

Springboard for Discussion

A distinguished British historian contends that man's greed — unleashed when he lost his awe of nature — is now working havoc

READERS DIGEST Dec 73

--cp. his Oct 73
NYT OpEd essay

The Genesis of Pollution

Condensed from HORIZON ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

AND God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

According to the Bible, God created the world; it was his to do what he liked with; he chose to license Adam and Eve to do what they liked with it; and their license was not canceled by the Fall. The tenant who had parked in the Garden rent-free was now rack-rented:

PROF. ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE, 84, author of *A Study of History*, has been assessing the role of religion in human affairs most of his life.

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... a religious cure?

THE GENESIS OF POLLUTION ^{classical fiction 125}

the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures, and the pollution of those not already devoured — can be traced back to a religious cause.

If one has been brought up as a Christian, Jew or Muslim, one has been conditioned to take monotheism (the belief that there is but one God) and its mundane implications for granted. Yet for pre-Christian, pre-monotheistic man, nature was not just a treasure trove of "natural resources" but a goddess. "Mother Earth." And the vegetation that sprang from the earth, the animals that roamed the earth's surface, and the minerals hiding in the earth's bowels all partook of nature's divinity. So did all natural phenomena — springs and rivers and the sea; mountains; earthquakes and lightning and thunder.

Such was the original religion of all mankind. The godhead was diffused throughout — a pantheon, plural, not singular. But when the Greco-Roman world was converted

to Christianity, the divinity was drained out of nature and concentrated in a single, transcendent God. Man's greedy impulse to exploit nature used to be held in check by his awe, his pious worship of nature. Now monotheism, as enunciated in Genesis, has removed the age-old restraint.

The application of science to technology lagged about 26 centuries behind the probable date of the directive to "subdue" the earth. But with the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution, Western Christians succeeded in enhancing human technology to a degree that gave them (and their non-Western pupils) mastery over the earth. The traditional balance between man and nature was overthrown. Ever since, men have been reaping wealth — and pollution — by industrialization.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Westerners have set their hearts on the increase of material affluence. And "verily ... they have their reward."

---a straight call to abandon monotheism (Judaism and Christianity) and "return" (?) to animism, preferably (given Toynbee's schooldays predilection for Greek and Latin) Greco-Roman paganism. ---of the 8 ways of being religious in F. J. Streng et al (WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS: READINGS FOR A NEW APPROACH TO RELIGION, Prentice-Hall/73, 627pp.), see esp. Way #3 ("Daily Living That Expresses the Cosmic Law"). ---Christian apotheosis in our culture is no longer enough: we must move to polemic (irenically!).