



The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community

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*Sweeping survey of world history offering a new understanding of the key challenge of our time

*Offers a positive message of hope for a sustainable and just future and a practical strategy for getting there

In *The Great Turning*, David Korten argues that "Empire," the organization of society through hierarchy and violence has always resulted in misery for the many and fortune for the few, but now it threatens the very future of humanity as Empire has become unsustainable and destructive.

Korten traces the roots of Empire and charts the evolution of its instruments of control, from absolute monarchies to the multinational institutions of the global economy. He describes efforts to develop democratic alternatives to Empire, such as the founding of the United States and shows how elitists with an imperial agenda have undermined the "American experiment."

Empire is not inevitable, and we can turn away from it. Korten draws on evidence from evolutionary theory, developmental psychology, and religious teachings to show that a life-centered, egalitarian, sustainable, democratic "Earth Community" is possible.

The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community Details

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From Reader Review The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community for online ebook

Marie says

I appreciate what Korten has to offer to the future world. I also want to believe that we are in the midst of shifting our view points and perspectives on the world. However, his oversimplistic, repetitive, and theory-only writing had me more often pointing out the flaws in his argument over the possibility and inspiration that it was should have had me thinking about. I think Korten is onto a good idea..and I like what he was trying to say, but maybe it was just too much for a 350 page book.

Catherine says

Korten posits that we're on the cusp of worldwide change. He spends much of the book examining history, focusing on humanity's tendency to dominate others, exploit natural resources and value power over all else. The best part of the book comes near the end, when he describes ways to help your community embrace sustainability and equality. I would recommend this book with the caveat of starting a discussion group to go along with your reading. Your debates and real-world solutions will greatly enrich The Great Turning.

Keith Akers says

I actually led a book discussion group on this book last year. The discussions were interesting but the book is, I think, inadequate. For anyone with vaguely leftist inclinations, It's sort of like going to see a romantic comedy starring (oh, say) Meg Ryan. You know what to expect, and you will probably enjoy it, but the plot is predictable and it is not going to really challenge you or add to your knowledge.

He's pretty sharp about social inequality, but less so about the environment. But the whole contrast between "empire" and "earth community" is just too simplistic and overdone. Empire is evil, evil, evil, but suddenly, we're going to turn around and everything will be wonderful!

Moreover, I cannot agree with his environmental ideas either. There is something unsettling about his first example of a "good" industry -- a cattle ranch where they treat the workers well. Cattle grazing is a leading cause of global warming, and according to November/December 2009 WorldWatch article by Goodland and Anhang, meat production actually contributes over half of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

Korten says at one point that rulers learned to domesticate people after they domesticated animals. Do you think that these two forms of exploitation are related? In what way? So we're all in solidarity while we kill animals and destroy the climate. There does not seem to be any awareness, either, about peak oil, the financial crisis, and related issues.

I've heard him speak: he eats meat, apparently, and he's overweight. Sigh. So, you might want to flip through the book to keep current with what people are saying, and Korten really is a good speaker, but his analysis lacks weight.

Eric Nelson says

Any reader of *The Great Turning* must remember one key fact: You're not reading this book because Korten is a noteworthy psychologist or theologian or anthropologist. Korten has some keen insights and his experience with international NGOs and in academia ensure that the telling of his vision is effective, grounded in reality, and at times inspiring. He finds great metaphors to convey concepts that otherwise might hover just above true comprehension. Korten not only defines and describes a new economy, he does so in ways that help you see that you never really thought logically about our contemporary system?even if you considered yourself knowledgeable in economics before. [return][return]Korten is right in that instituting his community-focused system would change everything?but he's also right that our current system is inherently based on change and therefore everything will change anyway, so why not work to ensure that future changes are improvements and not just helping consolidate the power of the already powerful. In short, Korten is at his best when he stays focused on undoing the conventional wisdom he characterizes as ?[Trusting] in the magic of the unregulated market to convert your unrestrained greed and self-indulgence into a better life for all.?[return][return]He reaches too far in his vision. His vision replaces an unsustainable global economy driven by conglomerates with a global sense of spirituality which is basically Gnostic garbage, often citing Borg and Fox?nothing new here, what he promotes has been commonplace theology since the dawn of Empires. It's ironic, since Korten seems to really understand the importance of love and community but doesn't seem to understand that the spiritual worldview he's embracing won't support his vision of loving local economies any better than the greed-centered worldview of crony capitalism. He equates love with tolerance, elevates the feminine above the masculine, and believes that knowledge is power. The economy he envisions requires love that doesn't tolerate abuse of power, puts men and women on equal footings, and understands that wisdom comes from outside yourself and is marked by humility.[return][return]He gets tripped up on this last point because of his reliance on conventional psychological models which are essentially repackaged Gnosticism that encourages intelligent people to believe that they are at the top of a five-step scale of human development. Instead of recognizing that people are a mix of good and bad, he prefers models which basically categorize people as either enlightened or unenlightened?inherently belittling the humanity of children and mentally disabled.[return][return]Fortunately, the system Korten promotes would better serve the people his theological and psychological models would exclude. If his economic ideas start taking hold, hopefully theologians whose theology is better equipped to bolster his communities will have more of an impact on his thinking.

Jennifer Joy says

Korten provides an excellent overview of Empire and how we've arrived where we are today. He exposes the infancy of America's 'democracy' and encourages the questioning and stretching that has to occur in order for the human race to move forward. A stimulating must-read. My only advice -- don't read this alone! Establish an 'Earth Community' to dialogue with as you move through it.

Polly Trout says

Korten reads like George Lakoff rolling on a tab of ecstasy: American society is gripped by a polarized

culture war between Empire (what Lakoff would call the Patriarchal Authoritarians) and the Earth Community (Nurturing Parents) -- and the good guys are definitely going to win, any second now.

Here's the polarized divide as Korten sees it. In the worldview of Empire, life is hostile and competitive, humans are flawed and dangerous, order is maintained through a dominator hierarchy, we must compete or die, and power, masculinity, and individualism are core values. In the Earth Community, life is supportive and cooperative, humans have many possibilities, order is maintained through partnership, we cooperate and live, we love life, we defend the rights of all, and we are gender balanced. These "competing narratives" are locked in a winner takes all armageddon struggle: if Empire wins, we all die, and if Earth Community wins, we will all live.

This reminds me of the opening paragraphs of Walter Kaufmann's Prologue to his translation of "I and Thou" by Martin Buber:

"Men's world is manifold, and his attitudes are manifold. What is manifold is often frightening because it is not neat and simple. Men prefer to forget how many possibilities are open to them. They like to be told that there are two worlds and two ways. This is comforting because it is so tidy. Almost always one way turns out to be common and the other is celebrated as superior. Those who tell of two ways and praise one are recognized as prophets or great teachers. They save men from confusion and hard choices. They offer a single choice that is easy to make because those who do not take the path that is commended to them live a wretched life.... Not all simplicity is wise. But a wealth of possibilities breeds dread. Hence those who speak of many possibilities speak to the few and are of help to even fewer. The wise offer only two ways, of which one is good, and thus help many."

Perhaps that is why Korten has a book contract and I have a blog: I don't think reality is tidy enough to reduce to two categories, and I'm suspicious of all dualism.

Korten recommends that we Earth Communitarians ignore the Empire and concentrate our energy on building an alternative reality based on our own values, secure in the faith that the Empire is doomed to self implode anyway (in 2012 I hear through the grapevine, although Korten does not give a specific date.)

I personally advocate a toolbox approach to social change: we need to have a flexible array of responses and tailor our response to the situation at hand. Problem solving, like ethics, is contextual. Sometimes ignoring the status quo and building alternative structures is the best plan, but sometimes we need to work to reform existing structures, and sometimes an existing structure will be so dangerous that we need to focus attention on defanging that system, bringing it down or at least doing what we can to cripple it so that the oppressed people in its shadow have time to regroup for the next battle.

It would be lovely if Korten were right. My worldview is very much aligned with his Earth Community, and I do what I can to fight the evil empire. But I don't believe the good guys always win, especially before they buy guns, as the Zapatistas discovered. Returning to Kaufman's essay, he continues:

"Mundus vult decipi: the world wants to be deceived. The truth is too complex and frightening; the taste for the truth is an acquired taste that few acquire.

Not all deceptions are palatable. Untruths are too easy to come by, too quickly exploded, too cheap and ephemeral to give lasting comfort. Mundus vult decipi: but there is a hierarchy of deceptions.

Near the bottom of the ladder is journalism: a steady stream of irresponsible distortions that most people find refreshing although on the morning after, or at least within a week, it will be stale and flat.

On a higher level we find fictions that men eagerly believe, regardless of the evidence, because they gratify

some wish.

Near the top of the ladder we encounter curious mixtures of untruth and truth that exert a lasting fascination on the intellectual community."

I would place Korten at the top of the ladder.

Alex says

Giving Thanks to Inspiration

Alex Knight

David Korten, long-time global justice activist, co-founder of Yes! Magazine, and author of such books as *When Corporations Rule the World*, lays out the fundamental crossroads facing the world in his 2006 book *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. In response to global climate change, war, oil scarcity, persistent racism and sexism and many other mounting challenges, Korten argues we must recognize these as symptoms of a larger system of Empire, so that we might move in a radically different direction of equality, ecological sustainability, and cooperation, which he terms Earth Community. This is a powerful and important book, which excels in overviewing the big picture of threats facing our ecosphere and our communities at the hands of global capitalism¹, and translating this into the simplest and most accessible language so we might all do something about it. It's pretty much anti-capitalism for the masses. And it has the power to inspire many of us to transform our lives and work towards the transformation of society.

Capitalism and Empire

Of course, Korten has made the strategic decision to avoid pointing the finger at "capitalism" as such in order to speak to an American public which largely still confuses the term as equivalent to "freedom" or "democracy." In fact the "C" word is rarely mentioned in the book, almost never without some sort of modifier as in "corporate capitalism" or "predatory capitalism", as if those weren't already features of the system as a whole. Instead, Korten names "Empire" as the culprit responsible for our global economic and ecological predicament, which is defined as a value-system that promotes the views that "Humans are flawed and dangerous", "Order by dominator hierarchy", "Compete or die", "Masculine dominant", etc. (32).

Korten explains that Empire, "has been a defining feature of the most powerful and influential human societies for some five thousand years, [and:] appropriates much of the productive surplus of society to maintain a system of dominator power and elite competition. Racism, sexism, and classism are endemic features" (25). In this way the anarchist concept of the State is repackaged as a transcendent human tendency, which has more to do with conscious decision-making and maturity level than it does with political power. While this compromise does limit the book's effectiveness in offering solutions later on, it does speak in a language more familiar to the vast non-politicized majority of Americans, and may have the potential to unify a larger movement for change.

Whatever you want to call the system, the danger it presents to the planet is now clear. Korten spells out the grim statistics: "Fossil fuel use is five times what it was [in 1950:], and global use of freshwater has tripled... the [Arctic:] polar ice cap has thinned by 46 percent over twenty years... [while we've seen:] a steady increase over the past five decades in severe weather events such as major hurricanes, floods, and droughts. Globally there were only thirteen severe events in the 1950s. By comparison, seventy-two such events

occurred during the first nine years of the 1990s" (59-60). If this destruction continues, it's uncertain if the Earth will survive.

This ecological damage is considered alongside the social damage of billions living without clean water or adequate food, as well as the immense costs of war and genocide. But Korten understands that the danger is relative to where you stand in the social hierarchy - the system creates extreme poverty for many, and an extreme wealth for a few others. He explains how the system is based on a deep inequality that is growing ever worse, "In the 1990s, per capita income fell in fifty-four of the world's poorest countries... At the other end of the scale, the number of billionaires worldwide swelled from 274 in 1991 to 691 in 2005" (67). The critical point that these few wealthy elites wield excessive power and influence within the system to stop or slow necessary reform could be made more clearly, but at least the book exposes the existence of this upper class, who are usually quite effective at hiding from public scrutiny and outrage over the suffering they are causing.²

Earth Community - Growing a Revolution

Standing at odds with the bastions of Empire is what David Korten calls "Earth Community," a "higher-order" value-system promoting the views of, "Cooperate and live," "Love life", "Defend the rights of all", "Gender balanced", etc. (32). These values are elaborated to describe a counter-force to the dominant paradigm of society that seeks to replace it. "Earth Community, which emphasizes the demonstrated human capacity for caring, compassion, cooperation, partnership, and community in the service of life, assumes a capacity for responsible self-direction and self-organization and thereby the possibility of creating radically democratic organizations and societies" (33). It's immediately obvious that these values stand in direct opposition to the self-interested, competitive and top-down capitalist order that now stands over the entire planet.

In an era when "TINA - There Is No Alternative" (to capitalism)³ remains the dominant political-economic viewpoint, at least in the U.S., it's this clear contrast between the two fundamental directions of Empire and Earth Community which is the book's main strength. The crisis-laden society we live in today is rightfully understood as not a result of destiny, but merely one possibility that we have the power to overturn through our individual and collective actions.

Actually, Great Turning does one better and puts forward the controversial, though I think certainly correct, argument that the "corporate global economy" (capitalism) is facing unprecedented disruptions which will likely spell the end of its worldwide dominance, "forc[ing:] a restructuring in favor of local production and self-reliance" (70-71). The conditions bringing about this potentially monumental paradigm shift are pinpointed as peak oil,⁴ global warming, the decline of the U.S. Dollar, and the ineffectiveness of standard military strategy. As the editor of endofcapitalism.com, it makes me glad to see others writing about the limits to capitalist expansion, both ecological and social. However I would have hoped that as a veteran of the global justice movement Korten would have added to this outline of very real challenges to global capitalism at least a broad outline of how organized communities are consciously resisting and making progressive change possible. From labor to environmentalists to students to feminists to people of color to queer and trans communities and far beyond, people are involved in an active struggle to restore their dignity and create a better world, and despite a steady stream of propaganda to the contrary, in many ways these movements are winning.⁵

This book also lays out a vision for what a future society organized around the values of Earth Community would look like, from culture to economy to spiritual values and more. Economically, the proposals are put forward under the heading "Local Living Economies", and include such common-sense but radical ideas as

"Economic Democracy", "Human Scale", "Information and Technology Sharing", and "Fair and Balanced Trade" (342-45). It must be noted that Korten advocates the use of markets as "an essential and beneficial human institution", but only if they are thoroughly regulated to "assure an equitable distribution of ownership and income" (304).

Another key insight is the distinction made between the "fictional wealth" of bank accounts, stocks, bonds, derivatives and so forth which are the obsession of our current economy, and what Korten calls "real" wealth: "Real wealth consists of those things that have actual utilitarian or artistic value: food, land, energy, knowledge, technology, forests, beauty, and much else. The natural systems of the planet are the foundation of all real wealth, for we depend on them for our very lives" (68). By flipping the idea of wealth on its head, Korten shows that social and ecological benefit should be primary considerations in all economic decision-making. For the author, and for myself, the goal is to create a system that seeks to maximize these real forms of wealth, not the profits of a few large corporations and wealthy investors. Respecting this form of wealth would allow for dramatically different economic outcomes, for example after surveying the poverty and immense pollution created through Mountain-Top Coal Removal, we might decide that it made more sense to use sites such as Coal River Mountain, West Virginia to produce wind energy instead.⁶

Korten outlines the society we are working towards in such vivid language that it's worth quoting from him at length:

"We will know a society has succeeded when it matches the following description...

- There is a vibrant community life grounded in mutual trust, shared values, and a sense of connection. Risks of physical harm perpetrated by humans against humans through war, terrorism, crime, sexual abuse, and random violence are minimal. Civil liberties are secure even for the most vulnerable.
- All people have a meaningful and dignified vocation that contributes to the well-being of the larger community and fulfills their own basic needs for healthful food, clean water, clothing, shelter, transport, education, entertainment, and health care. Paid employment allows ample time for family, friends, participation in community and political life, healthful physical activity, learning, and spiritual growth.
- Intellectual life and scientific inquiry are vibrant, open, and dedicated to the development and sharing of knowledge and life-serving technologies that address society's priority needs.
- Families are strong and stable. Children are well nourished, receive a quality education, and live in secure and loving homes. Rates of suicide, divorce, abortion, and teenage pregnancy are low.
- Political participation and civic engagement are high, and people feel their political civic participation makes a positive difference. Persons in formal leadership positions are respected for their wisdom, integrity, and commitment to the public good.
- Forests, fisheries, waterways, the land, and the air are clean, healthy, and vibrant with the diversity of life. Mother's milk is wholesome and toxin free, and endangered species populations are in recovery.
- Physical infrastructure - including public transit, road, bridge, rail, water and sewerage systems, and electric power generation and transmission facilities - is well maintained, accessible to all, and adequate to demand" (297-98).

This kind of vision for the society we want is all too rarely discussed, but it should inform all our decisions - otherwise we can too easily be confined to false choices and distractions from the way forwards. This book acts as a beacon, illuminating the path we need to walk.

Limitations

In a book as ambitious as *The Great Turning*, there are bound to be parts that don't succeed. Perhaps the most problematic ideas in the book come from the section on "Culture and consciousness." Here David Korten lays out a system of five "orders" of consciousness, from the lowest, "Magical Consciousness", up to the

"Fifth Order: Spiritual Consciousness" (54). This hierarchy of consciousness is used to explain that those who favor Empire tend to think in terms of either fantasies or in simple power terms, while those favoring Earth Community are much more complex thinkers, incorporating concern for others and concern for the future into their decisions. It's an analysis that appears relatively benign at first, but in the end is sadly limited by the problematic liberal belief that we must win a "culture war" against the other half of society which is perceived as hopelessly ignorant. This line of thought fits in nicely with Red-State/Blue-State politics and the essentially classist stereotype that Southerners and rural Americans are backwards and uneducated. As long as progressives allow politicians and the media to convince us of the enormity of this "cultural divide", forward motion on the path to a just and sustainable world will be held hostage by partisan bickering.

Another direction, based on overcoming differences and emphasizing unity of interests would be far more strategic. This can be made much easier by dropping the obsession with "culture and consciousness" and talking specifically about class, wealth, and power. Not that necessary and potentially divisive issues like race, gender, or sexuality should be overlooked! But when we begin to study the ways that most everyone, including the vast majority of Americans, are being victimized by capitalism, it becomes much easier to locate the true enemy. For one example, recall that upwards of 95% of calls, emails and faxes to Congress in advance of the vote on the \$700 billion Wall St. bailout last September were strongly negative. Here we can find an immediate rallying point against entrenched financial elites (who were able to buy the politicians into passing the bailout package over public opposition).

The "five orders of consciousness" analysis is further weakened by its apparent ageism. It's bad enough to suggest that supporting the values of Earth Community is a function of "maturity", which implies that education and age are prerequisites for human decency. But the book goes one step further and actually assigns age numbers to each of the five levels of the consciousness ladder. Level 4, "Cultural Consciousness", which is associated with having "the capacity to question the dysfunctional cultural premises of Empire," is specifically declared the domain of adults. "A Cultural Consciousness is rarely achieved before age thirty," states page 46, in direct contradiction to Abbie Hoffman's warning not to trust anyone older than the big three-oh. Speaking as someone under thirty, I have to question the notion that older folks are more inclined to support justice than my generation. Ageist statements like this have the effect of invisibilizing youth and student activism, which has always been at the forefront of progressive change. At this very moment, hundreds of students in California are organizing rallies and occupations of their school buildings in order to save public education from unprecedented tuition increases.⁷ I'd like to see the over-thirty crowd take such inspiring action for change!

A final limitation of the book is the lack of strategy it puts forward for achieving the "Great Turning" itself. As described by Korten, this enormous transformation will occur mostly by people elevating their consciousnesses and living differently - "a turning from relations of domination to relations of partnership based on organizing principles discerned from the study of healthy living systems" (295). But what steps must be taken to transform these relations are not adequately explained. Instead there are vague passages such as, "As communities of congruence grow and connect, they advance the process of liberation from the cultural trance of Empire and offer visible manifestations of the possibilities of Earth Community. Individually and collectively they become attractors of the life energy that Empire has co-opted - thus weakening Empire and strengthening Earth Community in an emergent process of displacement and eventual succession" (317). It sounds good, but how is that supposed to actually happen?

If history is any guide, Empire doesn't just fade away when something better comes along. Overcoming the system will require confronting the real forces of power that dominate our lives, and taking power back for our communities. Take for example the Civil Rights Movement. Black folks in the South had been struggling

for freedom since before slavery ended and continued to resist Jim Crow laws through the 1960s, when legal segregation was finally defeated (though de facto segregation and racism continue today). It wasn't enough to set up separate Black-owned schools or restaurants as refuge from the white supremacist realities of America, although this helped and is a positive step. Taking down legal segregation required direct confrontations with power - sit-ins at "Whites Only" restaurants, legal action which brought about *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, voter registration drives, and many, many other manifestations of mass-based popular struggle. To take down global capitalism and U.S. imperialism, the actual institutions behind what Korten calls Empire, any viable strategy will require a worldwide and multi-faceted, long-term movement for democratic change. This movement already exists, thankfully, so let's celebrate it and talk about how to strengthen it to achieve our common goals!

Conclusion - Giving Thanks for Life and Struggle

The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community is a much-needed book, which accomplishes a surprising amount despite its limitations. We can all be thankful that David Korten has compiled such wisdom from many different sources of inspiration in order to present a holistic vision of the world we want to lose and the world we need to gain. By translating radical concepts into everyday language, Korten widens the appeal of the fundamental transformation of society that is needed.

Moreover, he points towards a common-sense, radical politics by highlighting the strong majority of Americans supporting progressive change. For example, he quotes from various polls to show that, "Nearly nine out of ten U.S. adults (87 percent) believe we need to treat the planet as a living system and that we should have more respect and reverence for nature... Seventy-six percent of Americans reject the idea that the United States should play the role of world police officer, and 80 percent feel it is playing that role more than it should be... Eighty-eight percent distrust corporate executives, and 90 percent want new corporate regulations and tougher enforcement of existing laws." And, "More than two in three would like to see a return to a simpler way of life with less emphasis on consumption and wealth (68 percent)" (332-33). This is the common ground held by Americans that should be seen as the base for moving in the direction of Earth Community. If the United States can transform itself, then surely every other nation will follow.

This Thanksgiving, let us be thankful for our friends, families and communities, as well as our spiritualities for enriching our lives. And let us be grateful for the planet which sustains all that we do and all that we work towards. But let us also give thanks for those who speak and act boldly for justice and sustainability. From the generations that came before us and won so many victories, like ending segregation so that we might strive for unity, to the new generation currently struggling to save education in California and clean energy in Appalachia, millions have been struggling so that we might continue working towards a future worth living in. By giving thanks, we honor that challenge.

1 - "What is Capitalism?" <http://endofcapitalism.com/about/2-wh...>

2 - The "ruling class" is exposed by Paul Kivel in his 2004 book *You Call This a Democracy? Who Benefits, Who Pays and Who Really Decides*

3 - See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_is...

4 - <http://energybulletin.net/primer>

5 - Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber has written about the surprising success of grassroots movements for change in his essay "The Shock of Victory." Online at <http://endofcapitalism.com/2008/01/31...>

6 - <http://www.coalriverwind.org/> and <http://www.mountainjusticesummer.org/>

7 - <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2009...>

Dave says

One of the many books out there that basically gets what's wrong but doesn't go far enough with solutions. Although it's a little New Agey, similar to Charles Eisenstein's stuff, he at least does a pretty good job trying to make his explanations tolerable to different audiences. He points out the need for balance between science and religion, liberals and conservatives, competition and cooperation, "the feminine" and "the masculine" (I generally find these good female and bad male stereotypes that feminists use really irritating), etc. The solutions he does offer are probably okay for a temporary transition stage but even that's questionable in my opinion considering how much it would take to totally transform our industrial infrastructure. That might be more like jumping off a cliff while holding hands and singing. We're probably better off just phasing it all out as is. That's not exactly the most popular idea though, I'm aware.

Anyway, it's just a lot of words to get through for a relatively mediocre analysis and obscure solutions without any way to make them happen besides "changing our stories" and awakening "higher consciousness." He actually spends a lot of time defining the different levels of consciousness as he sees it, which of course puts himself in the position of enlightened Zen master, as well as things like what's required to be "fully human" and aligning ourselves with "creation's purpose", as if anyone can ever say for sure what that is. It's things like this that really bother me. He also comes out against the idea that free will is an illusion, pointing to quantum physics as evidence of choice. Personally, I don't mind the body as machine metaphor that so many are trying to distance themselves from or thinking about intelligent behavior as just complicated reactions based on programming. If free will is just an illusion, which seems almost undeniable to me, does that really change anything? It's not like there weren't any harmonious traditional cultures that believed in destiny. And it's not like they refused to discuss decisions because "who cares? God's already decided" or something. I mean, I understand that seeing things different ways can have an influence on behavior but a lot of these arguments people are getting into over these things are pretty pointless, which he actually seems to agree with based on other things he said.

Then, despite understanding the need for balance in other areas, he pretty much condemns anger and violence as inherently irrational responses to things, emphasizing a need to just "walk away" from empire. Because clearly that always works out so well for people. And one reason he gives for being hopeful that the majority will awaken to higher levels of consciousness is that a higher percentage of the population is aging, implying that we have more wise elders. Sorry but I don't find that encouraging at all. With how many members of that generation watch Fox News all day and consider it a sacred responsibility to always vote against their grandchildren's futures we should probably take more comfort in them starting to die off than anything. And just to mention one more issue I had, he actually glorifies some accomplishments of empires as great contributors to the progress of culture, democracy and "civilization" (he should know that civilization does not mean peaceful society even if that is how most people use it), then mentions how these discoveries coincide with ancient indigenous understandings. So why are you giving atrocities credit for what clearly could be figured out without them? I was just really back and forth with this guy. So he has good things to say but it's not exactly the masterpiece that others claim.

Kate Lawrence says

I participated in a five-session discussion series on this book. It gives a good overview of how we can respond positively to the many changes that will be brought about in the not-too-distant future by a deteriorating environment and peak oil. Korten has a background in international development and has clearly

thought about these issues over many years. Drawing on the ideas expressed in *The Chalice and the Blade*, by Riane Eisler, about dominator and partnership societies, he points out that the dominator model, fraught with economic injustice and war, has only been in place for about the last 5,000 years, out of the 200,000 years humans have been around on the planet. We had more peaceful and egalitarian societies earlier, and can develop them again if we have the will to do so. "We are the ones we've been waiting for," he asserts.

Bill Scarvie says

This book changed my life. Before reading it, I was in despair over the likely future of my twelve grandchildren. Global climate change carries the threat of massive human dislocation, widespread drought and famine, and given the current condition of world politics, the prospect of violent conflict over land and water. Peak oil carries the threat of financial chaos and violent conflict over dwindling fossil fuel resources. Finally the official position of the Bush administration was to ignore climate change, use military force to encircle and protect US interests in fossil fuel supplies, and to broaden the economic inequities that are the root cause of terrorism and revolution.

Korten's lucid analysis of the organizing principles of Empire--relationships of dominance and submission, social Darwinism, social order through actual or threatened violence, economic stratification, and perpetual growth--were an eye-opener. Clearly written and well-organized, he demonstrates that, contrary to popular mythology, humans are capable of organizing themselves in many different ways. Dominance and hierarchy is one possibility. Cooperation and partnership is another.

His analysis owes a great deal to the work of Riane Eisler *The Chalice and the Blade*, which he readily acknowledges. His contribution lies in the recognition that culture, regardless of its organizing principles, is a product of the imagination: It is a human construct. All cultures depend on formational stories, i.e. myths, to validate and perpetuate themselves. It is through these stories, told repeatedly via the organs of cultural institutions, that a people transmits the values and principles of society to future generations. Knowing this, a strategy of change emerges: *If we want to change the future, we must change the story*. We must create and transmit new stories, validating and promoting an alternative to the culture of Empire; that is, a culture of Earth Community.

Earth Community, according to Korten (and Eisler, who calls it the Partnership Society) is organized according to principles of partnership: cooperation, mutualism, and equity. Earth Community encourages people to achieve their full potential, and it supports their growth. It strikes a balance between individual and community interests, and it recognizes the dignity and worth of every living being.

Herein lies my hope for my grandchildren's future. Earth Community is the world I wish for them. I have dedicated my retirement to affirming and promoting the Great Turning. I invite all to join me.

Meghan Humphreys says

I'm an environmentalist tree-hugger. It's what I do all day, every day. But this book was too woo-woo for me, if you know what I mean. I believe there are those of us, especially here in Portland that could band together to create Korten's "earth communities". But it's, sadly, going to take a major crisis like declining oil supply or other catastrophe to make it happen. And we're just as likely, given Americans' penchant for guns and self-centeredness, to devolve into Mad Max-style Darwinism.

I think Korten's just too judgmental to really get people behind his ideas at this time. Maybe ten years from now, he'll be considered a genius. Or his book will be out of print. Not sure which.

Daniel says

Pretty good. Does a good job documenting the course of human evolution and the choices made for culture along the way. Provides a good framework on empire. Great job on applying psychological, biological, and physics to cultural/politics/economics. Leaves some operational definitions unclear but you pick it up eventually through the supporting text. Seems to have a slight misunderstanding of atheism and a couple of questions remain but you can tell he has evolved his views through time and has a good foundation. Operationally defines the political spectrum kind of wrong but it's a common error and not that consequential. Gives plenty of compare and contrast examples of what he calls earth community (which is functionally self determination small cities operating on the principles of sustainability, family, and justice) versus empire. A lot of good ideas and definitely helped me hone some concepts and strengthen cross discipline theories.

Taylor says

Yes! I support this book whole heartedly! I feel that it is one of those books that everybody should read... Korten gives a historical review of the last 5000 years in which we have been a patriarchal society. Then he visions about the direction we could be/are going in... which is very hopeful and affected by each of our lives and decisions. Over all, it is just really well written, inspiring, and powerful!

Rebecca Hecking says

I once had lunch with Korten at a conference. He's a nice guy, very soft spoken in person and a great speaker and writer. The premise of the book is completely valid in my opinion, and I would parallel his "empire" to Riane Eisler's dominator societies and his "Earth community" to her partnership societies. I am less optimistic than Korten but that's neither here nor there.

Rochelle says

Bill recommended this book. I listened to it during a 1600 mile car trip from Detroit, MI to McLean, Va via Toronto; Freeport, ME; and New York City. It was very good. I've been trying to find time to go back and listen to it again ever since. I haven't felt that I could give it the proper attention yet. One day I will!
