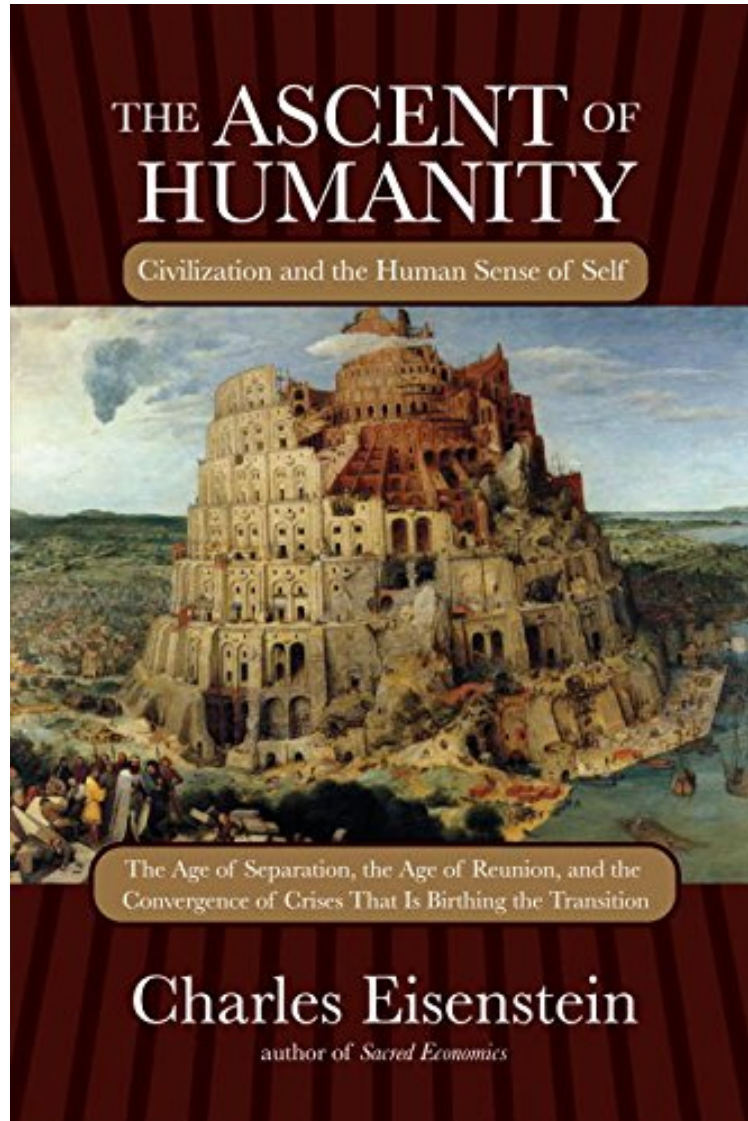


(Get free) The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self

# The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self

Charles Eisenstein

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**Charles Eisenstein : The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. I feel like crying as I read itBy NorWow. Life changing. I feel like crying as I read it. Articulates so well why in this age of unprecedented material wealth, things somehow still feel so... unsatisfying. It's a relief to be able to name the problem, to understand that we can get there from here. Really, my

mind is blown by this book and by *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. *Life Changing* By Mike Susinski To fully incorporate Eisenstein's observations and conclusions, I am looking very closely how I approach the rest of the universe, from how I impact my environment to how I treat other people. The book is very well researched. He says some things many times, and that might have been necessary. I took a lot of time to read it, a few pages at a time, since the ramifications of his world view require a profound reorientation of how I see myself relating to everything. Challenging and encouraging. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. *The Ascent of Humanity* By April Thomas Charles Eisenstein shares his deep insight into our human orientation (and identity). He traces the steps within our depart from relatedness or Wholeness, and announces our call back Home to It, and our arrival Home with the complexity that has come of our journey through separation, with all that we created and learned along the way. He is a Thinker among Thinkers such as Riane Eisler, Marianne Williamson, Chellis Glendinning, bell hooks, Joanna Macy, David Bohm, Thomas Berry, Michel Foucault, Peter Senge, Paulo Freire, and Fritjof Capra. This book is a penetrating exploration of the myriad cultural sources of our retreat from the Living world, and a journey (from the perspective of Indigenous Mind) deep into the dark, human-historical recesses of cultural hegemony. It is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the directives of our cultural evolution, and why it is that we continue to unwittingly co-create a world which, in our Hearts of Hearts, we have difficulty recognizing as the fruition of our own participation. I've been writing a similar yet unique edition on this theme my Self, and, again, I am surprised, impressed, delighted, and deeply moved - moved because I believe that as yet another of us transcends the magnetic pull of the tides of thought as it collectively exists as a system, that system is transformed. Only thought that is generative and Life-affirming can lead to human action that is regenerative! Eisenstein has been astute and thorough in this critical examination of many widely held and rarely questioned assumptions...

Charles Eisenstein explores the history and potential future of civilization, tracing the converging crises of our age to the illusion of the separate self. In this landmark book, Eisenstein explains how a disconnection from the natural world and one another is built into the foundations of civilization: into science, religion, money, technology, medicine, and education as we know them. As a result, each of these institutions faces a grave and growing crisis, fueling our near-pathological pursuit of technological fixes even as we push our planet to the brink of collapse. Fortunately, an Age of Reunion is emerging out of the birth pangs of an earth in crisis. As our old constructs of self and world dissolve in crisis, we are entering a new narrative of interbeing, a more expansive sense of self, and a more ecological relationship to nature. Our darkest hour bears the possibility of a more beautiful world not through the extension of millennia-old methods of management and control but by fundamentally reimagining ourselves and our systems. Breathtaking in its scope and intelligence, *The Ascent of Humanity* is a remarkable book showing what it truly means to be human.

"Yale graduate, professor, speaker and author, remove the letters "se" from his surname and you have an idea just how brilliant a thinker Eisenstein is considered to be." *Montreal Gazette* "This is an extraordinary book. Eisenstein has put his finger on the core problem facing humanity namely: separation. All the crises that humanity now faces are grounded in the belief that we are separate separate from each other, separate from the biosphere that sustains us, separate from the universe that has brought us forth. This is a tour-de-force filled with astounding insight, wit, wisdom and heart." Christopher Uhl, author of *Developing Ecological Consciousness: Paths to a Sustainable Future* "Quite marvelous, a hugely important work... This book is truly needed in this time of deepening crisis." John Zerzan, author of *Future Primitive and Elements of Refusal* "A radical awakening as to how we arrived at our current crisis and how we can more effectively redefine the path of our evolutionary journey." Bruce Lipton, author of *The Biology of Belief* "Brilliant and original, with great depth of insight and understanding, Eisenstein's *Ascent of Humanity* easily ranks with the works of such giants of our age as David Bohm, Julian Jaynes, Jean Gebser, Whitehead. It is a profoundly serious, indeed somber portrait of our times, even as it opens a door of honest hope amidst the dark destiny we have woven about us. Accept the challenge of this major accomplishment and discover the light shining within it." Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg, Magical Child, Evolution's End, and The Biology of Transcendence* "This is one of those rare books that moves the goal posts. Eisenstein pulls together a wide array of insights to show that what we thought was the solution is also the problem. It is eye opening fodder for conversations with everyone I meet. As a technologist and a human being, I believe this could well be one of the most important books of the decade." Garret Moddel, professor of electrical engineering at UC Boulder; chairman CTO, Phiar Corporation About the Author Charles Eisenstein is a teacher, speaker, and writer focusing on themes of civilization, consciousness, money, and human cultural evolution. His writings on the web magazine *Reality Sandwich* have generated a vast online following; he speaks frequently at conferences and other events, and gives numerous interviews on radio and podcasts. Eisenstein graduated from Yale University in 1989 with a degree in Mathematics and Philosophy, and spent the next ten years as a Chinese-English translator. The author of *Sacred Economics* (EVOLVER EDITIONS, 2011), he currently lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Civilization and the Human Sense of Self* By Charles Eisenstein An excerpt from the book *The Ascent*

of Humanity More than any other species, human beings are gifted with the power to manipulate their environment and the ability to accumulate and transmit knowledge across generations. The first of these gifts we call technology; the other we call culture. They are central to our humanity. Accumulating over thousands of years, culture and technology have brought us into a separate human realm. We live, more than any animal, surrounded by our own artifacts. Among these are works of surpassing beauty, complexity, and power, human creations that could not have existed could not even have been conceived in the times of our forebears. Seldom do we pause to appreciate the audacity of our achievements: objects as mundane as a compact disc, a video cell phone, an airplane would have seemed fantastical only a few centuries ago. We have created a realm of magic and miracles. At the same time, it is quite easy to see technology and culture not as a gift but as a curse. After millennia of development, the power to manipulate the environment has become the power to destroy it, while the ability to transmit knowledge transmits as well a legacy of hatred, injustice, and violence. Today, as both the destruction and the violence reach a feverish crescendo, few can deny that the world is in a state of crisis. Opinions vary as to its exact nature: some people say it is primarily ecological; others say it is a moral crisis, a social, economic, or political crisis, a health crisis, even a spiritual crisis. There is, however, little disagreement that the crisis is of human origin. Hence, despair: Is the present ruination of the world built in to our humanity? Are genocide and ecocide the inevitable price of civilizations magnificence? Need the most sublime achievements of art, music, literature, science, and technology be built upon the wreckage of the natural world and the misery of its inhabitants? Can the microchip come without the oil slick, the strip mine, the toxic waste dump? Under the shadow of every Chartres Cathedral, must there be women burning at the stake? In other words, can the gift of technology and culture somehow be separated from the curse? The dashed Utopian dreams of the last few centuries leave little hope. Despite the miracles we have produced, people across the ideological spectrum, from Christian fundamentalists to environmental activists, share a foreboding that the world is in grave and growing peril. Temporary, localized improvements cannot hide the ambient wrongness that pervades the warp and woof of modern society, and often our personal lives as well. We might manage each immediate problem and control every foreseeable risk, but an underlying disquiet remains. I am referring simply to the feeling, Something is wrong around here. Something so fundamentally wrong that centuries of our best and brightest efforts to create a better world have failed or even backfired. As this realization sinks in, we respond with despair, cynicism, numbness, or detachment. Yet no matter how complete the despair, no matter how bitter the cynicism, a possibility beckons of a world more beautiful and a life more magnificent than what we know today. Though we may rationalize it, it is not rational. We become aware of it in moments, gaps in the rush and press of modern life. These moments come to us alone in nature, or with a baby, making love, playing with children, caring for a dying person, making music for the sake of music or beauty for the sake of beauty. At such times, a simple and easy joy shows us the futility of the vast, life-consuming program of management and control. We intuit that something similar is possible collectively. Some of us may have experienced it when we find ourselves cooperating naturally and effortlessly, instruments of a purpose greater than ourselves that, paradoxically, makes us individually more and not less when we abandon ourselves to it. It is what musicians are referring to when they say, The music played the band. Another way of being is possible, and it is right in front of us, closer than close. That much is transparently certain. Yet it slips away so easily that we hardly believe it could be the foundation of life; so we relegate it to an afterlife and call it Heaven, or we relegate it to the future and call it Utopia. (When nanotechnology solves all our problems when we all learn to be nice to each other when finally I'm not so busy ) Either way, we set it apart from this world and this life, and thereby deny its practicality and its reality in the here and now. Yet the knowledge that life is more than Just This cannot be suppressed, not forever. I share with dreamers, Utopians, and teenagers an unreasonable intuition of a magnificent potential, that life and the world can be more than we have made of them. What error, then, what delusion has led us to accept the lesser lives and the lesser world we find ourselves in today? What has rendered us helpless to resist the ugliness, pollution, injustice, and downright horror that have risen to engulf the planet in the last few centuries? What calamity has so resigned us to it, that we call this the human condition? Those moments of love, freedom, serenity, play what power has made us believe these are but respites from real life? Inspired by such moments, I have spent the last ten years trying to understand what keeps us and what keeps me from the better world that our hearts tell us must exist. To my endless amazement, I keep discovering a common root underneath all the diverse crises of the modern age. Underlying the vast swath of ruin our civilization has carved is not human nature, but the opposite: human nature denied. This denial of human nature rests in turn upon an illusion, a misconception of self and world. We have defined ourselves as other than what we are, as discrete subjects separate from each other and separate from the world around us. In a way this is good news. In this book I will describe the profound changes that will flow, and are already flowing, from the reconception of the self that is under way. The bad news is that our present conception of self is so deeply woven into our civilization into our technology and culture that its abandonment can come only with the collapse of much that is familiar. This is what the present convergence of crises portends. Everything I wrote in the preceding paragraph about our civilization also applies to each of us individually. Saints and mystics have tried for thousands of years to teach us how we are trapped in a delusion about who we are. This delusion inevitably brings about suffering, and eventually a crisis that can be resolved only through a collapse, a surrender, and an opening to a state of being beyond previous self-

limitation. You are not, they tell us, a skin-encapsulated ego, and lasting happiness can never result from pursuing that egos agenda. These spiritual teachings have helped me realize, at least partway, my intuitions of what work, love, human relationship, and health can be. They are not the main subject of this book, however, nor do I claim to exemplify them in my own life. Nonetheless, the shift in our collective self-conception is intimately related to a parallel shift in our individual self-conception. In other words, there is a spiritual dimension to the planetary crisis. As this planetary crisis invades our individual lives, unavoidably, neither the personal nor the collective misconception of who we are will remain tenable. Each mirrors the other: in its origin, its consequences, and its resolution. That is why this book interweaves the story of humanity's separation from nature with the story of our individual alienation from life, nature, spirit, and self. Despite my faith that life is meant to be more, little voices whisper in my ear that I am crazy. Nothing is amiss, they say, this is just the way things are. The rising tide of human misery and ecological destruction, as old as civilization, is simply the human condition, an inevitable result of built-in human flaws like selfishness and laziness. Since you can't change it, be thankful for your good fortune in avoiding it. The misery of much of the planet is a warning, say the voices, to protect me and mine, impelling me to maximize my security. Besides, it couldn't be as bad as I think. If all that stuff were true about the ecological destruction, the genocide, the starving children, and the whole litany of impending crises then wouldn't everyone be in an uproar about it? The normalcy of the routines surrounding me here in America tells me, It couldn't be that bad. That little voice echoes throughout the culture. Every advertising flyer, every celebrity news item, every product catalog, every hyped-up sports event, carries the subtext, You can afford to care about this. A man in a burning house wouldn't care about these things; that our culture does care about them, almost exclusively, implies that our house is not burning down. The forests are not dying. The deserts are not spreading. The atmosphere is not heating. Children are not starving. Torturers are not going free. Whole ethnicities are not being exterminated. These crimes against humanity and crimes against nature couldn't really be happening. Probably they have been exaggerated; in any event, they are happening somewhere else. Our society will figure out solutions before the calamities of the Third World affect me. See, no one else is worried, are they? Life hums on as usual. As for my intuition of magnificent possibilities for my own life, well, my expectations are too high. Grow up, the voices say, life is just like this. What right have I to expect the unreasonable magnificence whose possibility certain moments have shown me? No, it is my intuitions that are not to be trusted. The examples of what life is surround me and define what is normal. Do I see anyone around me whose work is their joy, whose time is their own, whose love is their passion? It can't happen. Be thankful, say the voices, that my job is reasonably stimulating, that I feel in love at least once in a while, that the pain is manageable and life's uncertainties under control. Let good enough be good enough. Sure, life can be a drag, but at least I can afford to escape it sometimes. Life is about work, self-discipline, responsibility, but if I get these out of the way quickly and efficiently, I can enjoy vacations, entertainment, weekends, maybe even early retirement. Listening to these voices, is it any wonder that for many years, I devoted most of my energy and vitality to the escapes from life? Is it any wonder that so many of my students at Penn State look forward already, at age twenty-one, to retirement? If life and the world are Just This, we are left no choice but to make the best of it: to be more efficient, to achieve better security, to get life's uncertainties under control. There are voices that speak to this too. They are the evangelists of technology and self-improvement, who urge us to improve the human condition basically by trying harder. My inner evangelist tells me to get my life under control, to work out every day, to organize my time more efficiently, to watch my diet, to be more disciplined, to try harder to be a good person. On the collective level, the same attitude says that perhaps the next generation of material and social technologies—new medicines, better laws, faster computers, solar power, nanotechnology—will finally succeed in improving our lot. We will be more efficient, more intelligent, more capable, and finally have the capacity to solve humanity's age-old problems. For more and more people today, these voices ring hollow. Words like high-tech and modern lose their cachet as a multiplicity of crises converge upon our planet. If we are fortunate, we might, for a time, prevent these crises from invading our personal lives. Yet as the environment continues to deteriorate, as job security evaporates, as the international situation worsens, as new incurable diseases appear, as the pace of change accelerates, it seems impossible to rest at ease. The world grows more competitive, more dangerous, less hospitable to easy living, and security comes with greater and greater effort. And even when temporary security is won, a latent anxiety lurks within the fortress walls, a mute unease in the background of modern life. It pervades technological society, and only intensifies as the pace of technology quickens. We begin to grow hopeless as our solutions—new technologies, new laws, more education, trying harder—only seem to worsen our problems. For many activists, hopelessness gives way to despair as catastrophe looms ever closer despite their best efforts. This book explains why trying harder can never work. Our best efforts are grounded in the same mode of being that is responsible for the crisis in the first place. As Audre Lorde put it, The masters tools will never dismantle the masters house. Soon, though, this mode of being will come to an end, to be replaced by a profoundly different sense of the self, and a profoundly different relationship between human and nature. This book is about the gathering revolution in human beingness. When we say that the planetary crisis is of human (and not natural) origin, what do we mean? Human beings are mammals, after all, biological creatures no less natural than any other. In a sense, there can be no distinction between human and nature, because human beings are a part of nature and everything we do is therefore natural.

However, we do distinguish. We recognize in nature a kind of harmony, balance, authenticity, and beauty lacking in the world of technology. Think of the connotations of the word artificial. Whether in fact or in perception, we modern humans live in a way that is no longer natural. At the crux of the human/nature distinction is technology, the product of the human hand. While other animals do make and use tools, no other species has our capacity to remake or destroy the physical environment, to control nature's processes or transcend nature's limitations. In the mental and spiritual realm, the counterpart of technology is culture, which modifies and even supersedes human nature in the same way technology modifies physical nature. In thus mastering nature with technology, and mastering human nature with culture, we distinguish ourselves from the rest of life, establishing a separate human realm. Believing this to be a good thing, we think of this separation as an ascent in which we have risen above our animal origins. That is why we naturally refer to the millennia-long accumulation of culture and technology as progress. It is separation, then, in the form of technology and culture, that defines us as human. As well, it is separation that has generated the converging crises of today's world. People of a religious persuasion might attribute the fundamental crisis to a separation from God; people of an ecological persuasion, to a separation from nature. People engaged in social activism might focus on the dissolution of community (which is a separation from each other). We might also investigate the psychological dimension, of separation from lost parts of ourselves. For good or ill, it is separation that has made us what we are. [From *The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self* by Charles Eisenstein, published by North Atlantic Books, copyright 2013 by Charles Eisenstein. Reprinted by permission of publisher.]