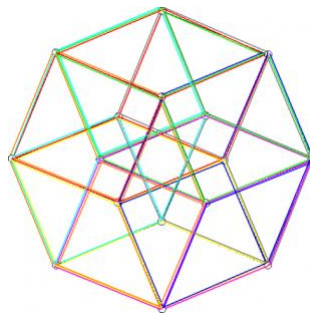


# Part 6 – The Shift from an Industrial to a Planetary Civilization: Catastrophes as the Spur to Institute Tricameral Legislature

by William Irwin Thompson

*“We Irish think otherwise”* Bishop Berkeley



\* I am indebted to Karen at Oddity Journal for this wonderful image of the tesseract.

Ideas of governance, like the folded geological strata in a landscape, are expressions of deeper forces of up-thrust and explosive force. Underneath surface layers of common opinions and impassioned ideas of morality and law is what Michel Foucault called an episteme—a deep structure of consciousness that shapes our world view and forms our scholarly and scientific disciplines.

Our Anglo-American notion of a constitutional republic is an expression of the prevailing seventeenth-century psychology of Dr. John Locke, one in which the mind is seen to be a lower house of sensory impressions and an upper house of ideas about impressions. But now after more than a century of developments in cognitive science—from Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (1896) to Evan Thompson’s *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Harvard University Press, 2007), it is time to move beyond these eighteenth century notions of governance based upon sensory stimuli and internal reflections. If as Paul Maclean argued there are three evolutionary brains within the human—reptilian, mammalian, and primate, or spinal, limbic, and cortical—then it is time our system of governance also reflected these interconnected and recursive domains of response, emotion, and reason.

Our eighteenth century constitution was conceived by rural aristocratic land owners and slave holders who feared popular democracy as the rule of the irrational urban mob, but it was also mid-wived by urban Federalists who wished to bring forth a modern nation-state based upon an industrial economy and a national bank. The machinery of the state with its checks and balances was an eighteenth-century steam engine fueled by the people but held on course by a governor that could lower the heat so the engine did not explode in civil war. A bicameral legislature was that century's vision of balance between passion and reflection—between a lower house of pushy and uncouth merchants and farmers and an upper house of men of property and culture.

Now in an age of gradual global warming and sudden catastrophes from hurricanes, earthquakes, coastal inundation, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, as well as plagues and pandemics, a scientific assembly is needed for a tricameral legislature in which government is provided with sound and objective scientific information and informed guidance. When East Coast multiple hurricanes overlap with West Coast earthquakes at a time of massive deficits, we may enter a time when natural catastrophes, and not just terrorist attacks, create the punctuated equilibrium that drives evolution. Under those tragic circumstances of the twenty-first century, we may find ourselves in such a condition that we will need to call another Constitutional Convention. At that time, the smug boomerism of capitalism that takes nature for granted in industrial development and distorts the ecological sciences to reinforce its own eighteenth-century ideology of free markets and industrial growth will be as historically irrelevant as peasant magic was to the industrial revolution.

It is time to move beyond John Locke and Adam Smith. The Bush Administration put forth new executive edicts in the thoughtless confidence that market forces were adequate to manage the environment and public health. It rejected scientific counsel and sought to constrain science to tell it what it wanted to hear for ideological reasons. In other words, it sought to treat science in the same way it treated Intelligence and the CIA in particular. Since the CIA has only the single client of the presidency, both the CIA and the Supreme Court have been corrupted by the growth of the Imperial Presidency—the “unitary executive” proposed by the morally challenged anti-constitutional lawyers David Addington and John Yoo. In an affirmation of Tudor Star Chamber imprisonment, torture, and the Divine Right of Kings, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice maintained that torture was legal simply because the President authorized it.

With such ideological manipulations of science and law, neither the legislative nor the executive branches of our government can be depended on to provide factual knowledge for good governance. A third chamber is now needed to be composed of truly intelligent and independent scientists, artists, humanist scholars, and professors of constitutional law. These outstanding citizens will need to be, not eighteenth century men of property, but twenty-first century women and men of “intellectual property.”

To insure that these citizens are not simply popular celebrities chosen through elections funded by the wealthy and the few owners of the media, they will need to be elected to this third chamber by an *ad hoc* Electoral College of the faculties of the state universities and the outstanding private universities of the nation. And it is this third chamber that should nominate learned scholars in constitutional law to the Supreme Court, and not the President. The Supreme Court in its very definition of *superus* is meant to be above politics—a goal that can

never be realized if the head of a political party appoints judges, and another body controlled by a political party's majority confirms their appointment.

Given the deep currents of anti-intellectuality and fear of government in American culture, it will be hard for our citizens to accept an Electoral College of the faculties of our universities and colleges. It will be easier for Canada to take this next step in cultural evolution because in Canada the universities are public and their faculty members are already civil servants. Canada at the present moment in its parliamentary democracy does not know what to do with its Senate. It has been used as a place to reward and store aging political party hacks, so it would be a small step for them to use its Senate as a new Assembly of Arts and Sciences whose members are elected by the faculties of all the provincial universities.

With three legislative houses for the United States there would be a better balance of the cultural faculties of our civilization. Our contemporary Senate has been called a millionaires club, so many recognize that it has become an American version of the English House of Lords. The House of Representatives should remain a popularly elected assembly of ordinary citizens from all walks of life and not merely lawyers. In a democracy, there will always be a place for the shallow and the ignorant, as the case of Michele Bachmann has recently confirmed, and that will be in the House of Representatives. A new Assembly of Arts and Sciences, however, should not be a popularly elected body, because the populace will simply vote for the celebrity with the best ads, or for someone who is media-loud and extravagantly rewarded for being outrageous entertainers—demagogues like Sarah Palin, Glen Beck, or Rush Limbaugh.

We do not need a popular assembly guess-governing us concerning matters of climate change, pandemics, and natural catastrophes, or to choose among new scientific programs such as the Hubble Telescope or the exploration of the solar system; that is what we have now and we have seen that it has resulted in the ideological degrading of science.

To avoid the imperial presidency that has sucked power away from Congress, from the days of Lincoln to George W. Bush, it would be better for our country to follow a model closer to the Swiss *Bundesrat* with its executive council. An executive council of four—a popularly elected president to chair it, and one member elected from each of the three houses of the legislature—would better serve the nation for the twenty-first century than our democratic simulacrum of a Roman Emperor. The Swiss as a people seem to be immune to charisma, so in Switzerland the Presidency of the *Bundesrat* rotates among its members, but we Americans are so addicted to the glamour of celebrities and the mystique of power that it is unlikely that we could let go of the potency of POTUS. It is more likely that any new constitutional convention would insist upon a popularly elected President to chair over an executive council of the presidents of the House, the Senate, and the Assembly.

My suggestion for amending the Constitution is, of course, merely a sketch and an exercise of the imagination, but this sketch, like any political cartoon, does express a pattern-recognition of the dangers inherent in our new mediocracy. The electronic media have created a new techno-peasantry whose attacks on the imaginary castle of science's Dr. Frankenstein now threaten to eliminate scientific textbooks from our schools to replace them with the bible. As popular ministers like Hagee and Huckabee thrust themselves to the head of the impassioned multitude, waving their bibles in the air, we risk being brought back to the ugly Thirty Years

War of religions that preceded the Age of Democratic Revolutions that motivated our Founding Fathers to put forth the wisdom of the separation of church and state. A twenty-first century Constitutional Convention will be needed to create a new tricameral legislature to serve to protect knowledge from the fratricidal passions of faith.

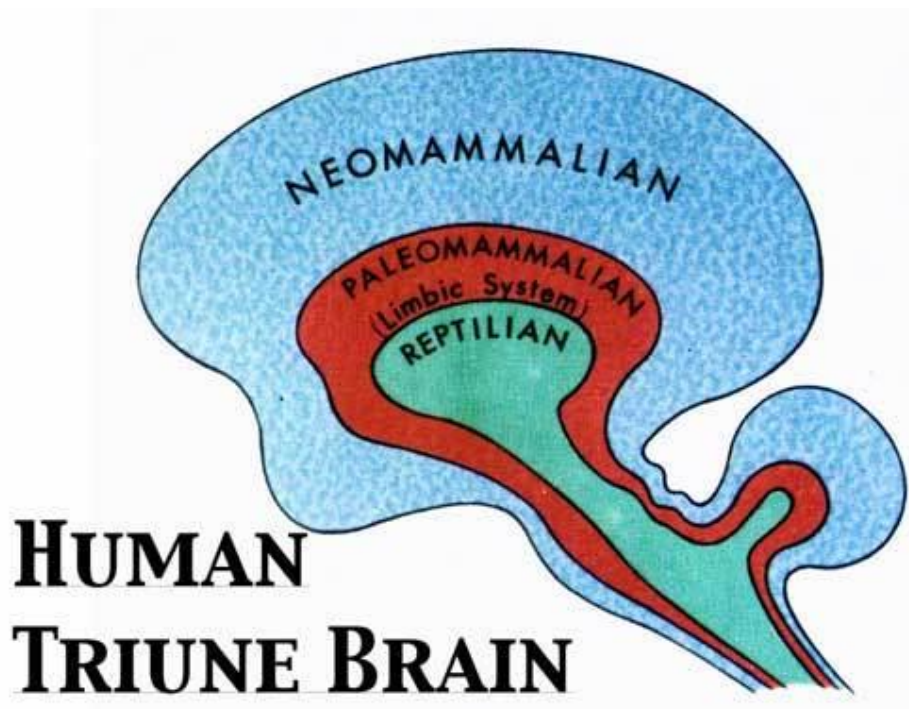
Now I am well aware that John Yoo was a professor at Berkeley and Condoleezza Rice at Stanford, so the mere fact of being on the faculty of a university does not protect us from bad hearts and agents of the Dark Side. But serving as counselors to kings and presidents seems to bring out the worst in intellectuals, from Thomas Cromwell to Kissinger and Rice. A general Assembly, however, of scientists, artists, and humanist scholars is more likely to balance *hubris* with humility than a single figure whispering in the ear of a monarchical President.

I also recognize that in the world of science there will always be linear reductionists like Patricia Churchland, Richard Dawkins, and E. O. Wilson to be found at the very top of academe. Behaviorist B. F. Skinner may pass away at Harvard, but sociobiologist E. O. Wilson steps forward to take his place to articulate a new simplistic ideology of Consilience for multiple disciplines. The dogmatic mode of the reductionist in promoting his or her own papal infallibility is never going to go away, because it meets a human need for rhetorical simplification through the elimination of ambiguity and complexity. We can't all be poets delighting in artistic ambiguity and thinking with their hearts and souls in complex harmony with their triune brains. In the large Assembly, I assume there would be multiple modes of thought and perspectives from many disciplinary insights, including the humanities and arts, and not just the sciences. Such an Assembly will need Kentucky farmer-poet Wendell Berry to balance Harvard's E. O. Wilson.\*

In ways that are similar to the Gaian biosphere of atmosphere, oceans, and continents, our civilization works through three different processes of validation in science, art, and spirituality. E. O. Wilson through his Consilience seeks to melt the three down into one cultural sludge, not recognizing that it is the distinctness of the cultural domains that energizes difference and thus brings forth a complex dynamical system. Art left to itself can become narcissistic, religion left to itself can become authoritarian and repressive, and science left to itself can become totalitarian and equally repressive even of scientific innovation. It is the distinctness of three different ways of achieving cultural validation that makes up a modern civilization, and not a medieval one built on burning books and heretics.

I call the third domain spirituality and not religion because human spirituality has evolved through the distinct stages of Ice Age shamanism (based upon oral culture), religion (based upon writing and sacred texts) and contemporary spirituality that is based upon mystical or yogic meditation in which the fractal mind of the individual becomes immersed in the larger mind of the universe. In this fractal landscape of minds and Cosmic Mind, God is more the God of the mathematicians Einstein and Whitehead than the jealous tribal war god Jehovah of the Old Testament.

I shall have more to say next week when I contrast the checks and balances of an eighteenth century constitution modeled on the physics of the steam engine to a twenty-first century constitution modeled on the ecosystem and complexity theory.



Three Brains of Man

\*See Wendell Berry's critique of E. O. Wilson in his *Life is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), 23-91.