

This is not going to be a lecture, but—I hope—a discussion. The theme I am proposing is “What are the consequences of humankind becoming a predominantly species?”

In terms of the crudest and most simple-minded of definitions, that of primary residence in conurbations officially listed as ‘cities’, we—that is, —passed the 50-percent mark some time last year or this year. See, on this point, the of September this year. So we will be talking about a

Cornish tin-mines, or the pioneering modern iron metallurgy of Coalbrookdale, and most of the early spinning machines worked by nearby waterpower were conspicuously rural.

Another point that tends to get forgotten, though stressed long ago by Lewis Mumford in his *The City in History*, was that many premodern cities, notably in the Western Middle Ages, had lots of green fields within their walls. Urban demographic density increased markedly during and after the Renaissance. Thus the term `city` can be tricky when used in far-ranging historical comparisons: its sense is not entirely stable.

Other aspects of *Chinese* history are distinctly wobbly. On the famous John Snow, who cracked the problem of the first level of the transmission of cholera, Edward Glaeser writes: «John Snow, a founder of epidemiology, had his great breakthrough in 19th-century London when the city itself provided the information he needed to understand cholera.» Presumably he means the presence of the famous contaminated well, whose function he grasped -- namely that the vibrio vectors — the vibrio is a bacterium — were borne by its water, and that he then persuaded the authorities to shut. He did not, strictly speaking, «understand cholera» as such, but rather the first level of its transmission. There is a second: the vibrio carried along by the water has itself to carry and emit a toxin if it is to transmit the disease. As an argument for the release of creative power by *China* as such this passage is a rhetorical bypassing of scientific method. Coastal China suffered from Bengal cholera at about the same time as London; in fact there were several successive attacks. It also had a number of quite large coastal cities. For example, Shanghai at this time already had close to the annual tonnage of shipping that went through London. No one in China solved the problem of the primary mode of transmission, for the most likely reason that Snow`s manner of thinking in a culture that had already had close to two centuries of scientific revolution was significantly, if not enormously, in advance of the Chinese style of thinking about such matters, and this was in essence a cultural matter. Proper scientific thinking has to at least try to control all these major variables, for all that in the humanities, as history is, this is extremely tricky and virtually never entirely possible.

Following this sketch of the at times recklessly stated and inadequately qualified pro-urban

become to have animal colleagues and companions. Additionally, an awareness of wild animals. My wife and I lived in the Australian bush for about 13 years, and there one certainly also develops a strong sense of what, for shorthand, can be called the `minds`, as well as the habits, of different animals, even at times individual ones. We knew some of our local kangaroos and wombats by name, though I can't easily imagine doing this with members of the two local species of lethal snakes, browns and tigers, who could, if we had been unlucky

They say to you
 whatever is in your mind —
 the white sands.

Alamogordo was where the first atomic bomb was tested during the second World War. The dunes are curiously hypnotic, virtually without vegetation, like a blank sheet.

They say to you
 is in mind —
 the white sands.

That's what sands are like.

The second one was written around 2003 in the bushland of New South Wales, among the casuarina trees and eucalypts, after rain had stopped falling:

Damp needles, leaves — underfoot.
 Looking round. On the path behind me
 was anyone ever there?

This is a disconcerting sensation, almost as if the past had completely vanished and one's past self along with it. If one has ever had a past self. No footprints are visible.

Damp needles, leaves — underfoot.
 Looking round. On the path behind me
 was anyone — —there?

Let's have a five-minute break for coffee, and then discuss our views of this complex agenda of issues.