

A Short History of Progress

(Ronald Wright)

Reading Response Journal

DIRECTIONS: Write a separate journal response to each of the following. Length for each journal response is minimum 300 words, but you are encouraged to go deeper and to write more.

Plan to complete the five journal responses in the order given, and to write them during the course of your reading (rather than completing the book first and then returning to the writing).

(5 marks each = 20 marks)

Note that each of these journal writings is an opportunity to explore and examine a particular idea. They will not be fully formed arguments that you produce but rather provide a basis for developing them. Be engaged. Own your feelings and opinions. Show your reasoning.

1. Gauguin's Questions

Record the questions that he poses and discuss the "myth of progress" and Wright's premise that "[it] has an internal logic that can lead beyond reason to catastrophe" (5).

2. The Great Experiment

This lecture deals with the role of specialization in the history of progress. Examine the struggle between Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons and explain why, in Wright's estimation, the bad guys one and how this victory helped to set up "the progress trap."

3. Fool's Paradise

Especially instructive, this lecture explores the role of violence in the evolution of civilization and, as such, is heavily ironic. As Wright argues, "Violence is as old as man, but civilizations commit it with a deliberation that lends it special horror" (73). Trace and comment on the arguments that the author assembles in support of our special dedication to violent behavior to solve our problems.

4. Pyramid Schemes

An investigation of wealth and power, this lecture explains how concentrations of wealth migrate upwards, so that the "only way onward is to keep wringing new loans from nature and humanity" (84). Choose a civilization and explain the reasons for its demise.

5. The Rebellion of the Tools

This final lecture offers an especially stark view of the future, suggesting that little time is left to us to recover control of our world before we surrender control to technology. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Wright's arguments? Offer a personal reflection of your own, giving reasons for your position.

Note: Your journal entries are due on the first day of class in September. (approx. 1,500 words or 3 typed pages). While this is the only required reading selection, the expectation is that students in AP Language will take time in the summer to read widely.