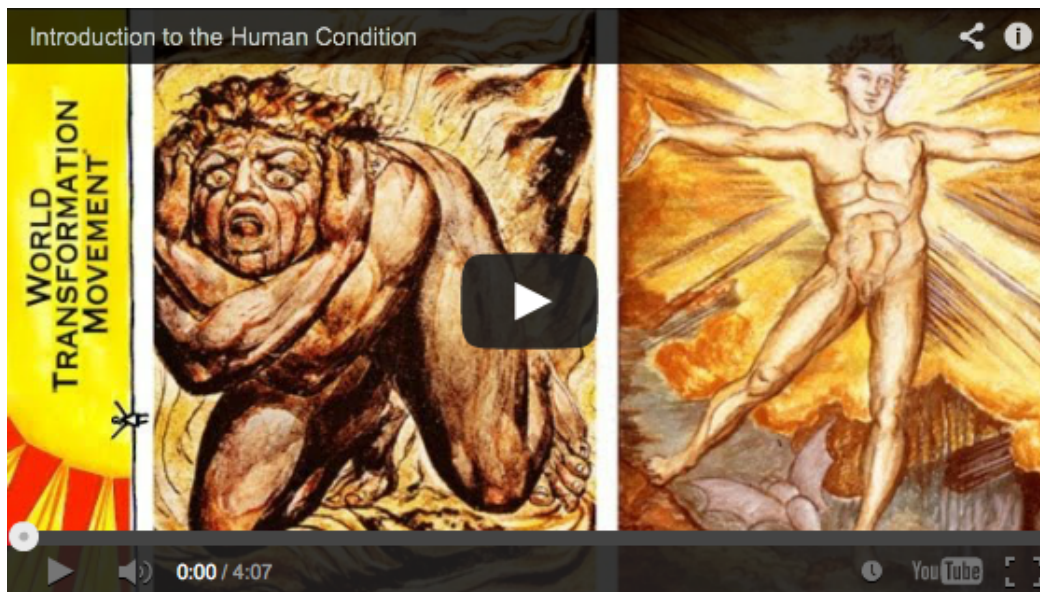
Written by Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith, 2011

The great mystery, dilemma and paradox of the human condition is humans' capacity for what has been called 'good' and 'evil'.

BUT until we could *explain* our less-than-ideally-behaved, seemingly-imperfect, even 'fallen' or corrupted condition we could barely afford to even acknowledge the subject.

MOST WONDERFULLY, however, the human condition is no longer an unapproachable, depressing no-go zone because biology is at last able to provide the dreamed-of exonerating, 'good-and-evil'-reconciling, 'burden-of-guilt'-lifting and thus rehabilitating—in fact, HUMAN-RACE-TRANSFORMING—explanation of our human-condition-afflicted lives! (And it should be mentioned that this explanation of our species' deeply psychologically troubled condition is *not* the psychosis-avoiding, trivialising, dishonest account of the human condition that the biologist E.O. Wilson has put forward in his theory of Eusociality, but the psychosis-addressing-and-solving, *real* explanation of it.)

Watch a 4-minute video introduction to the human condition



The truth is the human condition is the agonising, underlying, core, *real* question in all of human life, of are humans good or are we possibly the terrible mistake that all the evidence seems to unequivocally indicate we might be? While it's undeniable that humans are capable of great love, we also have an unspeakable history of brutality, rape, torture, murder and war. Despite all our marvellous accomplishments, we humans have been the most ferocious and destructive force that has ever lived on Earth—and the eternal question has been 'why?' Even in our everyday behaviour, why have we humans been so competitive, selfish and aggressive when clearly the ideals of life are to be the complete opposite, namely cooperative, selfless and loving? In fact, why

are we *so* ruthlessly competitive, selfish and brutal that human life has become all but unbearable and we have nearly destroyed our own planet?!

Unable—until now—to truthfully answer this deepest and darkest of all questions of our seemingly-highly-imperfect human condition, of are we humans fundamentally good or bad, we learnt to avoid the whole depressing subject—so much so, in fact, that the human condition has been described as **‘the personal unspeakable’**, and as **‘the black box inside of humans they can’t go near’**. Indeed, the famous psychoanalyst Carl Jung was referring to the terrifying subject of the human condition when he wrote that **‘When it [our shadow] appears...it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil’** (*Aion* in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 9/2, p.10). Yes, the **‘face of absolute evil’** is the **‘shattering’** possibility—if we allowed our minds to think about it—that we humans might indeed be a terrible mistake! Socrates famously said that **‘the unexamined life is not worth living’**, and it’s true that we needed to find understanding of ourselves, **‘examine’** the issue of the human condition, BUT, it’s *also* true that trying to go anywhere near the subject, trying to conduct any **‘examin[ation]’** of the human condition, raised such **‘shattering’** doubts about our meaning and worth as humans that it wasn’t **‘worth’** doing if we were to actually continue **‘living’**!! In fact, since almost any thinking on any subject brought our mind one way or another into contact with the unbearable issue of the human condition, even that most basic task for conscious humans has been a nightmare—as the Australian comedian Rod Quantock once said, **‘Thinking can get you into terrible downwards spirals of doubt’** (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1986). Yes, the truth is the human mind has had to live on the very surface of existence, live an *extremely* superficial, escapist existence.

So even though the issue of the human condition has been the *real*, underlying issue we needed to solve if we were to exonerate and thus rehabilitate the human race, we have been *so* fearful and insecure about the subject that instead of confronting it and trying to solve it we have been preoccupied denying and escaping it. The truth is that while much attention has been given to the need to love each other and the environment if we are to ‘save the world’, the *real* need if we were to actually succeed in doing so was to find the means to love the dark side of ourselves—to find the reconciling understanding of our ‘good-and-evil’-afflicted human condition that was *causing* so much suffering and destruction! Carl Jung was forever saying that **‘wholeness for humans depends on the ability to own their own shadow’** because he recognised that *only* finding understanding of our dark side could end our underlying insecurity about our fundamental goodness and worth as humans and, in doing so, make us **‘whole’**. The pre-eminent philosopher Sir Laurens van der Post was making the same point when he said, **‘True love is love of the difficult and unlovable’** (*Journey Into Russia*, 1964, p.145) and that **‘Only by understanding how we were all a part of the same contemporary pattern [of wars, cruelty, greed and indifference] could we defeat those dark forces with a true understanding of their nature and origin’** (*Jung and the Story of Our Time*, 1976, p.24). Yes, the need to know how to love yourself has been the silent scream of the human race since the human condition first emerged some two million years ago with the emergence of our fully conscious state, and it *is* only **‘true understanding of the nature and**

origin’ of that seemingly-unlovable condition that finally brings **‘true love’** to all our lives.

Yes, true compassion was ultimately the *only* means by which peace and love could come to our planet and it could only be achieved through understanding. Drawing again from the writings of van der Post: **‘Compassion leaves an indelible blueprint of the recognition that life so sorely needs between one individual and another; one nation and another; one culture and another. It is also valid for the road which our spirit should be building now for crossing the historical abyss that still separates us from a truly contemporary vision of life, and the increase of life and meaning that awaits us in the future’** (ibid. p.29). Again, it *is* the fundamental situation the human race has been in that *only* **‘true understanding of the nature and origin’** of our species’ ‘good-and-evil’-troubled, even ‘fallen’ or corrupted condition could allow us to cross **‘the historical abyss’** that **‘separate[d] us’** from a **‘compassion[ate]’**, reconciled, ameliorated, **‘meaning[ful]’** view of ourselves.

Most wonderfully and relievingly, this **‘future’** that Jung and van der Post looked forward to, of finding the understanding that would mature the human race from a psychologically insecure, human-condition-afflicted state to a psychologically secure, relieved, human-condition-understood-and-reconciled state, has now *finally* arrived. One day there had to be, to quote The Rolling Stones, **‘sympathy for the devil’**—one day, we *had to* find **‘true understanding’** of the **‘nature and origin’** of the **‘dark forces’** in human nature, and that day is here!

Yes, the eternal hope, faith, trust and indeed belief of the human race has been that the day would come when the all-clarifying, reconciling, healing and thus TRANSFORMING explanation of the human condition would finally be found, freeing humans at last of their insecure existence. And, as incredible as it is, through the advances that have been made in science, it is now possible to present that dreamed-of, reconciling and rehabilitating understanding of ourselves. That holy grail of the human journey of finding first principle-based, biological explanation of the human condition is finally here. (Again, it has to be stressed that this explanation is not the psychosis-avoiding, trivialising, dishonest account of the human condition that E.O. Wilson put forward in his theory of Eusociality, but the psychosis-addressing-and-solving, truthful, *real* explanation of the human condition.)

From a situation of bewildering confusion and darkness about what it is to be human we have broken through to a world drenched in the light of relieving understanding. The dawn of enlightenment has arrived; the sun is finally coming up to drain away all the darkness from our lives. This is THE most amazing moment in human history!



Francis Bacon's *Study for self-portrait* (detail) 1976

So, what is the wonderful reconciling, exonerating and thus rehabilitating, truthful biological explanation of our species' extremely competitive, aggressive, angry, selfish, greedy, materialistic, escapist, artificial, superficial, alienated—in fact, deeply psychologically distressed and lonely—human condition that brings about the long dreamed-of liberation from that terrible state and the complete TRANSFORMATION of the human race?

Certainly, we have invented excuses to justify our species' seemingly-imperfect competitive, selfish and aggressive behaviour, the main one being that we have savage animal instincts that make us fight and compete for food, shelter, territory and a mate. Of course, this 'explanation', which has been put forward in the biological theories of Social Darwinism, Sociobiology, Evolutionary Psychology, Multilevel Selection and E.O. Wilson's Eusociality and basically argues that 'genes are competitive and selfish and that's why we are', can't be the *real* explanation for our competitive, selfish and aggressive behaviour. Firstly, it overlooks the fact that our human behaviour involves our unique fully conscious thinking mind. Descriptions like egocentric, arrogant, deluded, artificial, hateful, mean, immoral, alienated, etc, all imply a consciousness-derived, *psychological* dimension to *our* behaviour. The *real* issue—the psychological problem in our thinking minds that we have suffered from—is the dilemma of our *human condition*, the issue of our species' 'good-and-evil'-afflicted, less-than-ideal, even 'fallen' or corrupted, state. We humans suffer from a consciousness-derived, *psychological* HUMAN CONDITION, *not* an instinct-controlled animal condition—our condition is unique to us fully conscious humans. (A brief description of the theories of Social Darwinism, Sociobiology, Evolutionary Psychology, Multilevel Selection and Eusociality that blame our divisive behaviour on savage instincts rather than on a consciousness-derived psychosis is presented in the [What is Science? article*](#) in *The Book of Real Answers to Everything!*, that this article also appears in, with the complete account provided in [Part 4:12*](#) of the freely-available, online book *Freedom Book 1*.)

The second reason the savage-instincts-in-us excuse can't possibly be the real explanation for our divisive, selfish and aggressive behaviour is that it overlooks the fact that we humans have altruistic, cooperative, loving moral instincts—what we recognise as our '*conscience*'—and these moral instincts in us are *not* derived from reciprocity, from situations where you only do something for others in return for a benefit from them, as Evolutionary Psychologists would have us believe. And nor are they derived from warring with other groups of humans as advocates of the theory of Eusociality would have us believe. No, we have an *unconditionally* selfless, *fully* altruistic, *truly* loving, *universally*-considerate-of-others-not-competitive-with-other-groups, *genuinely* moral conscience. Our original instinctive state was the *opposite* of being competitive, selfish and aggressive: it was fully cooperative, selfless and loving. (How we humans acquired *unconditionally* selfless moral instincts when it would seem that an *unconditionally* selfless, *fully* altruistic trait is going to self-eliminate and thus not ever be able to become established in a species is briefly explained in the above-mentioned [What is Science? article*](#), and more fully explained in [Part 8:4 of Freedom Book 1*](#)—however, the point being made here is that the savage-instincts-in-us excuse is completely inconsistent with the fact that we have genuine and entirely *moral* instincts, *NOT* *savage* instincts. Charles Darwin recognised the difference in our moral nature when he said that '**the moral sense affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals**' (*The Descent of Man*, 1871, p.495).)

So, what is the *truthful*, human-condition-addressing rather than human-condition-avoiding, biological explanation of our species' present seemingly-highly-imperfect, competitive, selfish and aggressive behaviour? The answer begins with an analysis of consciousness.

Very briefly, nerves were originally developed for the coordination of movement in animals, but, once developed, their ability to store impressions—which is what we refer to as 'memory'—gave rise to the potential to develop understanding of cause and effect. If you can remember past events, you can compare them with current events and identify regularly occurring experiences. This knowledge of, or insight into, what has commonly occurred in the past enables you to predict what is likely to happen in the future and to adjust your behaviour accordingly. Once insights into the nature of change are put into effect, the self-modified behaviour starts to provide feedback, refining the insights further. Predictions are compared with outcomes and so on. Much developed, and such refinement occurred in the human brain, nerves can sufficiently *associate* information to *reason* how experiences are related, learn to *understand* and become CONSCIOUS of, or aware of, or *intelligent* about, the relationship between events that occur through time. Thus consciousness means being sufficiently aware of how experiences are related to attempt to manage change from a basis of understanding.

What is so significant about this process is that once our nerve-based learning system became sufficiently developed for us to become conscious and able to effectively manage events, our conscious intellect was then in a position to wrest control from our gene-based learning system's instincts, which, up until then, had been controlling our lives. Basically, once our self-adjusting intellect emerged it was capable of taking over the management of our lives from the instinctive

orientations we had acquired through the natural selection of genetic traits that adapted us to our environment.

HOWEVER, it was at this juncture, when our conscious intellect challenged our instincts for control, that a terrible battle broke out between our instincts and intellect, the effect of which was the extremely competitive, selfish and aggressive state that we call the ‘human condition’.

To elaborate, when our conscious intellect emerged it was neither suitable nor sustainable for it to be *orientated* by instincts—it *had to find understanding* to operate effectively and fulfil its great potential to manage life. However, when our intellect began to exert itself and experiment in the management of life from a basis of understanding, in effect challenging the role of the already established instinctual self, a battle unavoidably broke out between the instinctive self and the newer conscious self.

Our intellect began to experiment in understanding as the only means of discovering the correct and incorrect understandings for managing existence, but the instincts—being in effect ‘unaware’ or ‘ignorant’ of the intellect’s need to carry out these experiments—‘opposed’ any understanding-produced deviations from the established instinctive orientations: they ‘criticised’ and ‘tried to stop’ the conscious mind’s necessary search for knowledge. To illustrate the situation, imagine what would happen if we put a fully conscious mind on the head of a migrating bird. The bird is following an instinctive flight path acquired over thousands of generations of natural selection, but it now has a conscious mind that needs to *understand* how to behave, and the only way it can acquire that understanding is by experimenting in understanding—for example, thinking, ‘I’ll fly down to that island and have a rest.’ But such a deviation from the migratory flight path would naturally result in the instincts resisting the deviation, leaving the conscious intellect in a serious dilemma: if it obeys its instincts it will not feel ‘criticised’ by its instincts but neither will it find knowledge. Obviously, the intellect could not afford to give in to the instincts, and unable to understand and thus explain why its experiments in self-adjustment were necessary, the conscious intellect had no way of refuting the implicit criticism from the instincts even though it knew it was unjust. Until the conscious mind found the redeeming understanding of why it had to defy the instincts (namely the scientific understanding of the difference in the way genes and nerves process information, that one is an orientating learning system while the other is an insightful learning system), the intellect was left having to endure a psychologically distressed, upset condition, with no choice but to defy that opposition from the instincts. The only forms of defiance available to the conscious intellect were to **attack** the instincts’ unjust criticism, try to **deny** or block from its mind the instincts’ unjust criticism, and attempt to **prove** the instincts’ unjust criticism wrong. In short—and to return to our human situation because we were the species that acquired the fully conscious mind—the psychologically upset **angry, alienated** and **egocentric** human-condition-afflicted state appeared. Our ‘conscious thinking self’, which is the dictionary definition of ‘ego’, became ‘centred’ or focused on the need to justify itself. We became ego-centric, self-centred or selfish, preoccupied with aggressively competing for opportunities to prove we are good and not bad—we unavoidably became **selfish, aggressive** and **competitive**.

What is *so* exonerating, rehabilitating and healing about this explanation of the human condition is that we can finally appreciate that there was a *very good* reason for our angry, alienated and egocentric lives—in fact, we can now see why we have not just been ego-centric, but *ego-infuriated*, even ego-gone-mad-with-murderous-anger for having to live with so much unjust criticism. No wonder we led such an evasive, escapist, superficial and artificial, greedy, smother-ourselves-with-*material*-glory-while-we-lacked-the-*spiritual*-glory-of-compassionate-understanding-of-ourselves existence! Yes, we can *now* see that our conscious mind was *NOT* the evil villain it has so long been portrayed as—such as in the Bible where Adam and Eve are demonised and ‘**banished...from the Garden of Eden**’ (Gen. 3:23) of our original innocent, all-loving, moral state for taking the ‘**fruit...from the tree of knowledge**’ (ibid. 3:3,2:17). Yes, science has finally enabled us to lift the so-called ‘burden of guilt’ from the human race; in fact, to understand that we thinking, ‘**knowledge**’-finding, conscious humans are actually nothing less than the heroes of the story of life on Earth! This is because our fully conscious mind is surely nature’s greatest invention and to have had to endure the torture of being unjustly condemned as evil for *so* long (the anthropological evidence indicates we humans have been fully conscious for some two million years) *must make us* the absolute heroes of the story of life on Earth.

And BEST OF ALL, because this explanation of the human condition is redeeming and thus rehabilitating, all our upset angry, egocentric and alienated behaviour now subsides, bringing about the complete TRANSFORMATION OF THE HUMAN RACE—and importantly, understanding of the human condition doesn’t condone ‘bad’ behaviour, it *heals* and, by so doing, *ends* it. From being competitive, selfish and aggressive, humans return to being cooperative, selfless and loving. Our round of departure *has* ended. The poet T.S. Eliot wonderfully articulated our species’ journey from an original innocent, yet ignorant, state, to a psychologically upset ‘fallen’, corrupted state, and back to an uncorrupted, but this time enlightened, state when he wrote, ‘**We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time**’ (*Little Gidding*, 1942).

Yes, finding the exonerating, redeeming understanding of our dark, troubled, psychologically upset, human-condition-afflicted existence finally enables the human race to be healed and thus TRANSFORMED—it makes us ‘**whole**’ again, as Jung said it would. To quote Professor Harry Prosen, a former president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association, on this dreamed-of, greatest of all breakthroughs in science: ‘**I have no doubt this biological explanation of the human condition is the holy grail of insight we have sought for the psychological rehabilitation of the human race**’ (*Freedom Book 1*, 2009, Part 2:2).

Finally the REAL means to think positively about our lives, to truly motivate and inspire ourselves and to properly re-build our self-esteem has arrived! We now have *the* answer to how to love yourself, the means to end the insecurity of the human condition!

At last, that exasperating, never-ending parade of false starts to the dreamed-of utopian state of being free of the agony of the human condition—including the 1960s Age of Aquarius movement,

the 1970s Peace movement, the 1980s New Age movement, the 1990s Stop the Greed movement, and now the Anti-Capitalist movement (and these are just some of the more recent of the litany we've been witness to)—comes to an end with the arrival of the understanding of the human condition that *actually* brings an end to that terrible human-condition-afflicted existence! Yes, all those endless, superficial, basically ineffectual 'think positive', 'human potential', 'self development', 'self improvement' motivational programs through which we tried to defy the human condition by surrounding ourselves with positive quotes about life and pumping ourselves with 'positive thoughts', 'motivational stories', 'positive words', 'inspiring thoughts', 'motivational thoughts', 'happy thoughts', 'inspirational thoughts', 'good thoughts about life', 'great thoughts', etc, etc, etc, are all now made obsolete by the dignifying, uplifting, redeeming, exonerating, psychologically healing, ameliorating, transforming REAL story about the true magnificence and heroism of the human race!

**As just demonstrated, with understanding of the human condition
found ALL the great issues finally become explainable.**

See also: [What is science?*](#)—[What is love?*](#)—[Soul*](#)—[Conscience*](#)—[Good vs Evil*](#)
—[What is the meaning of life?*](#)—[Is there a God?*](#)—[Our ego and egocentric lives*](#)—
[How can we save the world?*](#)—[Consciousness*](#)—[Human nature*](#)—[Why do people lie?*](#)

For a book of these explanations to keep or give to others, print
[The Book of Real Answers to Everything!](#)* by Jeremy Griffith*,
featuring a [Foreword*](#) by Professor Harry Prosen

and/or

[Watch videos*](#) on the biological explanation of the human condition and the
dreamed-of TRANSFORMATION of the human race that it brings about

and/or

[Read Freedom*](#), the definitive book on the world-transforming
explanation of the human condition

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Posted by patrizia on Apr 20th, 2013

Look! I thank you from my heart for all of this magic information.

Things happen for a reason, I am seventy three years old. Love life, I go to U3A. 'The University of the third age.' Mamma Mia, I am learning "Human Nature". Once again molto - molto grazie.

Posted by Daniel Lewis on May 16th, 2013

As you say, E.O Wilson's new book on Eusociality is attracting a lot of attention, and it does present a sweeping and persuasive argument for the origins of human nature and culture, but like a lot of people I realize that there are real problems with both the mechanics of the group selection argument, as well as his proposition that the human condition is just a conflict between selfish and selfless instincts. You argue that Wilson is still ignoring the fact that the human condition is a psychological condition. I tend to agree - this is the fundamental flaw in his theory.

Posted by Margaret Small on May 16th, 2013

Oh I am so glad I came across your website. I will definitely be reading further publications and comments here. I am doing research for art project and have found your article invaluable.

Posted by Vic Dempsey on May 16th, 2013

Coming from an older generation, I read through this article before watching Mr Griffith's presentation. I am familiar with the scientists mentioned and their schools of thought. I also pride myself on being able to follow a thread of logic and I can't fault the chain of logic, however the conclusions are rather difficult to accept. I followed the link to Griffith's theory for how we developed selfless instincts, because that is incongruent to natural selection, and it seems to hold water as well, at least on a theoretical level. I will be interested to explore your work further. Thank you.

Posted by mohsen on May 17th, 2013

thanks a lot for this information

Posted by Ray on May 31st, 2013

I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about. The human condition is we are born selfish, social Darwinism 101 – survival of the fittest. Our job is try to overcome those instincts for the

betterment of society. We can all reach a higher level of consciousness if we work and apply ourselves to it.

Posted by Sarah B on May 31st, 2013

I totally agree that the real problem isn't the environment or climate change or wars or anything like. We create the problems. If we didn't create them then we'd be able to fix them in a hurry. I don't know if I fully understand what is being said but at least you're dealing with the real problem and that's a good start.

Posted by SG on Jun 2nd, 2013

This is a rare pleasure. A rare topic and a rare treatment. Also rare to find a scientist quoting the Rolling Stones. I guess if you have explained the human condition then everything should be explained, even rock and roll. This is a good thing.

Posted by Anon on Jun 4th, 2013

It is interesting what Griffiths says about the conscious mind exerting itself at some point of its development, and coming into conflict with the instincts, because I have been watching my daughter who is only 2, and comparing her with her 5-year-old sister, and there is a big difference, not just in the power of their intellect, but in how they rely on it I guess. Interesting.

Posted by Daniel Volpe on Jun 29th, 2013

I do believe that we are living in a time of change, or growth, if you will

Up to this point of our development, we have been functioning on a very primal, fear-based mentality. We still settle our differences with violence, the guy with the biggest stick/weapon, still controls. One of the reasons we are stuck in this self-destructive rut, is the controlling element benefits greatly from this way of life. There have been studies in the past, 70s/80s etc. that had concluded, that war, starvation, or pollution, will do us in, if we don't change our goals and attitudes/or way of life. The use of money has played a big role in keeping us in this rut. Those that control the money control our way of life. I have been writing my observations, in a way that examines our way of life as if we were examining a newly discovered civilization, as an objective observer. I would love to communicate with like-minded people. Dan Volpe

Posted by daniel volpe on Jun 29th, 2013

To really examine the human condition, you have to disregard all of our established social framework. Politics & religion of all brands, the use of money, in other words, what we have accepted as our reality, or our (way of life). Look at our civilization as if we were studying a newly discovered planet.

Posted by Jim on Jun 29th, 2013

I once thought that the inequality and destruction in the world could be addressed through education and government reform but I see now the source of this great imbalance isn't our greedy materialistic economic system but our indifferent and selfish nature. Griffith quite rightly identifies and deals with this source, the human condition, and focusing on that is the only way we can implement the real and lasting change we long for, as he says in this essay:

'the issue of the human condition has been the real, underlying issue we needed to solve if we were to exonerate and thus rehabilitate the human race, we have been so fearful and insecure about the subject that instead of confronting it and trying to solve it we have been preoccupied denying and escaping it. The truth is that while much attention has been given to the need to love each other and the environment if we are to 'save the world', the real need if we were to actually succeed in doing so was to find the means to love the dark side of ourselves—to find the reconciling understanding of our 'good-and-evil'-afflicted human condition that was causing so much suffering and destruction!'



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