

Death Culture

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Neoliberalism is *Death Culture*.

Extreme wealth inequality, systemic racism, and white supremacy are *Death Culture*.

Predatory Capitalism is *Death Culture*. This includes Wall Street and nearly all major corporations.

The Republican Party is *Death Culture*. (The Democratic Party is *Death Culture Lite*.)

Donald Trump and his minions are *Death Culture*.

The Pentagon budget approved every year by Congress is *Death Culture*. Hell, way too many of the laws passed by Congress are *Death Culture*. The same applies to the Executive and Judicial branches of government: too much of what has been and continues to be done resonates as *Death Culture*.

The American “way of life” is *Death Culture*.

We — meaning humanity — are in the middle of a Mass Extinction Event, where Life on Earth is being snuffed out. So far, that has meant only some species. Ultimately, however, it means all life, nearly every species, including homo sapiens (that’s us). Billions of currently breathing humans don’t realize this, of course, since our heads haven’t been on the chopping block yet. We are still in the “bloom” of dramatic population rise. But that may be reversed quite suddenly, and soon.

This is the sixth time science knows about (based on verifiable evidence) where Life itself has been in serious trouble. Below is a list of the initial five Extinctions:

1. Ordovician-Silurian Extinction	440 million years ago	86% loss of all life
2. Late Devonian Extinction	365 million years ago	75% loss of all life
3. Permian-Triassic Extinction	252 million years ago	96% loss of all life
4. Triassic-Jurassic Extinction	201 million years ago	80% loss of all life
5. Cretaceous-Paleogene Extinction	66 million years ago	60-76% loss of all life

Each of those five Extinction Events had a different cause. In fairness, science isn’t totally certain what the causes were. Various theories have been offered for

each of those five *Great Die-Offs*, based on the geological evidence, but the explanations are still in process and debated among scientists. In other words, we're still guessing at what happened. All we know for sure is that these Extinction Events did, in fact, occur.

The sixth *Great Die-Off* is current, ongoing, and ramping up. It's been named *The Holocene Extinction*. That term comes from the Greek language and translates as "entirely recent." We might as well call it *The Anthropogenic Extinction*. Why? Because *we're* the cause — human beings. *The Holocene Extinction* began roughly 12,000 years ago with the arising of what we call "human civilization," which is a profoundly ironic term for something that's turning out to be so deadly.

Throughout most of the two-million-year history of our hominid ancestors, as well as most of the 200,000-year history of humans essentially like ourselves, the sum total of our collective activity was relatively beneficent and had only minimally damaging effects on the extraordinary presence of organic life on this Goldilocks planet. There simply weren't enough of us to do too much damage. Both individually and collectively, humans didn't possess sufficient power in manipulating (messing with) the physical environment to do much real harm to the Ecosphere. Over the past four centuries, and especially the last two, however, that has changed.

First off, there are now so many more of us. When I was born in 1949, global human population was roughly 2.5 billion. Now in 2020, our numbers have *tripled* to 7.5 billion. We're setting ourselves up for a very hard fall. On top of there being more of us, our collective human power to alter the environment has grown exponentially. Historically, we mined coal by sending human workers into deep shaft mines. Now we use industrial machinery to lop off the tops of mountains.

OK, my use of the terms "harm" and "damage" to evaluate human impacts on the environment clearly reflect my own bias, as well as a certain conservative sentimentality. Apparently I feel that the way things were is better than the way they're becoming. Yes, guilty as charged. By contrast, the earth and nature are not sentimental. Sentimentality is a *human* experience linked with habit and attachment. From where I sit, Gaia doesn't appear to grieve over clubbed baby seals, endangered polar bears, diminishing bee colonies, or the extinction of any species. If the earth has its own consciousness and/or agenda, whatever it is probably doesn't translate easily, and certainly not directly, into human terms. So, I apologize if I'm being presumptuous.

Taking this a step further, I realize that "living in harmony with nature" — a shibboleth within the mid-20th-century environmental movement — is impossible. No species lives in perfect harmony with nature. Not even close. The very act of existence changes the equation by altering the balance of interconnections. All species challenge the Ecosphere, and none of them (except us) worries about it for one second. For most species, however,

nature absorbs the effects and, with time, realigns. Balance is restored, one way or another. When the environment can't absorb the effects, because the cumulative impact is too severe, the Ecosphere adapts. That's what climate change is about — the earth is adapting to what humans are doing to it.

In a crude (and admittedly human) metaphor, it's as if the earth now has a fever (that's global warming). Fever is among the body's natural responses to infection, and we (human beings) *are* that infection. In a related analogy, the COVID-19 pandemic, especially here in America, is like the sick earth taking an antibiotic. Antibiotics are medicines used to combat bacterial infections. Viewed from that perspective, the COVID coronavirus is the earth medicine to combat the bacteria, which happens to be humanity.

If humans can't or won't choose to reduce our cumulative impact on the Ecosphere, then the earth will force us to do so. If necessary, it will remove us. That's what's beginning to happen now, and the evidence implies that the threat of our extinction will accelerate quickly. How much and how fast are still contentious, but it's getting harder and harder for people to remain unaware or in denial about what's happening.

I admit that our human tendency to choose illusion over reality, especially in regard to our most cherished illusions, lobbies against people getting the memo. Nonetheless, the current spate of hurricanes and floods, fires and droughts, are encouraging a certain percentage of those who have until now been in denial to move toward acceptance of this new and frightening reality. Over the coming years, as all the natural disruptions coming down the pike increase exponentially, that trickle of converts may become a torrent.

In civilization, whatever contributes to this threat to our continued survival — policies, practices, actions, philosophies, beliefs, attitudes, habit, norms, etc. — amounts to *Death Culture*.

Every time I see another ad for new cars or techno-toys that encourage more unrestrained consumption, I think, "*There it is again — Death Culture.*"

Every time I hear discussion of "economic growth" (the belief in infinite growth is a basic tenet of capitalism, despite the obvious contradiction of our living in a world with necessary limits), I think, "*There it is again — Death Culture.*"

OK, I understand that pursuit of self-interest for personal fulfillment and individual happiness is always juxtaposed against devotion to the greater good. Still, whenever I see further examples of people choosing themselves over all of us together (and I see this every day, even in myself), I think, "*There it is again — Death Culture.*"

I wonder if there's any realistic chance of our changing in time to save ourselves. I guess we'll find out.