

CLIMATE TRAUMA
RECONCILIATION & RECOVERY



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CONTENTS

Chapter One: INITIATION ~ The Great Dying

Chapter Two: TRIAL BY FIRE ~ Generation Trauma

Chapter Three: Ecological Grief & Climate Catharsis

Chapter Four: The Radical Path of Climate Truth & Reconciliation

**Chapter Five: Gaian rEvolution: Entering & Shaping the
Gaianthropocene**

Chapter Six: ONE EARTH INDIVISIBLE: Regenerating Human Nature

PROLOGUE: B.C.//A.C.



Before & After Coronavirus

“Truly the blessed gods have proclaimed a most beautiful secret:

death comes not as a curse but as a blessing to men.”

- Ancient Greek Epitaph from Eleusis

The Great Dying is upon us...

April 1, 2020. Snohomish County, WA. The world as we knew it is no more. A global lockdown has taken hold. The human race has been grounded indefinitely. Lonely death waits at the door, skies emptied of planes once more, streets mostly emptied of cars. Families spending time together, planting gardens together, and playing in the parks at safe distances from other families. Baby boomers are seeking closure with their surviving elders, not waiting till it's too late, as we are banned from the hospital when our loved ones die.

The most death-phobic culture ever *forced* now to live death-informed lives.¹ It is bittersweet, walking through a cloud of general sadness during a time of great loss, yet finding healing balm in authentic experiences of profound joy and re-vivified love. Collectively, this is a new kind of awareness, a new sense of interpenetrating interdependence, and it is tinged with newly deepened feelings of wonder, awe, and appreciation.

¹ *Ed. note:* it was not yet apparent at the time I penned this, but it turned out the most death-phobic among us, the maniacally death-phobic, would refuse to don masks, as to do so would require them to honestly acknowledge the closeness of death, which they're psychologically ill-equipped to do.

With death at the door, life deepens. Love deepens. We are compelled to find meaning.

Welcome to Planetary Hospice...

* * *

In the Fall of 2013, I had the great good fortune to enter training as a care giver with Zen Hospice in the Mission District of San Francisco. The hospice was founded by Shunryu Suzuki as a response to the aids crisis in the 1980s, and that lineage of dedicated service deeply informed the training. As a lifelong eco-activist attorney and dharma practitioner, I had walked away from that world at 55 years old to study ecopsychology, hoping to figure out why our culture is marching like lemmings to Armageddon, while at the same time answering a felt need to deepen my own spiritual understanding. I chose the California Institute of Integral Studies in part due to the proximity of the school to Zen Hospice, in the sad heart of the Mission District.

At that same time, I was taking a class on the Psychology of Death & Dying at CIIS, taught by a wonderful palliative care doctor and writer from Italy by way of New York, Alessandra Strada. It was at her prompting that I decided to write a final paper for the class on an idea I'd been harboring at a safe distance in the back of my mind for many years: the sense that we were somehow entering an era of '*planetary hospice*.' It wasn't so much a well-formed idea, really, as it was a feeling, an intuitive whisper from some deeper wisdom inside our collective consciousness.

The time had obviously come to give it shape and form, to bring it into the light, and let it find expression through the coarse filter of my legally trained, linguistically inclined mind. When I finally finished the hospice training and completed my term paper, "Planetary Hospice: Rebirthing Planet Earth," in January of 2014, both Alessandra and my ecopsychology mentor, Craig Chalquist, urged me to make it into a book. However, I was already working on another book at the time, on a quite different topic (spiritual purification), and preparing to teach a course on the three turnings of the wheel of dharma at CIIS (the same school, by the way, that Alan Watts taught at, giving me something to put on my gravestone now). As the prospect of writing another book seemed untimely, I offered instead to distribute the paper for informal peer review, soliciting critiques from some of the luminaries in the field.

One of those luminaries was Joanna Macy, a living inspiration to my work, an adjunct at the time at CIIS, and progenitor of "the great unravelling" narrative by which degeneration and regeneration are simultaneous forces in our brave new world. Much to my surprise, Joanna published the paper on her website for the work that reconnects, and it went viral in the Spring of 2014. It was translated into German, French, and Chinese, and I began receiving requests for interviews and appearances on a weekly basis, culminating with a presentation to an international symposium of educators and psychologists sponsored by His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Mind & Life Institute at Harvard in November of that year.

For me, all of this was a kind of field research. I certainly did not view my thesis as fully developed at that time, as I still hadn't gotten quite to the root of the problem (an obsession of my slow, but thorough, intellect), nor had I yet conjured a 'climate cure' — though the obvious resonance of the ideas I was expressing convinced me I was at least on the right track.

After a warm reception at the Mind & Life Institute's symposium in Cambridge, which happens to be my father's birthplace, I decided to give the idea of a book my best efforts. I was generously provided with a writer's retreat in the shadow of Pikes Peak, and began a process of plugging into the Earth every morning through non-dual awareness meditations on my cushion, channeling whatever arose in that transpersonal space onto the virtual page.

Not even a third of the way into the book, it became quite clear to me that Americans, in particular, were not ready for planetary hospice. As an advocate for climate sanity, I was not interested in preaching to the choir of people who happened to agree with my world view. The book that came to me then, instead of *Planetary Hospice*, was a book about climate grief viewed through the lens of cultural trauma: *Climate Sense: Changing the Way We Think and Feel about Our Climate in Crisis* (2015). It's basically a self-help manual for people who are trying to work through the difficult emotions that come up when they begin to grasp the existential dimensions of the climate crisis.

My field work, meanwhile, continued apace. And with a big assist from Carolyn Baker, who would regularly invite me onto her weekly podcast "The Lifeboat Hour," the really big picture finally crystallized and came into focus for me one day in the mist of a steaming hot bath: what is happening to the planet, which western science has only recently discovered to be a holistic, living organism, is actually a new and unprecedented form of trauma.

Just as quantum mechanics was a game changer, and just as the Gaian world view is itself a game changer of Copernican significance, so too is the idea of collective trauma. We have only begun to learn about collective trauma since the end of World War II, due to the horrific scale of the Holocaust, which is closely associated with the acknowledgment and study of cultural trauma. Biospheric trauma, a synonym for climate trauma, represents a new form of collective trauma at a previously unconsidered scale. I knew immediately that the implications of this new taxonomy, or classification system, for traumatology were immense and at the heart of our collective climate crisis.

I rushed to publish my findings in the form of an academic paper that was featured in the peer-reviewed professional journal, *Ecopsychology*, and entitled "Climate Trauma: Towards A New Taxonomy of Traumatology" (2019). As wonky as that may sound, it went even more viral than the more provocatively entitled 2014 paper, and has had far more influence on serious people's thinking. It landed me almost overnight in the top one tenth of one percent of academic researchers worldwide, and was viewed somewhere in the neighborhood of 30,000 times in over 100 countries within a year of publication.² Publication of "Climate Trauma" even inspired the first ever online summit on collective trauma, organized by a renowned modern mystic from Austria, Thomas Hubl. The symposium took place over the course of nine days, and was attended by over 50,000 people in 170 countries (the second annual course was attended by close to 80,000 participants). My own advocacy on Gaia's behalf since that paper was published has been featured in such publications as the *New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, the *Financial Times* of London, and *Psychology Today*.

And then came the coronavirus. The first collectively experienced global trauma since the advent of the internet, and the resulting emergence of a new level of global interconnectedness and awareness. While Carl Jung was the first great thinker to really explore and characterize the idea of collective psyche, even presaging the discovery of a planetary organism with the theories of *Anima Mundi* and *Unus Mundus*, which he worked out with one of the fathers of quantum physics, Wolfgang Pauli, in the modern era we are directly experiencing our collective psyche through virtual media and pervasive interconnectivity. We humans, perhaps unique among all species, are now aware of, and immersed in, a global consciousness. There is a collective awareness that we plug into through our fingertips. And this is happening at the same time we are coming to understand that the planet is itself a living organism. And now, in this time of planetary crisis, in the midst of the biospheric trauma that claims 200 species every day, it appears that Gaia is speaking to us in perhaps the only language we have in common: mortality.

² The reason I can't be more precise is that the journal took the unprecedented step of making the paper freely available online, with my permission, due to its perceived relevance to our climate emergency.

It is eminently clear to me as I shelter in place here at America's Ground Zero for the pandemic, Snohomish County, WA, that the world has changed unalterably. There is the world before the coronavirus - "B.C." - and the much more death-informed world that awaits us after the virus has had its way - "A.C." In my 2014 paper, I talked about the apparent inevitability of a new "Great Dying," one where we ourselves may be witness to the human population dwindling, rather than continuing to expand exponentially, as part of the continuing acceleration of the sixth great extinction event in the planet's history.

This is exactly how such an era would be ushered in. From my perspective, this appears to be just the first wave of the Great Dying - a mere ripple, really, compared to what's still to come. As soon as the pandemic took hold of our world, my 2014 paper went viral again, as if resurrected. That's when I realized, as so many others obviously had begun to realize, that this is it. We humans, as a species, have crossed the threshold into planetary hospice.

* * *

And so it's time for me to write the book, I guess. I'm no longer sure who I'm writing too, however. I still think the vast majority of people, especially in my own culture, are not ready for the simple truths I am compelled to speak of by my connection to Earth. I strongly suspect my audience resides in the future - though I can't predict if it is a near or distant future. Still, the time has arrived for me to synthesize my thinking, writing, and research on this matter of great import. I have no idea how much longer I have left in this mortal coil. This is my testament, for what it is worth.

We have a stark choice now between our own eventual extermination or a near term transformation. Such a transformation of human culture and the global economy will not come about without a simultaneous shift in collective consciousness. Trauma always raises questions of identity, whether considered at the scale of the individual, a culture, or now with the climate crisis, at the scale of an entire species.

The choices we humans are making now - and will continue to make this decade and the next - in response to this spiritual emergency will determine whether we engender spiritual emergence, the messy rebirth (transmutation) of our species, or instead repeat the kind of Great Dying that once wiped out 95% of all life on the planet, and required 10 million years for the biosphere to recover. My purpose in writing this book is to offer guidance and succor to all who those natural healers and existential professionals in the world, now and in the future, who hear the cries of the Earth, together with all those who would advocate for climate sanity, so that we may attend Gaia's bedside and serve as her spiritual midwives in Planetary Hospice. Whether Gaia is now dying, just ill, or about to give birth is largely dependent on how we, as a species, connect with and within her psychelium (our shared psychosphere), respond to her vital signals, and attend to her needs. Each and every one of us has the potential to manifest as either a Gaian cancer cell or a cell that is being activated in her auto-immune system.

But before we embark on this shared path of deep and empathic contemplative healing, we will need to be clear on the setting for this spectacle. It's important to begin by acknowledging just what it is that has so fundamentally changed in the world we share. If we can begin by recognizing and accepting that tectonic shift, then understanding will flow forth from that sacred space of shared awareness and resonance. So please bear with me for just a moment, and then I promise we'll get started.

What has changed? We have.

We have changed.

I began following the science of climate change in 1985, at the beginning of the same AIDS crisis that gave rise to Zen Hospice. I have a background in science, having studied thermal and environmental engineering in college, and as environmental counsel to the City of Colorado Springs, part of my job was to monitor the daily publications of the National Academy of Sciences for anything relative to environmental concerns. It was in this capacity that I learned something that has never been fully appreciated. Years before Dr. James Hansen testified to Congress about “global warming,” the climate crisis began with the AIDS pandemic.

Does that surprise you? Because it really shouldn't.

You see, what is misleadingly referred to in popular media as the ‘ozone hole’ is not really a hole at all. The hole that opened up over the arctic was simply the point of greatest depletion of ozone, while in reality ozone was depleted across the entire troposphere. This exposed the entire biosphere to levels of ultra-violet radiation that had never been experienced in human timescales. For example, the United States was being exposed to levels of radiation that were 15-30% higher than humans had ever been exposed to prior to this sudden depletion. What this meant in practical, scientific terms was that the immune defense systems of all life, not just humans, was now under attack. Since bio-immunity occurs across a spectrum, those with the most vulnerable immune systems, due either to genetics or to lifestyle choices, would find themselves at the greatest risk of developing problems with their auto-immune systems.

AIDS was certainly the worst of it, but hardly the only example. In fact, we've been dealing with compromised immune systems ever since. And not just humans, either - amphibians took the worst of it. When was the last time you saw a frog? And the ability of forests to defend themselves against epidemics and disease was compromised as well. While that was the beginning of the climate crisis, our government at the time decided it best to greenwash the matter, advising people to stay out of the sun, wear sun hats, and apply lots of sunblock. The idea was to make us see this as just another modern inconvenience, and one that we could easily protect ourselves against.

Then came global warming. But the way we were introduced to this aspect of climate change was with charts and graphs - in particular, the Keeling curve showing exponential increases in levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This was in the late 1980s, basically. It was “morning in America,” and we learned from the movie Wall Street that “greed was good.” Heady times, you might say.

And since we humans are possessed of a natural psychological defense system that will always do its best to externalize any perceived threat, to view it as remote and/or distant, a grossly irresponsible corporate campaign to deny climate science was allowed to prosper. Global warming became some future “Chicken Little” problem that we didn't really need to concern ourselves with in the present. For decades, the corporate controlled media continued to pretend there were two sides to the issue of global warming. This remained the situation throughout the neoliberal 90's and into the new millennium.

Then we began to witness the wide-ranging geophysical symptoms of the crisis. Unprecedented typhoons in the Pacific, hurricanes of a force and frequency we'd never seen before in the Atlantic and Gulf regions, intense flooding and historically destructive wildfire seasons, ‘firenadoes,’ killer heat waves, unnaturally prolonged droughts, melting glaciers, vast dead zones in the oceans, whales regularly washing up on shore...

Much more evocative than charts and graphs!

This geophysical manifestation got our attention, and set off all kinds of alarms for climate scientists, whose predictions were now consistently being outstripped by reality (and that remains the case today). But still, it remained possible to externalize these threats, to see them as a third world problem for African and Asia to deal with, or as threatening the existence of some tiny, distant islands. In most of the western world, we continued with business as usual - waging endless wars while consuming new technology and products like there's no (ahem) tomorrow, and like we have no choice but to replace our cell phones and cars every year or two.

Then we reached a kind of cultural tipping point in 2019. With the publication of “Uninhabitable Earth” by David Wallace-Wells in *New York Magazine* that summer, millions upon millions of people suddenly began to appreciate the existential nature of our crisis. There was a noticeable shift in our collective consciousness. The symptoms may have still been geophysical, but they were no longer deniable.

Quite naturally, then, we began to experience the symptoms of the climate crisis *psychologically*. While that same kind of psychological distress had first been observed in climate scientists earlier in the decade, it now became embodied. It was even given a human face with the sudden emergence of Greta Thunberg, the global poster child for ‘eco-anxiety.’

Even here, however, it must be noted that we continued to *externalize* the crisis by casting “climate change” as a threat to our mental well being. The truth of the matter is that it is *we humans* who are the threat to the climate! This popular transference reflects the inherent problem of mainstream psychology, which places ego at the center of the world rather than placing our world at the center of our identity, and thereby reinforces the “man vs. nature” narrative that got us into this global psychospiritual mess to begin with.

Today A.C., with the ongoing shift in collective consciousness that is being triggered by the coronavirus, it is no longer feasible to externalize the climate crisis. We’re now experiencing the symptoms of the climate crisis *somatically* - in our physical being. This can be readily observed in how all our responses to the pandemic have mirrored our responses to the climate crisis itself. And for good reason - there is really no separation between the two. In fact, there is a kind of intelligence reflected in the virus that is a manifestation of Gaia’s own higher, natural intelligence.

She's sharing her symptoms with us in a most direct way, speaking to us in a language we can understand. Elevated temperatures burning us up, as in a world on fire. Damaged lungs, making respiration difficult, as with hacking away at the planet’s lungs. And then drowning in our excess fluids, as with elevated oceans and unnatural floods. Organ failure can occur, or at least damage to our vital organs that may be irreparable, just as we’ve damaged ecosystems to the point of systemic collapse. We are faced with the sudden loss of our elderly parents, just as the planet is losing elder species like rhinos, certain species of whales, and elephants whose historic watering holes have disappeared.

The prospect of death is ever present in our lives now, at least for the time being. Like a dark night of our collective soul.

And she has not only forced us into a more death-informed way of living, she is also showing us how to radically transform our lifestyles in a manner that we should have done voluntarily long ago in response to her chronic distress signals. Planes being grounded. Cars not leaving home. Business as usual disrupted on a global scale.

It is as if Gaia herself has taken up the banner of Extinction Rebellion, which has been trying to shock us out of our ecocidal stupor since it was conceived in 2019, thanks to inspiration from Earth medicine.

So can we better appreciate at the outset here what has changed? Can we feel ourselves collectively standing on a precipice, peering into the Abyss?

The climate crisis has now become personal. There is no longer any space between the climate crisis and our mental health. No mental health without a healthy host organism, or planet.

We who voluntarily include ourselves in the dominant, global consumer culture *ARE* the climate crisis. It is no longer just abstractly a matter of life and death. It has been transmuted overnight into our very own, personal existential crisis.

Can you feel it?

And nothing will ever be the same again. Even 'going back to normal' has now become a death wish.

This *is* planetary hospice.

The Earth is our witness now.

How will we respond?

CHAPTER ONE:

INITIATION



THE GREAT DYING

"I'm a firm believer that often terror is trying to tell us of a force far greater than despair. In this way, I look at fear not as cowardice, but as a call forward, a summons to fight for what we hold dear. And now more than ever, we have every right to be affected, afflicted, affronted. If you're alive, you're afraid. If you're not afraid, then you're not paying attention. The only thing we have to fear is having no fear itself – having no feeling on behalf of whom and what we've lost, whom and what we love... So do not fear your fear. Own it. Free it. This isn't a liberation that I or anyone can give you – it's a power you must look for, learn, love, lead and locate for yourself. Why? The truth is, hope isn't a promise we give. It's a promise we live. Tell it like this, and we, like our words, will not rest." ~ Amanda Gorman

We must begin our initiation into Planetary Hospice by facing our greatest fear, since it seems to be driving so much cynicism and dystopianism in the world today. If we're honest, our greatest fear is the extinction of the human race. The fear that a tomorrow is coming when there will be nobody left to read these words, and all recorded history will, rather abruptly, have come to naught. So let's be brave here, and get this elephant out of the room. Let us collectively face our mortality in the way that we fear most.

(Deep Breath)

There have been five great extinctions in the history of planet Earth during the 540 million years since complex life first emerged. According to the National Geographic Society, "we are in the midst of the Sixth Great Extinction, an event characterized by the loss of between 17,000 and 100,000 species *each year*" (Nat.

Geo. 2012).¹ This is the first great extinction event since the last time a giant comet struck Earth numb. For this reason alone, these are dark times we inhabit. It is not in our interest to avoid that reality.

The worst of these prior extinctions, long before dinosaurs even, the one simply referred to as “the Great Dying,” resulted in the loss of 95% of all marine species and 70% of all terrestrial species.² Earth herself was that close to becoming just another lifeless rock orbiting just another star. It required ten million years before life would begin to prosper once again. The severity of the Great Dying, is largely attributed to mass releases of methane from the oceans and tundras triggered by (and quickly doubling) a spike in global temperatures of only about six degrees Celsius (from volcanic activity).

Euan Nisbet, an Earth scientist at Royal Holloway, University of London, [told the scientific journal Nature](#) that “methane levels are growing dangerously fast” as powerful countries around the world refuse to end the extraction of coal, natural gas, and other sources of the pollutant. Because of escalating releases of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere over the course of the industrial age, we are now starting to see a similar triggering of terrestrial and sea-bed methane, such that “[s]ome scientists fear that the situation is already so serious and so many self-reinforcing feedback loops are already in play that we are in the process of causing our own extinction.”³

Given what has long been understood to be the decades-long lag time between greenhouse gas emissions and climate uptake, or impacts like melting

¹ See: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2012/03/28/the-sixth-great-extinction-a-silent-extermination/> Retrieved 11.8.2013. This rate of extinction is about 1,000 times greater than natural, making it “anthropocentric.” See: http://www.truthdig.com/report/page2/are_we_falling_off_the_climate_precipice_20131219 Retrieved on 12.24.13.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permian%E2%80%93Triassic_extinction_event Retrieved 11.8.13.

³ See: Jamail, D. “Are we falling off the climate precipice?” *Tom Dispatch* (12/19/13), p. 2., at: http://www.truthdig.com/report/page2/are_we_falling_off_the_climate_precipice_20131219 Retrieved 12.24.13.

events, the biggest fear is that by the time we humans collectively appreciate the urgency of our situation, and the need to radically transform our lives in order to accommodate our host organism, it will already be too late. This, of course, has given rise to a large community of “doomers” in our culture, people who believe themselves smart enough to know the future based on some level of scientific understanding and reading the tea leaves of climate science.

But Gaia, apparently, has other ideas.

Guy McPherson is one of the early and more vocal proponent of the inevitability of “near term human extinction,” or NTHE for short. Guy had me on his popular podcast "Nature Bats Last" not long after the publication of my paper [“Planetary Hospice: Rebirthing Planet Earth”](#) in 2014. Because of my background in science, not just from college but also a career of presenting scientific disputes to judges, I knew that most of what Guy and other non-climate scientists like him were presenting with near certainty was, in truth, wild speculation. In conversation on this topic, he agreed with me that we can't assert NTHE with anything approaching scientific certainty, while I agreed with him that ANY realistic prospect of NTHE should be enough to spur us into action.

But it wasn't long after that Guy went back to professing certainty, and even began predicting human extinction by methane within a couple of decades. I find this rather outrageous, given that his degrees are in forestry and range management, and he's been roundly refuted by climate experts. That has not, however, stopped the NTHE bus from picking up passengers.

So that just became the next phase of my field research on all the different ways repressed climate grief can manifest, and was manifesting particularly in scientist circles at that time. After all, the title of the paper, “planetary hospice,” was *intended* to provoke such strong, visceral reactions. Still, even I was a bit taken aback by the depth of many people's emotional responses at the time, and

how that was feeding into cognitive dissonance/confirmation bias loops - and that's when it first really hit me. We are *all* in denial when it comes to the climate crisis.

I mean *everyone*. The only exception I'm willing to broach here is Greta. And I've since learned that even *saying* that "we're all in denial" triggers people in interesting ways, which you dear reader, if you hadn't considered it before, are probably experiencing right now. Denial of difficult truths takes all kinds of forms, and is not just a matter whether or not we acknowledge science and math. We can sometimes acknowledge things in our heads while not allowing them entry into our hearts, or permitting them to call into question our ingrained habits and assumptions.

What I have found is that there's a special brand of '*scientific materialist existential dread*' that produces powerful cognitive dissonance, selective confirmation bias, and hardens cynicism in those who pretend to comprehend the breadth and depth of everything that falls under the broad label of 'climate science.' Many of these Gloomy Gus' and Doomer Guys (and Gails) don't seem to appreciate the extreme hubris at the core of their professed certainty. It still seems exceedingly rare to find highly intelligent and empirically humble scientists in the climate arena, and exceptions like Karen O'Brien and Kritee Kanko prove the rule for me.

(Ed. note: it bears mentioning here that the one silver lining in the 2021 "Red Alert" Report from the IPCC is that it is able, as a matter of improving science, to narrow the bandwidth of range-of-response at various projected temperature rises, rendering doomsday scenarios more unlikely than they may have previously appeared. A small comfort, perhaps, that emphasizes the urgency of continuing to be proactive no matter how much things appear to be sliding off the rails.)

As I informed Guy, way back in the summer of 2014 when he interviewed me live on his podcast, "Nature Bats Last," he and his NTHE cohorts were overlooking one whale of a confounding variable in their projections about the future of the climate crisis. And it isn't just *any* confounding variable, either - it's

one that strikes at the very heart of their rigid analytical thinking, which in turn is an expression of their scientific materialist worldview.

The planet is a living organism.

Heck, we've even recently discovered that trees in forests are in constant communication with one another. As the renowned silviculturist Suzanne Simard, from the Univ. of British Columbia's School of Forestry, puts it in her book

Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering Wisdom in the Forest (2021):

When Mother Trees — the majestic hubs at the center of forest communication, protection, and sentience — die, they pass their wisdom to their own kin, generation after generation, sharing the knowledge of what helps and what harms, who is friend or foe, and how to adapt and survive in an ever-changing landscape.

Don't even get me started on fungal jungles and mycelium horizons!

The more scientists approach the natural world through the lens of Gaia theory, the more mind-blowing the discoveries become. There is simply no way to predict with any degree of comprehension, let alone certainty, just how Gaia will respond to the increasing levels of distress that we humans are subjecting her to through our shocking levels of carelessness and wanton disregard.

Exhibit A: Coronavirus and Covid-19.

Have people been predicting that there would be new pandemics?

Yes, of course. We know, for example, that as the permafrost in the Arctic melts, or as wild species are increasingly brought into contact with human populations by habitat loss, new and exotic viruses will be released into the biosphere. But nobody would have quite predicted the way the coronavirus brought the entire civilized world collectively to our knees, causing the global economy to buckle and bend overnight, radically reshaping our lives.

As I write this book, none of us can even predict how this particular pandemic will play out, either - how it will change us, what the world looks like on

the other side of this pandemic, or what black swan event comes next. According to leading experts, in fact, approximately 10 million deaths into the pandemic now, the coronavirus is here to stay, endlessly mutating into even more novel strains, frustrating our best efforts to eradicate or even contain it. And we still have very little idea what kinds of biological time bombs long-term COVID is planting in our biomes, though the evidence is that it can effect any one of our vital organs over time.

This is climate chaos writ large.

Gaia's immune defense system is in full activation mode now.

Are we feeling her pain yet?

* * *

My humble take on all this, from focusing exclusively on it for more than a decade now? The Great Anthropogenic Extinction is fully upon us now. With mass incineration events like the 2019 Australian conflagration - estimated to have killed **3 Billion animals** in one fire season - hopscotching across the planet; with rainforests becoming carbon emitters instead of carbons sinks; and, with other likely dramatic changes still to come, the prospects of survival for terrestrial species like rhinos, elephants, snow leopards, polar bears, etc., look rather grim.

Unimaginable. And that's before we even peak under the ocean waves.

And now, with the first wave of pandemics having swept over the entire human race, it is probably reasonable to conclude that the Great Dying 2.0 has begun as well. Sober consideration of the cumulative, cascading evidence, such as that set forth in painstaking detail by David Wallace-Wells in his 2019 book that shares the name of his viral article, *Uninhabitable Earth*, or even more evocatively in Dahr Jamail's 2019 book from the front lines, *The End of Ice*, leads one inexorably to the repugnant conclusion that life as we have come to know it over the last 11,000 years or so is, quite simply, at an end.

Yes - that world is gone.

Irretrievably broken by homo (not-so-sapien) sapiens.

On the other side of our grief over that still unimaginable loss, some kind of brave new world is already taking shape. This is the part doomers skip over. It will never be too late to assist Nature in the regeneration process, as we'll explore deeply in subsequent chapters. But it will never look quite the same again. To be perfectly honest, by the time we humans conform our lives to Gaia's demands, there will probably be far fewer of us, like a billion or two, and I suspect that this prospect is tantamount to extinction in many thoughtful people's minds - so they just jump to worst case scenario.

And that's *before* we've even peaked beneath the ocean's waves. Because while rising terrestrial temperatures are largely associated with atmospheric (climate) impacts of carbon dioxide, it is easy to forget that the oceans have absorbed most of the CO₂ released into the atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Age (525 billion tons). The cumulative impacts of this massive marine infusion, together with endemic plastic pollution and the unconscionable destruction of the ocean floor ecosystems from centuries of trawling,⁴ are reflected in dramatic changes to ocean water's chemistry - increasing their acidity by 26% - and severe losses in biodiversity, best exemplified by the lethal bleaching of the ocean's nurseries, coral reefs.

Just writing this triggers my own climate trauma. I know reading it is no easier, but how can we get past this oceanic grief without going through it? Breathe deeply. Soldier on...

Consider for a moment the shocking levels of plastic pollution that have now accumulated in the world's oceans *just since the end of WWII* - when the

⁴ The practice of using a large, wide-mouthed fishing net dragged by a vessel along the ocean bottom, effectively clearcutting the affected ecosystem. "As a result of these processes, a vast array of species are threatened around the world...The net effect of fishing practices on global coral reef populations is suggested by many scientists to be alarmingly high." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trawling> (Retrieved 11.10.13).

petrochemical industry turned from making war to making plastics and pesticides. The microfibers taken up first by fish are now showing up in our own bloodstream, just as DDT and PCBs showed up in mother's milk in the 1970's because - oops - *our circulatory system is connected to Gaia's own circulatory system.*

This is why it's pointless to argue over whether we have entered the Anthropocene or not. Many still object to the hint of anthropocentrism reflected in that label. But labeling the geologic era we've ushered in '*the Anthropocene*' is most pointedly NOT an endorsement of anthropocentric thinking. If anything, it is quite the opposite of that — an admission of our collective guilt (Indigenous people excluded here), a sound repudiation of our hubris. There is simply no disputing that we colonialist humans have dramatically remade the world in our own white trashy image over the last 250 years — especially during the “Great Acceleration” that followed WWII.

We truly and mindlessly live in a throw-away world now, thanks to exponential population growth and the obscenely stupid, ‘planned obsolescence’ of consumer societies, exported everywhere by transnational corporations that are the undying embodiment of colonial exploitation. Soon enough, if we do not change our ways, humanity itself will become obsolete. No art, no music, no literature, no appreciation of love and beauty. No awe.

No ocean metaphors! Unfathomable!!

According to the United Nations, more than half of global fisheries are exhausted, and a further third are depleted. Between 30 and 35% of *critical marine environments* — such as sea grasses, mangroves and coral reefs — are estimated to have been destroyed... and pollution from land is painting vast “dead zones” on the face of the planet - areas of coastal waters that are almost devoid of oxygen.

The anecdotal evidence looks even worse. On a recent trans-Pacific voyage he had completed many times previously, sailor Ivan Macfadyen distressingly

recounted his “shock and horror” at the near absence of any life compared to his prior passages: “[I]t felt as if the ocean itself was dead.”⁵

Do we even need to talk about dissolving starfish here?

Unfortunately, the news of our living planet’s declining health only seems to keep getting worse. Following climate science is a bit like looking in the rearview mirror of a moving vehicle: OBJECTS IN MIRROR MAY BE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR. Once the planet heats up enough to trigger methane releases from permafrost and the oceans, it is not unlike having a gas leak in your home. While the Great Dying resulted from a rise of only 6C, under current (unenforceable) emission targets we are on track for about a 4C rise in temperature well before the end of this century - this according to the World Bank.

And that is on the *low end* of the probable rise. It's easy to forget that most of the science we see in the media, via the IPCC, is "conservative" in that it requires consensus from a large body of diverse scientists. A remarkable and largely ignored 2011 paper authored by Jeffrey Kiehl from the National Center for Atmospheric Research, published in the journal *Science*, "found that carbon dioxide may have at least *twice* the effect on global temperatures than currently projected by computer models of global climate."⁶ Contrary to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) worst case scenario of 6C by 2100, which itself would result in a virtually uninhabitable planet,⁷ Kiehl *et al.* distressingly conclude that we could actually see an unimaginable 16C rise by the end of the century.

⁵ Ray, G., “The Ocean is Broken,” *Newcastle Herald*, Oct. 18, 2013.

⁶ <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/05/18-1> (retrieved 11.11.13), Ahmed, N., “Obama's Arctic Strategy Sets Off a Climate Time Bomb,” *Guardian*, May 18, 2013.

⁷ A 3.5C increase would render this planet uninhabitable for humans due to severing the food chain at the fundamental level of oceanic plankton and prompting temperature swings would severely limit terrestrial vegetation. Humans have never lived on a planet at 3.5C above baseline. http://www.truthdig.com/report/page3/are_we_falling_off_the_climate_precipice_20131219

There is no question humanity would go extinct if that came to pass.

And the relatively conservative International Energy Agency released a report way back in November 2013 predicting *a 3.5C increase by 2035*⁸ - only fifteen years away.

⁸ <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-Issues/2010/1111/Global-temperature-to-rise-3.5-degrees-C.-by-2035-International-Energy-Agency> Retrieved 1.2.14.



That's the correct response to this kind of speculation about our *current* trajectory.

And I no longer need to belabor this - which is a relief in itself - thanks to reliable chroniclers like

David Wallace-Wells and Dahr Jamail, and the decades-long determination of journalist/activists Bill McKibben, Elizabeth Kolbert, and Naomi Klein.

From a planetary perspective, this is all tantamount to the “less than six months to live” diagnosis that triggers hospice care for an individual with a terminal disease. It is hardly a stretch now, with the entire human species sheltering in place, that we have triggered our very own Great Dying.

The Great Dying 2.0, we could call it.

This does **not** mean, as it has so often been misconstrued, that human extinction is inevitable. I happen to believe that a significant contraction of our global population is probably necessary, and this may even include another bottleneck we have to pass through as a species. Our genetic markers show we have done so once before, when massive volcanoes blotted out the sun and our species was reduced to about 10,000 people. That was clearly a time when we were an endangered species.

We may be a ‘threatened’ species now, to borrow the graded terminology of the Endangered Species Act. But humans are adaptable, if nothing else, and somehow we managed to survive that last bottleneck and, in time, to thrive once more. There is no need to apologize for that. Part of the story we humans tell ourselves about ourselves is that we are good at overcoming impossible odds. Just go to the movies if you don't believe me.

Extinction or not - and mere survival is an obscenely low bar - we certainly do not want to go where we are now heading. I can personally attest how difficult it is to accept this kind of dystopian view of our present trajectory. While humans are actually hard-wired to focus on threats, we also have always been able to minimize them and adapt to changed environments. The idea that we might not be able to do that this time, at the cost of billions of human lives and with millions of species lost, is hard to fathom.

There is still a widespread belief that we will get through this pandemic in due course, as I assume must also be the case with 'climate change,' and return to some semblance of normal. But our "normal" happens to be lethal, and if there is any pattern to climate revelations over the last decade (the hottest on record, with each successive year being hotter than the last), it is this: the reality of the climate crisis continues to outstrip our ability to model ever-worsening scenarios.

It's also happening much faster than anticipated. The Great Unraveling, as David Korten and Joanna Macy have called it. Or "the Weather Channel," as it is now known. Just as with the insurrection of 1/6/20, we are now watching the climate come unglued right before our disbelieving eyes whenever we turn to our news feed.

Consistent with this out-of-control global climate experiment, methane has, in fact, begun to seep into the atmosphere from the oceans and permafrost at staggering rates, causing worldwide alarm of scientists and researchers (but not politicians or corporate media). In 2013, a NASA science team characterized methane readings as "amazing and potentially troubling" ("Is a sleeping climate giant stirring in the Arctic?") As one close follower of climate issues has observed, it is not inconceivable that we have already passed a critical point of no return:

If we have triggered a self-reinforcing methane feedback - and there is growing evidence that we have - then there is little point in talking about solutions. *What is needed is a strategy for maximizing the*

quality of life for those of our species who survive the coming catastrophe. There will be fewer of us, and we will consume far less, and the world will be a far harsher place. We will, quite literally, be inhabiting an alien environment, and our best bet is to prepare ourselves for the softest possible landing in this hostile new world (emph. added, Atcheson, 2013).⁹

Sounds just a little like a coronavirus world he was anticipating, doesn't it? The future keeps rushing to find us in the present.

Unfortunately, politics - especially the bipolar *toxic Americana* strain - has never been more myopic and impotent in the face of cascading crises, as is now graphically and obscenely on display in the 2020 pandemic (and again with COP26 in Glasgow). Beginning with an alarming 2007 report from the IPCC, when normally staid scientists issued a consensus warning that world governments had *eight years* to take 'drastic actions' in order to avoid catastrophic climate change, and culminating with the "Red Alert" IPCC Report of 2021, politics has become a game of either ignoring or undermining science and its inescapable realities, and then cynically gaslighting the public with spectacles like COP26.

Three years after that IPCC report, and in the wake of the 2008 alarm sounded by the International Energy Agency, President Obama not only ignored their call, he sent his emissaries to the climate talks in South Africa in 2011 to torpedo any chance of taking *any* effective action globally, let alone 'drastic' action, before 2020 - by which time he'd be safely out of office. Obama then proceeded to cry crocodile tears for the climate, as with his visit to Alaska two weeks after approving Shell's deep-sea exploration for more oil reserves, and he quickly turned America into the number one producer of oil and gas in the world, even surpassing Saudi Arabia, by pursuing his "all of the above" energy policy - which was just Sara Palin's "Drill Baby Drill" policy by another name.

⁹ <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2012/09/25-0> (retrieved 11.11.13), "Is Climate Change Hell Now Inevitable?".

To all my liberal and progressive friends who are reading this, let's be clear about this. Barack Obama was the first President smart enough to appreciate the science, and he took office at a time when there was no more doubt about the heart-attack seriousness of the crisis. It represented an historic opportunity to right spaceship Earth:

- He received multiple clear warnings from the world's scientific community as he was taking office.
- He had an unprecedented invitation to lead the world, which was fawning over him like it hadn't embraced a U.S. President since Kennedy. Humans everywhere were practically begging Obama to lead the whole world, not just the U.S., into a new era when he took office in 2009, with full control of Congress.

• The pivotal Copenhagen Climate talks were scheduled for later that year. Really, he could not have asked for a better situation to make his mark on human history.

Instead of leading the world into a new era of climate recovery, however, President Obama chose to spend almost all of his political capital on a new health care plan hatched in a conservative think tank and written by insurance industry lobbyists - the mislabeled 'Obama Care.' That is the sad legacy Barry left to his beautiful little girls: affordable health care in a dying world.

As if it is actually possible to have good health on a gravely ill planet in the midst of the Sixth Great Extinction with dying oceans!!!

(How's that working out, by the way?)

When history looks back on that critical juncture, from 2008-2016, Obama will be judged harshly. In fact, he will be lucky if historians do not conclude that he was guilty of unprecedented crimes against nature and humanity, crimes which he knew full well he was committing as a matter of moral conscience. At best, he will

be remembered for kicking the can down the road in order to get re-elected and make nice with corporate fat cats. And of course, this idea of reckoning *assumes* a future with historians recording history. *Even that* is now in doubt, due to Obama's unprecedented level of scientific arrogance (did he imagine we'd invent a cure?) and criminally lethal negligence (he was adequately warned).

Even history is in doubt!

And then there was Trump. The global poster boy for crimes against nature.

(Don't get me started! What's the point??)

Is it any wonder, then, that Gaia felt compelled to step in with coronavirus? Is it mere coincidence that we saw a "crown" in this virus? Maybe a crown of thorns.

And *poof* — like Trump Towers made of sand with the first wave of rising seas — there goes the Don's "beautiful" anything-goes, corporate gangster driven economy. And with it, his dreams of re-election. No match for Gaia's feverish swoon, I'm afraid.

In the face of exponential growth in the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the exponential growth of the human species itself, Gaia has prescribed a relatively mild anti(anthro)biotic for now, one designed to slow down the growth that is raising her temperature and violating her biotic integrity. I realize that will sound harsh to anyone who loses a loved one in this pandemic, which will most likely include myself by the time I'm through with this book (assuming I even have time to finish it myself, at 63). [ed. note: my mom and uncle both passed during the pandemic] But given the grave illness we've inflicted on this living planet whose health we ourselves depend upon, a malady that threatens all species, all life, is it realistic to think our medicine will not taste bitter?

Our Mother, resorting to tough love for her wayward children, has sent us to our rooms to think about what we have done. Will we find new meaning and resolve in this enforced solitude?

Or just escape out the bathroom window?

One thing is clear. This is all heart-attack serious. She has the attention of all who are still somewhat sane. Rest assured: the **next pandemic** will be much worse. Gaia's message could not be any more clear: Adapt or Die.

And so, the stage is set.

Our situation is terminal. Certainly that is true for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of species and the biosphere we co-inhabit with them. Species we humans co-evolved with - that make us human, in other words.

Lions & Tigers & Bears, Oh MY!

Declaring "climate emergency" is the collective equivalent of going to the doctor's office and hearing: "Without triple bypass heart surgery, you will not last the year." While our own demise as a species is far from certain, there is no denying the need for an intervention. That free-wheeling life of endless frontiers and fertility we have known for over 11,000 years is now at an end. We may well succeed in preserving something very similar for ourselves with necessary triage and ingenuity. But it will never be the same again. Let that sink in.



This is much more than just the beginning of a new Epoch - the Anthropocene.

We as a species have now entered...

(((Planetary Hospice)))

<< "Drift" by Jennifer Crickenberger

CHAPTER TWO:

TRIAL BY FIRE



GENERATION TRAUMA

“With the controlled splitting of the atom, humanity, already profoundly perplexed and dis-unified, was brought inescapably into a new age in which all thoughts and things were split - and far from controlled.”

~ James Agee, Time Mag., August 20, 1945

"With broken selves in a world on fire, trauma is everywhere."

~ Mark Epstein, M.D., *The Trauma of Everyday Life* (2013)

If we are going to chart a path out of the existential peril we have landed ourselves in, it is imperative that we understand how we got here to begin with. In our current state, we seem hopelessly fragmented and incapable or unwilling to respond appropriately to the threat we face as a species. Something is stopping us. What could it be?

Scientists tell us we have entered a new geologic era, or epoch - *the Anthropocene* - an age in which the world has been irreversibly altered by humankind's imprint on the geosphere, the biosphere, the atmosphere... the *natural* world, in other words, with which we co-evolved. It is only looking backwards that we've come to realize this as a matter of science. As a matter of experience, it coincides with what is known as the Great Acceleration, a time in which everything we humans touch has exploded exponentially. This experience of accelerating growth, this sense that everything is speeding up and careening out of control, is something we can all relate to. Collectively, we are going through a dark night of the soul. We are having a mental breakdown.

All of this is very recent, and rather haphazard. But even in the blip of time since the Anthropocene began - the brief span of a single human lifetime - the natural world, the *humus* in which we humans are rooted and from which we sprang forth, has become greatly diminished. Exponentially so. And it continues to accelerate. Ecologists and biologists refer to this phenomenon as "massive trophic downgrading." In more relatable terms, it is simply the impoverishment of all life on planet Earth.

In fact, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say that we no longer even inhabit a world one could call 'natural' in any real sense of that word. There is nothing natural, after all, about plastic - and we've somehow managed to fill the oceans with plastic just since the end of WWII. We could just as easily have named this new era the "Plasticine." The polymers that make up plastic are, by definition, unnatural. You can't mine plastic, any more than whales can digest it.

Microplastics are now a significant component in table salt, and are part of us in the same way that the toxins and "forever chemicals" that we've emitted into the environment are now passed on from mother to babe in her milk.

What a nightmare. How quickly we've progressed from feeding babies milk through plastic nipples to feeding babies plastic through a mother's nipple!

And it's unnatural to the same extent and in the same ways that we ourselves have become unnatural ~ alienated from nature.

Here is a critically important point to appreciate in relation to our shared dilemma:

**to be alienated from the natural world, as humans have now
mostly become, is to be alienated as well from our own...
*human... nature...***

What does it mean to be a human being detached from human nature?

Over the course of my own 6+ decades on Earth, born in the flight paths of the world's busiest airport the same year and in the same town where the world's very first McDonald's hamburger stand went up, humanity has become largely divorced from human nature. I know this to be true, because I've witnessed it firsthand over the course of my life.

Please excuse me, dear reader. I really feel like it is necessary as a matter of morality to pause the acceleration of time here in order that we may think about this phenomena of humans separated from human nature for just a minute. It

represents the realization of the very worst fears expressed by Mary Shelly on that idyllic lake in the Swiss Alps when she first conceived as a ghost story what would soon become the first great modern novel, *Frankenstein*:

**“It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world;
but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.”**

And so I now ask you to consider this conundrum: *what could possibly cause humanity to lose the thread of human nature?* Is this not the monstrous potential Mary Shelley was trying her best to warn her poet husband and all future generations about? Are we not her intended audience??

What a thing to believe...



To appreciate just how much we humans have lost touch with our own true nature, the poet inside each one of us, consider the fact that “human nature” itself has devolved into a term that is used almost exclusively in the *pejorative* sense now, to dismiss or even excuse poor behavior. “Oh, that’s just human nature,” people will often say, dismissively - when what they are usually commenting on is the exact *opposite* of human nature.

War, as a stark example, is most assuredly *not* human nature - it is quite *inhumane*, as a matter of fact. As Steven Jenkinson, the world’s leading theological voice on human grief today, puts it in his book *Die Wise* (2015):

Death dealt by people is Jacob’s ladder climbed... It becomes Death the Destroyer of Worlds, the act and consequences too vast for humans to carry... [O]ur capacity to kill each other or ourselves is not the natural order of things playing itself out, no matter how common it might be in our history, and in the papers, no matter how much we are inured to it or numbed by the horror of it. Instead, *it is a rupture that will not let life live according to its nature* (205).

Or, as the Dalai Lama says, war is *monstrous*!

And the same can be said of any cruelty or atrocity, really, as embodied today in the cruel and heartless bullies that appear on the world stage in these most chaotic of times, these end times of prophecy, setting people against each other viciously while gleefully despoiling the natural world. Does anyone really believe that Trump or Bolsonaro are the embodiment of human nature? NO!

Those who answer this question in the affirmative are the same cynical misanthropes who maintain that our species needs to be exterminated for Nature to survive. That's just self-hatred projected outward onto the unknown other.

The present world's authoritarian clowns, allergic to truth out of their deep-seated fear of the reconciliation and justice that would necessarily follow a full reckoning, merely show quite graphically how far we have fallen as a race - driven by *inhumane* greed, lust and avarice - from the natural order and our own true nature. Instead of revering human nature, we have entire religions whose creation myths involve *fallen* nature. While the creation myths of Indigenous peoples, those still living in relative harmony with nature, are of being born *into* a garden, Judeo-Christian people's myth is of being thrown *out* of the garden. No wonder we insist on seeking out and destroying the natural habitats still tended lovingly by Indigenous peoples. How DARE they make a mockery of our manifest destiny! This self-fulfilling myth of our fallen nature, drilled into us since the time of our birth as sinful little creatures is pathologically reflected in our hostile fallout with the natural world.

But Beethoven! Da Vinci!! Boticelli! Rodin!!



Human nature is clearly meant to be associated with higher sentiments and natural evolution - not immoral and depraved devolution into chaotic malevolence and cults of personality! Wasn't the whole point of Jesus Christ to stand up to all of that self-loathing submissiveness? How did we get from that spirit of natural goodness, spiritual beauty and *love thy neighbor* to Trump, Bolsonaro, and their hateful ilk in the West's so-called Christian World?

Trauma...

...in a word — and what a provocative word it is. Trauma is the rupture of all that is natural. It blocks the flow of information, obstructing relations, leaving us fragmented in its wake, overwhelmed - unresponsive.

We must, in solidarity, now reclaim human nature amidst the ruins of this broken world, even as it is unraveling all around us. There is a profound old Buddhist saying: “In the midst of afflictions, there is awakening.” In other words, rather than awaiting some peaceful mountain refuge near a babbling brook, after all of our problems have been solved, awakening is actually catalyzed in the cauldron of our afflictions, according to how we choose to relate to them.

In this, the Anthropocentric Age, a time when we Westernized humans are responsible for the world's peril and pending demise, it is we - or more accurately

“MWe,” the IntraConnected (Me + We) that Dr. Dan Siegel has identified - who must rip the mantle of human nature from our fraudulent rulers, and (re)claim it as our natural birthright. Might will never make right. The “survival of the fittest” is itself a perversion of the **benevolent forces that Darwin discovered** are actually favored by nature — natural sentiments like cooperation, solidarity and symbiosis.

Social Darwinism is not only *not* scientific in the least, it is a gross perversion of Darwinism, akin to Hitler’s eugenics. And besides, even from a socially Darwinian perspective, these nominal leaders are neither morally nor mentally “fit” by any sane measure. They are the collective and *cumulative* mistakes of history, and are in no way representative of humanity. There are complex socioeconomic reasons that they have been elevated to positions of power, such as neoliberal hypocrisy and hollowing out of the middle classes, but it is most assuredly not because they are deserving in any meaningful way. It is, instead, a modern form of regicide where we have, against our better natures, propped up the worst in us, projecting our shadow selves out into the world, so that we may once and for all reject and exorcise those daemonic forces that are responsible for so much suffering and now must die in order that we may finally live.

Human Nature. 1. the qualities *common* to humanity.

COLLINS ENGLISH DICTIONARY (2012)

There is pointedly nothing common about the detestable qualities of Trump, Bolsonaro, Assad, Bibi, Jinping, al-Sisi, Jong-un, Putin and the rest of the sociopaths who have managed to seize the controls of this sinking ship we call Earth. In fact, they are all *uncommonly* despicable and heinous. The common, pejorative degradation of the very term by which we define ourselves betrays

nothing less than the sooty reflection we now encounter in the cracked mirror of modern culture and society.

Insane/Inhumane... Insanity/Inhumanity. And the lunatics run the asylum.

It has become so extreme here in the U.S. that we are now somehow able to tolerate hundreds of babies being separated from their mothers and kept in cages on our imaginary national border! And some are willing to fight to the death rather than wear a simple medical mask to slow the spread of a deadly pandemic!!

Does that sound like human nature to any sane human being?

~*~

The world we seek to revolutionize is a world shaped not so much by ‘man,’ as the term ‘Anthropocene’ is intended quite deliberately to suggest. Rather — and this is a point still largely lost on the enthralled masses and in the manic media — it is a world shaped by humankind’s own unique (among species) form of collective trauma. As the child eco-prodigy Greta Thunberg points out:

"We are trying to find a solution of a crisis that we don't understand."

To wit: without having come to experience collective trauma on a global scale, as never experienced before by any species in the Holocene, owing to the advent of industrialized warfare, we would quite simply not have ended one geologic era and begun another, reshaping the world in our own fractured image and inventing our own warped mythology (the American Dream). In other words, *but for* collective trauma, we would not find ourselves in this existential quandary.

PLEASE NOTE: It is quite natural to feel some resistance to this point upon reading and maybe even re-reading it. That resistance, in fact, proves the point, since the fragmentation that flows from trauma gives rise *reflexively* to denial.

So please, if nothing else, suspend your disbelief. At least let’s take this as our working hypothesis, because you will then appreciate how salutary it can be.

And so I repeat, *ad nauseam* if need be:

We inhabit a world shaped by our own trauma.

In setting out to conquer the world, and succeeding now with frightening pace, we modern Westerners have cumulatively, by spiritual accretion, created a kind of ‘trauma-sphere’ — a traumatized cultural climate filled generation-by-generation with the accumulated detritus of genocidal mania, slavery, misogyny, nuclear detonations, endless war, the war on nature, and the ever present, self-fulfilling idea of Armageddon represented by a lit fuse of rekindled religious extremism in all corners of the world (which here at home happens to take the form of white supremacy). This is where we have arrived in our colonialist history, which is, sadly to say, the history of the world.

Inevitably, without fail, unresolved trauma gives rise to intractable drama in human affairs. Just as is true in our personal lives, when we're honest with ourselves. **Trauma => Drama.** The longer the trauma accumulates without being fully acknowledged and processed, the greater the dysfunctional drama that is produced in order that we may act out that unresolved trauma we carry in our political body, and give voice to it in our fragmented culture. And now the scale of this collective trauma has become *existential* — giving rise to existential drama.

It just doesn't get any more real than that.

Eventually, it becomes readily apparent that continuing denial and deflection is suicidal, leaving us with no choice but to confront the elephant of our accumulated trauma. And that, too, is where we have necessarily arrived in our political history — divided between those who are willing to face up to our responsibilities in all this, like adults, and those who insist on continuing to behave like spoiled children and troubled teens. Disavowing truth itself. Dispensing with inconvenient facts.

How *else* would an imminent existential threat manifest in the human race? Why are we even shocked by this?

Because we too, after all, have been living the dream. We, too, have been lulled into a false sense of exceptionalism by all the materialist excess and fabulist distraction. And now the world has arrived at such a crisis point that the sane and aware among us can no longer tolerate pretense in ourselves or in others. It's all right in our face now, and once we acknowledge the reality of what we are facing, then continuing on as before itself becomes intolerable.

The time has come to grieve our losses and process our unresolved trauma and grief. It isn't so much about waking up as it is about growing up. Children rarely have any choice but to act out their traumas, due to a relative lack of self-introspection. Adults, however, have agency over their unresolved traumas. In mature relationships, we learn very quickly that all past personal traumas are present. Growing up in relationships involves seeing into and processing through our own traumas and the unresolved traumas of our beloved others. And it is only when we are able to do so, to break our destructive patterns of behavior, that relationships survive and life becomes meaningful.

And that's precisely where we are collectively now in our spiritual development, in the maturation of our social systems, and in our relationship with Earth. Until we learn to master our collective traumas, we will continue to be their slaves - risking genocide at our own hands in the process. Without the kind of spiritual emergence that can result from spiritual emergency, I'm afraid we will continue to be hobbled in our efforts to tackle our climate emergency. We must come to see, collectively, what is trying to emerge from the great unveiling associated with these apocalyptic times.

It is time to make our break with the past.



Since “trauma” is one of the most emotionally charged words in the English language, a term that on its own can trigger our limbic system, prompting us to shut down or turn away, it may be helpful to begin by defining our terms with some precision and clarity. This will help you to see that what we are talking about in this book is a little more fluid than the label ‘trauma’ might suggest.

The Greek word *traûma* literally means wound. A gaping wound is about the most unnatural thing that can happen to an embodied being, isn’t it? We begin with this miracle of life, the sheer complexity of biological life of which we are a unique expression - and then a grievous injury is inflicted, causing the whole to dis-integrate, break down, or even turn on itself, the threat of annihilation made manifest in the flesh.

From the standpoint of nature, it’s a shock to our system. If we are lucky enough to survive, we become scarred for life. As already noted, there is of course a place in nature for death. But apart from all the many natural threats, there is really no place in our psyche for the threat of an unnatural death - whether our own or a loved one’s. There is no room in a healthy psyche to integrate the deaths in the holocaust, women being burned at the stake, young boys being sliced up on a battlefield, bodies overcome by plague being thrown into pits or piled up on the outskirts of town, becoming fodder for wolves, or to cite a more contemporary example, being thrown through a windshield at unnatural speed with the unnatural force created by the very vehicles which have, psychologically at least, made into extensions of our identities.

These are not natural events, and we have a hard time making sense of them when they happen to us or to those we care about.

The ancient Greeks largely understood trauma in the physical sense. A “physical wound,” like that of Achilles, say, or more symbolically, Psyche’s wound from the arrow of Eros. It is only over the course of the last century-and-a-half in

the West that trauma has come to be associated with a psychological condition. In fact, it is the study of the effects of childhood sexual trauma in Victorian Vienna and Paris that marks the beginning of what we have come to know as (Western) “psychology.” Given the 11,000 year old course of human civilization, with all of its disease, pestilence and war, it’s rather remarkable that it took us that long to become self-reflective in this way. But there you have it.

So trauma is the very reason the discipline of psychology even exists. Trauma, we could accurately say, is Western Psychology’s *raison d’etre*. And yet as recently as when my father came home from WWII, we still had no real, practical understanding of how trauma imprisons us in our bodies, or how it can shape and limit the entire course of our lives, causing us to compulsively self-harm - not to mention the course of human affairs, which is self-harm writ large.

Unlike the Greeks, today we all tend to think of trauma as a “psychic wound[ing] — an unpleasant experience which causes abnormal stress.” I would add “which we are not, by our nature, equipped to handle emotionally.” And so we repress our true feelings about what happened, and suppress our memories of the deep wounds we carry, and “act out” by creating destructive patterns of harmful behaviors in our lives that we feel powerless to change. This is how we’ve come to understand trauma and its discontents.

Since this behavioral knowledge represents a very recent development in human understanding, it remains difficult or problematic for us to even broach the subject - like a social taboo - while we continue to learn more and more about the pervasive nature of trauma’s insidious effects every year, generation-by-generation. For example, as I first write and much later edit this, we remain in the cauldron of collective global trauma called “COVID-19,” learning as we go about human responsiveness and lack of responsiveness to a daily, pervasive existential threat. And in this age of climate crisis in which the coronavirus is embedded, in this

Anthropocene era defined by man's continuing lethal assault on the natural world and other species, *we really cannot afford to keep getting trauma wrong!*

We all need to become conversant in the language of multivalent trauma.

So yes, let us talk about the very thing that nobody ever seems to want to talk about. That thing that it seems like it is never the time to speak of. Let's talk trauma, and let's not stop talking about trauma, at all levels, until we've resolved enough of it to become functional again.

Let's talk about how we broke the world.

~*~

When trauma overwhelms our psychological defenses, we quite naturally shut down, we suppress the experience of trauma itself, and in extreme cases we even dissociate from the reality of what is happening to us altogether. Then we repress any memory of that experience, pushing it down into our somatic memory ('soma' = body). And not unlike how we store emotional stress in various parts of our body, like neck and shoulders, or lower back, unresolved trauma is effectively codified and stored in our muscles, nerves, and the largest functioning organism in our entire body, very recently discovered lurking right under our skin - the fascia (a.k.a., the 'interstitium').

Fascia is a thin casing of connective tissue that surrounds and holds every organ, blood vessel, bone, nerve fiber and muscle in place. The tissue does more than provide internal structure - fascia has nerves that make it almost as sensitive as skin. This organ might help protect the rest of our organs and tissue. It could also explain the spread of certain cancers, as well as how a number of diseases progress in the body.

This is like our mainframe. Stored here, unresolved trauma lies in wait, and can be triggered at any time, distorting our relationships and creating all kinds of problems. Unresolved trauma is like having an invisible predator in our personal

lives, cat quick and always ready to pounce on whoever dares trigger us. Instead of seeing this unwelcome presence in our lives as having a cause, we tend to just accept that this is how we are, or even who we are, and others just need to deal with it - because we're unwilling or unable to deal with it ourselves!

Similar to the way we deal with trauma individually, Dr. Judith Hermann characterized the history of trauma in the West as "*a history of forgetting.*" Which is precisely how it causes trouble for the collective, and why understanding how trauma operates and how it is released is such a key not only to personal growth, but also in fully appreciating our current collective predicament. We can appreciate this by considering the fight/flight/fright response of our *political* body (in codependent relationship with popular culture) in the face of the existential threat of climate chaos.

Returning to the individual valence, it's a bit like blissfully forgetting we've been dismembered, and finding a familiar solace in our disembodied state. Remembering our trauma, by contrast, involves coming back into our bodies, and is reflexively painful - but necessary if we are to ever feel whole again, or at least embodied. Talking with psychologists, one of the most telling traits of people in today's culture is how detached we've become from our bodies - especially men who get de-sensitized from a young age (e.g., killing animals on ranches/farms).

Think about how you are when you're walking somewhere. Most of us tend to live in our heads, so that even when walking somewhere we are lost in thoughts about where we've been, where we're heading, or some other story we're telling ourselves. If we're not present for walking in our bodies, then it's a good bet we're part of that disembodied culture. Most people first realize this when they try to sit for mindfulness practices, where we're asked to sink our awareness into our bodies, to feel into our soma and listen with attentiveness. For people afflicted by disembodied culture, this is torture - all they can feel is panic from the thoughts

racing through their head. Fortunately, all it takes to get past that conditioned reflexive stage is fortitude and persistence. The secret to mindfulness and meditation is just showing up.

So here is a really important thing to understand about trauma. The longer we repress our trauma — literally carrying it around in our body (and at the collective level in our political body, as expressed in the cultural zeitgeist) — the more we tend to act it out in ways that are harmful to ourselves and others. Trauma begets drama, remember, which usually precipitates even more trauma, sucking us into a downward spiral of self abuse and bewilderment: “*Why do I keep making these same mistakes?*” is the common lament of someone with ‘trauma issues’ and ‘*history repeats itself*’ because of unresolved collective trauma.

Here’s another important insight: trauma wants to be healed. We naturally tend towards wholeness. And so we keep recreating the stage plays, with an ever-changing cast of interchangeable characters, by which we act out those traumas that most need/want to be healed. Until it is resolved, trauma increasingly interferes with our ability to live our life. *Paradoxically, trauma demands resolution and wholeness by producing dissolution and brokenness in our personal and collective lives.* It doesn’t just want to be healed - trauma demands that we heal.

The Multivalent Traumasphere:

From the Personal to the Collective

We ignore trauma’s cumulative demands at our own increasing peril.

We obviously each need to think about that personally, in relation to our own experiences of violation and loss. That’s a big part of our individuation, or self-realization, process as we mature and ripen as human beings. For most of us,

myself included, that process kicks in when we have a mid-life crisis of some sort, where our repressed spiritual needs overwhelm our ego's agenda:

Michael Washburn sees the midlife crisis as a shift in the movement of the ego. Instead of its outward flow toward accomplishment, it turns inward toward transcendence, which is where, according to transpersonal psychology, the self is grounded and was initiated. "The ego goes back over the old ground of the psyche and childhood for healing and regeneration" (Cortright, p. 87). How long and how deep this "regeneration of spirit" is depends on whether and how the person relates to it—face the midlife developmental process, or escape it? It takes time and support to embrace the shadow. It is helpful if one's culture supports regeneration.

Narvaez, D. (2019). "Ego Dissolution," Pysch. Today.

But while we are following our own healing path, we can also learn to see how these dramas play out on national and global stages when our society refuses to acknowledge, let alone resolve, our chronically symptomatic collective traumas. Just as we carry our personal unresolved trauma in our bodies, and just as we carry our unresolved generational traumas forward in our genetic expression and family dysfunction, so we also carry our unresolved collective traumas forward in our cultural 'norms,' express them in popular 'memes,' and encode them in our social structures - such as the systemic sexism, racism and structural violence encoded into the body politic against oppressed minorities.

What it means to "act out" our unresolved trauma is that we repress the feelings around that deep wound whenever we're triggered, and then we tend to repeat echoes of the original trauma in our patterned behaviors. At the collective level, this can take on many guises. An obvious example to me, as a baby boomer, is the perpetrator trauma (a kind of unspoken guilt) Americans carry from dropping atomic bombs on civilian populations. It is not necessarily reflected just the thousands of additional nuclear bombs we subsequently detonated on ocean

islands, in the desert, or underground — though that is certainly significant and reinforcing — but moreso, I think, in our propensity to continue bombing civilian populations generally, dismissing such war crime as “collateral damage” and pretending it’s acceptable because America is somehow “exceptional.”

By repressing our nuclear trauma, we became addicted to making bombs of all kinds. Carpet bombing Korea in the 1950s, Napalm bombs in Viet Nam in the 1960s - *bombing under the banner of “human rights!”* - all the inhumane bombing in Iraq that led up to the Gulf Wars - a great example of repressed perpetrator trauma, actually, with Secretary Albright’s statement that the deaths of hundreds of thousands of women and children from bombing water treatment plants in violation of the Geneva Convention was “worth it” — echoing similar statements made about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That cold-hearted, inhumane and criminal behavior is a repurcussion of the unresolved collective trauma that is the psychological fallout from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Or consider POW-PTSD Senator McCain gleefully singing “Bomb Bomb Bomb, Bomb Bomb Iran” to the tune of the Beach Boys classic “Barbara Ann”!

Really, the whole idea of "American Exceptionalism" is a psychological compensation and over-justification for perpetrator trauma. As with dropping nuclear bombs on women, children and old people, it is somehow okay when we do it, and terrorism if someone else does. It is not difficult to understand how this same kind of attitude can lull us into a sense that it is somehow okay to fundamentally alter the climate, as it is 'necessary' in order for us to pursue the American Dream of conspicuous consumption.

And now our infatuation with drones has reduced civilian bombings and executions to a kind of video game played by precocious kids sitting in dark rooms in Las Vegas, the City of Lights. Remember, all this began with dropping nukes on

civilian populations in the Land of the Rising Sun. We are psychological through-and-through!

We've become, in the infamous words of Roger Watters, "comfortably numb." Nobody bombs like the U.S. And nobody is as shameless, since nobody else has had to live with the specter of what we did to a civilian population of elderly people, women, children and pets at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And oh, by the way, nobody does mass shootings like us, either. And of course we are the world's leading emitter of Greenhouse Gases, #1 producer of fossil fuels.

These things are not unrelated!

They instead are representative of a complex, and painfully illustrate how unresolved trauma perpetuates itself through increasingly dramatic cycles of behavior echoing out in time. Trauma demands that we acknowledge and begin to resolve it - *or else!* The reason Black Lives Matter is so imperative is because we have yet to resolve the terrible twin traumas of slavery and civil war, which of course we continued to act out through the mass extermination of Indian Americans in the immediate aftermath of that fraternal slaughter fest. Recognizing the terrible cumulative force of trauma, one begins to appreciate just why it is that America is now the bubbling cauldron of the global oppression that empowers mass extinction and climate trauma.

At some point, however, the shared trauma we perpetuate, accumulate, and pass on becomes unmistakably ugly and, to most, intolerable. We see this quite clearly right now with new generations of young children demanding resolution of the climate crisis, and who seem to see social injustice so clearly compared to those of us who've somehow tolerated it up to this point. *When have we ever seen a social movement led by children in the world?*

The cumulative trauma we have visited on the natural world is so great that this new generation is refusing to inherit it the way the average citizens in each preceding generation have swallowed it.

We boomers are their worst nightmare! And no small wonder, either.

So by broadening our perspectives of loss from the personal to the collective, we can see how trauma is multivalent. ‘Valence’ is a term from physics for the graded shells, or inner and outer orbits, of electrons around the nucleus of an atom. What is fascinating about these shelled frequencies in nature is that when change happens in the configuration of electrons in orbit, they jump from one valence to the next - a quantum leap - *without ever actually appearing in between*. It's one of those natural phenomena that calls into question our quaint notions of how change really comes about. In the natural world, change is rarely, if ever, linear. The same can be said of trauma and related complexes. Change happens like the collapse of a wave, or suddenly finding yourself in one field of experience when you never thought you'd escape from a very different field.

So I use this term “multivalent trauma” purposely. We carry epigenetic trauma at the deepest level of our psyches and bodies. Just as the expression of genes is an individual response to being triggered one way or another, so we express, or act out, our epigenetic traumas (expressions of stunted RNA) in our families, which become encoded in dysfunctional family patterns of behavior. And, of course, we carry our own share of traumatic experiences around in our fascia as well. Our cultural traumas are experienced collectively (9/11, Jan. 6, etc.), embodied in our politics, and encoded in our popular culture. So, like Russian dolls, we have indwelling epigenetic trauma, individual traumas carried somatically in our fascia, the family dysfunctions that are an expression of both, all embedded in a larger culture that imparts and offers its own cycles of trauma, such

as exploitative corporate culture, destructive consumer culture, polarized political culture, and patriarchal/misogynist religious culture.

Trauma deforms. It distorts our view of others, like a maladaptive lens.

Generational trauma is just the inner valence of our own shell, hardened into prejudice and defensiveness, seemingly protecting us reflexively from a world perceived as threatening. While they can be resolved with love and a shared sense of growth, they can also metastasize if childhood trauma, in the form of abuse or chronic neglect by trusted adults, is piled on. This presents a real challenge to social evolution or cultural transformation, because families who have adapted to their traumas in dysfunctional ways, such as militant Christian Nationalism, will see attempts to acknowledge collective traumas as threatening their way of life and their most cherished beliefs. They cling to their dysfunction, and often project their shadow onto society at large. And so they tend to rally behind autocratic figures who are expert at triggering and manipulating those all-too-common traumas for political reasons - "father figures" posing as friendly tyrants that will do their bidding.

I distinctly remember the moment I realized Trump might actually become President. His lovely daughter Ivanka, dressed in angelic white with her hair blowing in a stage-generated breeze, introduced him at the GOP Convention with a speech during which she repeated the phrase "my father" approximately every 25 seconds. Remarkably, nobody in the media picked up on this. It was fascist stage craft exquisitely adapted to our chaotic times.

We see all kinds of collective traumas expressed and reflected in our institutions and in our media, from textbooks to video games, and certainly in our police dramas and movies, all of which provide creative outlets for acting out - but not with a view towards resolving - our most personal traumas as fantasy, in a relatively safe spiritual container (living rooms, movie theaters). Consider for a

moment the “fanatic” behaviors of individuals at sporting events all around the world, not to mention the ritualistic recitation of national anthems at the beginning of such events, and remember for just a second how it all began in the Roman Coliseum! Forcing humans to engage in mortal combat, or even feeding them to ferocious animals, as public spectacle is *pure trauma*, is it not? In our culture, we have photographs of public lynchings, with families bringing picnics to celebrate slave culture. Or the erection of gallows for lynching and waving the Confederate flag in the halls of Congress on January 6 - the day after the first African American candidate (and first Jew) won a senate seat from Georgia. Culture is replete with these kinds of encoded traumas, and can serve as a relatively safe forum for either resolving our traumas or, if profit and power prevail, perpetuating them.

Excuse my Industrial Age metaphor, but culture is rather like a ‘natural trauma resource,’ there to be mined for good or ill.

And now, after a couple centuries of industrialized, exponential growth, and with the onset of the Great Acceleration in the wake of World War Two, we are seeing the trauma we’ve inflicted on the corpus of the natural world coming back to haunt us in the waking nightmare of our deranged global politics and trauma-exploiting tyrants, our disintegrating lives, families, and cultures, and our unravelling landscapes and ecosystems. It seems like we’re just waiting for the global economy to finally collapse, like the house of cards that it is, before we really make the fundamental changes that are called for in response to this existential threat. And looking around, there is nowhere left to serve as a repository for our gross preponderance of accumulated, unresolved traumas.

We are, collectively and as a species, in a bit of a panic.

Chaos reigns supreme on the world stage right now, does it not? Doesn’t it almost feel like we’ve entered a new reality? A different, stranger dimension? We’ve fundamentally and unalterably changed the atmosphere, the biosphere, the

troposphere, and the lithosphere. Psychosynthesis therapist and social systems thinker Mark Skelding has quite sensibly proposed that we complete the Gaian organs listed here by adding the ‘*psychosphere*’ by and through which we are all inextricably connected, enmeshed in sentient awareness with all that lives.

It is this sentient being-ness, this psychosphere, that has been grievously wounded, and is thus intentionally triggering all or our systemic alarms. In other words, we are now inhabiting a traumatized psychosphere - a *traumasphere* - of our own making, which is euphemistically labeled (again, by us) the Anthropocene ~ more mirror than geology.

As Pogo put it way back when, “We have met the enemy, and it is us.”

Are we brave enough to look in that hyper-objective mirror? To admit that we've been wrong all along? And isn't that what is really called for by these particular, peculiar exigent circumstances?

In his book *Hyperobjects*, modern philosopher and existential thinker Timothy Morton strikes at the very heart of our crisis:

“What we desperately need is an appropriate level of shock and anxiety concerning a specific ecological trauma — indeed, *the* ecological trauma of our age, the very thing that defines the Anthropocene as such.”

It is thus incumbent upon us, if we are to chart a course out of this global miasma and planetary mayhem, to try to make some sense of it all, and to make peace with ourselves. Only when we acknowledge the real reasons that we've created the mess we find ourselves in, only when we can identify its true causes, will we even begin to understand the scope of the crisis well enough to see our way out of it.

It helps to see that this, too, is human nature. We express it in our movies, which are nothing other than myth-making for modern times. The stories we keep tellings ourselves *about* ourselves, over and over, almost always involve our

overcoming impossible odds and extricating ourselves from intractable situations. It's just how we roll. And please believe me when I say this: we can and we will solve this, no matter what terrible toll our recalcitrance exacts.

Indeed, we've *already begun* the difficult and taxing work of resolving our collective traumas. Building on the solid foundation of the global Civil Rights Movement, on the broad historical shoulders of women's suffrage, Mahatma Ghandi, the Rev. Martin Luther King, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, efforts like MeToo, Black Lives Matter, the Landback Movement (Indigenous Rising), together with the historically unprecedented Children's Movement (Fridays-For-Futures, Sunrise, etc.) will, over time, succeed - because they have to - and these relational adjustments will in turn free up the energies and resources needed to fundamentally transform our relationship with the natural world.

Of course, there will be push-back from the more trauma-deformed sectors of society. And yes, it's not happening fast enough.

But it is happening. Order always emerges from chaos.

Therefore, despair is useless. Hope is pointless. Activation is everything.

The New and Emerging Taxonomy of Trauma

Against this backdrop, it is easy to appreciate that nothing is more vital to our survival and the survival of so many other species than acknowledging and understanding trauma. Because of the central importance of the clarifying lens of collective trauma to resolving the world's most intractable problems, a brief summation, or primer, on trauma is in order. We must all become trauma literate in order that our actions, at individual, familial and societal levels, can be trauma-informed. Trauma-informed actions are the heart of collective activism.

Trauma can generally be thought of as experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing. Trauma overwhelms our ability to cope,

leaving us feeling powerless. By absencing ourselves from the conscious experience of trauma, we give rise to patterns of behavior on our lives that are harmful echoes of the original trauma.

It is important to point out right at the outset, and to keep always close to mind in our conversations around trauma, the *yin/yang* relationship of trauma and oppression. This is why unresolved trauma eventually gives rise to social justice movements - because it is our oppressors who benefit unjustly from the perpetuation of trauma's cycles of pain and suffering. Pull back the curtain, and we see this injustice reflected in the unprecedented wealth gap today between the super-rich, whose wealth is inevitably based on exploitation of people and planet, and the populous poor, whose poverty is inevitably rooted in injustice. For example, the systems of slavery and capitalism are forms of collective trauma, while White Christian Nationalism and the minimum wage "slave labor" resulting from power-over economic models are the unjust echoes of those unresolved traumas. Trauma is inflicted and perpetuated by overt oppression, and can only be resolved by fundamentally changing relationships, whether through reparations or labor unions.

Now, because of the developed world's continual assault on our shared biosphere carried out largely by transnational corporations (at the behest of their shareholders and consumers), we find ourselves inhabiting a 'brave new world' of Orwellian proportions that perpetrates a relentless assault on all of our psyches and central nervous systems. This is the meaning of 'traumasphere.' We can observe it on full display at all levels of life today.

As William Agee prophetically pronounced at the start of the Anthropocene, everything is split, we're increasingly polarized, and everyone seems caught up in a vicious cycle of fight, fright and/or flight, leaving no one free to live their life the way life was meant to be lived. All of our long-held assumptions are being

questioned. We feel a growing sense of dread in our bones and in our guts. We are facing unprecedented levels of insecurity, anxiety, and fear.

How do we cope with all this madness? It's TOO MUCH!

That is the feeling of powerlessness that mass trauma induces.

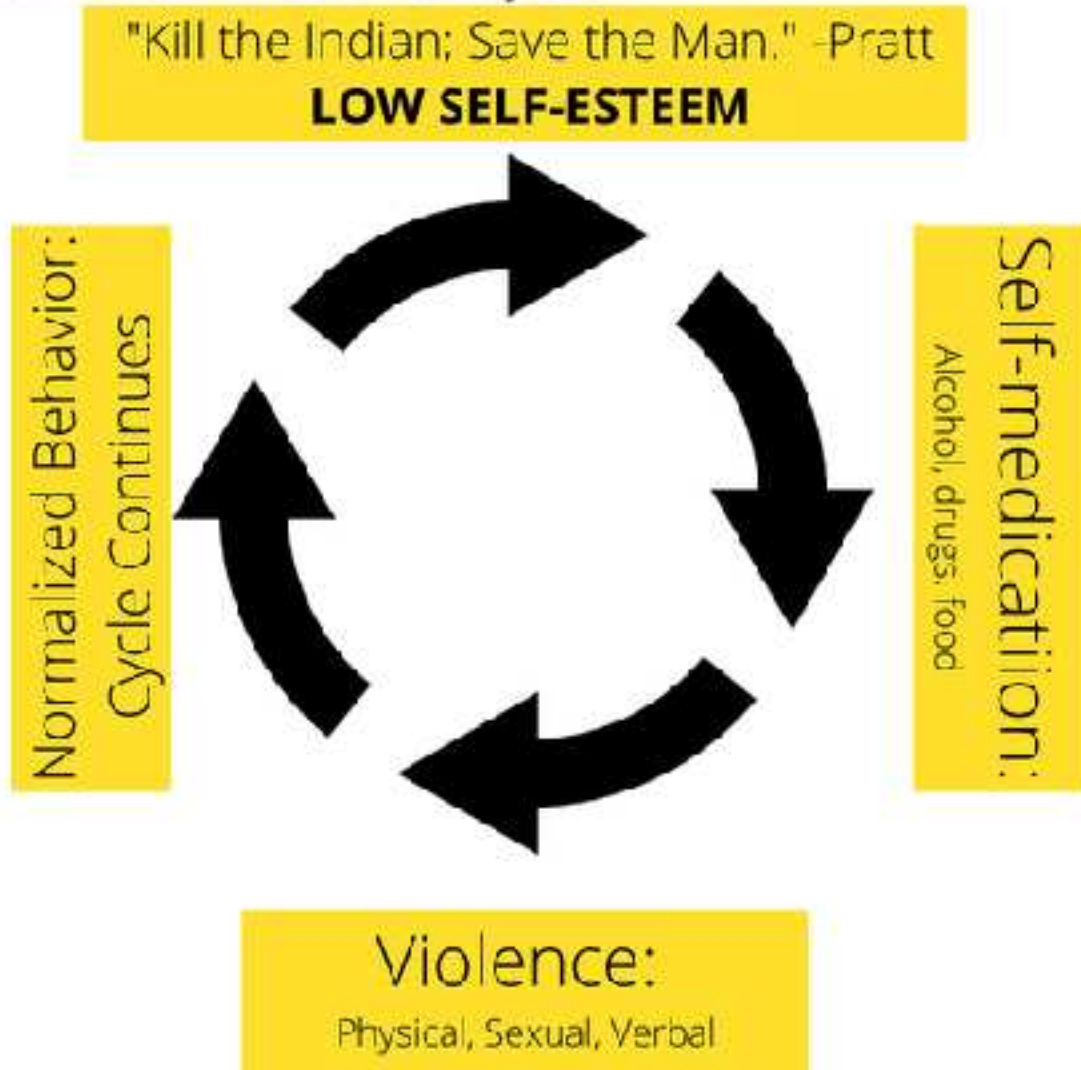
(And that's the feeling our oppressors exploit)

What we've learned so far from the study of trauma here in the West since the beginning of Industrialized Warfare (WWI) has come mostly from studying the after-effects on those who have been subjected to major common traumas - the victims and perpetrators of chemical trench warfare, survivors of the Shoah and their children, as well as the survivors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Viet Nam war, the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the genocide of first peoples everywhere, the descendants of slaves and, more recently, from 9-11 and the Capitol Insurrection of 2021. From all of this experience, we have learned sequentially, over time, that human beings experience trauma on at least these three distinct, but interrelated and inter-acting, levels:

- **individual trauma:** as with child abuse, sexual assaults, automobile accidents, or battlefield experiences. This is the trauma we've long recognized, and is rooted in violations of trust involving people or activities;
- **inter-generational, or epigenetic trauma:** first observed and studied among the children of Holocaust survivors, and more recently observed in the expression of stunted RNA passed on by the sperm of traumatized fathers. This category involves unspeakable assaults that are so profound as to impress themselves on our genetic code and/or otherwise fundamentally alter the way we relate; and,
- **cultural trauma:** as seen quite starkly here in America with Native American culture, as well as with Aborigines in Australia, Tibetans in China, Kashmiris in India, or even our own poisonous culture of neoliberal "exceptionalism" that has come to fester in response to 9-11.

Native American example of generational/cultural trauma:

Historical Trauma Cycle:



What we've learned the hard way, again and again, is that the effects of trauma do not just subside and fade away when we ignore them. Contrary to the popular adage, time most definitely does *not* heal all wounds! This is neither true at the individual level or the collective level. The passage of time only masks our traumas with scabs that constrict our broken hearts. Collectively, this social or

ethnic scarring and cultural masking set the stage for mob rule (e.g., Jan. 6), inter-tribal or even internecine grievances (e.g., former Yugoslavia).

The effects of trauma will stubbornly persist and accumulate, and if not treated eventually metastasize, until the underlying, common traumatic experience itself is recalled, brought up from the body somehow into conscious awareness, and *cognitively* processed in safety, with some combination of unconditional acceptance and compassionate awareness. In other words, only *active healing* heals traumatic wounds. Time is rather irrelevant, apart from the cumulative force of unresolved traumas.

When we fail to acknowledge trauma— well, that's where it gets its power from. That's the real troublemaker in our lives and in the world. Trauma feeds off our avoidance behaviors, our patterns of repression and denial, including our repressed rage, anger and hurt. We act out our unresolved traumas in small, habitual ways and, episodically, in big, damaging ways. Simply stated, unresolved trauma deforms all our relationships.

So, as a prologue to any dialogue for healing our collective traumas, before we can really understand how to resolve climate trauma, it behooves us to first ask ourselves some even more fundamental questions:

- *What seems to be the root cause of trauma?*
- *What is the nature of this beast that feeds on our silence and rises up in our shadow selves, in our families, in our mobs, and in our armies?*
- *Who is the real enemy here? Why this evil??*

Crimes Against Nature

Trauma can be distilled down to humans (or any life form) unjustly experiencing inhumane injuries and/or intolerable circumstances in relationship with trusted figures and activities. The more an action or experience goes against

our innate human nature, the more we recoil in horror and disbelief, and the more our cognition and emotional system shuts down in response to overwhelm.

Here is as good a definition of trauma as any I've come across out there: "***a rupture that will not let life live according to its nature.***" (Jenkinson, supra.)

We should never accept the propaganda that war is somehow part of human nature. If war was in fact congruent with human nature, then why, after millennia of practicing war, do soldiers still come home traumatized by their experiences on the battlefield? If war was so natural, then would we not expect humans to *thrive* in relation to our battlefield experiences, rather than be anesthetized by them? Of course, sociopaths and psychopaths may thrive in war, but that only proves the point.

What we today celebrate as "Veterans Day" was, for many decades, a response to the trauma of industrial warfare, observed quite soberly as Armistice Day. During the 11th minute of the 11th hour, on the 11th day of the 11th month, people everywhere, no matter what they were doing, used to pause collectively to observe a full minute of perfect silence in remembrance of the 'unspeakable' horrors of World Wars I and II. Today, people wave flags and celebrate their patriotism. This gets back to trauma involving a history of forgetting.

The idea of Armistice Day originated on the battlefield, actually, with the realization that what soldiers were experiencing during the new forms of warfare in the 20th Century defied our imagination. It could not be adequately described in words, and the decisions generals were making in their war-rooms on paper could no longer be so easily justified with what was happening in the trenches. Industrial warfare, quite simply, made war intolerable.

This is surely still the case. It's why we've never seen a "limited" nuclear war, for example. And it explains why drone warfare is so easily tolerated by its perpetrators. It also explains why bringing the Viet Nam war quite graphically into

our living rooms on the evening news, in a way that had never been possible before, hastened its end. And yet, for some reason, our rulers found it necessary to replace Armistice Day with the more celebratory, more amnesia-inducing term Veterans Day.

Of course they did. Armistice Day was bad public relations for the war industry that lords over our elected leaders. Something very important was lost in that nominal exchange.

War is inhuman - **inhumane**. War involves the perpetration of crimes against nature - **human** nature (and Nature, as well). Yes, war is monstrous. Is any of that remembered on Veteran's Day anymore? Does anyone bother to pause and reflect on the inexpressible horrors of war at 11:11 on Nov. 11?

Trauma is the history of forgetting.

* * *

So the takeaway from this condensed primer on the brief history of trauma in the West is this:

Trauma is what happens when humans violate Nature

I simply cannot emphasize that enough. That's the key to understanding trauma at all levels — in your life, in your close relations, in politics, and in the headlines. If you retain nothing else from reading this book, you must remember this: the cause of trauma is unnatural human behavior. Like placing humans in chains for no other reason than to control them. Or sexually assaulting a child. Or crashing a car. Or creating killing factories for animals. Or vacuuming fish from the oceans. Or removing a mountain top to get at the coal.

Now you might still be asking yourself: why the compelling need to come to agreement on these ideas of trauma and human nature, or to be talking about this at all? It's a most uncomfortable topic, after all, in any kind of social situation. We normally only feel safe enough to discuss our traumas in the refuge of intimate

relationships, where it is hoped we might be able to process them with the support of our loving partner or a trusted confidant.

It is a rather risky proposition to discuss the topic of trauma apart from that level of intimacy. So there has to be a good reason if we are going to embark upon or even advocate for a national discussion of trauma and its discontents.

Let us, then, bring this discussion home by getting right to the most salient point of our shared existential crisis...

We are now experiencing an entirely new and unprecedented form of trauma: *Climate Trauma*. You will not find it in the APA's DSM V, but it is on full display everywhere you look today. It is undeniable to anyone with eyes to see, the loud and omnipresent ripples of a grievous injury that is being actively inflicted on the entire biosphere - which, of course, includes us self-proclaimed wise bipeds.

And Climate Trauma is quite unlike any other form of trauma we have ever experienced or actively forgotten. It is constant, not episodic. It is pervasive, not limited to individuals or groups — or even species. It's like a cracked mirror every time you look up to the sky, warping our view of ourselves.

The best and worst thing about climate trauma is that, due to its relentless and pervasive specter, *it's always triggering all our unresolved traumas*. All our past traumas are now present, all demanding resolution at the same time. And that, too, feels overwhelming. It's like a Rubic's Cube of multivalent trauma that we must solve before the whole Earth explodes.

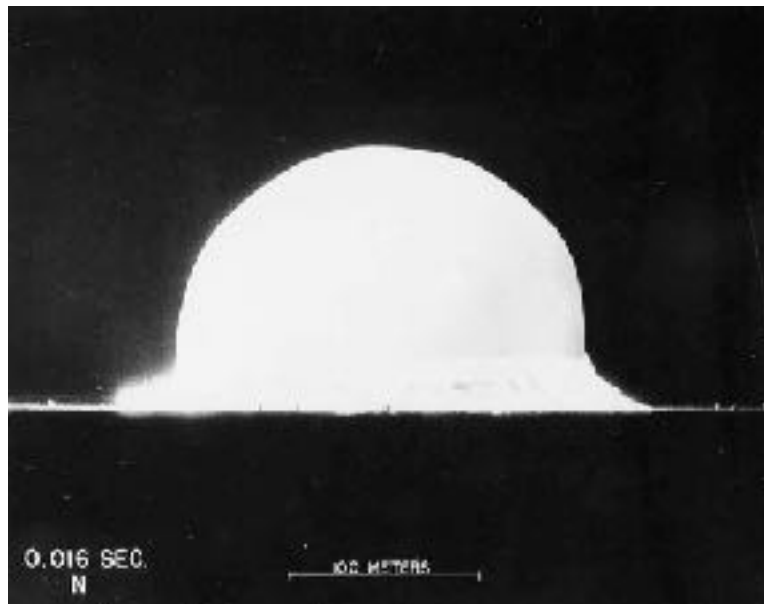
The 11,000+ year Holocene Era in which civilization arose and developed, an era marked by a nurturing, accommodating, and relatively stable climate, is now ancient 'history.' That epoch is officially over, as a matter of science, culture, and psyche. We are now inhabiting (and shaping) the Anthropocene.

You are to be excused if you missed the memo, since at the time the Holocene was ending we were all quite oblivious to the fact, but geologists¹ have now marked the start of the Anthropocene quite precisely:

July 16, 1945

5:29 a.m., PST

Trinity ... The religiously named first successful detonation of a chain-reaction nuclear bomb, the vision of which sparked a thought in the mind of its creator, the brilliant and pretty cool in a 1940's way American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer:



*“Now I am become **Death**, the destroyer of worlds.”*

Oppenheimer, seeing into the future through that rupture of time and space when we ripped open the very fabric of reality, spontaneously recalled this passage from the 5000 year old sacred Hindu scripture, the Baghavad Gita. But he was speaking

¹ The Anthropocene epoch was formally declared in 2016 by the official keepers of geological time, the International Commission on Stratigraphy, with a tentative starting date of 1950, the year when plutonium isotopes from widespread nuclear testing clearly appears in the earth's crust.

for all of Western civilization, if not for our species (Indigenous peoples rightly object to their inclusion in this secret conspiracy).

And so while it may well *feel* like we are inhabiting the long-prophesied End Times, in another sense it is also like we are at the beginning of creation, having so recently been spawned by the primordial trinity.

So...

In the beginning...

Let us begin again with a confession from this baby boomer born at the very height of that population explosion (DAMN you FREUD!),

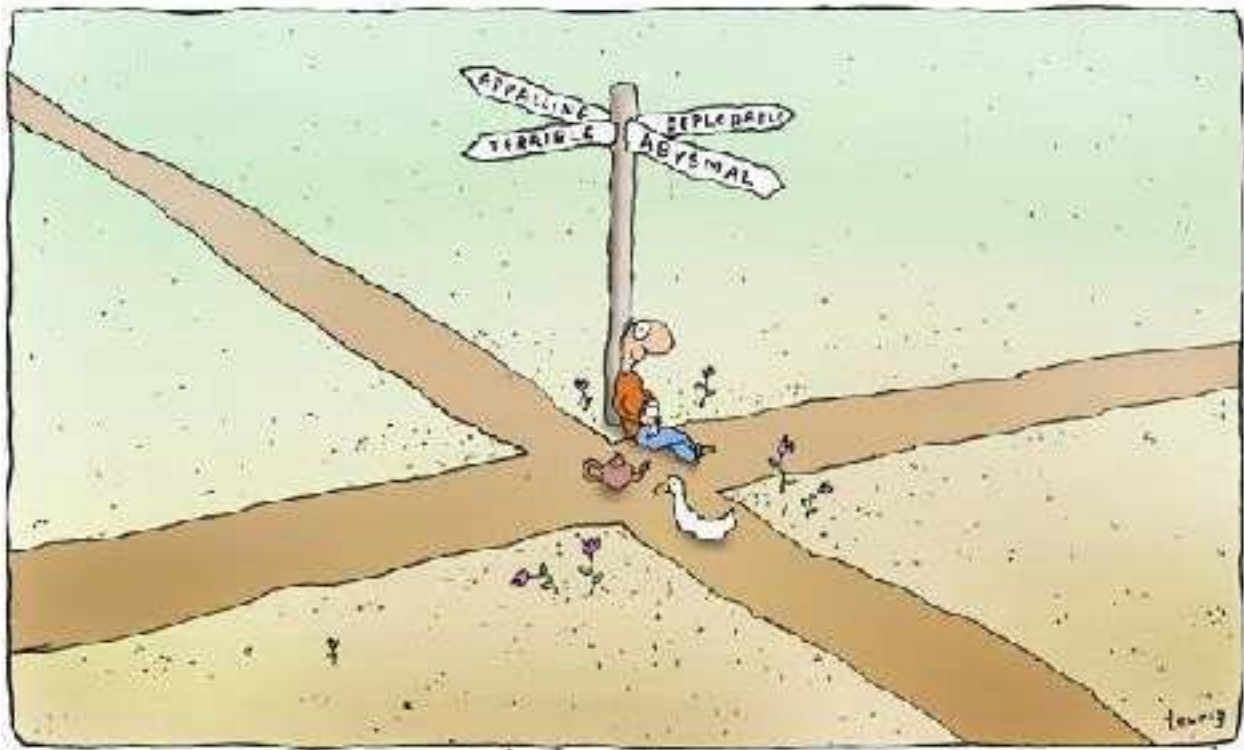
Always a good place to start. BOOM!

This world we are now inhabiting, this new epoch with new, never before deposited elements in the geologic record, like the trinitarium created in the blast itself, with nuclear legacy wastes that will still be radioactive ten or more millennia from now, with oceans, with marine life itself, filling with plastics and micro-plastics made from man-made petrochemicals developed for industrial warfare, and now tragically mistaken for food by marine animals — ***THIS ANTHROPOCENE!!!*** — is largely the rather direct and precipitous result of the unresolved traumas my father's generation and his father's generation first suffered through, and then, in their own efforts to cope — without any real support from mental health professionals or culture (just copious amounts of hard liquor) — subsequently suppressed, acted out, and inflicted on the entire planet, on all life forms, and on all generations to follow, beginning with my own...

Over 2000 detonations of nuclear bombs in the first half of my life, all much more powerful even than those dropped on Japan. My life is NOTHING compared to the half life of THAT fallout! I've long suspected that all that extra radiation sped up time itself. As James Agee opined on the back page of Time Magazine in

the wake of Hiroshima, “With the controlled splitting of the atom, humanity, already profoundly perplexed and disunified, was brought inescapably into a new age in which all thoughts and things were split - and far from controlled.”

...Wait! Don't despair! This is the GOOD news!!



Can you see why?

Being so new, climate trauma is really difficult to acknowledge. It took me years of studying it without understanding it before I finally recognized it for what it is. And while so many other psychologists and social thinkers smarter than me saw it right away, most mainstream professionals still refuse to see it. Fortunately, that is changing, slowly, and it is just a matter of time before we dispense with the euphemisms, like “eco-anxiety” and “solastasia.” As the popular philosopher

Timothy Morton first observed in 2012, in his influential book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*:

“What we desperately need is an appropriate level of shock and anxiety concerning a specific ecological trauma — indeed, the ecological trauma of our age, the very thing that defines the Anthropocene as such.”

Being such a *recent* phenomena, it is still quite accessible, and quite curable as well - psychologically, at least. Climate trauma is still subject to a group intervention, you could say. And that would unleash a cascade of healing ripple effects, altering all of our relations at the root, almost archetypal level. But we must face this new form of trauma now. It is our collective shadow projected out onto the planet itself, like a great eclipse that has now gone total. Behind this shadow is a light that can reveal all the solutions we seek.

We cannot, however, afford to perpetuate it psychologically by continuing to adopt euphemistic misnomers like “climate change” and “global warming,” or the APA's banal diagnosis of "eco-anxiety," all of which only serve to satisfy our reflexive need to cast the trauma we are experiencing viscerally as a distant threat on the horizon. We must face all of our worst fears at this unique and pivotal time in history; because behind these fears, unresolved traumas hide from us, gaining power and causing endless trouble.

It is another kind of exceptionalism to pretend that I should only feel traumatized by the climate crisis in the wake of an extreme weather event. I do not need to live in Australia in order to feel and grieve the traumatic loss of 3 billion animals in a single fire season. That is not "anxiety"! We all feel that because we are all integral parts of a living planet. It is simply a matter of the degree we are sensitive to that collective experience of trauma. If we are cut off from our own embodied traumas, we will not feel climate trauma. Instead, we'll keep it in our

heads. And maybe that is what "eco-anxiety" really is - the inability to feel climate trauma even though you see it happening in real time.

While biospheric trauma is now pervasive, it is the aggregate of a number of distinct, unnatural behaviors which we have been conditioned to ignore by those who have charted and profited from this disastrous course. Ideas like:



*Industrialized warfare, for example. *What a concept from its inception!* Trench warfare with poison gas, which rather quickly gave rise to human killing factories, carpet bombing, cluster bombs, “collateral damage,” and nature-destroying chemicals like napalm.

*From there, it wasn’t far at all to industrialized agriculture — killing everything that lives in soil with gas and deadly chemicals, and the ‘collateral damage’ of poisoning our own bodies in the process - with toxins showing up in our mother’s milk - eventually leading to pandemics of autism, Alzheimers, the rise of autoimmune diseases and immune deficiency syndromes, obesity, *ad nauseum*.

- * Industrialized fishing — emptying the source of all life, the oceans themselves, of life. *90% of all big fish gone in my lifetime*, with plankton now being rapidly displaced by micro-plastics, starving out the whales. We are on pace to have no life at all in the oceans by 2050 -and about half the planet’s oxygen is produced by marine life. Meaning we are close to snuffing out the very source of our own life.
- * And oh those killing factories — could anything be more unnatural? — first designed in war, for humans, and then repurposed as factory farms and industrialized slaughterhouses, perpetuating the atrocities of WWII and numbing humanity to the scale of suffering from **70 Billion animals** - with real feelings, just like our pets - inhumanely **slaughtered every year**.

* Chemical warfare has persisted, in spite of the obvious horror, including all the napalm dropped in Southeast Asia for the purpose of *directly obliterating nature itself* — so that the enemy had nowhere to hide, you understand — and the many other unimaginable horrors attending carpet bombing (Dresden, Tokyo, Korea, Cambodia), “shock and awe,” fracking, clearcutting, strip-mining, MOUNTAIN-TOP REMOVAL (!!), and vast chemically-dependent monocrops used to fatten up McCows (and those who eat them) and mass produce Frankenfoods.

WE ARE AT WAR WITH NATURE! Homo industrialis horribilis. That is the species awaiting transmutation.

And make no mistake here - this isn't a war we can win. In fact, we are being routed, as evidenced by increasing tides of refugees surging across the planet in search of new homes. The Syrian war began as a fight over water between farmers, displaced by unprecedented droughts, and Assad's forces on the outskirts of Damascus. Water wars will become commonplace as the glaciers that regulate water supplies for most of our populations dry up and disappear.

We see, and are banally complicit in, this same kind of industrialized war against Nature happening in Indonesia today, perpetrated on orangutans rather than Viet Cong guerrillas, so food manufacturers can have cheap palm oil. The raging war against Nature includes transnational corporations colluding with corrupt governments to regularly kill Indigenous activists and remote tribes people guilty of the sin of trying to protect the natural environment they've co-evolved with since “the time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary” (legal def. of “time immemorial” which is the source of custom's legal force).

And again, at an even larger scales, we see it on the ocean floors and on the high seas, with China's fleets going everywhere to satisfy their insatiable demand for fish stocks created by wiping out all the fish stocks in the oceans around China itself, and with Japan's relentless slaughter of whales for “research purposes.” And,

of course, we are witness to the eradication of whatever intact natural ecosystems are still left in the world at an accelerating pace. An area of wild lands the size of Mexico has been eliminated just in the last decade, mostly to grow crops to feed cows for fast food giants, just as much of the sea plunder goes to feed chickens and cats!

INSANE!! Homo industrialis horribilis is utterly insane. While it is still nascent, and doesn't have to be this way, the Anthropocene at this point is an industrial crime scene.

And all of this, when we get right down to it, owing to our collective failure to resolved traumas *of such recent vintage!* In my case, it's my father's traumas I'm trying to redeem. My goodness, if we hadn't been determined to punish the people of Germany so harshly in the buildup to the Great Depression, that monster we created with poisons in the mosh pits of WWI, Adolf Hitler, would never have gained traction in Weimar Germany! A harsh lesson, but one we are so slow to learn STILL! (See, e.g., Israel's *uber*-harsh treatment of Palestinians displaced in their own homeland as reparations for German sins).

Of course, lest we forget, the ever present threat of nuclear warfare, the immediate precursor to climate trauma, which also was bequeathed to us by the insanity of WWII and Harry 'Horse-Shit' Truman, the industry-picked successor to FDR (because his chosen successor, the wildly popular VP Johnson, cared too much about working people). If trauma is truly cumulative, left unresolved, and biospheric trauma is the (ill-) logical culmination of this pattern and practice of industrialized trauma, then we cannot overlook the greatest globally felt traumas of all, the 'original sins' at the very root of all this unnatural devastation. In response to the killing factories of the Holocaust, the American Commander in Chief recklessly unleashed Hell on Earth in the land of the rising sun, mere weeks after shamelessly invoking Trinity in the unholy consecration of our new age.

How Freudian is that, really? No culture has been more poisoned by Freud's thanos, or death wish, than good 'ole "God Blessed" America. It is here we find the real demon seed of our present climate trauma - the 'Old Glory' seed that spawned the Anthropocene. The reason I keep circling back on it is that it [disrupted our most fundamental archetypes](#) - a creator god and mother nature - and the cure for climate trauma will be found close to this deep, collective psychological wound.

While it is no doubt true that slavery and genocide are our original sins as a nation, it is Trinity that led inexorably to biospheric trauma on a scale never before imagined, and is thus our original sin as a species. Indeed, it was Trinity that introduced us to the unimaginable scales that philosopher Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects," and the overwhelm they induce. That demon seed is just as alive in us today — with every chant of "U.S.A! U.S.A!" (or, more recently, "LOCK THEM UP! LOCK THEM UP!"), with every invocation of "American Exceptionalism," and with every bomb dropped on civilian populations — as it ever was back in those more innocent times when we were saving the world from Hitler. Indeed, with the repressed perpetrator trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the festering of climate trauma, we have now invoked those same fascist archetypal forces we were so stridently aligned against back in the 1940s. We are summoning all our demons now.

What comes up for you when you think of those 2 nukes falling on mostly women, children, their pets, old people, songbirds, and even American POWs (more Americans were killed in those bombings than died in the Trade Towers on 9/11) in the crowded cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

< O >

As dawn broke that bright August day in the White Sands Desert of New Mexico, one of the physicists joining Oppenheimer as witnesses to the God-blessed Trinitarian event remembered his own impressions...

Suddenly, there was an enormous flash of light, the brightest light I have
ever seen or

that I think anyone has ever seen.

It blasted...

it pounced...

it bored its way into you.

It was a vision which was seen

with more than the eye.

It was seen to last forever.

You would wish it would stop...

... altogether it lasted about two seconds.

That was Isidor Isaac Rabi's evocation of our initiation into a new world order that fateful day — his description so vivid, so emotional for a trained scientist in a time of war. And yet, expressed so organically, his words are quite telling for anyone who has studied trauma.

Dr. Rabi was imprinting in real time (time being a product of memory, after all) a very deep experience of trauma, if not the very deepest, from both the perpetrator's and the victim's perspective. This trauma inflicted by man on the pristine, white-sand, morning sunlit earth, an unutterable violence carried out in our name against the very laws of nature whose secrets we'd just unlocked - rather like Pandora opening the urn, or box, on her wedding day.

This box let loose a parade of imaginary horrors, unleashing death of a kind and on a scale too horrible to imagine. Jacob's ladder would've been a more appropriate name than Trinity.

(read Rabi's vivid description once more, please, with *feeling*)

Trauma victims themselves become frozen in time. Our most unnatural of experiences become trapped in a perpetual present, a present moment that is

preserved and encoded in our somatic system, in our muscle memory and in our neural networks, rather like the outlines of Hiroshima's vaporized bodies inscribed on sidewalks and against buildings, the eery shadows of people who no longer existed. These undigested experiences are by definition shocking, a violent and unexpected wound that is inflicted on our psyche.

Certainly, nothing has ever quite approached the sudden violence of that lonely moment in frozen, white-desert time, quickly reverberating in the detonations that ended a world war, and then continuing to ripple out for decades into the oceans and underground, with two thousand or so more detonations, violently blasting apart 'uninhabited' ocean atolls, or turning Pluto's underworld into molten waves of soil and rock, as we tested new versions of plutonium and uranium bombs.

What kind of perverse alchemy do we practice when we extract elements from the Earth in order to create death? Humanity taking control over the "basic forces of the universe," as Truman crowed from his perch atop the ruins of world war, hubristically assuming the province of creator gods - of providence itself - and subsequently overcompensating with televangelical fervor on the road to perdition, all under the guise of "American Exceptionalism."

Like the Holocaust it was intended to end, the idea of our nuking civilian populations living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki lies just outside of our imagination, at the boundaries of our ability to rationalize or even conceive. To really think about it, say in terms of children on playgrounds, young lovers kissing, fathers going to work, or infants suckling at their mother's breasts, all unknowingly defining "Ground Zero" on the bright mornings of August 6 and August 9 in the year 1945 — well, it just overwhelms our emotional capacity...

...like an experience that is seen to last forever...

...though you wish it would stop.

MAKE IT STOP!

< O >

*It is through acting out our unresolved traumas
that we are still remaking the world in our own image.*

< O >

There is agency here, in a collective sense.

So we really do need to talk about this. We need to own this, because its already too late. It may be uncomfortable, but life as we've always known it is coming to an end as I write, which just happens to be during a global pandemic under a vast cloud of smoke from yet another season of unnatural forest fires.

Our world is dying all around us. As Greta says quite poignantly, our house is on fire. Ask Australians. Ask someone who once lived in Paradise, California, or Detroit, Oregon. Ask an Amazonian tribal member. Or a fisherman from Maine or Alaska. Ask a killer whale in Puget Sound. Or a matriarchal elephant leading her family and cohorts to a last-resort water source that has always existed, and finding only dust.

This terminal condition can be appreciated most critically by pausing to reflecting again on where all life began - in the oceans that comprise our Mother Earth's womb. As a largely unintended, unseen, and cumulative consequence of the industrial age that began in the soot and grime from burning coal in 19th century London — the world's first megalopolis — global warming has now heated the oceans by the equivalent of one-atomic-bomb-exploding-every-second... for the past 150 years!

Talk about hyperobjects! Morton defines "hyperobjects" as phenomena that are "massively distributed in time and space" relative to us. How could we possibly wrap our mind around this horrifying math? It doesn't seem possible, does it?

Maybe the reason so many people have such a hard time accepting the facts underlying our climate crisis is because they sound like science fiction!

When I was growing up, the very idea that we humans could affect something as vast as our oceans was, if you will excuse the pun, unfathomable. That very word embodies the ocean as a hyperobject. As does the idea of one nuclear bomb going off every second under the ocean's endless waves.

Call it the exponential growth of the nuclear age as concept, like the flash of impossibly white molten light that emanates instantly and everywhere from the detonation of a fusion bomb in the empty space of thin air.

That shocking statistic, by the way, comes from a fairly recent (Nov. 2018) study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences — I'm not making this stuff up! — the same study that revealed the oceans have been absorbing 90% of all greenhouse gases - about twice as much as previously assumed. This is rather troubling news, and a good illustration of how nascent climate science is. Apart from measuring trends in physical CO₂ emissions or the chemical composition of ocean water, anyone who pretends certainty about Gaia's future is not to be granted credence. Even as I edit this, in 2022, an enormous volcano has erupted in the Pacific Ocean, and vulcanologists are still studying the cooling effects of increased volcanic activity registered in ice cores and geologic records. What if Gaia's response to global warming was increased magma activity?

In any event, what we can say is that what we're now seeing in the atmosphere and troposphere is quite literally only the tip of this climate iceberg lurking beneath the ocean's waves.

You know... like [Godzilla](#)? No longer the enemy who once delighted in toppling Japanese skyscrapers, Godzilla is cast as an unlikely eco-warrior battling to defeat the Titan menace -- led by the three-headed King Ghidorah -- and save humanity from itself.

That's OUR Frankenstein, Ms. Shelley. The monster from the depths of our collective psyche, conjured up in the wake of WWII and breathing nuclear fire. Commenting on the latest "climate" remake of the movie, anthropologist Nathaniel J. Dominy and biologist Ryan Calsbeek opined in the journal *Science* that "What began as a pointed anti-nuclear fable has since evolved into a broader allegory for human folly and our reckless disregard for the natural environment."

"We need to engage with the reality of climate change in order to deal with it," said Caroline Hickman, a psychotherapist who lectures at the University of Bath in southwest England on the topic of climate trauma as a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance. "The monster gives us a metaphor, a narrative through which we can do that."

And now, in relatively short order, having never really confronted, let alone resolved, this psychological dragon, we have somehow effectively created a global traumasphere. And it's leading us right back into the womb of our own creation, the very amniotic waters we've been mindlessly poisoning during the 75-year Great Acceleration.

It's time we confront and slay that dragon.

* * *

The world's foremost expert on the marine world, Sylvia Earle - now in her 80s - devotes whatever time she has left on Earth to traveling the world over, informing politicians at every stop that yes, it's true - the oceans are dying.

She's like a sweet old planetary canary in the deepest, darkest coal mine of politics. And, of course, she reminds them as well that without living, vital oceans, we can kiss our sorry asses goodbye. Unlike the plankton it is displacing, plastic microfiber does not produce oxygen!

I know how distressing all this can be. Really, I do.

I know full well how easy it is to tune it out now, as most of us are still adept at doing - even while bringing children into this dying world. We can't *stop* having babies, either. What we really need is more *adults*, not fewer babies.

Because if we refuse to recognize, accept, and understand how the world is shaped by our own inherited traumas — traumas that we are all acting out in our relations with each other and to the world every single day this crisis continues — we will never have another opportunity to come into balance with any semblance of the beauty and wonder of the natural world that gave birth to us.

The world that has sustained us for over 11 millennia with a stable climate.

The natural world that nurtures us still, in spite of all we have done to her.

We no longer have any choice in this matter. That is the whole point of attaching the “existential” adjective to “crisis.” Our lives and all lives depend on our own emotional intelligence and maturity - NOT on our so-called leaders. They represent the worst in us, not our best! ***Don't Look UP!*** (not to them, at least).

“If you bring forth what is within you,

what you bring forth will save you.

If you do not bring forth what is within you,

what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Gnostic Gospels (ca. 200 CE)

The food chain is breaking down, on land and at sea. There is mass human and animal mortality, and mass migrations are underway. The ice caps are melting. The forests are disappearing in megafires that give rise to ‘firenadoes’ (fire tornadoes). We are experiencing a pandemic that seems to be mutating faster than we can develop vaccines for it, and we’ve just begun to unleash viruses and

bacteria from the melting permafrost that have not seen the light of day for thousands of years.

Fukushima has yet to be safely contained!

Is this not an unprecedented scale of trauma?

So why are we treating it like weather? Or a scientific problem??

Or a political issue, even! This is a global insurrection, after all. A battle of the forces of life and death - quite literally.

It is precisely because of the accumulation of this kind of unacknowledged, unresolved trauma that we ended up watching a white terrorist and misogynist like Donald Trump, an obese embodiment and (ahem) hair trigger for all our unresolved traumas, ascend to the height of political power, and then try to tear it all down. Trump was not just some random shitshow, he represents our national shadow, our cultural *id* on steroids and hallucinogens, and the nightmare he is visiting upon us emerged from the depths of our own collective psyche. FOR A REASON! It's meant to *wake us up*, in the same way any nightmare startles us awake and forces us to face our worst fears.

Allow me to repeat myself. Shaped by our unresolved trauma, the world is dying. As the just departed Thich Nhat Hanh asked of us, *can we hear the cries of the world?* Or do we chronically tune them out, left deaf, dumb and benumbed by our own unresolved traumas?

Stated another way, are you an Earth Protector, or a World Destroyer?

This is the question posed to each and every human being by the existential threat we in the dominant culture have facilitated through our collective neglect.

This is Climate Trauma...



When I say the world in the Anthropocene is shaped by Western man's trauma (and for once, I mean "man" and not humanity's, since 99% of the trauma is our doing, and women have suffered as much as anyone), we have to remember that the Industrial Age - which replaced the Agrarian Age and led precipitously to Industrial Warfare, Industrial Agriculture, the petrochemical industry, industrial fishing, factory farms and a dying planet - began maybe 7 generations ago. The trauma we have visited on the Earth in that time, the trauma we continue to carry and act out, is an exponentially accelerating cumulative force that is carried on the wings of our unresolved generational trauma - especially during the Great Acceleration that was spawned by WWII, with the wholly unnatural, alchemical accelerant of nuclear radiation and polymer soup, all reinforced by exponential population growth.

But that historical perspective certainly doesn't make generational trauma seem any more remote, does it! It is right here, right now, all backed up and heart-attack serious. We carry it in our bones, in our bodies, and in our hearts, just as

surely as we inherently possess human nature as part of our makeup. Except one is natural, and the other is not.

Collective trauma is both a blessing and a curse. A blessing when we are brave enough to face it, before it destroys us, and if we are wise enough to resolve it. It only becomes a curse the more we choose to ignore it. Then it is like Pandora's open box, spewing forth a wide pantheon of imaginary horrors - like Fukushima spewing heavy water and cesium into the ocean currents.

As a famous Supreme Court Justice once said in an entirely different context: *Seven Generations of idiots is enough!*

We the living perpetuate generational trauma - in our minds.

It finds expression in our habits. We encode it in our culture. It clouds all our relationships, including at its root our own spiritual relationship to our true selves and to Mother Earth, our life source. It pollutes our relationship to our own human nature and, thus empowered, to the natural world of which human nature is intimately an integral part.

So it has become imperative now, faced with increasingly existential threats, that we as individuals, as a culture, and as a species acknowledge, appreciate, and grow to understand generational trauma, how it is encoded in and perpetuated by cultural trauma, and how it triggers us and others in the most polarizing ways.

Otherwise, there is no hope for us in remedying biospheric trauma.

The cumulative force of all this trauma is coming to a head right now, especially with these newer generations. And guess what?

They're mad as hell, and refusing to take it anymore!

Good on them! It's time we learned from our Indigenous elders to think seven generations ahead. That's what it means to be an adult in today's world. I feel climate trauma - it is personal to me, too. And I grieve these accumulating losses, and have anticipatory grief for the losses still to come. In fact, it is only

because I grieve deeply that I am able to feel and experience the depth of our climate trauma. It has pounced and bored its way into me. It is a vision I see with more than my eye. It looks like it could last forever.

I wish it would stop...

“A child shall lead them.” (Isaiah 11:6)...

Hello, Greta.

~*~



We find ourselves at this unique inflection point in human history.

While climate trauma is an affliction of the powerless, *addressing* it at the levels of cultural and individual trauma is truly empowering.

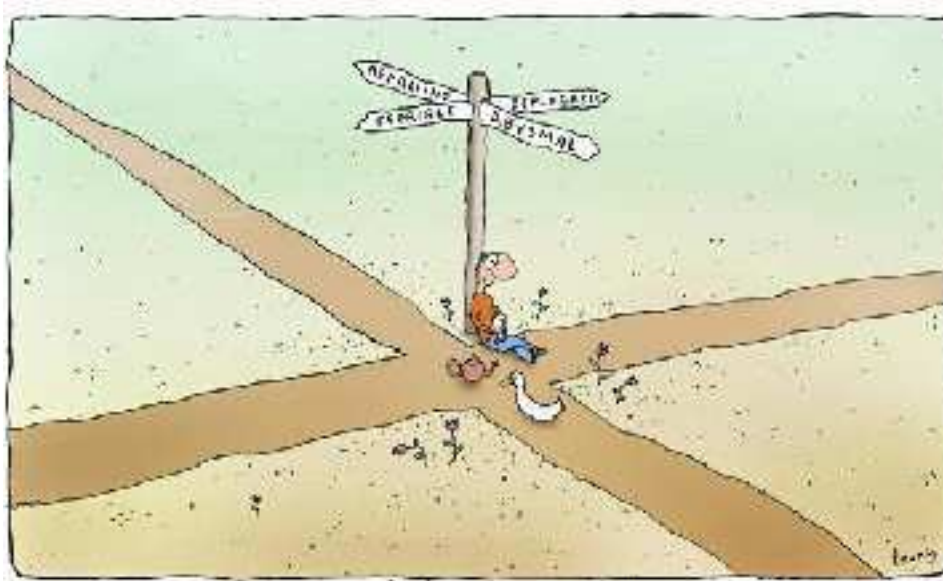
And so we rise up against our oppressors. *We rise.*

We are each cells in Gaia's auto-immune defense system. We are being activated now in order to defend Her right to life. Eventually this new Gaian Awareness will fill us with appreciation at the deepest lever for Her Sovereign Nature.

Time's up.

This is *Her* time.

Chapter THREE



ECOLOGICAL GRIEF & CLIMATE CATHARSIS

A Psycho-spiritual, Sociocultural Process of Anthropocentric Transmutation

Climate: the prevailing attitudes, standards, or environmental conditions of a group, period, or place.

Catharsis: A psychological technique used to relieve tension and anxiety by bringing repressed feelings and fears to consciousness.

Anthropocentric: viewing and interpreting everything in terms of human experience and values.

Transmutation: the transformation of one species into another.

Only birth can conquer death—the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be -- if we are to experience long-term survival -- a continuous 'recurrence of birth' to nullify the unremitting recurrences of death.

~ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

The natural response to traumatic loss is grieving. When we grieve the ruptures in our lives and losing loved ones, it frees up latent energy to respond appropriately to problems and threats in our life and in the world. So in a time of unprecedented trauma and collective grief, we would be well advised to refrain from obsessing over the seemingly intractable threats, and ask ourselves instead what, in this time of great dying, may be emerging and what we can do to help birth that?

We now hold the fate of all life on planet Earth in our collective hands, after all. All living beings will be forever changed by the actions of our species over the past 250 years, and all life hangs in the balance awaiting our response over the next decade or two to the mess that we have made of things. The old Chinese curse “may you live in interesting times” has never been more poignant.

While it is undoubtedly true that life as we have always known it is hurtling to a heart-rending conclusion, it is equally true that something quite new and even panoptic is emerging, as would be anticipated by Emerson’s natural law of compensation: “Our strength grows out of our weakness. The indignation which arms itself with secret forces does not awaken until we are pricked and stung and sorely assailed.”¹ Or, as Naomi Klein puts it, *“climate change isn't just a disaster. It's also our best chance to demand—and build—a better world.”*

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841), *Compensation*.

And just as, in this country, the generation that was strongest in spirit and resolve arose from the cruel deprivations of the Great Depression to conquer the most demonic force ever assembled against humanity, Hitler's industrial death machine, so too should we anticipate that a great spiritual force will arise in response to the unprecedented material and biological impoverishment that is now spreading across the planet because of our *own* industrial death forces - fossil fuels, petrochemicals, factory farms (livestock production), marine destruction, and nuclear wastes.

The necessary and natural compensation for all this material and biological destruction will necessarily be some kind of *spiritual* awakening.² It has to be, because it is the forces of spiritual darkness (greed, avarice, and ignorance) that are at the root of our descent into this all-consuming *materialist* madness. Those who continue to look to these same forces for solutions, let alone salvation, are tragically deluded. Just as we cannot overcome hatred with hatred, so we will not overcome materialism with a different kind of materialism.

Meanwhile, those who are tending to the spiritual needs of society without being overly distracted by the intense melodramas of world politics, these spiritual midwives who are determined to rebirth Earth, are already sensing a spiritual re-awakening, or radical shift in human consciousness, taking root. It is these roots that will grow new life from the soiled ruins of industrial civilization, like mycelium regenerating new life in a burned forest. Herein lies our only realistic hope for redemption.

But is this realistic? What is the pragmatic basis for such hope? Why should we not instead despair, as believers in near-term human extinction despair, become more stoic, as urged by Jem Bendell and his Deep Adaptation community, or follow the [advice of James Lovelock](#), originator of the Gaia hypothesis (world as

² For an interesting essay on the spiritual implications and applications of Emerson's natural law of compensation, see: [The Law of Compensation](#) by Rev. Alan A. Rowbotham.

living organism), who contends that we should simply, hedonistically enjoy what time we have left?

In the paper *Planetary Hospice: Rebirthing the Earth* (2014), I scaled up [Kübler-Ross](#)' classic model for the stages of grieving at a collective, psycho-spiritual scale to account for the collective response to the climate crisis in our modern consumer culture.³ My primary insight was that, since grief is a force of psychic nature, even if we collectively repress it, we will still culturally act that repressed grief out. I found that trends in our mental health as a culture, as evidenced by levels and types of drugs being prescribed to mask our afflictions, were a reliable marker for the stages of collectively repressed grief over the accelerating loss of our connection to the natural world that followed WWII.

Planetary Hospice was intended as a preliminary assessment, and elicited enormous feedback after going viral, even being translated into multiple languages for global distribution. I should mention that this was directly as a result of Joanna Macy reading it, as an academic advisor (since I'd written it for a class at CIIS), and immediately posting it on her popular [Work That Reconnects](#) website. After taking all the feedback and responses into a more holistic, contemplative realm, what emerged quite suddenly and almost of its own force was a new, integrated model of climate grief, which I then presented or intense feedback at an international conference of psychologists and educators at Harvard's 2014 Mind & Life Conference (poster presentation). That seemed an invaluable culmination of that phase of my climate psychology project.

Fleshing this model out with systems analysis at spiritual, social, and cultural levels from a depth psychology perspective, it slowly became apparent that we, as a culture - and I can only speak for my own culture here, that popular

³ Unfortunately, it is principally America's values that are at the heart of the Anthropocentric epochal shift, as we have been so successful in creating a hegemonic global trade empire, and as we remain the largest stumbling block to effective (or even ineffective) political change in response to the climate crisis.

culture of the American Dream, or material progress - were much further along in our collective (repressed) grieving process than I had originally surmised in 2014.

I found this quite encouraging!

THE KEY: East/West Model of Consciousness

The key that unlocked the door to this model in my own mind, allowing it to seemingly emerge whole from some deeper realm, was a synthesis of the Buddhist model of consciousness with Carl Jung's model of the psyche. From the standpoint of Buddhist tantra, "[t]he mind is seen as having three levels of subtlety, beginning with gross consciousness, moving deeper into subtle consciousness, and deeper [still] into extremely subtle consciousness."⁴ Preece, a Buddhist practitioner and Jungian psychotherapist, relates these directly to Jung's model of the mind:

- gross consciousness is synonymous with Jung's notion of personal, everyday consciousness;
- subtle consciousness is the equivalent of Jung's personal unconscious mind, where our motives and conditioning take shape; and,
- extremely subtle consciousness is commensurate with Jung's unique (in Western Psychology) idea of the collective unconscious realm, from which archetypal images and primal forces emerge into our individual minds, take shape in our dreams, and find expression in mythology and astrology.

One significant difference between Jung's model and the Buddhist model is that Jung maintained that the contents of the unconscious realm are not readily available to our personal consciousness, that it's effectively a one-way street, whereas Buddhists maintain that this uniquely Western notion of the "unconscious" is simply a matter of *clouded awareness*. The more refined one's mind becomes, especially when developed through quiescent meditation, the more clear and expansive one's awareness becomes, allowing one to fathom the depths of

⁴ Preece, R. *The Psychology of Buddhist Tantra* (2006, Snow Lion Publications), at 91.

consciousness all the way down, according to Preece, to “the deepest level of awareness, the one that takes us beyond the personal into relationship with the essential nature of reality.”

While Buddhism seems to have a more sound basis in experience, for our purpose here we can rectify this relatively inconsequential difference, and synthesize these readily compatible models, simply by utilizing the term ‘awareness’ in the broadest possible sense. We can posit, for instance, that we all share a base level of primal awareness, though we may only rarely become conscious of its contents. This would explain where intuition comes from, as well as our dream world, mystical states across religions, and the Indigenous phenomenon of immersion in the natural world referred to as the "participation mystique" — a natural, non-dual state of consciousness that remains largely a mystery to non-Indigenous peoples.

The key to applying this synthesized, East/West model of the human mind to our largely suppressed grieving process over the loss of life as we know it on planet Earth is to then relate it to the equally congruent ideas of the world soul, or *anima mundi*, and the Buddhist notion of interdependent origination. We and all living beings and the Earth which sustains us are inextricably linked - even at the deepest level of consciousness. Thus, even if our awareness is clouded, or if we repress the ideas and feelings pushing up from this deepest level of collective consciousness, by our very nature as “earthlings” we all still ‘know’ at the core of our being what is going on with the life support system that is our planet, our ground of being. There is a big difference between knowing something intellectually and knowing it directly, organically, and/or intuitively in the depths of our being. The ancient Greeks called this experience of direct knowing "gnosis."

Thus, long before the scientific evidence is amassed and presented to us, we all are aware at some primal, base level of consciousness when something is amiss. We may not be conscious of that *gnosis*, we may well not permit it into our personal consciousness in thought form, or we may repress and distort it when it does enter our field of consciousness — as e.g. Jung observed with the proliferation of professed alien encounters — but we feel it nonetheless, probably even more so *because* of our failure to allow it full expression. Or, as Bob Marley said, "who feels it, knows it."

From this depth psychological perspective of expansive, interdependent, interpenetrating awareness, then, the collective grieving process associated with the significant losses we've collectively experienced over the past half century can be illuminated in a trauma-informed way. This integrated perspective, in turn, can serve as a spiritual container for resolving that trauma with appropriate grief work, both individually and collectively, which in turn has the effect of freeing up psychic energy, unblocking feedback loops, and restoring the free flow of information; that is, facilitating individual and collective healing. It was this praxis which eventually helped me to heal my own epigenetic trauma, and then with that latent psychic energy unleashed, to eventually understand that we are collectively experiencing climate (biospheric) trauma - a trauma I have deeply felt my entire adult life.

An Integral Perspective on the (Repressed) Planetary Grieving Process in the Culture of the American Dream (of material progress) During the Time of the Great Acceleration

Planetary Hospice was not the first attempt to correlate climate grief with the Kübler-Ross model. Nobel Laureate Steven W. Running did so at the level of the individual in a [2007 talk](#) in my former home town of Missoula, Montana. The following year, ecotherapists Sarah Anne Edwards and Linda Buzzell reported on a

pattern of psychological responses in their clients that mimicked the five-stage grief cycle, which they referred to as the “*waking up syndrome*.”⁵

Of the two, the waking up syndrome is the one that perhaps comes closest to the insights expressed in *Planetary Hospice*. Both the Running and Waking Up models, however, consider the grieving process only at the scale of the individual psyche, while *Planetary Hospice* posited suppressed grieving and mental health at a societal scale. Of course, these are simply two perspectives on the same phenomena, since from a mental health perspective a society is merely an amalgam of individuals existing along a scale of sensitivity. Some of us are always going to be more sensitive to collectively experienced phenomenon than others, but our individual experiences, expressions and impressions will inevitably reflect some aspect of those larger phenomena.

As already indicated, the starting point is a consideration of our societal mental health profile in relation to the stages of grief attendant to the growing realization that life as we have known it during the Holocene Age, an era of relatively natural symbiosis between humanity and Earth, has already ended. It is no mere coincidence, after all, that it took us the span of an entire human lifetime - 70 years - to realize that the 11,000 year long Holocene ended in the White Sands Desert in 1945, and the Anthropocene began. Thus, in 2012 philosopher Timothy Morton could accurately state: “The end of the world has already occurred.”

The explicit assumption here is that at a base level of awareness, that level at which we are all connected to our planetary life support system, we intuitively ‘know’ what is transpiring, which gives rise to existential angst or eco-anxiety. However, because evolution has not really prepared us to deal with such an existential threat at this grand a scale - since we have only very recently reached

⁵ *HopeDance* magazine (Jan/Feb 2008), included in anthology *Ecotherapy* edited by Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009, Sierra Club Books

and exceeded the planet's carrying capacity, and gained the kind of mastery over it that accelerated after WWII - there is a natural, reflexive tendency to suppress this awareness before it emerges into consciousness, and also to continually repress it thereafter.⁶

Finally, while the grieving process varies from individual to individual, and the stages of grief do not necessarily unfold in a linear fashion, it does appear that when the grieving process is considered at the societal level there is a kind of collective *zeitgeist* (spirit of the time) that characterizes a majority of the people - with significant outliers on both ends - as we move through these suppressed stages in a more-or-less linear direction.

What we are talking about here is admittedly unquantifiable, qualitative, and complex. While it is probably not possible to posit these relations in a provable cause and effect model, due to the complexity of confounding variables and the colonialist exclusion of environmental factors from mental health analyses, we can still approach the problem intuitively if we acknowledge the connection of our individual psyche to a collective psyche that is in direct relationship to the *anima mundi* (world soul, or Gaian Psyche) via the *unus mundus*, or the unified psycho-physical nature of reality. This kind of salutary analysis is not difficult to entertain.

For illustrative purposes here, and at the risk of over-simplifying, we could state as our hypothesis that Americans as a cultural collective are in the middle of this grieving process - the third stage, bargaining. This would perhaps be evinced by pervasive attempts to avoid the inevitable with various unrealistic strategies. But it would not follow that many Americans were not still regressed at the stages of denial or anger, or that many more had not already progressed from bargaining

⁶ Clinical psychologist and psychotherapist John Wellwood, Ph.D. posits that the “most basic problem people have is that [we] are afraid of [our] experience. Because feelings and emotions often seem overwhelming and threatening, they become suppressed, avoided, or denied...” *The Sacred Mirror*, Prendergast et al. (ed.'s), 2003, at pp. 156-57 (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House). This problem is heightened in the context of the staggering threat of mass species extinction, including the potential for near term human extinction, posed by unnatural climate changes.

to depression. Nor would it infer that there were not already many outliers who had even progressed further, to the level of acceptance, or to the recently added sixth stage of finding meaning in our losses. The culture and the dominant mental health trends, on the other hand, *would* necessarily reflect where the majority were in this collective grieving process.

Because of the evolutionary stakes, because of the inherent difficulty in grasping this unprecedented knowledge, at *every* stage of grieving a loss on this vast scale, both individually and collectively there is bound to be cognitive dissonance caused by our psyche's natural resistance to, and suppression of, the relevant information and its implications. Even the information that we do assimilate must thereafter be consistently repressed, as a matter of practical necessity, since the alternative is to become one of those caricatures walking up and down the sidewalk in a flowing white robe and carrying a sign reading "The End Is Near" - *nobody wants to be that guy!* It is this psychological defensive phenomenon that then gets reflected in shadow forms by the trends in mental health, with those least equipped to deal with the emerging awareness the most likely to dissociate and/or act out in harmful or unproductive ways that reflect our collective societal neuroses and psychoses.

Thus, mental health trends become reliable markers for where we are in our collective grieving process at the start of the Anthropocene. These mental coping mechanisms are also reflected in popular *cultural* trends, though not all mental health trends are treated as problems by mainstream psychology. This last point is significant. One mental health trend that *Planetary Hospice* completely overlooked, effectively skewing the conclusions, was the incredible scale of greed and promotion of self interest that was first celebrated during the Reagan revolution, and then ran rampant during the Clinton/Bush era. Any sane society would certainly have viewed this kind of behavior as symptomatic of severe

neurosis, if not actual sociopathy. But in modern American culture, narcissistic personality disorder not only flies largely under the radar,⁷ it is actually *rewarded* with advancement in the corporate, political, and entertainment spheres. Indeed, unlike most mental disorders, in the U.S. narcissism is said to occur along a continuum from “healthy” narcissism to psychopathic narcissism. As further support of its social acceptability, [recent studies](#) have shown that narcissists not only don’t hide from their personality disorder, but tend to boast about it.

Finally - a mental disorder Americans can be proud of!

This foolish pride is reflected in almost all segments of American culture, in our politics especially, and helps explain why the richest society in world history not only consumes a disproportionate share of the world’s resources, but has become the largest obstacle to addressing the climate crisis. And, of course, it provides direct insight into why someone like Donald Trump could ascend to the highest office in the land.

Early Stages of Collective Ecological Grief

Planetary Hospice correlated the overlapping epidemics of anxiety and then depression in America from the 1950s through 2000 to our growing awareness of the imbalance between humans and nature, as well as the progression of environmental problems from local to global. This coarse analysis, while sound in approach, was probably over-influenced by focusing on pharmaceutical trends, and ended up speculating that we were now only just beginning to transition from the first stage of grieving, denial, to the anger stage. If our focus is switched to the level of base awareness that is driving the process, then a very different picture begins to emerge.

⁷ Though in 2009, *Twenge and Campbell* conducted studies suggesting that the incidence of Narcissistic Personality Disorder had **more than doubled** in the U.S. in the prior 10 years, and that 1 in 16 of the general population had experienced NPD in their lifetime. Source: *The Narcissistic Life*, Bergemeester, A. (2014).

After World War II, there was a fundamental shift in the way Americans lived their lives: from a largely rural, mostly agricultural country dotted with a few big cities here and there to a largely urban/suburban country sprawling out into formerly rural areas; with the largest cities becoming connected by metropolitan corridors; and, with family farms being supplanted by industrial mono-culture heavily dependent upon unnatural (synthetic) chemicals. We doubled our population within fifty years - BOOM! - and today over 70% of us live in one of nearly 500 urbanized areas.

This is the era of economic explosion referred to as the Great Acceleration, and it came at the expense of the natural world that was still quite abundant at that time. For example, the great American oceanographer, Sylvia Earl, was inspired by Jacques Cousteau, inventor of scuba tanks and the nature documentary series. Earl grew up on the Gulf of Mexico at a time when she could not recall *any* oil derricks off shore. How quickly we "progressed" from that maritime innocence to BP's Deepwater Horizon travesty, or Fukushima for that matter.

The advent of Anna Freud's warped social experiment - American suburbia - in the 1950s brought with it a preternatural obsession with manicured lawns that still largely persists to this day, giving rise in turn to the ritualistic gathering of dead leaves every autumn for transport and disposal somewhere out of sight. We no longer had room in our world for something as natural and timeless as leaves on the ground, which of course would otherwise provide winter habitats for insects. (*Silent Spring* alerted us to the fact we couldn't enjoy songbirds without insects!)

Every suburban neighborhood had access to a well-manicured park, and "forest preserves" on the outskirts of civilized existence were converted into picnic areas for family getaways - never mind the ants (or bring the *Raid*). It's safe to say that by the time Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962, we Americans were increasingly, if not painfully, aware of our growing alienation from the

natural environment of Turtle Island, which had held firm for 20,000 years or so of cohabitation by Indigenous people.

However unsettling that may have felt, it was also during this era that we honed the fine art of denial of our own human nature. As long as the lawn got mowed, weeds were removed, and water came out of the faucets, we couldn't really be bothered as a culture about some vague notions of a more "natural" lifestyle. We were modern! Living the dream!

And so this became the Golden Age of Anxiety, with Valium promoted in popular magazine ads for all those distressed housewives, and that trend continued well into the mid-1970s, abetted by the growing availability of anti-anxiety drugs and, significantly, by escapist, ubiquitous entertainment in the form of silly sit-coms, Bond movies, musicals, and the burgeoning popularity of spectator sports, where people are permitted and even encouraged to act crazy. One thing that is interesting to note is that many of the popular sitcoms of the 60's depicted fantasy realities: *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched*, *Green Acres*, *My Favorite Martian*, *Get Smart*, *The Flying Nun*, *Addams Family*, *Mr. Ed*, *The Munsters*, etc. It is as if we were intuitively aware just how silly our life divorced from nature really was, and so we entertained ourselves by imagining Hillbillies dropped into Beverly Hills, or NY sophisticates dropped into the more natural, rural America that was quickly disappearing. These are examples of *literally* acting out our neuroses.

Gradually, from the mid-60s onward, our collective awareness shifted from a growing imbalance with nature, which was relatively easy to suppress, to an awareness of increasing ecological devastation. Our rivers and lakes began dying as foul smelling and multi-colored effluents poured into them from industrial pipes, our national forests were being liquidated with updated "bunch-felling" machinery (clear cutting), like mowing a big lawn, enormous industrial farming operations

gobbled up all the smaller, family farms, or put them out of business, forcing them to sell out to the spread of suburban development, and the air in big cities started to become unbreathable. Suddenly, from the numbing normalcy of our post-WWII innocence, the effects of our unnatural lifestyles became alarmingly evident to us. Humans were having quite a dramatic impact on their environment, and the idea of endless growth and prosperity that fueled the American Dream came into stark relief against an increasingly dystopian landscape. We can roughly mark this shift culturally from around the time of the first Earth Day in 1970 and into the early 1980s, when the awareness of human impacts began to shift from devastation of our local environments to our impacts on the global climate and even, eventually, the oceans. This was a rude awakening that called for much more drastic measures of repression and suppression to safeguard our deluded notions of shared prosperity in the land of milk and honey!

Not surprisingly, then, anti-depression prescriptions began to skyrocket, gradually supplanting anti-anxiety drugs, with the combination of the two doubling until nearly one in ten of us was being clinically treated for depression -- from 16 million Americans in 1962 to roughly 31 million in 1975. This represented our progression to the second stage of collective grieving, depression being a form of suppressed anger - though we were not yet fully aware of the global scope of our impacts. We were a very *angry* country during those years, waging an unconscionable (and *ecological*) war in Southeast Asia, bringing it into our streets and to our political conventions with police riots, and culminating with American soldiers actually shooting protesting students dead. There were all those who were actively suppressing our anger, and then there were those who were acting it out in the streets and on the news.

While they certainly did not represent the norm at the time, it is no coincidence that those same rebelling youths advocated for a more natural lifestyle

and began protesting polluters as well as warmongers. The wave of rebellion broke with the deposing of the president in 1974, and arguably there was a sea-change in our culture at that time as well. We abolished the draft, began to clean up our waterways and our air sheds, the human potential movement took hold, and we even elected a conscientious *farmer* as president - a politician who was actually spiritual and cared about human rights, placed solar panels in the White House, and first alerted us to the need to break our addiction to fossil fuels (as we waited in long lines for gas!).

Culturally during this same period, those inane sit-coms progressed from silly fantasy realities to what could easily be called ‘angry sit-coms,’ like *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *Sanford & Son*, *The Odd Couple*, *The Jeffersons*, and *M*A*S*H*, which were set in ordinary reality.⁸ The *Godfather* movies were wildly popular. Meanwhile, we became increasingly fascinated by aliens and outer space as forms of escapist entertainment, including *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), and climaxing with the phenomena of *Star Wars* (1977). This was also the time when the pornography industry took hold.

Certainly, these kinds of juvenile/primal escapist fantasies are all consistent with the need to release repressed anger and frustration. Looking to outer space can be seen as a suppressed fight or flight response to ecological plunder here on Earth, or alternatively as looking for salvation from the heavens, the sense that we need to be saved from ourselves.

Middle Stages of Collective Grieving Process

Anxiety and depression have become endemic to American culture as the pharmaceutical industry has grown, and as the underlying causes from an ecopsychological viewpoint have never really been adequately addressed (e.g., ecotherapy is still relatively obscure, while our consumer lifestyle continues to

⁸ The only notable exception to reality-based sitcoms in the 70s was *Mork & Mindy*.

disconnect us from nature). However, beginning right around 1980, when denial was practically enshrined in a presidential campaign ad announcing it was “morning in America,” our base level awareness entered an entirely new and previously inconceivable phase, a phase for which our only preparation was the sudden potential for nuclear annihilation which had dawned less than a generation earlier, and which we were still grappling with.

Suddenly a gaping hole opened up in the thin bubble that encapsulates our home planet, allowing geologically unprecedented levels of UV radiation through to suppress the immune systems of all living beings. We became aware, for the first time ever, of an existential threat to life as we know it from our own, rather mundane daily routines (e.g., CFCs in refrigerants and hair spray, as well as chemical fumigants used to grow our food). While many still fail to make the connection, it wasn’t long at all before immunodeficiency related diseases began increasing, as had clearly been predicted in studies conducted for the National Academy of Sciences — including the onset of the AIDS epidemic triggered by a virus that has been around forever. Forests started to sicken, with trees no longer able to fight off the pests that they had co-evolved with. Frogs began disappearing (when was the last time you saw a frog in nature?), or showing up with gross deformities. Kangaroo blindness became epidemic down under, and humans were warned to avoid direct sunlight.

Avoid the sun?!? *REALLY???*

Arguably, it was time to amp up our collective coping mechanisms as well. Paradoxically, our elected leaders began to roll back environmental protections, even going so far as to ridicule concern for the environment as a sign of weakness. For example, Al Gore became “the Ozone Guy,” said with a sneer of superiority by a man famous for making movies with a chimp named “Bonzo”! Like Reagan himself, beginning in the 1980s politics became all hat and no cowboy.

Now it's one thing to acknowledge that dumping sewage into rivers kills fish, and quite another altogether to acknowledge that the consumer culture -- our reward for enduring the Great Depression and the hell of WWII in quick succession -- could end up killing the planet. So while many environmentally awakened people responded to the new paradigm rationally, by becoming even more alarmed than before, it seemed like our culture as a whole began reverting back to the comfortable illusion of Ozzie & Harriet's American Dream - a nostalgic time before all these ideas that the selfish pursuit of happiness for oneself and one's loved ones was fundamentally flawed. A wide rift opened up between ideology and reality in response to this existential threat, a divide that our political system would never recover from, eventually culminating in MAGA and the flat-out denial of truth.

Welcome to the bargaining stage of grief.

At the individual level, this stage is often associated with unrealistic, magical thinking - along the lines, for example, that if only God will take our disease away we promise to devote our life to noble causes. Or that a vast store of weaponry and ammo will protect us from the coming Apocalypse. More recently, we've seen these kinds of fantasies metastasize into the QAnon phenomenon. At the cultural level of 1980's America, however, it manifested more as a mad scramble for a secure future. The Reagan era marked the beginning of: a near-pathological hoarding of wealth; retreat into gated communities, while warehousing the under-privileged ("Super-Predators" projection by the elite) in an expanding, for-profit prison system; class warfare between corporate hoarders and the labor force; predatory corporate takeovers involving liquidation of assets and funneling the wealth up to obscene CEO salaries; and, ostentatious displays of obscene wealth.

As Gordon Gecko put it in the popular movie *Wall Street* (1987): “Greed is good” and “Money never sleeps.” This is bargaining as religious belief. No coincidence, then, that Reaganism also fueled the rise of prosperity theology, as power-mad evangelicals entered into an [unholy marriage with the neocon state](#) that would quickly, as our founders foresaw, bring our nation to the brink of ruin. In the ultimate expression of suppressed grief as bargaining, polls revealed at the outset of the climate crisis that about a third of Americans not only didn't "believe" in climate change, but viewed it as largely irrelevant in light of their belief that Jesus was going to return in their lifetime.

Vampires became quite popular during these final decades of the twentieth century, sucking the lifeblood out of their victims. They weren't depicted as mysterious caped Transylvanians, either, but rather as looking just like you and me. They are an almost perfect metaphor for what corporations had become in America and throughout the world - immortal and powerful beings that not only preyed on society, but actually have the power to assimilate those individuals who they seduce into their ranks, to prey on others.

It would not be long before the highest court in the land would declare that corporations were people, too. And money is speech.

Subconsciously, this all makes so much sense. If the gig is up, I better get mine while the gettin' is good! *It's the American way*. If money is not enough to provide the security I crave, then a huge cache of guns and ammo and canned goods to retreat into the woods with and await Armageddon. Ruby Ridge and the Branch Davidians in the Waco siege (1992-93) were the iconic outcomes of this kind of religious derangement, followed by the Oklahoma City bombing a few years later, and then the advent of school shootings. All this hatred and violence can be viewed as pathological bargaining, usually welling up from deeply

traumatic personal circumstances, with the fears associated with uncertain outcomes and externally perceived threats.

Meanwhile, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* enjoyed an extended voyeuristic run from 1984-1995 (Reagan-to-Clinton), popularizing so-called “reality tv” as an escape from reality (!), state-run lotteries became the norm rather than the exception. Gambling spread quite suddenly from the now-wildly popular Vegas to just about every state, as we became more aware of just how much we were gambling with our very future. The day-trader phenomenon allowed the desperate masses to play the stock market. Average people started stockpiling gold coins, or even sports memorabilia. Even our *vehicles* began to take on ridiculous proportions, stopping just short of personal armored tanks. As if gated communities and personal military vehicles would make us invulnerable to the coming storm everyone felt, but no one talked about.

Celebrity worship became so heightened that it has become a regular feature on the once-staid evening news. Sports became more about wealthy superstars than winning teams, while the teams themselves are all about winning now, without much regard for building into the future.

In short, it seems that during this prolonged socio-cultural bargaining stage, Western culture morphed into something that no longer just *reflects* our suppressed grief, but enables that suppression. The dominant message that emerged culturally in America during this span of time in which it became apparent that we're facing the gravest threat our species has ever faced, would appear to be that '*distraction cures all ills*' -- just stay distracted 24/7 and you will never have to be bothered with worrying about your's or your children's future, let alone your children's children's future. It wouldn't be long at all before we perfected the art of endless distraction with the ubiquitous smart phones.

Obviously, this dysfunctional social strategy is not compatible with the well-being of the individual's psyche. At the collective level, our awareness has progressed from the simple *dawning* of an existential threat, the idea that we as a species could actually somehow threaten the continued existence of life on this planet without even firing a single nuclear warhead, to actually *carrying out* that threat. Now we have a growing awareness that the Sixth Great Extinction is underway, that the cumulative absorption of carbon by our oceans over the course of the Industrial Age has altered their chemistry and is breaking critical links in the food chain, that extreme weather events are slowly becoming the norm, and that it's all happening at an accelerating pace that consistently outstrips the climate scientists' predictive models. The future keeps arriving sooner than we expected!

This is what Morton means by the climate crisis being a hyperobject, something paradoxical in that we can't really wrap our mind around it, but we're constantly reminded of it whenever it rains, or we set a new record high, or even when we awake in the morning to the absence of birdcalls.

Perhaps most unsettling of all, we have the dispiriting awareness that our political leaders are either unwilling or incapable of addressing this fast-rising tide of threats to life on planet Earth. In point of fact, they've been throwing gasoline on the fire with increasingly widespread and insane warfare and accelerating extraction of previously inaccessible or unprofitable fossil fuels (fracking, tar sands, deep sea drilling, etc.). It gets lost in the maelstrom of polarization, but most of us elected a President who promised he would reverse the tide of climate change, an appropriate and rational electoral response to the magnitude of the crisis in 2008, only to see him immediately treat the Deepwater Horizon disaster as a public relations problem, undermine the 2009 climate talks in Copenhagen, and turn America into the world's leading exporter of fossil fuels with his "all of the above" energy extraction policies.

Still, we tried! For a shining moment, the whole world saw him as a savior. They awarded him a Nobel Peace Prize, and he proceeded to melt it down for personal and political gain. (See: [Obama's Lethal Climate Legacy](#)).

Sorry about that, world. (And sorry Obama cultists. The truth hurts, doesn't it?).

So while the global-stakes bargaining escalates with resource wars, restrictive borders, repressed rebellions, oppressive 'austerity' programs, and plutocratic trade agreements, and while it seems our political leaders may forever be stuck in this hellfire spiral on their corporate-sponsored world stage, the *rest* of us mostly moved on in the 1990s from the bargaining stage of climate grieving to the fourth stage - *depression*. This may turn out to be the most repressive stage of all, and the most difficult stage to progress through collectively - many either remain stuck there, or have slid into despair..

It's quite understandable that the intolerable situation which developed over the course of the prolonged dysfunctional bargaining stage gave rise to so much dystopian pessimism about our collective future from the growing segment of the population that is *consciously* aware of the gravity of our situation. Suicide rates are climbing, with the rate among baby-boomers - that generation which has witnessed the entire spectacle - surging by nearly 30 percent in the first decade of the new millennium.⁹ Mass killings happen with chilling regularity, with the overall incidence of mass shootings tripling since 2008.¹⁰ We now 'escape' to movies about apocalypse and dystopian futures, which are legion, and it's very telling that we progressed from a widespread cultural fascination with blood-sucking vampires to a rather morbid fascination with the *walking dead*. Zombies are an appropriately iconic symbol of depression over the dismal state of affairs on

⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/health/suicide-rate-rises-sharply-in-us.html> Retrieved 12.24.13.

¹⁰ <http://rt.com/usa/holder-mass-shootings-triple-519/>

planet Earth. Many (certainly not most) scientists have concluded that the human race itself is tantamount to a “dead man walking,” after all.

And as might be expected, there has been yet another dramatic shift in mental health trends associated with this, the most troubled of all stages of grieving. *How much psychological pain are we in as a nation?* Well, **beginning in 2010**, *opioids* became the most prescribed class of medications in America!¹¹ “Opioids are a class of controlled pain-management drugs that contain natural or synthetic chemicals based on morphine... effectively mimic[ing] the pain-relieving chemicals that the body produces naturally” (*Psychology Today*). In 2011, there were over *238 million* prescriptions for narcotic analgesics, prompting the **National Institute of Health** to declare it an epidemic, with opioids “now responsible for more deaths than the number of deaths from both suicide and motor vehicle crashes, or deaths from cocaine and heroin combined.”

We’re not just medicating ourselves anymore, we’re becoming our own palliative care providers!

Whether opioids have actually passed anti-depressants as the drug of choice in America depends on which study you consult - they seem to be in a dead heat, if you’ll pardon my gallows pun.¹² The combination of opioid and anti-depressant prescriptions annually in the U.S., like guns, far exceeds the number of Americans living on Turtle Island. Of course, we still have free access to alcohol, increasingly free access to potent strains of marijuana, heroin has made a big comeback with significant drops in price to compete more effectively with the flood of synthetic opioids on the street, and now the deadly synthetic drug fentanyl - 50 times more

¹¹ Nora D. Volkow, Thomas A. McLellan, Jessica H. Cotto, Meena Karithanom, Susan R. B. Weiss. “Characteristics of Opioid Prescriptions in 2009.” *JAMA*, 2011; 305 (13): 1299-1301 DOI: [10.1001/jama.2011.401](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2011.401); Nora D. Volkow, Thomas A. McLellan. “Curtailling Diversion and Abuse of Opioid Analgesics Without Jeopardizing Pain Treatment.” *JAMA*, 2011; 305 (13): 1346-1347 DOI: [10.1001/jama.2011.369](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2011.369)

¹² For example, in 2010 **253.6 million** prescriptions were filled for anti-depressants.

powerful than heroin - is gaining popularity. Let's not even talk about cheap meth - the drug of choice among rural zombies everywhere.

What is inescapable in all this is not zombies, however. What is inescapable is that America is a **heavily medicated society** right now - and we're not very self-reflective about it, either. So culturally speaking, we entered the fourth stage of repressed climate grieving, depression, during the 1990's, when everyone began dressing as if we were collectively in mourning (and we've been wearing black ever since), and younger generations first began to sense the severe limitations of the future we were leaving them. And by pathologizing and medicalizing our demoralized state, including widespread over-medication of children exhibiting what we used to simply consider to be "conduct problems," we have unnecessarily prolonged this difficult stage of collective depression and miasma over our shared predicament.

It is, after all, in Big Pharma's (and the American Psychiatry Association's) vested interest to keep us (and our children) heavily sedated, and addicted at least to the idea that drugs, and not lifestyle changes, are the solution to all of our personal problems. Just watch the evening news sometime - it's just one drug commercial after another. And it's also in their interest to keep us from even *talking* about these things. There really is a pandemic of mental health problems and substance abuse in America right now which, like the climate crisis itself, merits very little attention from corporate media. We're just to accept these things as "the new normal." While they will periodically and sensationally report on the widespread problem of opioid abuse, they tend to avoid talk of solutions. What are the real reasons underlying widespread addiction? That angle is rarely even approached, and when it is they pretend it has more to do with economic dislocation than ecological destruction of our home planet.

This is quite obviously, at a societal scale, our collectively encoded limbic response of *flee*, or escape, from all the collective traumas we would rather not resolve, or even revisit, up to and including accelerating biospheric losses and climate trauma. And now this kind of mass escapism is even fueling a frightening new political movement based on shared denial of reality, history, and more generally, truth. If it succeeds in toppling the U.S. government from within the rotting corpse of the GOP (the anti-democratic party of insurrection and hate-filled projection), that emotionally reactive movement constitutes a threat to all life on planet Earth.

As Noam Chomsky has astutely observed, the Republican Party of America represents the largest terrorist organization in the world. And you really cannot bargain with these terrorists.

Viewed from a trauma-informed perspective, this kind of collective psychosis, this cultism as culture, should not be too surprising given that, culturally speaking, we are provided with two false, but implicitly encouraged, choices: we can choose to mindlessly distract ourselves from all of our unsatisfactory circumstances and conditions, which hugely benefits the electronics and gaming industries; we can numb ourselves out, making Big Pharma happy; or, if we're *really* good consumers, we can endlessly alternate between numbing ourselves out and keeping ourselves distracted. Psychologically speaking, this is the nihilistic culmination of the Great Acceleration that took flight 75 years ago.

And it is killing us.

Of course, there is a third, more functional choice that has begun to take root in the world. This is the choice being made by self-regulators — those people who know what it means to be embodied, or are at least in honest touch with their feelings and emotions, who are astute enough to see what is really going on in the world, who have worked on attaining and maintaining healthy relationships with

their close others and within healthy communities, and who have worked through any issues with the stuck stages of grief in their lives: denial and the resulting inability to engage; anger and self-pity; and, unrealistic bargaining/manipulation. They have a healthy relationship in their lives with depression, as well - meaning that thanks to healthy spiritual containers they're neither demoralized nor have they slid off the climate ledge into the bottomless pit of despair, cynicism, and misanthropy.

Let's talk about them!

Late Stages of Collective Ecological Grief: Climate Catharsis

Despair, like guilt, is a rather pointless, and largely unnecessary, emotional response in any context. It's just like the Dalai Lama, who has more reason than any world leader to be prone to despair over the treatment of his people, says about worrying: if something can be done, then worrying is pointless, it gets in the way of action; and, if nothing can be done, then worrying is pointless, as it leads nowhere. This is exactly how I view despair.¹³

Just as the healthy alternative to guilt is regret, healthy alternatives to despair include resolve and learning to value our broken-heartedness, instead of rejecting it at all costs. In other words, despair is nothing more than unresolved (repressed/unprocessed) grief, and unresolved grief is rooted in unacknowledged fear. Fear, like trauma, is only a problem when it is not acknowledged - otherwise it's an invaluable evolutionary aid (e.g., fear of heights by the edge of a cliff, or even fear

¹³ This is *not* intended as a criticism of Joanna Macy's "Work that Reconnects," which I enthusiastically endorse. As many who read this will be familiar with that approach, it is important to make this point. Joanna and I have had lots of personal interaction, and I myself have done "the work." We have agreed to disagree on our definitions. What she characterizes as despair, I actually define as either grief or healthy depression in response to the unhealthy situation we find ourselves in. As we tend to stigmatize depression in this culture, I believe it gets conflated with despair. In grief work, at least, it is working through depression that leads to acceptance, and there is no place for despair in that processing.

of human extinction!). Accordingly, when we find ourselves in despair, it's a strong indication that we simply have some more work to do. I see despair as frozen, overwhelming fear. The most counterproductive thing we can do is to dwell in despair, because if we dwell in any powerful emotion long enough, we begin to identify with it. And tragically, people who identify with despair end up seeing suicide as the only way out.

In the present context, instead of despair, *we can actually take heart* and even find hope in our current state of affairs! Shocking, I know. But do not be distracted by all the dysfunction and insanity we are witnessing right now, or even by all the disruption and dislocation that is certain to come. Instead, from a larger perspective, *look at where we are* in our collective grieving process over our lost connection to the natural world and to our own human nature. Because as Ilya Prigogine's Nobel prize-winning theory of dissipative structures holds, these kinds of complex systems need to reach their *highest tolerable degree of chaotic disorder* before a sudden, quantum leap to a new and unprecedented level of order can transpire. Recall our discussion of multi-valence. Those electrons do not proceed incrementally to the next valence - they just suddenly are there. Social change in a totally interconnected, interdependent system can also be expected to proceed in this same lurching way.

Climate chaos is GOOD! Climate depression is HEALTHY!!

The brilliant Gestalt therapist Stephi Bednarek, one of the founders of the Climate Psychology Alliance, views this kind of chaos theory from a more psychological perspective that has direct relevance to our present social disorder:

Derangement and disorientation are not states we would ordinarily choose, but they are necessary catalysts in the maturation process. For fundamental change to happen, the toxic normality needs to be deranged, rigid structures have to be dissolved, so that things can come out rearranged. Acknowledging that we are lost forces us to

acknowledge that we are not in control any more and leaves us with no choice but to reorient ourselves. It is in these times that we truly experience that not everything is resolvable in linear fashion.

So perhaps instead of obsessing over every bit of troubling new scientific information that supports worst-case analysis and dystopian forecasts, the most pertinent question we should be asking ourselves right now is whether we might not actually be *emerging* from this dysfunctional cultural paradigm of suppression and repression, which the system of oppression relies upon to maintain the *status quo*, and collectively entering into the final two stages of grieving that are not susceptible to repression: acceptance and meaning.¹⁴ Perhaps we are actually on the brink of global, social transformation. If this could be the case, then what would the clearest indications of that societal emergence be, and how might we best support and advance it?

The clue to answering this inquiry lies in this integrated model of climate grief. The logical question is this: *just what is it* that we are becoming aware of at the deepest level of collective consciousness in relation to these final stages of grieving the end of life as we know it? What is the culmination of the progression in base level awareness from imbalance (ca. 50's and 60's), to ecological destruction (ca. 60's and 70's), to existential threat (ca. 80's), to the Great Dying and the losses associated mass extinction (ca. 90's to present)?

The most natural and sensible answer to this question is that we are in the process of experiencing some kind of regeneration as a species through a relatively

¹⁴ David Kessler, co-author with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross of the iconic book *On Grief and Grieving*, recently added this final stage to the established 5-stage grief model. Kessler argues that it's finding meaning beyond the stages of grief most of us are familiar with—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—that can transform grief into a more peaceful and hopeful experience - a timely message for these troubled times. See: [Finding Meaning - The Sixth Stage of Grief](#) (2019).

contemporaneous and organic death/rebirth process. In a word, the awareness associated with acceptance and meaning should be very much like a *spiritual awakening* reflected in a shift of collective consciousness, and felt in community and what Pope Francis refers to as a new kind of universal solidarity. Not an awakening in the traditional Buddhist sense of becoming enlightened, but rather something beyond (*trans-*) individuality, and something *generative* that is capable of thriving through the adversity we will be increasingly confronted with.

This global awakening should be experienced as a growing cultural awareness of something new and quite unprecedented dawning in the spectrum of human consciousness -- a new kind of perspective dawning and taking hold, a different way of seeing ourselves in relation to all that we have previously considered to be other than and apart from us. And it has to be a spiritual awakening, because ultimately this is a crisis of spirit that calls into question who we are as a species in the grand scheme of things.

And consistent with the latter stages of grief, this awakening should grow out of a sober acceptance of the Great Dying we have already brought upon ourselves and all others, with our grief ripening into something quite meaningful. We will take a deep dive into the nature of this growing ecological consciousness in Chapter 5. For our purpose here, in our search for catharsis out of climate grief, let us look for clues in our own milieu, since these kinds of new paradigms always emerge first in a few individuals or groups who are ahead of their time¹⁵ -- harbingers of what only in retrospect will be acknowledged as a quantum leap, or seismic shift, in human consciousness. And as we consider these climate exemplars, let us consider if we, too, do not already share this growing awareness.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Bucke, R. 1901. *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*. Perhaps the first Western scientist to study this phenomenon, and himself a harbinger of the century to come. As Bucke concluded: "This consciousness shows the cosmos to consist not of dead matter governed by unconscious, rigid, and unintending law; it shows it on the contrary as entirely immaterial, entirely spiritual and entirely alive..." (p. 17).

[Stanislov Grof](#) is one such extraordinary thinker who has always seemed to be three steps ahead of his time, and has always seemed to be in on the ground floor of these kinds of shifts in human culture. One of the more colorful illustrations of this point is [his story](#) about opening a box from Sandoz Laboratories in 1954, during his internship in psychiatry, with an enclosed note from Albert Hoffman that someone needed to do some research into the extraordinary properties and potential therapeutic applications of the enclosed capsules of LSD-25! Years later, when his research along those lines at Johns Hopkins in Maryland was shut down, he moved to an obscure hot springs resort called *Esalen*, and along with such luminaries as Abraham Maslow, helped found the human potential movement in the late 60's. It was Grof who coined the term "transpersonal psychology," creating a new field of psychology intended to honor the entire, diverse spectrum of human experience.

And so it should come as no surprise that Grof himself was one of the first to point out this new form of human awareness as it began to bubble up from the gnostic depths of our collective psyche, at a time when the existential threat of climate change was just starting to get the attention of scientists. In his 1985 book *Beyond the Brain*, Grof's "central point" was that we were beginning to see "a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions," a course alteration that is changing "our concepts of reality *and of human nature [itself]....*"

Other visionaries could surely be listed here, not the least of which would be Arne Ness and Wendell Berry from the deep ecology movement that also took hold around the time global environmental issues started to become evident. A more contemporary example is the social visionary Charles Eisenstein, and especially his book *Climate: A New Story*. However, the watershed event that most clearly signaled this emergence was the publishing of Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown's book [Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World](#)

(New Society Publishers) in 1998. Macy and Brown detailed a “silent revolution” in “the ways we see and think and relate,” which has only grown in scope and influence ever since. As Macy put it in her introduction:

I imagine that future generations will look back on this period and call it the time of the “Great Turning.” It is the epochal shift from a self-destructive industrial growth society to a life-sustaining society.

With its regenerative, death/rebirth connotative title, *Coming Back to Life* observed that the most basic dimension of this Great Turning that the authors were witnessing in their work on the cutting edge of this nascent movement was “a profound shift in our perception of reality... both as cognitive revolution and spiritual awakening.” This cognitive revolution, spawning Extinction Rebellion and the Sunrise Movement, can be viewed as that base level awareness welling up from the most subtle level of collective consciousness that feels directly connected to Earth and is capable of supporting an acceptance of both our own mortality and the end of life as we know it, while at the same time generating something new. Macy described her own deeply felt sense of this shift at the time as an ‘ongoing revelation’ - and indeed she has since carried that work forward into ever-widening spheres of meaning and participation.

This represents the compensatory spirit of climate catharsis that can and must breathe life into the moral and ethical transmutation of the human species, and it must reach critical mass and take hold if we are to survive in the short term - the next several decades - and thrive in the long term as part of a healthy, biodiverse system of living with and as part of, rather than on and removed from, planet Earth. It is this spirit of emergence out of spiritual and climate emergency that has given rise to [The Earth Charter](#), a principled expression of this shared awakening, pointing the way forward to “a change of mind and heart... [and] a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.”

And it is quickly taking shape as well in the kind of relational change that is being called for by the United Nations between Western civilization and the largely degraded ecosystems that we now inhabit to eventually reverse global warming (e.g., “We need to recreate a balanced relationship with the ecosystems that sustain us.” From the 2021 UN [Generation Restoration Report](#)). A very pragmatic manifestation of this seismic, ecological shift in consciousness is the G20’s financial support for [UNESCO’s initiative](#) “to sensitize and train 100% of the world’s population to environmental challenges, so that each individual is able to become a guardian of our Earth,” focusing on involving young people in the effort to change the way we all relate to our local ecosystems.

That’s radical!

The Great Turning as Transmutation

The ‘Great Turning’ adroitly captured and expressed the appropriate response to our growing awareness of the potential transmutation of the human species that is now starting to be deeply felt by a substantial segment of globally conscious and ecologically conscientious communities of people and activists. To get a better picture of how this revolutionary awareness is manifesting socioculturally, it helps to place it into some additional context.

Certainly, following on the heels of the transpersonal psychology and human potential movements, and bridging them with the deep ecology movement, both ecopsychology and its philosophical counterpart, panpsychism, represent a paradigm shift in our worldview. As Stan Grof pointed out in *Beyond the Brain*, “[s]cientific revolutions are those noncumulative episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in its entirety, or in part, by a new one that is incompatible with it.” And as David Abram put it in his introduction to Andy Fisher’s 2002/2012 book, *Radical Ecopsychology*, ecopsychology “neatly explodes [the] age-old

divide between mind and nature, between the psyche ‘in here’ and nature ‘out there.’”

What better place to look for the emergence of something radically new in the human psyche than in the field of psychology itself? After all, ecopsychology is not just some new branch of psychology, as some have tried unconvincingly to rebrand it. Rather, it aims to *supplant* the dualistic worldview of mainstream psychology in much the same way that quantum physics is radically altering the way we conceive of mind and matter and panpsychism is radically changing the way we conceive of consciousness itself.

Andy Fisher best expresses this emergent strain in ecopsychology. He grounds what he terms ‘radical’ ecopsychology in humanistic principles intended to support people in:

- (1) “finding their place in both human and more-than-human society;”
- (2) “perceiving a world beyond the boundaries of strictly human reality;” and,
- (3) “learning to see their own lives symbolically mirrored and bound up in the flesh of all living things.”

Significantly, Fisher recognizes that “the Egoic mode [of Western civilization] is so antagonistic to and split from nature, ecopsychology is called toward a *spiritual* mode, one that would overcome Ego” and resuscitates the very meaning of “psyche” (i.e., soul) in psychology. This pretty well sums up the challenge facing the human species; that is, as Macy would have it, replacing the ego-driven industrial growth society with a spiritually motivated life sustaining society “bound up in the flesh of all living things” (Fisher).

From the world of systems thinking, yet another [important movement](#) that began in the late 60’s, we can also look for clues to what is emerging in the work of the prolific Hungarian philosopher of science, systems theorist, and classical pianist Ervin Laszlo -- and in particular his 1996 book *The Whispering Pond*:

The paramount feature of the emerging quasi-total vision of cosmos, matter, life, and mind is subtle and constant interconnection... The current shift in science's concept of the world from a life-less rock to an interconnected and quasi-living universe has intense meaning and significance for our times. The concept of a subtly interconnected world, of a whispering pond in and through which we are intimately linked to each other and to the universe, assimilated by our intellect and embraced by our heart, is part of humanity's response to the challenges that we now face in common. Our separation from each other and from nature is at the root of many of our problems; overcoming them calls for a recovery of our neglected, but never entirely forgotten, bonds and connections... The insight that emerges is both meaningful and timely. It confirms psychologist-philosopher William James' image: we are like islands in the sea - separate on the surface, but connected in the deep.

More recently, Laszlo commented on the shift with this telling statement:

“The breakout from the old has started already, but it is not yet committed to a breakdown or to a breakthrough.”

I was once informed by a wise old Jewish-American Tibetan monk from Canada via New York that the only difference between a breakdown and a breakthrough is whether or not there is an adequate support system in place. It is up to those who have accepted the fact that life as we have always known it on Earth is ending to actively build the support system that will appear as a bright light illuminating the end of the presently waxing dark age. For those who are waking consciously into this growing, shared awareness, it's the challenge of a lifetime. It's also, of course, an incredible consolation to consider yourself a light-keeper in an otherwise dark age. As Laszlo put it at the end of that same essay:

Choosing our future by consciously furthering and steering the burgeoning world-shift is the greatest opportunity ever to have been granted a generation in history. It is up to us to seize it -- and ensure the future of humankind on the planet.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Radical Path of Climate Truth & Reconciliation



*“It is only through the reclamation of our cultural shadow
and the integration of collective trauma, that we become a
sentient whole, able to make the world anew, together.”*

~ THOMAS HÜBL

Responding To The Great Dying with Big Psyche: A Regenerative, Psychophysical & Relational Approach

While the mental health profession has a crucial role to play in the Great Dying, it is largely ill-equipped for that role, especially here in the U.S., due to its historical exclusion of Mother Earth and the natural world from accredited models of psychological health. This remains the case even though science now views us as an integral part of this larger organism, the living planet. Western psychology continues to "other" Earth as external to self, to objectify Gaia rather than to reposition our psyche internally within her psychosphere. This is a problem, because it largely makes psychology irrelevant to an existential crisis.

How is it possible to define mental health apart from planetary health? Would we ever consider a fetus' health apart from the body it is being carried to term by? Of course not. Naturally, then, the health of the planet is integral to our mental health. And every psychotherapy session should begin with the question: "So, tell me about your relationship with your mother, Earth."

It was in response to this fundamental flaw in the foundation of Western psychology that Ecopsychology emerged from the Deep Ecology movement, marked by the publication of the ground-breaking book *Voice of the Earth* by Theodore Roszak in 1992:

"What the modern cultural environment has required of us is an enormous extroversion of attention and energy for the purpose of reshaping the Earth into a global industrial economy. For two centuries we have been subordinating the planet and our deepest personal needs to that project. This great act of collective alienation... lies at the root of both the environmental crisis and individual neurosis. In some way, at some point, a change of direction, a therapeutic turning inward, had to take place within a culture as maniacally driven as ours has been by the need to achieve and conquer."

As mainstream psychology, due to its stubborn scientific bent and its unseemly entanglement with industrial capitalism, is guilty of enabling this maniacal cultural drive, Ecopsychology sought to effectively reframe psychology with the addition of “the psychological processes that tie us to the world or separate us from it,” thereby aspiring to a more holistic vision and model of the human psyche. Buzzel & Chalquist, *Ecotherapy* (2009). The more holistic and humane ecopsychological model quite naturally views humans and the world we inhabit as entangled right from the start, such that our mental health and the health of our sociocultural interactions are inextricably intertwined with the health of our natural surroundings, up to and including the health of our host organism.

In the 50 years since the movement was founded, the American Psychological Association, or APA, has chosen to treat Ecopsychology as a threat rather than a midcourse correction, going out of its way for example to deny accreditation to Ecopsychology programs offered by various colleges and universities. More to the point, however, the APA has largely clung to its Freudian cigars and refused to give up its pernicious attachment to ego-psychology - the self-obsessed model of psyche spawned by the sex-obsessed Sigmund Freud which places humans at the center of the universe, rather than viewing us more accurately and coherently as micro-organisms which are integral to the macro-organism that is this living planet.

In spite of its obsession with being considered a science, the APA's conceptual model of the human psyche is essentially religious, since God's first decree to man in the Bible, to "subdue" the Earth and have dominion "over every living thing" casts the relationship between humans and nature as one of separation and control. This APA-reinforced, thoroughly unscientific paradigm continues to support an ego-centered, self-reinforcing *consumerist* oriented worldview by which

the convenience of plastic bottles becomes more important than protecting oceans and marine life.

How could such an objectifying, egoistic worldview lead to anything *other* than the consumption of ‘our’ planet? Nature becomes something external to us, a world out there for us to impose the will of our ego upon, something to consume like every-*thing* else, and not even worthy of inquiry, let alone self-reflection, in the psychotherapeutic context. “So what if our world is dying! Tell me what YOU really want or need...”

Ironically, while recognizing that most of our modern psychological problems arise in the context of our relationships, ego-psychology enables the consumption of the planet (there is even a branch of industrial psychology) and is largely complicit in the great social ills of our time - increasing isolation, polarization, and substance abuse - because of its continuing allegiance to the materialist worldview of Descartes rather than the *relational* worldview of quantum physics.

What a death trap!

A century of Freudian complexes and behold: Unnatural Man (*homo unnaturalis*), toxic masculinity (beginning with Freud himself), and a profoundly inhumane culture that elevates personality, entitlement, and grievance above nature, harmony, and symbiosis. To mis-quote Oliver Wendell Homes, a century of idiots is enough! Freud was cynically prescient when he acknowledged that the function of ego-psychology was to make us more content with our unsatisfactory lot in life, or “less unhappy.”

Ecopsychology, in sharp contrast to ego-psychology, places our very *life-source*, the world in which we emerge and with which we are merged, at the center of our constellation of self. Major advancements in the development of the theory and practice of Ecopsychology include: Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown’s

Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World (1998, reissued 2014); Andy Fisher’s *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life* (2002, reissued in 2014); and, most recently, Andrew Fellow’s *Gaia, Psyche and Deep Ecology* (2019).

The reason I list these three books here is that together they represent a radical *political* praxis, or movement, one that quite naturally leads to a more holistic, *relation*-oriented worldview, displacing the antagonistic, *thing*-oriented worldview of Freud’s less unhappy society. In light of our present predicament, they should be viewed as political treatises more than as academic works, just as important to our times as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* was to the founding of America and Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* is to critiquing industrial civilization.

A social movement that advocates for a political re-orientation towards ‘all our relations’ will, in turn, empower colonized minds to recover the natural indigeneity we’ve lost through industrial and consumer conditioning. A widespread rehabilitation of relational culture fueled by individual and communal indigeneity may, as we will explore in the last chapter, represent our last, best hope at turning this sociocultural Titanic around.

As Buzzel & Chalquist noted in their influential book, *Ecotherapy (supra)*, the mental health professions bear a special responsibility in helping people to confront the harsh realities we are now collectively facing:

At a time of planet-wide environmental crisis, it seems both outrageous and irresponsible that so few mental health clinicians connect the *epidemics of mental distress* in industrial societies with the devastating impact of our suicidal destruction of our own habitat and ecocidal elimination of whole species that used to share the Earth with us (*Ecotherapy*, p. 19).

Perhaps we would now add “pandemics of ecological distress” after epidemics of mental distress to this condemnation.

What the mental health industry, institutionally represented by the APA and constrained by Big Pharma (funding), is doing instead is to perpetuate the pop-cultural fraud of “eco-anxiety” - based upon the backwards thinking that it is the *climate crisis* that represents an external threat to *us*, or our mental health and well-being. This is little more than a collective psychological defense, or “complex,” dressed up in political correctness (or ‘wokeness’) that effectively masks the inconvenient truth that it is *we humans*, and our collective mania, that represents the true threat here — to the entire biosphere. We are not just threatening the climate, in fact, we’re actively assaulting it, and in the process we’re perpetuating our own poisonous cultural climate of fright, fight, and flight (on steroids). To diagnose this serious malady as a case of “eco-anxiety” would be akin to saying a wife-beater is afflicted with “spousal anxiety.”

It seems like just a matter of time before Big Pharma comes along and patents something like *Climatextm* to alleviate our anxiety over the 6th Great Extinction, dying oceans, and rising tides, so that we may feel at ease in continuing to drive our muscle trucks, fly to exotic locations, and drink water out of tiny plastic bottles. “Ask your doctor if *Climatextm* is right for you.” ** side effects may include mass extinction, ocean death, insufferable heat, extreme weather events, alienation of your children, and the collapse of industrial civilization.

Until the APA acknowledges the fact that Earth is a living organism, one that does not revolve around us, and that we are to Earth's biome what our biome is to us - i.e. systems thinking that comports with reality rather than hegemony - it will mostly continue to be part of the climate problem, not part of the solution we should rightfully expect from such an important profession. Modern psychology may help individuals and families at the scale of their lives, but at the larger scales of culture, society, politics and the planet, it is unhelpful at best, and toxic at its worst (remember the APA-certified torture advisors?).

One would think that by now the APA would be able to provide our leaders the benefit of a trauma-informed view of the climate crisis, one that would actually be conducive to recovery. Failure to do so cannot be viewed as anything less than a shameful abdication of their ethical obligations to the society they helped create and profess to serve. It is therefore up to individual psychologists and psychiatrists to abandon the orthodoxy of the APA - which, fortunately, they've begun doing in droves. I am herewith prescribing Fellows' book for all psychologists, as well as Jung's *The Earth Has a Soul*. They must also become more responsive in their own professional and political communities, speaking up on *Gaia's* behalf, and begin their therapeutic sessions with the following corrective to Ego-psychology:



"So, tell me about your relationship with Mother Earth."

Is that really too much to ask of our profession in a time of climate and ecological emergency?

In preparing society at this late stage to honestly face the end of life as we have always known it, and had assumed it would always be — that is, human civilization over the last *eleven millennia*, which co-evolved with the remarkably stable and supportive climate that we have now unmoored — we should certainly look to existing models of grief and hospice for guidance, and seek to apply the principles and lessons from these models at a societal level. Examples like the Work that Reconnects, the Good Grief Network, Positive Deep Adaptation, and the Climate Psychology Alliance are already contributing critical mental health services to our society's well-being in this regard - efforts that should be applauded, replicated and mimicked.

At the same time, however, the COVID-19 Pandemic has revealed a dangerous schism in the way we are likely to respond collectively to the accelerating climate chaos over the ensuing, most critical decades, calling on all social activists and advocates of planetary sanity to significantly recalibrate our approaches to social engagement. The inherent trauma of our dis-integration during this burgeoning “eco-catastrophe” does not *have* to trigger widespread panic, dread, fear, despair and hostility. Without clear guidance and support from mental health influencers, however, it most definitely *will* trigger all those unwelcome and unnecessary, collective neuroses and psychoses.

As the anti-mask madness and the continuing insurrection that prompted the mob violence against our Capitol have shown, we here in the U.S. represent perhaps the greatest obstacle to short-term climate triage and long-term climate progress due to the over-weening prevalence of assault weapons in our culture, concentrated in the hands the most lizard-brained, **cognitively challenged** minority segment in our society — the racist/survivalist, toxic male ego-on-steroids strain of White Christian Nationalism, **currently 30 million strong**, mostly fueled by the dangerous biblical mythos of Armageddon combined with the insidious prosperity

theology, who still cling to the cold, clammy corpse of the American Dream (MAGA), or their own perverse idea of American Exceptionalism. Is it not time to recognize that this is a *virulent form of mental illness*, a social pathology for which no vaccine exists — not unlike what the world saw develop in Nazi Germany?

Why doesn't the Mental Health Profession step up to the mic and talk about mob mentality and mass psychosis?

Because unlike the rest of us, when these deranged white Christian nationalists watch “The Handmaid’s Tale” in their living rooms, their response is: “*Why not us?*” Don’t believe me? As one reporter found:

“They are pro-gun... and argue Christians should be trained in ‘trench warfare.’ They want to save ‘our constitutional republic’ by making American law ‘Mirror the Law and Justice of God.’”

(See: [Guardian story on extremists](#)).

Surely, it is no coincidence that the very people who have consistently denied the existential threat of the climate crisis are now organizing themselves as an existential threat to democracy, in order to protect their privileged status and consumptive lifestyle. These mom and pop domestic terrorists, who are no longer isolated politically, intend to outlaw abortion, pre-marital sex, same-sex marriage, and vaccines. Far from representing some kind of high-minded religious or political ideals, they are driven primarily by fear and negative feelings toward discrete social groups primarily aligned with the Democratic Party: African Americans, Hispanics, Muslims, and gays and lesbians. See: ”Activating Animus: The Uniquely Social Roots of Trump Support” (cited in [Stroop's](#) article “The uncomfortable truth about the authoritarian Christian right's role in American politics”).

But unlike Margaret Atwater’s dystopian vision of Gilead, these shockingly prevalent white Christian militants have no intention of protecting God’s creation. Their Armageddon would instead be a self-fulfilling prophesy filled with guns,

barbecues, and muscle trucks that would mean the end of all life on planet Earth - which they dismissively label “God’s will.” Donald Trump has provided us a great public service: finally exposing, for all to see, the dark underbelly of the American Dream. It would be insane for the rest of us to ignore the existential threat they represent to democracy and life itself under their "Pro-Life" pretext.

It is therefore incumbent on the mental health profession, in light of this prevailing madness and the very real prospect for a holy-civil war, to actively and politically advocate for a *societal intervention*.

Seriously, if Anna Freud could [engineer the conformist American Dream](#), which is the psycho-genesis of this viral societal madness, why isn’t the mental health community coming forward now with an effective antidote to this growing cult?

In the words of Dr. Lise Van Susteren, with Physicians for Social Responsibility:

"It no longer makes sense, because of the challenges presented by the climate crisis and the unique skills we have, to confine our professional lives only to traditional roles and services in our offices, academic settings and clinics. We need activism now to *initiate* services in this time of urgency—helping people out of their denial, tending to their wounds, working to create resilience.”

"Psychological Impacts of Climate Change and Recommendations" (2020)

At the very least, mental health advocates should be promoting more sane and adaptive response to the stages of collective grief over the great dying precipitated by our collective mental dysfunction as a society. But there is so much more untapped potential here for a socially responsible mental health profession to counsel a consumerist, egocentric culture that has now become pathologically and malignantly narcissistic, as ably represented by their messianic leader. A society is only as healthy as it is sane, after all, and social sanity is necessarily defined by the

nature of our relationships. Ecocide is, in a word, insane. And as Dr. Van Susteren points out, "Our canons of ethics tell us it is our duty to protect the health of the public and to participate in activities that contribute to it."

Simply stated: Mental health must precede and actively become an integral part of the recovery of global health. The reasons for this should be painfully self-evident. While the APA's [Climate Change Policy Guide](#) is certainly a positive step in that direction, it doesn't go nearly far enough in *acknowledging its own complicity in the climate crisis*, and rooting out the psychological disease that is producing the symptoms it seeks to address. This was the very reason eco-psychology was intended as a corrective to industrialized psychology.

If mental health is not elevated to a central place in this existential crisis, if it continues to be treated only as a scientific or technological issue - which is getting us nowhere fast, by the way - then we can expect that the collective grieving process associated with the cascading losses of species, and of the stable 'known' world we co-evolved with, will only continue to be culturally repressed, suppressed, and self-medicated. If provided with no outlet, this repressed dark energy will tend to metastasize as a death drive - as already evident with the opioid epidemic, anti-maskers, and authoritarian movements - inevitably ripening into exactly the kind of doomsday-cult pathology and abhorrent behavioral reactivity that we've seen before and have been witnessing again during these cascading waves of global pandemic.

Those are the stakes now. This social pathology must be contained. We would do well to remember that this viral strain of culturally reinforced narcissism is relegated to a significantly traumatized, amoral *minority*, and not some kind of rational, moral majority. This faction was isolated and without power for decades, often literally living off the grid, and they live their lives of not-so-quiet desperation in largely dysfunctional homes, finding community only in churches

where people speak in tongues and hide their worst sins, or in militias where they prepare for the end days. These segments of the population had, for too long, been forgotten, unsupported and ridiculed by our political leaders ('deplorables'), left behind economically, and shamelessly under-served by mental health providers (leaving it to social workers or police to manage the symptoms of domestic violence, substance abuse, etc.).

Especially now that they pose a smoldering threat of civil conflagration, an ***active social intervention*** that takes advantage of everything we've learned about trauma and its discontents is an urgent sociopolitical and climate imperative. These segments of our social fabric are inherently redeemable — *and we know where they live*. We know, in other words, how to reach them. If we're not successful in containing this anti-truth, anti-reality (i.e., trauma dis-informed) social virus, both politically and spiritually, they will probably achieve their desired end of controlling us forcefully, acting out their own special brand of collective trauma on a large scale. After all, they're already disproportionately represented in our militarized police forces. They're not bashful in clearly stating their objectives, either, supporting racial oppression, authoritarian leaders, mass incarceration, and advocating for civil war if they don't get their twisted way.

Containment Strategies

While it's ultimately important to find ways to address each emotionally disabled person's root trauma in order to dispel the big lies, the appropriate spiritual container at the cultural level needs to be grief-informed in order that it might elevate what is noble in all of us, collectively:

“The psychology of death is a psychology of life because it concerns human hopes, human motivation, human satisfaction, and human frustration. Human beings remain human beings when they are dying, and death brings out in humanity its goodness (with its capacity to love, transcend, grow) *and* its capacity to hate, to destroy, and to deteriorate psychologically.”

(Zinker & Fink, 1966). The same is true, at a societal level, for the psychology underlying the end of life as we have always known it.

We're seeing all of this play out during the pandemic, *are we not?* If we accept the results of the 2020 U.S. general election as representative, then roughly half of society seems to want to learn the lessons of the pandemic and create a more just, more sustainable, and more compassionate world, acknowledging the truth of industrial civilization and reconciling ourselves with the natural world, while the other half want to hide their heads in the sand - denying reality at every turn - and pretend that we have the option to go backwards in time to a simpler world that only ever existed in their own deluded minds. *And they're willing to die in service of that delusion.*

Because, after all, this really is an *existential* crisis, not just another political issue. There are two primal reactions to the sudden onset of a deadly threat, one responsive and one reactive:

- “*Something must be done!*”
- “NO - THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING!!”

In other words, while a significant portion of us have been jolted into living more death-informed lives during this global pandemic, gaining a greater appreciation of our intimate connections to the natural world and a deeper respect for our social connectivity in the process, another significant segment of our society has been triggered into cult behavior that clings to death-phobic, escapist, science-denying and consumer-driven attitudes of divine entitlement. Is that really just another “political view,” or is it instead an urgent mental health concern?

While we have no problem dismissing the QAnon folks as a bunch of crazy meth-heads hanging out in Dallas Square, awaiting the return of their savior, the *rest* of the Republican Party is actually the greater mental health concern - though it is



taboo to say so out loud - and equally deluded down inside their own “up is down” and “war is peace” white rabbit holes.

Assuming this doesn’t devolve rather precipitously into

America’s New Civil War, there are still plenty of vital lessons we

can learn from this first wave of ecological and socio-cultural unravelling.

The difference between a breakdown and a breakthrough, or between a spiritual emergency and spiritual emergence, has to do with the adequacy of the support system that is in place. America and other places in the world where society is unravelling and authoritarian responses are gaining traction clearly are having a mental health crisis, and do not have adequate support systems in place for people and communities who are in crisis mode. Politicians are preying on their worst impulses rather than providing any kind of support for them. No wonder their constituents are telling them they know where their families live, essentially holding democracy at gunpoint! Where can these people turn to for help and guidance? So we have to begin by seeing this for the crisis that it is, and then we need to get these people help! Medicating them is not the answer - self-medicating is the problem here, not the solution. The APA doesn’t seem to have any answers. This is why, in a time of unraveling, it makes sense to approach a mental health crisis not through the traditional lens of the medial industry, but rather through the more compassionate lens of the hospice movement.

We must also remember, however, that the hospice model itself is a fairly recent development that arose in direct response to another kind of trauma and suppressed grief: the medicalization of clinical death and the dehumanizing of our

culture that came with it during the Great Acceleration following WWII. After the overwhelming global trauma of successive world wars, with a Great Depression sandwiched in between for good measure, our industrialized and mechanized civilization elevated the medical model of illness to a level of technological madness, transforming dying from a natural process that used to take place in the more natural spiritual container of people's homes, with sympathetic and empathic community involvement, into a chilling clinical nightmare played out in hospital rooms under harsh lights, with the morgue conveniently located in the basement. It all fit perfectly with the culture of denial and conformity that followed the great wars, turning us into a death- and grief- phobic society where people were no longer real with one another. Who cared about reality when we 'all' (who mattered, anyway) had shiny cars, perfect lawns, chrome toasters on formica tables, and magic TVs! We'd had enough reality with Hitler and Hirohito.

The advent of hospice and palliative care, beginning in the 1960s, began to re-empower families and individuals to find some solace and meaning in dying and death again, mostly by creating an intentional space for the natural goodness of the dying and their extended families to be expressed and held, in safe spiritual containers, and by allowing each of us to define the passage into the great unknown in whatever way we and our loved ones might choose. The dominant culture slowly began honoring death once again, seeing it as a natural part of life once again - and even welcoming it in response to onerous medical attempts to prolong life for life's sake alone - rather than continuing to futilely fight death at every step in the clinical process under the pretense that dying is somehow an act of injustice, or a sign of personal and family failure.

If we apply these same kinds of humane principles at social, cultural, and even global scales to the long emergency of our existential climate crisis, we will come to view this 'Great Dying' as the collective moral and spiritual emergency it

is. This is the symbolic importance of XR getting governments to declare climate emergency, by the way. With an appropriate sense of death-informed urgency, we can at least *begin* to transform the climate/spiritual emergency into climate healing and spiritual emergence. Rather than becoming the ‘new normal,’ from this transformative perspective the chaotic profusion of petro-society’s unraveling is seen as a kind of ‘initiation,’ just as leading thinkers like Stan Grof, Richard Tarnas, Sean Kelly and other have suggested. See, e.g.: [Becoming Gaia: On the Threshold of Planetary Initiation](#) (2020). With this kind of intentional pivot towards emergence, or what Joanna Macy calls the Great Turning, more and more *regenerative* psychotherapists, somatically grounded cultural healers, empaths, deep ecologists, depth psychologists, archetypal astrologists, ‘highly sensitive people,’ authentic plant medicine guides, trained hospice workers, planetary thanatologists, and doulas everywhere will feel empowered and hopefully be encouraged to step into their deeply felt roles as *sociocultural spiritual midwives*, born for these times, guiding us all collectively through the planetary death/rebirth process we’ve already set in motion.

That’s the idea, anyhow, behind moving away from the overly-medicalized mental health ‘industry’ towards a more humane support system for people’s mental health crises as our economic support system crumbles. This can transpire according to a shared sacred intention to transform this crisis from the presently painful dislocation, rife with suffering and regret, into a much more constructive and even instructive *spiritual healing* process -- for each of us as individuals, including the traumatized Trumpeters, for all of us who find ourselves enmeshed in a mushrooming global mycelium (‘psychocelium,’ as the Wachowski’s presciently called it), for human beings as a species with growing self-awareness, and for our Mother, Earth, above all else, including all Her own cherished forms of life and expression.

That may sound like a tall order, I know, but it actually just involves a shift in orientation from within popular culture. As quantum social theorists point out, these kinds of shifts can happen quite suddenly. And we can facilitate that shift with the kind of wise intervention from climate-aware mental health professionals that is designed to break down the walls of psychological resistance and emotionally reactive conspiracy mongering at this critical time in our story. If ever there was a time for psychologists to make themselves useful to society at large, now is certainly that time.

If ever there was a time for psychologists and sociologists to make themselves useful to society at large, now is certainly that time. In fact, given that scientists have done all they can do to impress upon us the urgency of this existential threat, and still emissions climb, you would think that coming up with an antidote for this kind of mass climate psychosis would be the "Manhattan Project" moment for mainstream psychology, in particular, bringing our brightest and best experts on the human psyche together to thoroughly diagnose the disease and devise an appropriate psychosocial algorithms to change the behaviors of consumers and citizens alike, or to shift the zeitgeist of our ecocidal culture. It is instructive to remember that the profession gained its foothold in American society when the government turned to it after WWII to help the traumatized generation of soldiers cope and return to their communities as productive members of society. Why wouldn't our government turn to them now?

To their credit, I suppose, the APA's Climate Task Force took another run at the problem in 2022, going beyond its initial reports triage scope. The "[Action Plan for Psychologists](#)" doesn't exactly have a Manhattan Project sense of scale to it, but at least it recognizes the need for psychologists to have a "stronger" role in addressing the crisis. As the task force rather tepidly puts it: "To enhance the soundness and impact of their work, psychologists must engage with other

domains that address climate change – not just other disciplines and professions but policymaking and advocacy as well.” The task force concludes that psychologists “can be strong leaders in addressing the climate crisis,” while calling out the APA for not being an effective voice to date. The thrust of the report, however, remains on “mitigation and adaptation,” rather than looking to the psychological roots of the crisis and the present paralysis in the face of an existential threat. Surely we can do better than that!

Unfortunately, from promising beginnings with the publication of a book that portended to speak for the Earth, the field of Ecopsychology doesn’t really fare much better on this account. Fifty years should’ve been long enough to make more of a difference than it has on American culture. Rather than sparking a social movement with active engagement as its focus, Ecopsychology itself retreated into a largely academic tower that still talks a good game, but doesn’t speak for the Earth in the way Gaia needs her advocates to speak up for Her. Indigenous people are doing a much better job of that, as we see with the battles over pipelines, but what naturally should’ve been a powerful alliance between Ecopsychology and Indigenous people never seemed to develop - in spite of the fact that Indigenous voices like Dr. Leslie Gray were there right from the very beginning.

Those Indigenous voices of Mother Earth were not elevated and supported as they clearly should’ve been from the start, and as even the APA belatedly acknowledges they need to be now, and as a result the profession of ecopsychology became politically timid and allowed itself to be cowed and marginalized by the same psychology industry that supported torture during the Bush years. While scientific journals broke with convention and became politically vocal more than a decade ago now, even the journal Ecopsychology made an editorial decision early on to avoid political activism, according to its long-time editor, Peter Kahn, Ph.D.

Extinction Rebellion UK has modeled the correct response for successful professionals who can clearly see the dire emergency we're facing: if what you're doing has not proven effective in transforming the way we collectively think and act, and especially if you're just motivated by the security attendant to your status as a professional, then now is the time to either revolt from within your current structure or get out of it and make yourself useful. Even climate scientists themselves are talking now about refusing to issue any more reports until the reports they've already issued are taken seriously by policymakers. That XR model hasn't really taken here in the States yet, in part because we have such an entrenched professional class of "environmentalists" - another colossal failure I was party to for two decades of my life.

And so I'm happy to issue the challenge now to the one profession, ecopsychologists, that *should* know better than any other profession the present moral imperative for radical action. The challenge is to go beyond what the APA is now recommending psychologists do, which is little more than a kind of voluntary *pro-bono* service outside of the therapy room. To wit: either use your current position as a platform to raise a ruckus in advocating forcefully for social sanity, even at the risk of tarnishing your reputation, or quit your spiritually numbing job, get out in the streets, and/or otherwise devote what is left of your professional career to fighting for a future for the human race.

From our greatest adversity as a species we can give birth to an equally great spiritual awakening. We just have to see climate trauma and recovery as an initiation and transmutation process by which the human species will be transfigured into a truly *humane* species. Deciding who we want to be is as simple as adding an "e" to the end of our species name! Sure, we might perish altogether - but as far as we know we still can choose to grow *through* this crisis, however long it takes, and to evolve out of it, leaving behind all these childish and adolescent

ways of thoughtlessly being in the world. We still have time, individually and collectively, to grow into the responsible adults the children of the world are now pleading with us to become. Why would we choose anything less?

From a psychological and spiritual perspective, at least, the key to this collective evolution is really rather basic: we need to begin by acknowledging that this time of cascading losses that we are suffering through in the world right now is actually quite traumatic, that [this is a personal crisis](#), not solely the responsibility of our failed world leaders. Then we need to honor, creatively reinvent, and even ritualize the kind of healthy collective grieving process that is best-suited to unleashing the healing potential of our pervasive traumas. As Nobel prize-winning climate scientist Karen O'Brien states: "The trauma dimension of really *healing* [climate] trauma can release a lot of the energy that we need to face head-on the challenges that are facing us now and that will face us in the future." In other words, the larger the trauma, the greater the healing potential energy that is latent in that trauma. Honesty in relation to difficult truths requires real bravery, while denial is just insincere and insecure cowardice hiding behind a facade of bravery.

The kind of courageous re-orientation O'Brien advocates reminds me of how bison in the wild face into the fiercest of storms, and then just plow right into and through to the other side, where green pasture can still might be found. As O'Brien cautions, however, in order to tap into climate trauma's healing potential, we must be prepared to allow our hearts to "break open and not break down." All the wisdom we Western humans have gained from decades of hospice care is brilliantly reflected in that wise prescription.

What people tend not to appreciate about trauma, death and grieving is that each carries [a unique gift](#) when they arrive at our door. Inviting these admittedly unwelcome guests into our home, and then taking them into our broken hearts, is richly rewarded by the profound appreciation we gain for both the beauty

and fragility of existence — what the Indigenous healer Woman Stands Shining (Kate McCabe) refers to as the sacred Hoop of Life:

“Every form of life gets to have a place on this sacred hoop, and every form of life has a perfect design for a thriving life... [However], every single member of this sacred hoop of life has to uphold their part or the integrity of the hoop begins to fail.”

As Hübl teaches us, “[t]rauma is part of the underlying separateness of life. And collective trauma creates the basic foundation for separation.” Because trauma arises in relationship, Hübl wisely concludes “*collective trauma has to be healed by the collective.*” Are we up to the task? Can you appreciate why this is the cauldron in which the climate crisis can be resolved?

Again, we see here a crying need for the global mental health profession, preferably in [close alliance with Indigenous cultural healers](#), to impress this wisdom of our time to political leadership everywhere - not just [Iceland](#), [New Zealand](#), and [Bolivia](#). The only organization that I’m aware of that demonstrates a clear understanding of this leadership role from mental health experts is the UK/EU [Climate Psychology Alliance](#), which deserves a lot more recognition, obviously - *and funding* - though it is growing in both strength and number. The North American offshoot of CPA is currently represented on the APA Climate Task Force, so that’s an encouraging sign. Still, much more urgency and political activism is required of all those with special skills and insights for addressing our traumas.

Some might view breaking the silence around collective trauma as the opening of old wounds, politically speaking. But with trauma, the cure is always found close to the wound and, politically speaking, those wounds have already been reopened (if they were ever even closed, that is). A closed heart is just our psyche’s way of reflexively contracting around the wounded self at the core of our

being - thus giving rise to grievance politics. All closing our heart produces is the scar tissue of our patterned behaviors, repeated *ad nauseam* until we begin to believe that is just who we are.

But when we allow our heart to break open in response to grievous loss, whether that loss is long past, current or ongoing, a kind of healing balm naturally emerges from the wound itself, breaking us out of the self-imposed prison of our unresolved traumas. The wounded self (or segment of society) is honored, allowed to express itself, and then healed in the same kind of relationship in which it arose. From a disintegration process, we find the resources to re-integrate our self identity, individually and culturally, at a much more holistic level of integrity.

[Educator Brad Kirshner speaks eloquently](#) to concurrent integration process that emerges from the ongoing disintegration of acknowledging our collective traumas:

"We have begun the Great Release, the Great Unravelling, through the portal of critique and judgment, and now it is time for the Great Embrace, and the Great Integration, through the portal of love and healing. It won't come easy. We will need to address and heal the collective trauma of the shadow side of each structure of being and community: the violence and sacrifice of our tribal foundations; the fundamentalism and dogmatism of our totalitarian civilizations; the materialism, scientism, individualism, and colonialism of our modern expansion; and the nihilism, alienation, fragility, cynicism, and inequality of our postmodern/capitalist/neoliberal lifeworld."

Climate trauma arises in both a primal and cultural relationship:

- Primally, there is the intergenerational split from our Mother, the natural world in which we are all embedded, culminating with the [archetypal](#)

[disruption of our splitting the atom](#), and the Great Acceleration that conquest over Nature triggered; and,

- Culturally, there are all the oppressive forces that are designed to lock us into the same patterned behaviors which perpetuate the trauma.

Since it is not possible to separate the oppression of the fossil fuel industry from the oppression of women, Indigenous peoples, and people of color, the cultural expressions of climate trauma can only be resolved through responsive social movements oriented towards reparation. But in order for these to translate into healing the biosphere and climate, we're required at the same time to address our *primal* trauma — by acknowledging its entanglement with Gaia's trauma, by re-valuing and learning to really listen to Indigenous voices, and finally by coming into proper relationship with ourselves, our communities, and our mother organism holistically, all in a symphonically symbiotic way. Climate healing is cultural healing, and cultural healing is climate healing.

As the closing panelists for the first Collective Trauma Summit agreed, merely *invoking* collective traumas, along with honoring their presence in our lives and in the currency of our social relationships, is already producing a socially significant, profound shift in our collective Psyche — like the light of day first entering a formerly sealed cave. At the end of 9 days of processing our shared traumas in a global community of over 50,000, there was a felt sense amongst participants that respectfully acknowledging collective trauma was *in itself* having the effect of initiating us into a healing circle that felt close, but spanned the globe. Empowered by Hübl's own growing popularity and the success of his and his artist wife's [Pocket Project](#), there was a consensus among all involved to make the summit at least an annual event. Just two years later, using the same format, participation had nearly doubled. It's become quite apparent that there is a real opportunity to scale up Hübl's efforts, such as with the Climate Psychology

Alliance's efforts, in order to address the multivalent layers of climate trauma for years to come. This is, after all, something we will be living with the rest of our lives.

Hübl takes advantage of the condition that broken systems want to rediscover their wholeness. Healing has the effect of pointing us in that direction. When we can hold that space of awareness collectively, with empathy, in small groups or large, and when we can hold a space for Gaia's organic wisdom to manifest through our own, it naturally triggers a kind of alchemical process that heals the collective soul. As mentioned, this healing potential is inherent in the trauma itself. Since climate change represents the greatest trauma on the grandest scale, the potential energy for healing waiting to be unleashed in relationship with this crisis is immense, as currently evidenced by the heightened levels of chaos.

Trauma appears in my dreams as a dragon in a cave, or submerged in the ocean, and it holds in its claws the jewel of our staggering potential as human beings. Collective awareness is the transformational, unifying force of nature with which we can heroically slay that dragon or, as my Buddhist sensibilities prefer, get it to release the jewel. Summit speaker William Ury, a Harvard negotiator and author of the best-selling book *Difficult Conversations*, reported from the front lines of his decades-long experience with the world's most intractable conflicts:

“I believe that humanity has this capacity to heal itself, and our jobs as healers, or as global social witnesses, is to serve as activators of... the global immune system of humanity.”

It's worth repeating Dr. Elworthy's profound insight here:

*We are capable of affecting very large systems
because we are connected with very large symptoms.*

That pearl of wisdom really is the essence of healing climate trauma. With that potential in mind, we're now ready to face the big, fire-breathing dragon that holds the entire planet in its claw: systemic oppression.

Climate Racism: White Power Over IPOC

“The fact is that we live in a world that has been profoundly shaped by power. Differentials of power between and within nations are probably greater today than they have ever been. These differentials are, in turn, closely related to carbon emissions. The distribution of power in the world therefore lies at the core of the climate crisis.”

~ Amitav Gosh, from *The Great Derangement*

In the next chapter, we will explore the innate potential of shared awareness to shift collective consciousness at a global scale in this new internet age of radical connectivity and interdependence. Related to that phenomenon, we've looked at the critical role social movements are playing in resolving, or at least bringing attention to, our most persistent collective traumas. And as we saw in chapter two, these collective traumas and climate trauma are entangled.

In this chapter, we're focused on the sociocultural aspects of our shared dilemma, and are taking a realistic account of the obstacles that we still need to surmount. Viewing our current, metastacizing political polarization through the trauma-informed lens of accelerating climate trauma, it is easy to appreciate the central importance of 'truth' to advancing a sane political agenda. But contrary to an old maxim, truth alone will not set us free. In order to effectuate truth in the saturated realm of accumulated traumas, it must lead to some kind of *reconciliation* process, both culturally and politically. As columnist Robert Koehler states:

“Looking directly, and collectively, at the truth must be done not with the intent to cast further blame and create another scapegoat, but to heal the harm and transcend the hatred.”

But how do we proceed from truth to reconciliation?

Primed by Covid and [#BLM](#), we should now be ready to consider the lethal role that overt, systemic racism is playing in our collective refusal to respond sanely to the existential threat of our shared climate crisis. After all, as a practical matter, is it not true that ruthless politicians and their corporate overlords are keeping their authoritarian knee on the windpipe of Mother Earth? She was already visibly wheezing *before* the Covid pandemic, and the mass distraction and political pandemonium created by lockdowns and mass dyings have only resulted in acceleration of the rate at which we are hacking away at her lungs.

Gaia can't breathe, either.

In the wake of George Floyd's brutal murder by a cop who seemed to think that he was just doing his job, our collective failure to respond to rising CO2 levels in the atmosphere, 92% of which are produced by the Global North, should now reasonably be viewed through the lens of climate trauma as a racial issue on a global scale. While this point has been emerging through trans-sectional dialogue, it really came into focus for me listening to a precocious eleven-year-old UK climate activist, Elsie Luna, [patiently explain to Jem Bendell](#) that even folks with Extinction Rebellion did not seem to fully appreciate the underlying cause of the climate crisis: *oppression*. The "power over" syndrome that has shaped our modern world, in other words. As Elsie bluntly put the matter, if we're not fighting oppression, then we're not doing anything to solve the climate crisis!

In light of how long we've been fighting, and even winning the public relations battle, without having any effect whatsoever on rising CO2 emissions - every year a new record - it's worth considering the matter afresh, through the eyes of a child. Children of a certain age can be quite uncompromising and perceptive, perhaps because they've yet to be worn down by pervasive cultural conditioning.

Without intending to detract from the pressing agenda of #BLM and the urgent need to address the institutionalized racism reflected in militarized police brutality, it's time for us collectively as well to acknowledge an even more lethal symptom of this centuries-old plague of virulent, mostly Christian, white supremacy — one with a greater death toll already than the pandemic and police brutality combined. As Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright, U.S. Coordinator with Leap, has been articulating for some time now, the imperialistic, settler mentality that inhibits effective social change in the U.S. and Europe is also precluding the kind of radical global changes that scientists tell us are urgently called for to avert, or at least lessen the impacts of, the coming climate cataclysm.

As with the kind of shocking environmental racism that was on display with the intentional lead poisoning of the predominantly black and brown residents of Flynt, Michigan, everyone should be able to readily appreciate the fundamental injustice of our chronic climate chaos. The economically ‘developing’ world of the Global South, and Indigenous communities the world over, are already bearing a grossly disproportionate share of the accelerating *effects* of climate trauma, even though they contribute substantially less to the continuing *causes* of the crisis.

Climate change amounts to an undeclared, deeply unjust war against the global poor. Though they have emitted almost none of the heat-trapping gases that have raised global temperatures to their highest levels in civilization’s history, it is the poor—especially in low-income countries in Asia, Africa, and South America—who suffer first and worst from overheating the planet.

(Climate Coverage Must Stop Ignoring the World's Poorest)

In fact, it is all too plain to see that much of the crisis is being driven by our imperialist control of the Global South’s sub-standard living conditions — just as we callously strip-mine the ocean floor of life, our transnational corporations strip indigenous people’s homelands of “natural resources,” with virtually no regard for

the environmental consequences the exploited local populations are then left to live with, all in order to fuel our comfortably numb lifestyles of excess consumerism and profligate waste. We poison their waters with fossil fuel extraction practices these criminal corporate raiders would never try to get away with in white countries, even using mercenary armies to quash local resistance, and then we raze their vital rainforests to grow mono-crops to feed our cows!

As succinctly stated by the authors of a 2017 book entitled *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (Bonneuil & Fressoz):

The overwhelming share of responsibility for climate change of the two hegemonic powers of the 19th (Great Britain) and 20th (U.S.) centuries attests to the fundamental link between climate change and projects of world domination.



One of the uncomfortable truths documented by Nikole Hannah-Jones in [The 1619 Project](#) (NYT) is that the slave plantations in the South gave rise to capitalism as we know it. In point of fact, however, those plantations were never really abolished - we simply scaled them up and moved our operations to the Global South, because those countries are filled with people who mattered even less to European sensibilities than Indians did in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation, or the continental Indians did to the British, for that matter, or the Aborigines did to the Ozzies at the turn of twentieth century — not to mention all the other imperialist incursions into countries of color.¹

¹ Photo of Nigerian farmer Eric Dooh showing his hand covered with oil from a creek near Goi, Ogoniland, Nigeria. Photograph: MARTEN VAN DIJL/EPA



(Chevron in Ecuador's Rainforest)

While our colonialist sensibilities may have at least appeared to change for the better in the last century, you wouldn't know it from the way our corporations do business. The very fact that we do not legally require these domestic corporations that we charter to behave the same way abroad that we require them to behave at home says all you need to know about how those same racist attitudes have been institutionalized systemically. It's immoral and obscene - and nobody questions it!

But if corporations are people entitled to due process, as the courts now rule, then they should be required to behave humanely overseas, the same way we ostensibly require them to behave here at home. Right???

These same disparities, by the way, have been on full display with the global response (and lack thereof) to the pandemic, as David Bush points out quite clearly in his essay [The Imperialist Pandemic](#). The same corporate, imperialist powers that

prevent effective responses to the climate crisis are busy capitalizing on the misery of the pandemic, in what has come to be known as “disaster capitalism,” while needlessly perpetuating its causes and insuring that it will not go quietly into the night.

It’s a rather convenient and ultimately lethal trap, however, to scapegoat imperialist actors on the world stage for inhibiting an effective response to the climate crisis without also acknowledging the part our own comfortably air-conditioned attitudes play in not demanding urgent action and corporate reform in response to the climate crisis — the same way white allies are now, finally, demanding urgent policing reforms in response to the persistent cries of our black brothers and sisters. Just as we can see the role white supremacy is playing in the structural violence of America’s police force, we also need to see very clearly the role white supremacy plays in the structural violence of our assault on Mother Earth. As the Indian climate scientist, social activist and Zen teacher Dr. Kritee Kanko bluntly stated on a [FB post](#) on June 10:

“White supremacy is the most important cause of climate crisis.”

Let that sink in. How often have you heard it from the mostly white leaders of the climate movement? Have you *ever* heard it from a politician not named AOC? Is it any less true??

In response to our sudden awakening of collective conscience and compassion for IPOC, Hop Hopkins echoed Dr. Kritee’s sentiment in the national magazine of that once white bastion of environmental concern, [The Sierra Club](#), calling it a “long over-due realization” that “[w]e’ll **never stop climate change without ending white supremacy.**” And the Rev. Fletcher Harper, an Episcopal priest who is executive director of GreenFaith, a global religious-based climate action network, posted this [on his blog](#):

“For too long, the environmental movement has not been concerned enough about the destruction that climate change wreaks on Black and Brown communities around the world. For too long, we haven’t been concerned enough about Black and Brown people who can’t breathe because they are carrying the weight of climate change and White supremacy.”

This climate racism represents a criminally neglected aspect of our activism around climate issues that deserves far more discussion than I can possibly advance here, but at least we can all agree on the parameters and critical import of the concern with systemic imperialist oppression. Because as Hopkins notes in the same article: “The richest people need for white supremacy to remain invisible so they can continue to plunder our planet.”



Look at the role white supremacy has played at the outset of the mass migrations which climate scientists have predicted all along would result from global warming. The climate crisis has already produced unprecedented

droughts in countries like Syria, sparking civil wars and strife, flooding predominantly white Europe with climate refugees. This has, quite predictably as well, been met with a rise in white nationalism and border restrictions.

The same is of course true here in America, where Trumpublicans want to wall off refugees from the Global South, who are being driven north by the very conflicts and climate displacements that we are largely responsible for, and they have no moral compunction as white Christians with placing brown babies in cages! The ‘wall’ is just a shadow projection for keeping the climate crisis they

cannot bring themselves to face, and its relatively blameless victims, fenced off from their cherished sense of privilege and entitlement.

This is all overtly unjustifiable and racist.

In their essay "[The Case for Climate Reparations](#)," Olufemi O. Taiwo and Beba Cibralic bluntly state there are two ways of collectively responding to the "great climate migration that will transform the world," which is just beginning: climate reparations or climate colonialism.

"Climate colonialism is like climate apartheid on an international scale. Economic power, location, and access to resources determine how communities can respond to climate impacts. But these factors are shaped by existing global injustices: the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism that enriched some countries at the expense of others. Global warming has exacerbated these inequalities..."

That is the REAL "inconvenient truth," is it not? We must ask ourselves, would the U.S. and Europe be walling out climate refugees and migrants if they were *not* poor people of color? (Note: The Ukrainian War recently answered this question for us). Do our political leaders even even pretend to care that it is our own habitual, fossil-fueled lifestyle that is largely to blame for their woes? Would we be content to watch millions, or even billions, of people perish in the mostly dark-skinned Global South if, somehow, we could ourselves avoid the worst of climate chaos in the bargain?

It sure seems that way. Again, as Pope Francis asserts, the climate crisis is asking us all to consider what it means to be human in this brave new world - and that question is especially pertinent for the pale-faced European Christians whose beliefs justified centuries of slavery and colonialism. It is up to moral Christians who believe in penitence and God's love for all creatures to reclaim the mantle of

Christianity from the politically active “Prosperity” Evangelicals who actively promote white supremacy and American exceptionalism.

It’s instructive to note that this pandemic happened to hit the mostly white countries of Europe and North America first, or the exact opposite progression of impacts that we are seeing with global warming. What would it look like if we were to respond to the climate crisis with the same sense of urgency and resolve that shaped our initial response to the Coronavirus pandemic? How about, after declaration of a national/global emergency:

- minimizing use of fossil-fueled cars to the maximum extent practicable right away;
- eliminating all subsidies for fossil fuel producers, and re-directing the money to conversion of our energy and agricultural systems - which, as to the former, happens to be [all it would require](#);
- rationing gasoline in the short term;
- creating incentives for folks to get rid of their gas-and-diesel-powered cars altogether, either going without altogether, with a generous public transportation stipend, or trading up to an e-car.

There is no reasonable debate anymore as to what needs to be done — halt and then reverse the buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from fossil fuels — and the pace at which it needs to be accomplished — a decade, according to the 2018 UN IPCC Report. But when it comes to the kind of action that would even slow this heat engine, the world acts like a deer caught in the headlights of its oncoming demise. *Why is that?*

Certainly bad actors like Trump, Bolsonaro, and Putin bear a lot of the blame for derailing the Paris Accords. But we also know that even if every signatory was faithfully implementing the Paris Accords, it would still not be nearly enough to avoid unparalleled suffering and loss on a scale that would’ve made Hitler blush.

And we know that the Accords themselves were only designed to be voluntary. It isn't actually required that our world leaders avert extinction of life on planet Earth.

How dare they?!

Given that the 'commitments' set forth in the Paris Accords were negotiated by Obama's fossil fueled minions on the stated assumption that 3–4 degrees celsius rise in average global temperatures would be acceptable, in direct contravention of the 1.5C rhetorical limitation subsequently added into the text, it seems quite apparent that wealthy, mostly white capitalist countries and transnational corporations in the so-called "first world" (RACISM ALERT!) have already made a calculated assumption that they can somehow survive on islands of luxury in a global sea of misery. The most recent COP26 in ~~Gaslight~~ Glasgow, Scotland brought that point how quite vividly. And so they collectively keep kicking the can down the road, keeping fossil fuel subsidies in place, they continue to extract dirty fuels like Australian and West Virginian coal, Canadian tar sands, and deep sea oil, and they even continue opening up new areas to fossil fuel exploration!

It's a mistake, in other words, to view this as a partisan, political issue and not an *oppression* and racial reparations issue, as the professional climate movement has mostly done so far. The implicit injustice and amorality, and the patent racism that undergirds this global stalemate, as well as the enabling lack of urgency from people not named Greta Thunberg or Elsie Luna, can readily be appreciated by considering the *alpha* and *omega* of Climate Trauma:

- How we got here; and,
- how we get out.

Anyone can quickly appreciate the imperialist, racist overtones of the climate crisis and paralysis by considering three graphs, compliments of Dr.

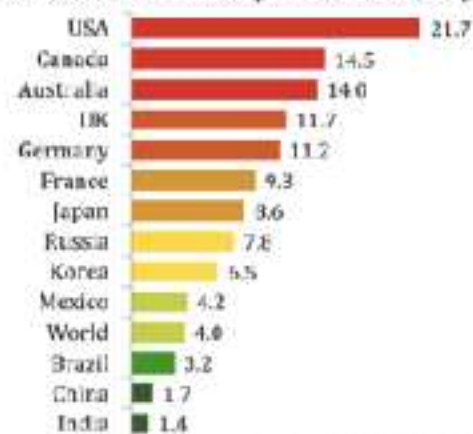
and extreme flooding events — and massive wildfires, together with other climate-related unnatural disasters.

No wonder, then, there are more refugees now fleeing those regions of the world hit hardest by climate change than the world has seen since the end of WWII. These are climate refugees, plain and simple, whether we choose to call them that or not. And they're people of color, guilty only of being born into relative poverty and strife created by our economic exploitation. They've been living in sub-human bondage to our precious economies and our cherished consumer culture for centuries now.

We have to be honest about this if we're going to re-solve this crisis.

Now consider where your own carbon footprint falls in this graph:

Personal Carbon Footprints: t CO₂e (2001)



Note: The personal carbon footprint represents the combined emissions from personal consumption, including housing, travel, food, product and service emissions. It excludes capital, government and land use emissions.

Sources: Hertwich & Peters 2009



More here: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/maps-and-graphics/co2-emissions-per-capita-ranking/>

75% of those global carbon footprints are accounted for by white countries. As Dr. Kritee points out in an [illuminating YouTube presentation](#), what needs to happen quickly in order to come into compliance with the Paris Accord's goals is for everyone in the world to reduce their carbon footprint to that of a person in India by 2030–2035. This is an emergency, after all, right? Much more so than the

pandemic, though the higher urgency of the climate crisis tends to be obscured by the significant, decades-long time-lag between our emissions and climate uptake, while a pandemic has more immediate impacts. The truth is that no amount of green energy can bring everyone up to our material standard of comfortable excess in that time frame, so it's clearly incumbent on we, the privileged, the predominantly white people to simplify our lifestyles in order for a future to be viable. Isn't that responsibility clear enough to us yet? (We'll return to this notion of shared responsibility in Ch. 6).

To be even more specific, the average carbon footprint of Americans is about 50,000 lb. of CO₂ equivalents. According to the famous 1.5 degree report released in 2018, in a just world where all countries fairly shared the burden of stabilizing our shared climate, the average American's lifestyle would need to be reduced ***by a factor of ten in the next ten years*** — down to only 5000 lb. of CO₂ equivalents, or the average emissions of someone living in India.

What are we waiting for, exactly?

So far, three years since that 2018 UN clarion call, we have not budged — except, of course, just a little in our initial response to the pandemic. But that was understood by most to be just a temporary inconvenience. So, if like me you are from the settler class, do you feel entitled, for some reason you haven't bothered to think through, to live a more extravagant lifestyle than a human being from a 'country of color'? Do you feel 'exceptional,' or perhaps like one of God's 'chosen people'? Let's try to remember that geneticists have now proven that we all come from the same tribe in Africa, and that our skin color is merely a reflection of migration to different latitudes over time - and there's nothing inherently smarter about moving to colder climates. (How ironic that the people who moved to colder climates, and imagine themselves superior to the people who remained in sub-Saharan Africa, are now responsible for heating the planet!)

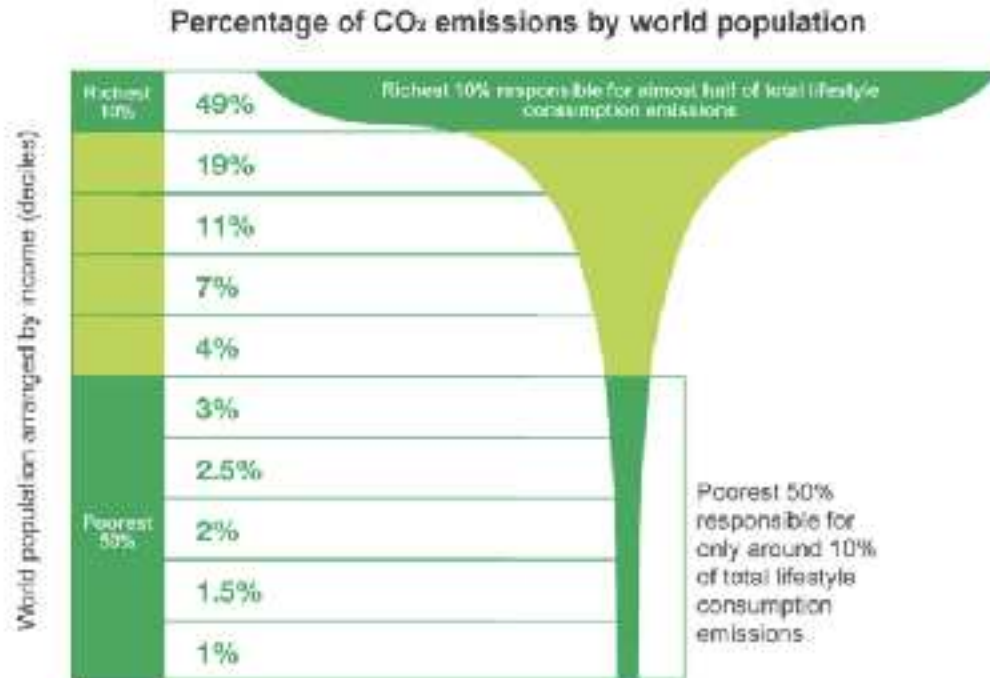
For that matter, why do so many people still feel entitled to sacrifice *whole species* just to support their accustomed diet? And why are these considered to be *political* issues instead of being considered personal issues - especially when it is so clear that politicians are constrained or at least reluctant to take action? **It's our lifestyle**, which is to say the way we choose to live our lives, **that is the problem**, is it not?

We're all in denial here, to varying degrees. Every one of us can take each of the following actions to reduce our impact: have fewer children; fly less, if at all; give up your gas-powered vehicles; and, adopt a vegetarian, organic, locavore diet. There are even plant-based meat substitutes now that are difficult to distinguish from the factory-farm equivalents.

Collectively, according to Andreas Malm, at a minimum we need to take the following steps: stop building carbon-burning power plants; shut the existing ones down; halt any further expansions of air, sea and road travel, introduce a rationing system for transportation; rapidly expand our mass transit systems; switch urgently to food grown locally with regenerative agriculture (i.e., break up Big Ag); dismantle the meat industry's racist factory farms and (yes) plantations in the Global South, substituting plant-based proteins that permit returning vast monocultural lands to regeneration by wildlife; and, heavily invest in climate 'drawdown' efforts to draw atmospheric carbon levels down before they can exert their full climate impacts.

Only some of these steps require systemic changes. We can all drastically change our transportation habits, use mass transit, boycott factory farms and otherwise adjust our diets, while at the same time marching on D.C. to demand this climate triage. It is not an 'either/or' proposition. It is a 'both/and' proposition, or 'all hands on deck' for the preservation of life on planet Earth.

Perhaps this final graph will bring all this more clearly into focus:



Source: Oxfam

So yes, there is one meat that is still climate friendly: EAT THE RICH!

Gaia's Life Matters

If America, purveyor of the American Dream and the World's Policeman, is a microcosm of the global system right now - and it is - and if everyone is now clearly seeing just how racism has been baked into our social disparities and oppressive systems of policing and incarceration, *then why can't we see the same racism enshrined in our global economy that we saw exhibited on the streets of Minneapolis in the wake of George Floyd's murder?*

Are we waiting for Gaia to say she can't breathe before we take our knee off the necks of African countries and the rest of the Global South?

As I am writing this, scientists have just reported that Gaia's lungs, the Amazon Rainforest, is now a *net emitter* of CO₂ rather than the carbon sink it has ALWAYS been. Throughout all the millennia of human history, and even human evolution, any fires in the Amazon would be extinguished by the seasonal

monsoon. Now she is experiencing drought, and we have fires that burn all year round. That is the equivalent of cutting off Gaia's oxygen supply with our knee.

Maybe it's time that we in the over-developed world simply demand that our corporate rulers treat the entire planet as an autonomous, racism-free, imperialist-war-free, and global-cop-free zone. As one of my more intelligent activist friends once wrote on a chalkboard:

SAVE EVERYTHING! FREE EVERYONE!

Or maybe it's time we demand that our political leaders see the world as it is seen from space — a world without borders. A living, conscious being, with only one race of humans. [The human race](#).

It's time for America, the World's Policeman, to turn in our badge and dismantle our forces of oppression. For all the same reasons, really, that we're demanding the same of our militarized police forces.

We are the oppressors.

Time has come today. We must radically reform our way of life. For humanity's sake. For a future to be possible. *For everyone* — regardless of their ethnicity or place of birth. For all species. Because in the final analysis, from the standpoint of recovering from this accelerating biospheric trauma, which is on pace to lay waste to the entire living world, we are but one species.

And, alas, there is only one planet.

So in the end, we the human species only get one chance to get this right.

And this is the end. Life as we have always known it is over. And all life hangs in the balance.

When we do get it right, when we finally, unequivocally demand an end to imperialist power-over people and countries of color, and power-over Indigenous peoples, when we do finally stop abusing the natural world and listen to ecologists

and Indigenous voices for the Earth, when we finally enlist Gaia as an ally in our struggle, then *and only then* can anyone finally and genuinely be heard to say:

“Yes, it has come to pass: All Lives Matter.”

Chapter Five:

Gaian rEvolution: Entering & Shaping the *Gaianthropocene*



*“If we give our belief to the earth,
She will believe in us.”*

~ N. Scott Momaday

Query: Why is it so difficult for non-Indigenous people and modern culture generally to accept the idea that this living planet - of which we ourselves are integral cells - has a soul (psyche) or is, at the very least, a very sentient being?

As a life-long eco-activist of European descent who, over the last decade, has become gradually and increasingly obsessed with the collective psychology of our shared climate crisis, I know this query to be a loaded, multivalent question of science, politics, and moral philosophy. However, it is the spiritual dimension of this question that I've come to focus on more and more as [Pachamama](#) cries out in distress over our accelerating violations of her natural sovereignty.

I believe this question is rising from Earth, not my mind or intellect, and I believe it is demanding to be answered.

The politics of climate respond-ability was already complicated enough before scientists became radicalized, due to the trauma experienced by them as our front-line responders in our continuing war on Nature. Unfortunately, thanks to the limbic cultural response to the alarms being sounded by our leading experts, science itself has now become politicized according to competing ideologies, rather than accepted as a shared body of facts and mutual assumptions to be acted upon collectively. That has given rise to the political crisis we now are gripped by. It should be clear by now to most concerned that if we do not untangle the complicated settler-psychology underlying this global climate crisis in a trauma-informed way, we will continue to struggle politically to bring humanity into any kind of proper relationship with the natural world.

In all the tumult and turmoil between science and politics, and especially against the background of a rapidly unravelling global ecosystem, it is all too easy

to forget that the climate crisis, at its heart, is a spiritual crisis. The organic example of indigenous peoples still living in harmony with their rapidly shrinking environments should serve as a constant reminder of the spiritual dimension of this global climate emergency. Or, for that matter, a quick read of Pope Francis' brilliant encyclical on the care for our common home, *Laudato Si'*, also serves to beautifully elucidate the spiritual dimension of our existential crisis:

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal...

'The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.' For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion.

An existential crisis is, almost by definition, a crisis of spirit. If we fool ourselves hubristically by thinking that this is just another scientific puzzle to solve, the outcome is going to be bleak. That is the path we are on right now. I suspect that the masses avoid thinking much about this crisis because of some form of magical thinking by which either God will intervene on our behalf (as IF!) or, more prevalently, someone will invent something that will somehow allow us to go on our merry way.

When we finally stop to seriously ponder the existential dimension of what the human species is busy doing to the planet and all its inhabitants, when we get past the initial terror and dread, we cannot avoid asking ourselves what it means to be human anymore. In the successive waves of global pandemic, with its Holocaust-sized death toll, this existential question was really been brought home

to us, first by the globally televised murder of George Floyd, then by the Capital Insurrection, and now by Putin brutally ripping open the scarred-over wounds from world war and Stalins steel curtain.

What does it mean to be human with exponential population growth, with mass extinction now underway, with unnatural conflagrations that kill billions of animals in one fire season - and then are quickly forgotten in the grips of global pandemic or the next unnatural disaster? What does it really mean to be human when our own primordial womb, the oceans from which we emerged, are literally being poisoned, plundered and choked out before our disbelieving eyes?

WHO ARE WE??

(To be clear, who are we, the non-Indigenous citizens of the world who fancy ourselves to be modern or progressed?)

Sadly, one doesn't even have to be religious to ponder in quiet moments whether we humans, as a species, are good or evil. "Evil" here not in a religious sense, but rather in the sense of "live" spelled backwards — that which is against life, and thus gives rise to widespread and unnecessary, horrific suffering. That's my pragmatic definition of "evil." And this, I suspect, is the gnawing question that leads so many good-hearted, well-intentioned activists into a pit of despair, slimed with the twin lubricants of cynicism and fatalism. That is a hell-realm of our own creation, however, no matter how much we may insist on blaming others for our misery. (See: "shared responsibility," ethical dimension, Ch. 6)

To view this life-and-death crisis in spiritual terms is not to exclude science - just ask any scientist who has suffered through his or her own spiritual crisis in the past decade. On the contrary, as any reasonably spiritual person would agree, it is the science which must inform our spiritual response - but not just the science of greenhouse gases! Endlessly obsessing over the science and math of "climate change," on the other hand, represents a subtle form of spiritual bypassing, a

different kind of denialism. While we certainly cannot discount the laws of physics, this crisis is not *solely* defined by physics. It is not just about humans and our technology. At an even more fundamental level, it's about how we relate to the natural world.

Surely it is no coincidence that during the same brief span that the global and existential scope of our Nature-crisis has become readily apparent, the painfully relevant Gaia theory has proven itself to be predictive in the same way Einstein's theory of relativity, and then quantum theory, have proven their mettle. What began as the Gaia hypothesis has now, with subsequent congruent discoveries in Earth systems science, already passed the gold standard of science, and become [generally accepted](#). How else do you explain plants having intelligence and forests exhibiting shared awareness? Or *entheogens*, for that matter - a relatively recent discovery for non-Indigenous people like myself, a child of the 60's.

But have we even *begun* to integrate Gaia theory into our climate activism? Sure, most scientists now agree that Earth is not some inanimate object - the "third rock from the sun" - as our dominant 'scientific-materialist' world culture had always presumed. Instead, as most Indigenous cultures have always insisted, Earth is a living organism — a 'self-regulating' subject, not an inanimate object. A life-source to be honored - not a resource to be exploited.

Do any of our urgent approaches to solving the climate crisis incorporate this radical new orientation? Or do we still fear how that might make us appear to more narrow-minded, profit driven policy makers?

New theories lead to new discoveries, and sure enough Gaia theory rather quickly led to the new field of plant cognitive ecology, or the study of plant sentience and intelligence, which continues to produce ever-more startling discoveries. Forests turn out to be thriving communities of apparently "conscious"

trees who communicate with one another via a complex underground mycelium layer, the mycorrhizal “wood-wide web,” that resembles and functions much like the neural networks in our brains - and more expeditiously, via the pathways of other symbiotic organisms and the trees’ own pheromones, carried on the breeze. Thanks to this complex interdependent web of life, trees are able to live for centuries in community and, according to the perceived distress of individuals and groups, share resources like medicine and nutrients with one another. They even tend to treat family members preferentially, much as we do in the animal kingdom...

Trees are Ents!

We’ve only just begun scratching the surface of this vast plant kingdom of symbiotic cognition. But consider the ramifications and implications of these very recent discoveries for just a moment, and remember that none of this is a matter of “belief” anymore - the science is impeccable: Trees care about their children. The planet is a self-regulating living being. The lithosphere is alive with a chemically and cognitively charged neural network that spans the entire planet... *Ours is not the only world wide web!* And the other one is both ancient and alive.

These and related discoveries of an implicate biological order underlying all life on planet Earth just happen to be coming to our attention during this time of accelerating anthropogenic climate disruption of that previously hidden order, necessarily calling our entrenched worldviews into question. This is synchronicity playing out on a global scale.

And up till now, we’ve called people “primitive” for believing that they could communicate with the plant world! In other words, these discoveries are arising in psychologically uncomfortable ways for Western civilization. It’s becoming quite clear to us now that the first peoples who we settlers slaughtered like animals - did you know there used to be a dark tribe in California that lived

nakedly, peacefully, and innocently in the woods, as if in a Garden of Eden, until those gold-mad 49ers wiped them out? - those ‘noble savages’ we *hunted* as ‘game’ as recently as the beginning of the 20th Century (in Australia), these Indigenous peoples we subjugated the world over in order to ‘acquire’ our homelands, were clearly *not* savages or sub-humans, as conveniently presumed by the conventional Christian morality of colonialist cultures. They are, in fact, as it turns out, quite *superior* to we, their vanquishers and interlopers, in many of the most significant ways of being human! Like the notion of reciprocity, for example, which is far more civilized than anything we’ve come up with until very recently, with the new discipline of ecology.

We settlers are quite late to the game of life on planet Earth, as it turns out.

Yes, quite uncomfortable to come to that realization after all this carnage. I speak as a Mayflower child here, someone who has always enjoyed privileges historically unavailable to most human beings. My ancestors just happen to have been better at killing things, when you get right down to it - especially after the discovery of gunpowder! We've become so good at killing and displacing living beings, including human beings, that we are now a threat to the greatest living being of all - our Mother, Earth.

Apparently, killing is NOT the highest human trait!

Black Lives Matter is just the tip of the oppressive colonialist iceberg. While BLM justifiably condemns the systemic racism built into our “law and order” society, the inescapable truth of the matter is that Black *Countries* Matter, too - including most of those in the global South, from whom we settlers ‘imported’ actual human beings as slaves, as ‘capital,’ and whose lands and peoples to this day we in the colonial-*cum*-industrial North continue to plunder and oppress in order to support our accustomed, artificially bloated life style.

Can we the descendants and inheritors of this colonial, racist and inhumane legacy finally admit *we were wrong*? Is it really such a difficult thing to do? Is it not the only humane thing to do? Do we not still fancy ourselves as humane creatures? And isn't that a big part of how we want to answer the question of what it means to be human in the Anthropocene??

Can we the capitalist Chauvins of the world, in other words, finally remove our knee from the collective gullets of the Countries of Color we still oppress institutionally? And are we willing to make amends to them now that it is those countries, ironically, who are on the front burner of global warming because of our plundering the Earth? Why do politicians never have to address these kinds of political issues?? Is that lack of accountability the whole point of hiding behind 'American Exceptionalism'?

Can we finally mature as a species and recognize as a matter of 'enlightened' science that we are **all genetically the same** *for crying out loud*, and that no humane excuse exists for continuing the oppression that has led us, along with our Indigenous brothers and sisters and all other species, right to the brink of this existential abyss?

If we the civilized 'inheritors' of Earth, our Mother and ultimate slave, can not bring ourselves to renounce this unholy inheritance of what cannot, by any moral right, ever be possessed, then what prospect is there, really, for resolving our chronic **climate trauma**? What prospect is there, even, for our survival as a civilization?

Trauma arises in relationship, and so trauma can only be healed in relationship, and humanity's dysfunctional, racist relationships are what is now perpetuating our global climate trauma. These unnatural relations need to be dismantled, as is now painfully apparent, in order for us all to come back into proper relationship with Gaia.

That is the whole takeaway from viewing this existential crisis through the clarifying lens of trauma theory. And it's not nearly as difficult as we make it out to be with our opaque political lens of fight, flight and fright. If we pay mind, instead, to the emerging paradigm shift in worldviews, which takes on the appearance of dis-integration and re-integration of social contracts, and the derangement and re-arrangement of human relations, including all the messy politics implicated in these processes (e.g., nations without borders!), then we begin to see there really is a way out of this seemingly intractable crisis.

Objects vs. Relations & “All my relations”

To see the climate crisis as a spiritual issue means to understand that it is, fundamentally, a crisis of relationship. By appreciating this shift in perspective, we come to view the political and social upheavals being triggered by the growing urgency of the climate crisis as the symptoms, not the causes, of our escalating existential crisis. From this holistic, science-informed, moral and ethical perspective, a systemic transformation designed to root out all “power-over” forms of oppression becomes a philosophical and political imperative. It forms the basis for Pope Francis’ call for a new form of universal solidarity, an umbrella over the banners of all the emergent social justice movements.

A true spiritual crisis demands more than just the kinds of political and/or technological solutions represented by the Paris Accords and the Biodiversity Conventions. It calls instead for spiritual and moral evolution, which will take shape as outright *revolution* at this late stage of moral atrophy. This expansive sense of moral urgency is what sets Extinction Rebellion apart from previous environmental movements. XR is a movement that emanates from the collective heart of its adherents, arising out of their connections to Gaia, rather than just the

‘funder-friendly’ and politically competitive organs of the environmental movement. As the great global psychiatrist of our age, Dr. Stanislav Grof, might say, it is only out of our collective spiritual emergency that we may finally emerge with a sense of spiritual urgency ~ and thus take a collective leap in moral maturity as a species.

So, from this ‘rational’ relational perspective, we come back to the three pressing spiritual questions facing all non-Indigenous cultures and people -- while noting, of course, that Indigenous cultures should be looked to for guidance in answering these questions, as the United Nations itself now recognizes (since ‘oh by the way’ they’ve been right all along anyway):



•What does it mean to be human in an age where we are shaping the planet in our image and crowding out plants, wildlife, birds, fish, and now even insects?

•How do we see ourselves relationally as a species, in other words, and who do we want to be when we grow up?

•How do we come into proper relationship with Gaia ~ the single most complex and breathtakingly beautiful form of life we’ve ever encountered anywhere in the Universe?

This point is worth repeating: Isn’t it strange and incongruous that we continue to look to outer space for other forms of life, or signs of higher intelligence, when we’ve only just begun to realize that we ourselves are interconnecting cells and organelles of a much larger organism than we’d ever before imagined existed? Gaia is magnitudes of order bigger than even a blue

whale, after all, and as much as it taxes our imagination to see and appreciate this primal truth, just like those blue whales:



Gaia is a SentientBeing!

And just as apparently, while she would never claim this to be true, *Greta speaks for Gaia*, this small sea urchin of a child scolding us directly from her heart in the same way we would imagine our Mother, Earth, scolding her wayward children. A small child whose growth was stunted due to her inability to eat upon first intuiting the existential threat of our crisis, *telling us grown-ups to grow up! On the world (UN) stage!!* This is not only remarkable (think about what you were doing at 15), it is entirely unprecedented.

And the reason it works with Greta in ways it could never work for just any activist is because, due to that portion of the spectrum she is speaking to us from (her superpower, as she calls it), *we know it to be true*. We don't even have to think about it at that point, really. We feel it directly to be true, because we are all organically connected to that larger organism. We feel it in our hearts, and then register it in our heads. Historically, only prophets communicate in that way, and only prophets are as unaffected by fame and attention as she is. Many of us old-timers in the eco-defense ranks have long pined for the kind of galvanizing leader

for Mother Earth that MLK was for civil rights. None of us would've ever guessed that the answer to our prayers would be a mere child, though we have on occasion speculated mirthfully about divine birth (though hers is most natural, not divine).

Of course, I am not suggesting we should fetishize or form a cult around Greta. Quite the opposite, in fact. What I *am* saying is that Gaia could not have chosen a more believable oracle at a more critical time than little Greta Thunberg from the Great White North, the land of melting glaciers. And I think it's okay to honor that Gaian agency with all the respect that is due Greta (and her parents) personally. None of this can be easy for her. She's clearly most happy with her labs, at home, not traveling around the world on trains and sailboats to speak to large crowds.

For what I'm saying about Greta being Gaia's "chosen one" to be *literally* true, as I happen to believe, presupposes Gaian sentience. And that's the crux of the matter right there. That's the button I'm pushing. Because while Gaia theory itself is no longer controversial, the idea of Gaian sentience remains *uber*-controversial, *taboo* even, and it raises a lot of thorny spiritual and theological issues that must be re-solved if we're to find the necessary 'resolve' to collectively respond in an adult manner to this life-threatening global emergency of our own making. It may seem discordant at first blush, but to be adults here, it is necessary for us adults to listen to the counsel of our children, and necessary as well for us settlers to listen to and follow the advice of the very Indigenous peoples that we've (mostly) displaced. Those will be the true marks of our maturity as an ecological civilization.

For reasons of scientific method, which turned out to be profoundly misguided, we who've always fancied ourselves to be the most "civilized" of beings for far too long refused to extend simple sentience (subjectivity, or the ability to feel) to non-human beings. This conventional ignorance was the result of a religiously-based bias that infected Western science right from the start, with the

fathers of modern scientific method, Descartes and Bacon, each convinced in the religious view of their time that humans were divinely favored by God, and all non-human life forms lacked any meaningful interiority.

How ironic that science's biggest mistake turns out to be a religious belief! (Then again, the idea that mind arises from matter is equally religious, though still the prevailing view). This same theistic blind spot, dressed up in scientific garb at a time when doctors still employed leaches to drain blood from sick people, also justified the doctrine of "manifest destiny," by which we civilized types practiced genocide (unredeemed savages!) and routinely tortured animals. This shared ignorance - a kind of psychosis, really - culminated in the shameful preponderance of factory farms today, quickly and conveniently displacing the abundance of wildlife which Gaia had generated and propagated, and through which she and we all thrived. All of this heinous, inhumane suffering was the direct result of this obscenely immoral, scientific blind spot about one species having dominion over all others. Even those who still believe that mostly are willing to acknowledge that "dominion" does not authorize the kind of abuse and genocide that has traditionally fallen under its biblical banner. We were supposed to be caretakers, after all, not undertakers.

Descartes and Bacon were grievously mistaken, in any case - on that we can all agree - and we're still paying for their sins. The body count here that precipitates mass extinction already includes about 80% of all wildlife, 90% of all big fish in the seas, and upwards of 75% of all insects, which tolling on its own justifies characterizing this era as the Great Dying 2.0. All of this unholy carnage has occurred in less than the span of one human lifetime, while our own world population has nearly tripled.

And all this carnage coinciding with the discovery that “our” planet is alive! It’s akin to discovering that you’re responsible for the subjugation and impending death of a Goddess! This is climate trauma. This, I feel in my gut.

So yes, uncomfortable psychology here. *Too bad!* No time for your white Christian pity parties! We need to grow up and deal. Many of us heard that message quite clearly during the global coronavirus lock down, collectively feeling like our mother had sent us to our rooms to think about all this bad behavior. And fortunately, many of us have been doing just that. The potential for sudden and unanticipated social change is building day-by-day.

The concluding chapter in this book, which is a salutary synthesis of the climate trauma hypothesis, grew out of the global social gatherings on Zoom that I’ve been participating in from the start of the first lockdown, informed by BIPOC voices. I have personally witnessed, in other words, this growing potential for quantum social change. If it wasn’t so real, there would not have been the reflexive pushback that we’ve seen everywhere in the world. By advocating for global sanity, we’ve unleashed our shadow side, as embodied by Herr Trump, Boris the Clown, Brazil’s Bozo and Vlad the Impaler. Of course!

Much like the cognitive dissonance we experience knowing the legacy of genocide America is founded on and then learning the beauty and wisdom of Indigenous culture from the living descendants of those our forebears displaced, now we so-called modern civilized and ‘encultured’ human beings, we the unjust inheritors and privileged consumers, are being asked to acknowledge that the planet we’ve re-shaped for the sake of modern convenience — as with e.g. our very own god-like creation of omnipresent plastic — is none other than Gaia, a living, self-regulating sentient being Herself. Not just some blank canvass upon which we write the history of the human race, but a being in her own right, comprised of all beings, and with even greater agency than we enjoy (or thought

we'd endlessly enjoy). She is, as her closest inhabitants have been trying to teach us since time immemorial, our sacred life source, with all that may imply.

And yet to this day, even in scientific circles, even amongst climate activists and leaders - and yes, even among classically trained psychologists (who mostly continue to perpetuate the separation of self and other/environment) - there remains this stubborn and inexplicable reluctance to acknowledge the planet-sized elephant in the room:

A living being is necessarily a conscious being.

We may not be able to conceive of the way this elephant thinks, but there she stands before us nonetheless, demanding to be reckoned with. Let's not make the same mistake with Gaia that we've made with Indigenous Peoples and all other animal species under the hideous pretense of "scientific enlightenment." And no, of course I'm not suggesting we throw the baby out with the bathwater, and return voluntarily to caves and huts (though that will surely be the end result of the hubristic path to perdition we're following now). We have made grievous mistakes, but we have also made wondrous discoveries that are worthy of celebration, like space travel, quantum physics, the Hubble telescopic view of the Universe, and electronic communication. And yet we are slow to acknowledge the greatest discovery since Copernicus - Gaia may not be the center of the galaxy, but she is a living being worthy of adoration and reverence! Mother Earth turns out not to be a metaphor at all - but an intuited truth.

Perhaps this reflexive denialism of Gaian sentience is attributable to the simple fact that to finally face the inconvenient truth that Gaia is a sentient, living organism — to acknowledge her personhood, at least as a working hypothesis, in the same way we've begun to grant personhood to rivers — rather inexorably leads to the acknowledgment that she is the one, true sovereign! For who could reasonably pretend to exercise sovereignty over Her?

So yes, even we Americans must acknowledge that Gaia's right to life may justifiably interfere with our own perceived constitutional rights to a luxurious life, mask-free liberty, God-given (obscene) wealth, and the pursuit of inadequate health insurance for all. Because even those diminished rights will be of little value to us once we've become extinct! Which is why it is criminally corrupt, by the way, for black-robed federal judges to throw children's climate litigation out of court. How can they not recognize that a child's right to life and the pursuit of happiness is threatened existentially by our government's refusal to respond to the climate crisis? (Answer: the [Federalist Society's](#) capture of the Republican Party, elevating corporations and money worship over humans and other living beings).

Just as with Copernicus displacing Earth from the center of God's creation, sparking what became the Copernican Revolution in human thinking, so with Gaia theory humanity is being challenged to re-think our place in the natural order of things, along with the conceit that we're the highest form of life in the known universe. Heck, we're not even the highest form of animal life, if we're honest about it. (I personally favor elephants and whales). As Gabor Mate puts it:

“Now, what you see regularly in nature, no animal will foul their own nest... So [the] climate crisis is an example of just how denatured we've become; really *separated from our own true nature*, because no animal in the state of nature will destroy their own habitat.”

And just as with Copernicus, the idea of an intelligent planet has a religious spin, since a global sentient being does not fit very well into our Creation Story! All of the Abrahamic religions will, perhaps justifiably, fear that Gaia could displace God if people came to see Her as a being possessed of a higher intelligence -- an intelligence reflected all around us and even in us, if we were to so permit. They may even have to apologize for slaughtering pagans! This is the heart of what organized religions have always feared from science, and why they

were so intent upon displacing pagan cultures and 'heathens' who worshiped nature and goddesses.

But this is no longer (just) a matter of religion.

It's a matter of (unreligious) science. It's a matter of survival.

And it's a moral imperative quite apart from any religious belief system, as Pope Francis's own Encyclical on the matter makes clear, speaking of her as an embodied sentient being:

"[She] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her... she 'groans in travail.' (Rom 8:22)" (*Laudato Si*).

One way or another, we have got to *grok* this pervasive Gaian sentience. This is what I've been thinking about during my own Puget Sound Lockdown for the past year or so. And I've come to some pertinent conclusions, which naturally lead to solutions.

The Mind of Gaia: its not like ours!

To begin with, let's consider an entirely different way of thinking and feeling our way across this challenging scientific, political, spiritual and religious terrain. As what I'm about to assert may seem controversial at first blush, I'm compelled to beg your indulgence by briefly setting forth my qualifications for saying it. This will also serve to provide some context for my assertions.

In addition to being a scientifically trained - thermodynamics by education, ecology by profession - life-long eco-activist and environmental lawyer, I've literally spent thousands of hours meditating in nature and on formal retreats with H.H. Dalai Lama and others in his lineage. I'm a reborn Tibetan cave-dweller,¹

¹ I've been advised to leave this out, but it's not a boast, and as an ongoing long-term study at the Univ. of Va. has shown, it is not that uncommon for people to remember their previous incarnation, especially when that prior life ended traumatically. See: [U. Va. Dept. of Perceptual Studies](#)

probably an old Taoist soul as well, and in this life I am what Stan Grof refers to as a “psychonaut” ~ a determined explorer of all forms of consciousness accessible within the mindstream I happen to inhabit. Naturally, that includes some explorations of expanded states of consciousness induced by LSD in my formative years and, after decades of living with lay vows on the paths of kriya-yoga and then high-tantrayana, one well-timed, life-and-death affirming experience with the profound entheogenic medicine 5-MeO-DMT, the so-called “god molecule” (other forms of DMT are referred to as “spirit molecules”). Thanks to my own karma and, more significantly, the kindness and wisdom of my teachers, all of these experiences have cohered into a very congruent understanding of, and insights into, the conscious phenomenon.

I was drawn to meditating in nature early on by my karmic disposition, and thus I feel I’ve been in a relationship with Gaia for as long as the climate crisis has been unfolding. Backpacking around the world in my early 30’s, I related to Her as *Pistis Sophia*, and thought of my meditations as an exploration of ‘gnosis’ (direct knowing). That privileged experience taught me that "the I that I am in nature" IS Nature. At the end of my time in Eden - four glorious moons in the Alps of New Zealand - I noted in my pocket journal how I'd arrived at that deeply intuitive conclusion:

*I left society behind to escape time.
I let my ego go and escaped desire.
I let fear go and found heaven.
I let heaven go and found earth.*

Eventually, after getting in over my head with Taoist spiritual alchemy, I grounded this growing natural relationship in decades of disciplined, hours-a-day, highly structured Tibetan *sadhana* (path of gradual attainment), including annual spiritual retreats as well as long solo wilderness retreats. The great Hindu/Tibetan

wisdom goddess Tara quite naturally displaced the wisdom goddess Sophia in my mind, since both are embodiments of the same archetypal energy. In Tibetan Buddhism, however, we recognize these deities to be projections of our own mind, choosing to work with a kind of sophisticated psychology that has been developed over millennia, even as we continue to relate to her as goddess.

While I have come to intentionally conflate Tara with Gaia, I have also come to recognize that Gaia is most definitely *not* a projection of my mind - she's *just as 'real' as I am*. We're both living organisms, and I am part of Her biome in the same way my own body is comprised of countless living organisms that are "not me"- what philosopher and systems thinker Ken Wilber refers to as "holons," shelled wholes that build upon, integrate and then transcend the whole systems they include. While Tara is 'just' an archetypal energy, a symbol like the Marian archetype in Christianity that is deeply rooted in collective psyche, this divine feminine archetypal energy turns out to be quite congruent/coherent with Gaia's own electromagnetic energy field — a field of generativity (eros) and light and sound that has given rise to life itself — and connects us with Her in the oceanic depths of Psyche, or soul.

That may not sound very 'scientific' to the casual reader, but actually science shows that deep dreamless sleep, meditative states, intuition, and memory all occur in the same brain frequencies (theta waves, as opposed to the alpha and beta waves of our busy mind) as Gaia's electromagnetic frequency (the so-called "Schumann resonance" of 7.83 hz), which is the field of energy in which our consciousness and the consciousness of the biosphere is at play in. So when we achieve a kind of intentional coherence or resonance with that narrow band of the spectrum of the electromagnetic sphere our mind inhabits, as with slowing our mind down in nature through meditation or contemplative walking (aka "forest bathing"), from a phenomenological perspective, at least, it makes perfect sense that we are *in*

communion with Gaia. And for thousands of years, Buddhists have maintained that in the realm of deep, dreamless sleep, we can experience the “clear light mind” of primordially shared awareness.

So at a minimum there is nothing unscientific about this common phenomenon. We've all talked about "communing with nature," have we not? But have you ever wondered how it would even be possible to commune with nature were nature not just as alive and aware as we are? This experience has always been deeply felt by those of us not unduly inhibited and disembodied by our pervasive social conditioning - and it is deeply humbling, as well. It is the perfect antidote, in fact, for the scientific materialist and anthropocentric hubris that has given rise to this existential mess.

Pachamama. Anima Mundi. Eve ('life'). Gaia. In Buddhist cosmology, 'maitri' - a coherent field of holistic (unitive) consciousness by which we are connected with all that is alive. David Bohm's "implicate order" (in Buddhism, the *dharmadhatu*). That's my spiritual container right there, one that will always be strong enough to process trauma within, and sadhana (i.e., formulaic practice) for me is a form of psychospiritual alchemy, or mysticism if you prefer, that is rooted in Earth, the *prima materia* (matter, *mater*, Mother). It isn't really mysterious, though. It happens to be the electromagnetic current that animates all life (eros). The religious impulse is just one expression of that primal, animating force.

To sum up my more traditional quals, along with depth psychology and archetypal astrology, I've studied mind and mental factors (Buddhist psychology) under His Holiness the Dalai Lama, both directly and indirectly through his close, long-time student/collaborator Ven. Thubten Chodron, the founding abbess of Sravasti Abbey. After being initiated into higher tantra in 2011, I went on to study *Atiyoga* - highest yoga tantra, or Dzogchen - and other Buddhist doctrines under the tutelage of Dr. Steven Goodman (1946-2020) in the Asian Studies Department

at the Calif. Inst. of Integral Studies — the same school where Alan Watts famously held court. I myself taught Buddhist theory at CIIS as a grad-assistant in the East/West Psychology Dept.

During that time at CIIS, I also studied and trained at Zen Hospice in San Francisco, a profound lineage that stretches all the way back to the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. It was in the midst of that training I was inspired to write the academic paper, “Planetary Hospice: Rebirthing Planet Earth (2014)” (popularized by Joanna Macy) for a class on the psychology of death and dying. After graduating, I presented my working model of collective climate grief to the Mind & Life Conference at Harvard (2014), followed that up with a book on climate grief, *Climate Sense: Changing the way we think and feel about our climate in crisis* (2016), and then published an even more widely circulated paper, “Climate Trauma: Towards a New Taxonomy of Trauma” (2018) in the professional, peer-reviewed journal *Ecopsychology*. (So I ain’t just talking smack here! ;)

Psychospheric Sentience

Again, I offer this brief personal background as a way of qualifying the “quantum phenomenology” I now feel ready to share, representing myself as a fairly reliable cognizer in relation to this pressing matter of Gaian sentience. Quantum phenomenology is an important new term coined by the esteemed contemporary philosopher Evan Thompson to describe our capacity, which can be developed in meditation, to observe our own field of conscious awareness. It speaks to a form of subjective empiricism associated with the science of mind that has been tested for many millennia now -- and intensely so since the founding of the [world's first university](#), Nalanda -- as compared to the much more recent development of objective empiricism associated with Cartesian dualism.

It has thus become my firm conviction that we in academia, in the professions, and in our various non-Indigenous spiritual traditions, presently

perpetuate our dysfunctional relationship with Gaia due, at least in part, to a conflation of the related phenomena of ‘consciousness, ‘mind,’ and ‘awareness.’

The climate movement, in turn, is falling short of its full potential to transform society because of this failure to effectively articulate our embodied connection to what is a living planet, with her supremely inherent right to life. Supreme, obviously, not in any religious sense, but rather in the very pragmatic sense that if Gaia has no right to life, then no living creature can possess such an inherent right. What is the point of my constitutional right to life, or the right of an endangered species for that matter, if we can’t honor and protect the rights of a living planet? To think otherwise is to view ourselves as gods.

Does anyone still believe we are in a position to exercise dominion over Her? If so, why are we so bad at it that She is dying?

Because we civilized types have managed to reverse this natural order, I’ve become increasingly convinced that a key to coming into proper relationship with Gaia, the natural world, Indigenous peoples, and human nature itself at this time of extreme existential crisis is to disentangle these conceptual strands of sentience and related orders of natural sentient being. If we are clear about this, it becomes much more difficult to deny the sovereignty of Gaia, and that sovereignty, in turn, can provide both the moral and legal imperative to act on her behalf (e.g., protecting and restoring terrestrial and marine ecosystems, along with their keystone species).

I will endeavor to make this case as simply as possible. Let us begin with what we call ‘mind.’ Mind is nothing other than a convenient label we affix to a constellation of subjective experiences of consciousness and awareness, more accurately viewed as a seemingly endless stream of thoughts and dreams and sensations and feelings, none of which considered separately nor all of which together have any independent existence that would support the label (e.g., no two minds are alike!). Let’s not make the anthropocentric, hubristic mistake, then, of

trying to explain or even point to Gaia's mind. After all, we can barely account for the mind of an elephant, a whale, or a common crow! How could we be expected to conceive of the mind of a vastly more complex and evolved organism like Gaia?

I'm reminded of the great 14th Century Tibetan master Longchenpa's admonition here:

There is no pointing to it: Mind is inconceivable!

While Longchenpa was presumably referencing the human mind, his assertion applies exponentially if we try to point to what might be labeled the 'mind' of a living planet, which would undoubtedly be vast and mysterious from our own, limited (and embedded) perspective. It is not unlike a Christian speculating about the mind of God, an endeavor that can only lead to unnecessary conflict with no hope of resolution. Or just consider how wrong and for how *long* we have been when it comes to speculating about the minds of animals! And we've just now discovered plant intelligence. So it's self-evident that we non-Indigenous types are terrible at speculating about the minds of non-human beings.

So we begin our analysis, respectfully and humbly, by setting that metaphysical quandary aside. (Whew.)

It is the conflation of consciousness with awareness that we really need to attend to here, since it is this confusion that prompts conventional humans to adopt a colonialist attitude towards all non-human beings. We've foolishly used self-referential measures (e.g., tool-making, language, etc.) to profess our superiority over other forms of consciousness we encounter in the natural world — even those that appear objectively to have superior brains to our own, as measured by intensity of folds and size, like elephants and whales. Then we profess shock upon learning that whales have personal names and sing to their babies, that crows use tools, gorillas enjoy pretty sunsets, bison mourn their dead, and elephants communicate over long distances via subsonic frequencies carried by Earth.

Science has never even solved the hard problem of explaining how it's possible for immaterial, subjective consciousness to emerge from material phenomena like neurons, since this theory violates fundamental notions of causality; e.g., like arises from like, not from unlike, so it's a bit like saying you can get blood from a rock. According to physicist and science philosopher B. Alan Wallace:

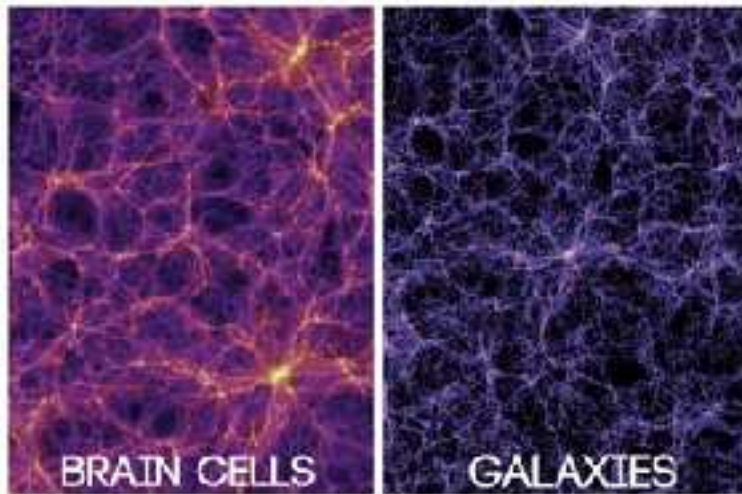
“[C]onsciousness is not physical or physically detectable, and its alleged emergence from chemical and electromagnetic activity in the brain is not comprehensible in terms of the laws of physics. Consciousness no more resides in the brain than it does in silicon-based computers or between the covers of books. It is not an emergent property or function of matter, and the unquestioned belief that it must be is the greatest superstition promoted by scientists today.”

Therefore, comparing something as ineffable as the subjective experience of consciousness between species is not only problematic, it's immoral in the same way eugenics was an immoral and illogical use of science to justify the genetic superiority of Aryan people.

So as with mind, we run into the same problem when trying to speculate about Gaia's subjective conscious experience. We will likely never know what that experience might be like. At the same time, however, it is highly unscientific for us to presume that the most complex living organism in our known universe does *not* possess consciousness, simply because we're ill-equipped to explain it's content. Thanks to Gaia theory, we have now learned as a matter of replicable scientific experiment that **plants are intelligent**, and that they can even solve problems. But that doesn't mean we can hook them up to an EKG, perform a CT Scan on them, or gauge their IQ relative to us. We're simply able to observe the epiphenomenon, or manifest results, of that intelligence in action.

The same must surely be true for Gaia, then. How incongruous it would seem to attribute intelligence to forests of plants and trees, which span the globe (even in the oceans, with mangroves and kelp forests), but deny intelligence to the larger organism they are merely the organs, or component parts, of!

Consciousness, according to the growing philosophical consensus around panpsychism, exists along a spectrum, and humans are as far from amoeba at the low end of the spectrum as we are from Gaia at the top end. And for all we know,



our solar system might just be one cell in an unimaginably vast conscious being, as we can readily imagine when we compare a map of the cosmos to our brain. HELLO?

In short, the takeaway from panpsychism is simply this:

“We are conscious creatures embedded in a world of consciousness.”

And that is the truly relevant inferential implication of Gaia theory, quite apart from the physical science of Earth systems.

But if we can't really point to Gaia's mind or consciousness, then where does that leave us in determining how to properly *relate* to Her?

How do we relate to a being whose consciousness is so obviously superior to ours? Especially when, due to our prior scientific ignorance, we have for so long dismissed this being as subservient to us. (That question should sound familiar ;)



That is our overarching concern, is it not? How do we wrap our mind around the idea of a Gaian sentient being in a way that is conducive to bringing us into proper relationship?

Which is precisely why I submit it is so important to focus on the deceptively simple, universal phenomenon of *awareness*. Because what we do know, both in our hearts and as a matter of common experience, is that it is awareness that unites us, even beyond species demarcations, with all that is alive, while our stubborn and ultimately unscientific notions of consciousness only serve to divide us all endlessly into self and other, self and environment, subject and object. If we focus on what we share in common with one another and with other life forms, then our differences will naturally tend to recede into the background, and we will be able to easily intuit how to come into proper relationship with all of our relations, up to and including Gaia.

When we communicate with our pets, to cite a common example, we quickly learn that we're capable of sharing awareness with them in meaningful ways. This sense of shared awareness can be both playful and profound. The Lakota tribe, to cite just one source of Indigenous wisdom, came to know themselves as "buffalo people," but not for the reasons that the colonialist mind might posit - that they depended on bison for their survival. Instead, it was because they co-evolved with buffalo, and very early on structured their family and social customs by observing the ways of the buffalo - a very complex social animal (and keystone species for grasslands on Turtle Island).

Similarly, in India there is strong evidence that human language originated, in part, from imitating the sing-song of birds! And Druids developed Celtic culture from a practice of seeking rebirth from within Earth mounds. The term "Druid" itself is thought to derive from a compound of "dru-wid" - "dru" (tree) and "wid" (to know). Not only were they right about forests being aware, but they've

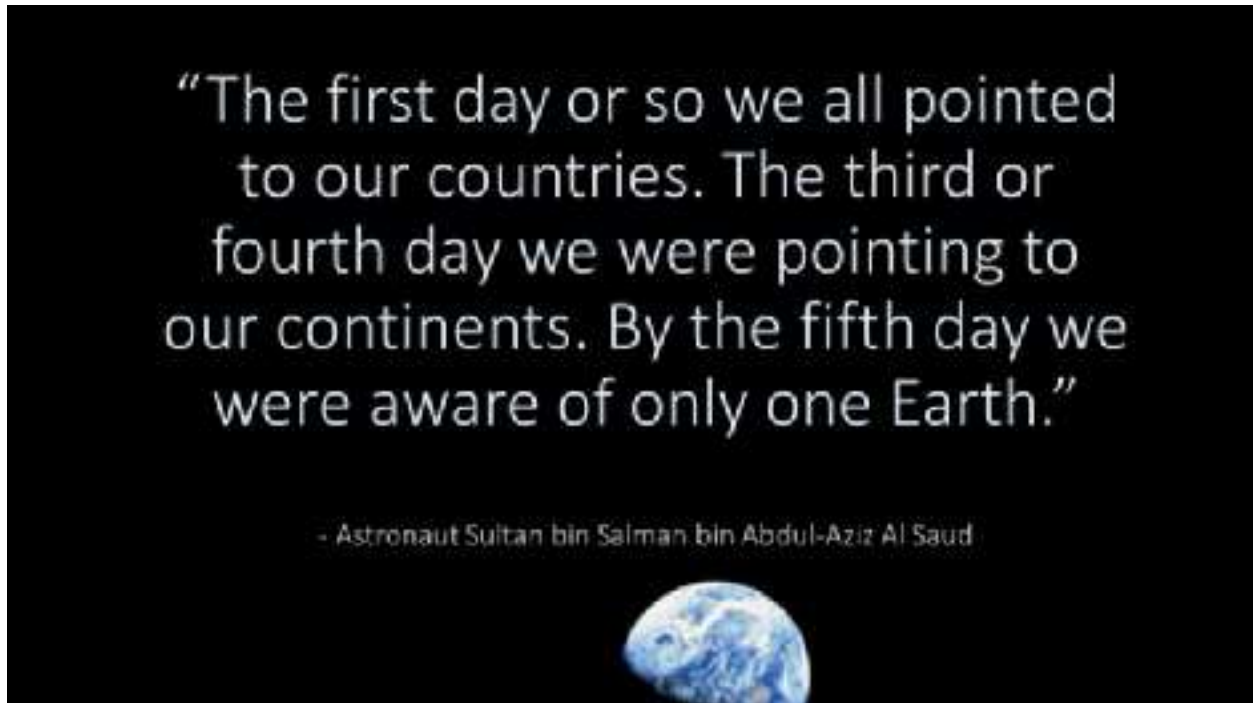
always been able to share in that awareness themselves! What these examples vividly illustrate for us is the incredible power of shared awareness to transmit lessons organically across species barriers, even plant/animal barriers, as well as showing how the notion of humanity itself includes other species.

Considered from this more sophisticated kind of co-evolutionary, symbiotic perspective, rather than Descartes' theological scientific, objectifying and reifying perspective, there is really no room for holding one species superior and another inferior. And personally, as an ecopsychologist who firmly centers Gaia at the center of "self," I have a hard time imagining what it would even mean to be human anymore in a world that no longer included lions, tigers, polar bears, rhinos, Orca, giraffes, emperor penguins and gorillas, to name just a few of the charismatic mega-fauna that will succumb to an over-heated climate.

So here we can all appreciate that a taxonomy of awareness supports a more *wholesome* scientific worldview, which can thus be the basis of healthy biome relationship, than ranking organisms according to subjective views of arbitrarily measured "intelligence." Assuming some consensus here, reflective of Indigenous wisdom - or even just taking this as our working hypothesis for utilitarian reasons - let's scale this commonly observed phenomenon of shared awareness *way way up*, by focusing on an even more relevant example for our current exposition of Gaian sentience. This is where it gets fun!

Here is how Apollo astronaut Edgar Mitchell described the "**Overview Effect**" upon viewing Earth from the moon in 1971, when Gaia was still a burgeoning hypothesis: "You develop an instant *global consciousness*, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it." That is a highly trained scientist describing his conversion upon experiencing shared awareness with our planet - which he understandably conflates with 'global consciousness' - due to the quantum

phenomenology of unitive sentience, and which has since turned out to be a common, if unexpected, experience for all these trained scientists who view Earth from outer space for the first time.



“Many astronauts have reported when they looked down on the Earth, they experienced *radical shifts* in consciousness, some of which can feel deeply emotional and promote a *sense of connectedness* with the Earth and with one another. Termed ‘the overview effect’ by White (1987), he described this effect as ‘a profound reaction to viewing the earth from outside its atmosphere.’ This overview effect has been described by many astronauts as one of the most meaningful moments of their lives.”

~ Shaw, S. (2017), “The Overview Effect” (Psychology in Action).

In his book, *The Orbital Perspective*, NASA astronaut Ron Garan describes the feeling as being “flooded with both emotion and awareness.” And in a short [documentary on the overview effect](#) that is well worth pausing here to view, due to its import, the effect is described as conveying a direct knowing (gnosis) “that the

Earth is one system. We're all part of that system, and there is a certain unity and coherence to it all."

Pretty solid evidence of Gaian sentience from the leading edge of science -- the only humans who've ever physically encountered her 'face-to-face.' In that same film, philosopher and long-time climate leader [David Loy](#) suggests that this pattern of inter-subjective experience "*seems to imply a new kind of self-awareness.*" Ever the philosopher, Loy doesn't specify whose 'self' he's talking about — but I think we can venture a guess.

And, of course, let us not forget that it was this same astounding, life-changing unitive view of Earth from outer space that catalyzed the cognitive crystallization of Gaia theory in the first instance. We might even ask ourselves here: did Lovelock and Margulis really invent Gaia theory? Or was it instead bestowed upon them and us as a matter of conscious experience by the more highly developed, implicate consciousness of Gaia herself? From a limited scientific-materialist perspective, the former seems conventionally true. From the perspective of self-regulating planetary consciousness on the verge of a life-threatening illness attributable to this one species out of countless species, the latter view seems equally feasible and sensible.

Instead of a human invention, Gaia theory and the overview effect should be seen as Gaian transmissions, in the same way our own body sends messages to those areas of our biome where a threatening imbalance develops. I'm reminded of how one of the greatest breakthroughs in chemistry, the "discovery" of the benzene ringed molecule, could not be rationally worked out, and only resulted from the German chemist August Kekule napping and dreaming of Ouroboros, the snake eating its own tale, from deep in our collective, archetypal unconsciousness.

I would hasten to add here that, while I'm not an academically qualified scholar of consciousness studies, I have researched this distinction between

awareness and consciousness in Buddhist doctrine as part of my ongoing Buddhist and Depth Psychology inquiry. Western scholars in the know view the thousand-year old Buddhist scholarship objectively as a science of mind, developed empirically and tested continuously through vigorous debate and intensive contemplative analysis. In my own comparative studies I, like one of Western psychology's founders, William James, have found the 2500 year old Buddhist psychology and science of mind to be **far more sophisticated and rational** than the century-old Western psychology, which appears more like magical thinking to me than the exhaustive "mind and mental factors" approach of Buddhism.²

This emergent phenomenon of Gaian awareness is of critical significance to these dark times we inhabit, and to our present overwhelming task, in what philosophy professor Sean Kelly characterizes as a “Second Axial Age” in his book [Becoming Gaia: On the Threshold of Planetary Initiation](#) (2021). From Kelly's well-researched and reasoned perspective, the crisis we find ourselves in is a kind of crucible that is initiating our species into a "radically new kind of identity, or subject, on a planetary scale.” This new identity, Kelly suggests, will be founded upon an a newly emergent global, even tribal, consciousness.

Here is what I consider to be an inescapable conclusion underlying this phenomenon:



Awareness is not our own.

Awareness is not something our brain generates, nor is it a faculty that we possess, in the same way for example we possess our sense faculties.

² I make exceptions for Carl Jung, H.S. Sullivan, and Stan Grof, who were more in line with James more philosophical views of psychologism than with Freud's more medical views of psychiatry and psychology.

To think in such a conventional way is a mistake of subjective appropriation, largely attributable to ego-grasping and the 'individualist' ethic that has metastasized into the Great Acceleration of our consumer culture.

To say “I am aware” is to assert “I am” in some self-existing Cartesian way, apart from all that I am not. This is what Descartes got wrong at the outset, based solely upon his conception of God. Awareness is, instead, a kind of shared cognitive commons through which braided streams of consciousness flow like cognitively charged neural pathways and vastly intricate networks of luminosity, packed with information, all pulsing and vibrating at multitudinous, overlapping frequencies. In relation to our subjective experience, awareness is a kind of *field phenomenon* we are able to consciously inhabit, with varying degrees of surrender, not a faculty within us.

And though I’m not a religious scholar, either, I think it’s safe to say all mystical traditions would concur with this phenomenology. When we yield our ego to the field of awareness, we experience an open, spacious and unitive consciousness.

Accordingly, let us renounce "I think, therefore I am" once and for all! Instead, let us embrace: "We share awareness, therefore we are embedded in a larger conscious organism." Okay, I know, not as catchy, right?

“*In Awareness, we are One.*” Simple.

The full spectrum in which these integral frequencies of awareness are embedded can be considered to comprise a *psychosphere* (Skelding, *infra*) that interacts dynamically with the biosphere, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and the lithosphere. These various spheres, or realms of being, are Gaia’s vital organs, and they all function together to sustain her viability and vitality. By belatedly adding the psychosperic organ, we complete the organismic view of Gaia, and bring ourselves into accord with Indigenous wisdom.

Unlike Teilhard de Chardin's "noosphere," which is a planetary "sphere of reason" defined in relation to human intellectual development, the psychosphere is not anthropocentric, and does not imply that we are superior to all other species. It's just another realm we inhabit, much closer to Jung and Pauli's idea of a psychophysical reality. By adding a psychosphere to the integrated Earth system, we finally grant Gaia her natural sovereignty. And in that sovereign realm, we are now able to view ourselves as natural, or fractal, subjects of a much larger, integrated whole. This brilliant hypothesis of a psychosphere animates Gaia theory, and puts us in our proper place in the grand order.

'Consciousness' in Sanskrit - the language of the Vedas, humanity's oldest science of mind - is vijñāna. The prefix vi- means "split" or divided, while jñāna means "awareness." In other words, consciousness is just what we humans do with awareness, in the same way that breathing is what we do with air and seeing is what we do with light. Awareness is what our curious mind carves out of an inexhaustible, nonlocal and non-temporal cosmic mine -- or from the quantum perspective, a zero-point field -- of cognitively charged awareness.

Awareness-qua-awareness is pure, undefiled, largely impersonal sentient being-ness. It may well be what Buddha was pointing to with the profoundly non-conceptual term "suchness," which pervades everything. It is an experiential phenomenon that we, along with any living organism, are connected with and can abide within whenever we are not distracted by proliferating, objectifying thoughts pitting self against all that is perceived as "other than self" (Sanskrit: *anatman*).

Awareness is not coterminous with mind any more than air is coterminous with breath. In fact, if it is coterminous with anything, awareness is coterminous with luminous space, as reflected in the term "the space of awareness." Even Gaia, in other words, is likely embedded in this universal field, rather than representing its outer reaches.

To recognize awareness as phenomenal, with consciousness and mind as epiphenomenon (derivatives), opens us up to an entirely new way of being in the world *and of it* at the same time - a more humane form of sentience. This is what we are evolving into. It's the key to recovering our indigeneity in relation to 'all our relations' in a world governed by Gaia's regulating forces, and it represents a new, relational worldview centered on a more consciously interdependent (relational) existence in which Indigenous people can serve as exemplars and guides. Supported by this opening frontier of Gaian (or quantum) awareness, we will come to see ourselves more fully realized as relational beings, rather than the exploitive, objectifying and ultimately 'isolational' human beings we've devolved into. As the fully awakened Buddhist Dogen put it seven centuries ago:

'I came to realize clearly that mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.'

This, I believe, is the kind of dizzying transmutation of the human species into a humane species that has been underway now for the last 3-4 generations in the western world, beginning with Einstein on a train, continuing through Jung and Pauli's exploration of psychophysical phenomenon, and flowering with Lovelock and Margulis' Gaia theory, as well as Grof and Maslow's transpersonal psychologies, Deep Ecology and Ecopsychology's ecological consciousness, and most recently with the consensus forming around Panpsychism - a philosophy of consciousness that is in accord with quantum reality and ecological thinking.

"Consciousness is the result of ripping reality into self and other."
 Holocek, A. (2020). Of course, the still-ingrained, if not dominant, Cartesian worldview even objectifies and atomizes awareness itself, treating it as self-generated or divinely bequeathed, something that is personal to us, like human agency. My awareness is thought to be somehow very different than

your awareness or my dog's. Mine might be refined, yours could be considered uncouth or even savage by comparison, while my dog's awareness would be considered primitive or merely reactive. The awareness of a mosquito would not be worthy of consideration on this scale. And trees could not possibly 'possess' the kind of awareness we have now observed, as a matter of science, in forests.

But this is clearly wrong-headed, and has been the cause of much toil and trouble besides. It is only our thoughts that are distinct, and perhaps our feelings as well (though feelings can actually be characterized as well-rehearsed thought patterns). This deification and reification of self-awareness is how we tend to conflate mind, consciousness, and awareness as self, losing sight in the process of the truly unique, salutary properties of awareness.

In pure awareness, there is truly universal equality. It is a uniter, not a divider. One of the most revered Tibetan tantric masters, Jigme Lingpa (1729-98), in his seminal work on highest yoga tantra, put the matter quite succinctly:

This is the Nature, the natural state of the ground [of being].
 It is known as Awareness,
 the natural state of mind,
 or as the natural state of all phenomena.
 This is what is meant by the original ground.

(from *The Fearless Lion's Roar*). Psychophysical through-and-through, as Jung, Pauli, William James and many others have directly intuited.

It is rather mysterious, is it not, and profoundly revealing that Buddhist epistemology asserts that the very field of awareness in which our consciousness is planted is also the ground, or the natural generative state, of all phenomena. And

that this was also the fundamental insight that emerged from Carl Jung's life-long collaboration with the Nobel prize-winning father of quantum physics, Wolfgang Pauli, regarding their respective experiences of 'synchronicity' ~ the kind of inexplicable coincidences (often cumulative) everyone has experienced at one time or another in their lives, a force of Nature that can also be tapped into with sufficient intentionality.

This is where the science of mind (Buddhism, consciousness studies) and the science of matter (Quantum Physics, Panpsychism) are converging; i.e., on the so-called "Jung/Pauli Conjecture" that reality is psychophysical through and through. It is comprised of a realm of waves and frequencies, and it is comprised of a realm of quanta/particles and photons. *And both realms are just different ways of experiencing the same realm.*

This "original ground," this natural, psychophysical background state from which all phenomena arise, including consciousness, has also become the foundation of the emerging quantum world view, what I refer to as "Quantum Awareness," a relational orientation. For there is no other way, really, to explain the weirdness of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, by which the experimenter's subjective expectations influence the physical outcome of the particle/wave experiment, no matter how carefully controlled. Very much like a magician's trick: "Look, it's a particle. Look again - it's a wave!"

And there is no other way of explaining the 'spooky action at a distance' of entanglement. And there is no other way of explaining synchronicity, etc.

Without real, fixed objects, there can be no real objectivity - no "thinking" or thinker that is separate from, and thus observing, reality. And yet this idea of objectivity just happens to be the primary directive upon which all scientific method is founded. Since that objectivity has been the foundation of our world view ever since Descartes and Bacon, blowing it out of the water didn't just blow

Einstein's mind, it necessitated a new world view. Since that new world view is admittedly strange, involving ideas even Einstein couldn't accept — like non-locality (zero point field) and the spontaneous arising of matter and energy in a vacuum, neither of which was proven until after he'd died — it didn't really pick up much momentum until one of its most useful applications, the internet, took hold, and people finally started to grok interdependence and Thich Nhat Hanh's explanations of interbeing.

Naturally, this emerging world view still meets with much resistance, especially from the more entrenched sciences, since it blows up the scientific materialist worldview that fuels our global economy. But it is especially dismaying that the institution of psychology, the very province of mind, still clings stubbornly to objective empiricism, scoffing at the very idea of subjective empiricism that has been studied and rigorously tested for millennia by Buddhist scholars and adepts. This archaic worldview thus precludes the APA from speculating about a psychosphere, or Gaian sentience, or even accepting the obvious psychological connection between climate trauma and cultural/individual traumas. Because that would mean the world has a soul, or Psyche, which is the same as saying Gaia is both living and sentient. At a time when this emerging, ancient wisdom is most relevant and needed, the profession of mental wellbeing is incapable of advocating for Gaia's wellbeing because, well - objective empirical orthodoxy!

Subjective empiricism is not only valid, as it turns out, one could even go so far as to substitute the word “subjective” for “psychophysical” here; that is, reality is *subjective* through and through. Proof? There are no objects in our universe - only relations - as proven by quantum physics. Objects are merely conventionally agreed to constructs of consciousness, and thus do not exist apart from conception. And we ourselves are merely referent points in what turns out to be a *conscious* — or “pan-psyche” (the prefix ‘pan’ meaning pervasive) — universe.

What could ‘the stuff’ of a conscious universe be, other than awareness?

So these are the outer parameters of the emergent, relational worldview from the world of quantum physics and its close relative, panpsychism. And this is why we have so much to learn from those traditions who’ve been exploring the deceptively simple phenomenon of awareness (*jñāna*) and consciousness (*citta*) so rigorously for so long. ***This is not about religion.*** Since we can no longer delineate science from mind, or mind from body for that matter, then what was previously considered to be a “science of mind” is now simply science.

Since awareness is the natural state of all phenomena, synchronicity - the experience of external circumstances corresponding with internal thoughts in what appears as a cause/effect relationship - *occurs only within heightened states of awareness.* There are no coincidences in a psychophysical world, accurately perceived. Humans reach the moon, look back and see Earth for the first time, science realizes we are looking at a living organism, names her Gaia, and we learn almost immediately upon naming Her, after granting Her agency of a strange sort, that she’s dying at our hands. That is synchronicity at a cosmic scale.

And all this in the brief span of a decade or two? Really??

So no, it’s no coincidence that we find ourselves standing on this existential, evolutionary threshold. It’s clear evidence of a higher intelligence, for which we need look no further than the horizon. Yes, Gaia is named after the Greek Goddess of Earth, but let’s not confuse this with having to *invent* the existence of an intelligent creator God to explain our own existence. Gaia is very much in evidence, and we are all part of her biome.

These are facts.

Everything is relative, relational through-and-through, and nothing actually possesses ‘thingness.’ Call that “nothingness” if you like, but it is nonetheless a

scientific fact. As physicist Lorent Nottale puts it, there are no objects to be found anywhere upon ultimate analysis, there are only relations:

“If things do not exist in absolute terms, but do nevertheless exist, then their nature must be sought in the relationships that bring them together.”

No objects, only relations. Can we appreciate why this undermines our old worldview so radically? It is the exact opposite of objectification - which is like a religion in our society (e.g., fetishizing young girls, demonizing people based on skin tone, both of which indicate the extremes we go to in objectifying others).

That simple, factual statement in and of itself describes a new level of ‘quantum awareness’ ~ a ‘whole’ (as in holistic) new way of seeing ‘things,’ or ‘grokking’ reality, in Heinlein’s apt phrasing. And as this newly emerging way of viewing the world relationally gains a foothold in our collective Psyche, as already reflected in a growing culture of awareness (e.g.’s: the virally popular *Matrix* trilogy; the mindfulness movement; Brian Swimme’s *Journey of the Universe*; David Attenborough’s nature films; *Fantastic Fungi*, etc.), we are finally experiencing more directly the kind of radical paradigm shift of the world on its axis that will, at some critical phase, precipitate a quantum leap in how we relate to the natural world in which we are embedded - physically, psychologically, socially, politically, etc.

GLOBAL SOCIAL QUANTUM ACTIVISM

This primary phenomenon of pure awareness also blows our ideas of linear time out of the water, since it’s no more possible to measure awareness by specifying the length of a single moment in time (so-called “momentary awareness”) than it is to delimit the outer reaches of the universe, or to describe a

“moment of ocean.” Einstein intuitively grasped this. In a letter of condolence he wrote to a widow only a month before his own passing, he noted:

“Now he has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That signifies nothing. For those of us who believe in physics, the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”

The Buddha, too, saw this fundamental truth: “The past is imperceptible, the future is imperceptible, and the present is imperceptible. The three times are equality. (From the *Sutras of the Mother*). Because if, in your mind (Einstein’s workshop), you really try to separate the past from the future in terms of time, you inevitably come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a present moment. It’s like sitting still in front of a large tree, which you know is growing moment-by-moment, and trying to perceive actual growth. And if a moment is our only present evidence of linear time, then that temporal interval, or moment in time, must *itself* have a beginning and an end to it - thus it is comprised completely of past and future. The present moment turns out to be endless or, as Buddha observed, the three times are one.

Yes, you could counter that it is past and future that are disproven by the present, but the point is that it is *awareness* that ushers us into the indeterminate world of non-temporality and, by necessary implication, the thoroughly entangled world of non-locality. In popular culture, non-locality is referred to as the ‘butterfly effect,’ where events happening here - *a butterfly flapping its wings* - are seen to instantaneously change circumstances somewhere else - *a hurricane forms*. These notions of indeterminate time and non-local cause and effect, in turn, are what informs the strategic thinking of quantum activism, a new way of thinking about catalyzing social change, a kind of shape-shifting of culture and society, that is emerging in response to our existential predicament.

The leading proponent of quantum social activism in response to the climate crisis is IPCC Nobel laureate and social scientist Karen O'Brien, at the University of Oslo. In her illuminating book, [You Matter More Than You Think:](#)



[Quantum Social Change For A Thriving World](#), O'Brien discusses the concept of "resonant consciousness":

"Our relationship to social consciousness depends on the degree of explicit awareness of our interconnections with others. Perhaps one of the important aspects of the idea of the Anthropocene is that our *relationship* to the Earth System is changing: humans are becoming more self-aware that their actions are influencing global systems. From the perspective of entanglement, when a [whole/part] of the system changes, the system itself has changed... Resonant social consciousness acknowledges a coherent [I/we] space of oneness, which has been described in philosophy and metaphysics as 'pre-space,' 'the implicate order,' 'ultimate reality,' 'unus mundus,' or 'Source.'"

Quantum activism is based upon the limitless potential of awareness as an activating, unifying force of nature, and a powerful agent of change. By seeing actions as catalysts taking place in "morphic fields of resonance," chaotic social disorder at any scale can be "shape-shifted" into higher, unprecedented social orders in direct response to concurrent shifts in collective consciousness. This is Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures in action - order self-organizing out of chaos - which applies to all systems within the self-organizing organism we are part of, or Gaia.

It is curious that we in the activist community have largely failed to appreciate and avail ourselves of the dynamic potential represented by this new way of thinking - though Extinction Rebellion operates on such a 'catalytic converter' model of social activism. The creativity of their actions, in contrast to boring old marches, almost immediately catalyzed a shift in our collective consciousness that "caused" governments around the world to declare a climate emergency — which represents a big shift politically and socially, even though it happened in relatively short order. In contrast to the "incremental change" always favored by neoliberals and overly-political environmentalists, XR and Greta are prime examples of "collapsing the wave" of potential that is inherent in a globally connected economy.

In other words, at the same time the world is now being shaped by anthropogenic agency, we *anthropoes* have become close to fully interconnected in ways that allow for shared awareness on a global scale—including shared awareness of Gaia. Learn to mine that field of shared awareness, and no matter how impossible or improbable it appears, *small groups and even individuals can change the world*, by precipitating seismic shifts in collective consciousness. We can even aspire to shape-shift the still nascent, and thus highly mutable, Anthropocene into what Sean Kelly has christened the *Gaianthropocene* — an age of global human and other-than-human relational awareness.

A striking example of the activating potential of shared awareness was recently brought home to us by the murder of George Floyd 'live' on social media, with 9:29 of his excruciating trauma experienced empathically at the level of our hearts the world over. For a brief but historic span in time, it felt like the soul, or psyche, of humanity became an expression of the soul of the world, or Gaia's Psyche. The world gasped, was aghast, and then grasped, seemingly as a single species in one fell swoop, the full scale and entrenched force of all the unjust

oppression that is our inheritance. And with one, unified voice drowning out all the racists and fascists - for a moment-in-time, at least - [I/we] as ‘whole parts’ declared it intolerable. We demanded change. We as a species, I’m saying (for once). Humanity itself almost seemed to wake up in the empathic expanse of that intolerable breach. As noted by Howard W. French in NY Magazine:



"[T]he protests that followed the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May [] prompted the most stirring reexamination of race, justice, and national history in the U.S. in at least a generation [and] had the remarkable secondary effect of inspiring social and racial justice movements in an extraordinary number of countries on several continents."

Overnight, support for Black Lives Matter *leaped* from roughly a 30/70 split to a 70/30 split - a reverse of polarity in public opinion reflected not just here in the U.S., but across the planet. That is the kind of transformative potential that is inherent in just under ten minutes of shared awareness. That is quantum social change in action.

This is a remarkable, but not an isolated, example. It comes on the heels of the [#MeToo](#) Movement, and Indigenous voices rising in a new way after Standing Rock’s ‘Water Protectors’ (not protesters) made their stand, expressing Gaia’s trauma most directly for the rest of us. And then, of course, there is the human catalyst that is Greta Thunberg, and the Sunrise Movement she inspired, acting in morphic resonance with Extinction Rebellion - which *itself* emerged from the shared awareness of a small group of activists who journeyed together with plant medicine, intentionally seeking guidance from Gaia (yes, she has a voice).

The role that shared awareness has played in the manner in which these movements quite suddenly crystallize, and then coalesce at a global, species-wide scale, is indicative of this new kind of activism at play in fields of resonance and coherence at all scales. This is what some systems thinkers have aptly characterized as ‘quantum activism’ - local actions having non-local effects without the normal cause-and-effect, chain reactions of the (already outdated?) networking campaigns we’ve come to associate with political movements. These burgeoning social movements seem bigger than politics, with politicians and corporations having little choice but to follow -- though obviously they also tend to spark emotional reactivity in the more traumatized segments of society that feel threatened by sudden social change, and triggered by its manifestations.

An age of growing quantum awareness is upon us, and we’ve only just begun to explore its catalyzing potential. In response to Pope Francis’ call in *L’adauto Si*, a quantum view of awareness is also the sacred ground upon which we can build a new, universal form of solidarity in defense of Mother Earth. Because, as already alluded to, awareness just happens to be the most fundamental unifying force in nature, fully capable of uniting us all with our (true) selves, with one another, with our life source, and with all other forms of life, since we all are in fact united in sentience, this felt sense of being, and since we all inhabit the “*unus mundus*” (lit. ‘one world’) of psychophysical reality. It is a field of unlimited generativity, the *prima materia* of spiritual alchemy. And as Robin Alfred pointed out in the first ever symposium on healing collective trauma:

"The more that we experience ourselves as an integral part of Earth, as an integral part of the planet, that in itself gives us the resources, both individually and collectively, to integrate and to transform the challenges that we face."

Systems thinker and social ecologist Mark Skelding astutely proposes calling this field of shared awareness the “[psychosphere](#),” completing the rapidly evolving Gaian conversation between the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and lithosphere. The revered lama Tharthang Thulku describes this field of awareness quite pragmatically:

"As space must be available for objects to appear, so awareness must be available for distinctions, perceptions and other mental activity to take place. Like space, awareness is somehow 'endowed' with the capacity to accommodate. As space might be considered the 'field' for objects, so awareness could be considered the 'field' for mental events. If awareness is regarded as a field, its accommodating capacity might also be seen as a dynamic 'field mechanism' in operation. Through this mechanism, the link between awareness and its content, like the link between physical space and objects, is there from the outset, programmed into the 'field'... In accordance with this mechanism, thoughts and perceptions gather together, mutually interacting to establish the field content."

Knowledge of Time & Space (1990), Dharma Publishing. And now, apply Sheldrake’s field theory to this conception of awareness:

“The morphic fields of mental activity are not confined to the insides of our heads. They extend far beyond our brain *through intention and attention*. We are already familiar with the idea of fields extending beyond the material objects in which they are rooted: for example magnetic fields extend beyond the surfaces of magnets; the earth's gravitational field extends far beyond the surface of the earth, keeping the moon in its orbit; and the fields of a cell phone stretch out far beyond the phone itself. Likewise the fields of our minds extend far beyond our brains... *This means that new patterns of behavior can spread more rapidly than would otherwise be possible.*

Our psyches are thus embedded individually and collectively in Gaia's psychosphere, along with forests and every other living being, in a grand symbiotic, evolving sentience that itself finds expression in this unified field of awareness that stretches out into the cosmos as far as our imagination allows. One little girl makes a simple sign -- "Fridays for Future" -- that taps into this throbbing Gaian intelligence, sits outside a parliament building one brisk Autumn day, quite alone in her vigil. Someone else empathizes, snaps a picture, and the entire resonant field begins to shift in coherent ways that ripple out in all directions under her feet. A very short while later, she ascends the world stage, unafraid and unaffected by her sudden fame, and scolds world leaders in a way that nobody else could have credibly done.



That is the kind of forceful power we are dealing with here.

Gaian Awareness is the ultimate unifying force of Nature - including human nature. It is the very medium of the interdependent, interpenetrating connectivity we all have a growing, felt sense of. We can feel Gaia in the biome of our gut. Without intending to downplay the trauma of dispossession forced upon Indigenous peoples, for all of us non-indigenous people who've suffered a rupture with the natural world in our own lineage and in our culture, especially during the Great Acceleration after WWII, the relational view that emerges from working with Gaian/Quantum Awareness opens up creative ways for us to cultivate *our own* indigeneity — regenerating the very 'human nature' that is so redemptive for our

species. We will explore this neo-indigeneity in depth in the next chapter, and see how it fits into reconciliation and recovery from climate trauma.

Indeed, imbued with Gaian awareness, ‘human’ nature becomes *humane* nature.

Globally, this more humane nature can effect the kind of transmutation of the human species that is being elicited by this existential crisis. As Sean Kelly evocatively asserts, what we are going through may well be a necessary kind of “[planetary initiation.](#)”

This quantum field view of an organic ‘psychosphere’ also helps to explain why simple awareness remains such a vital and powerful force of healing, both individually and collectively, when we’re able to open to it, trust it, and surrender the fixity of our thinking to it. As every good psychotherapist knows, healing from any trauma begins with awareness of the fragmentation that trauma induced. Awareness is a spiritual elixir. Without it, with the kind of conditioned unawareness of consumer culture, we are left with the perpetuation of dysfunctional behavior and/or thought patterns that support trauma’s ‘feedback loop.’

The contemplative mystic Thomas Hübl points out that it’s only in this field of awareness, whether at the individual or collective level, that truth has a chance to emerge and be re-integrated. As his friend and colleague Srini Pillay, M.D. responds, “trauma is an opportunity for coming apart in order to come together again.” At the societal level of collective trauma, leading climate psychotherapist [Steffi Bednarek points out](#) that the "Great Derangement" - a term for the cultural component of our crisis coined by the novelist Amitav Ghosh - is symptomatic of the fact that periodically, societies need break down, appearing to be deranged in that process, in order to be re-arranged at a higher level of coherence.

Awareness is a source of both wisdom and healing. In awareness we become - or at least grasp our potential to become - whole sentient beings. This stands to reason, since it is only in awareness that we're able to connect with our true nature, our human nature, which aspect of our psyche is naturally embedded and encoded in Nature herself. This conscious ecology of mind connects us, psyche-to-Psyche, to our very life source, Gaia, where we are greeted by a wellspring of spiritual nourishment. Hübl refers to these resonant states of shared awareness as “safe fields of coherence,” and it is by inducing them in large groups that he is able to [heal collective trauma](#).

Healing Gaia's trauma is forcing us to evolve our felt sense of awareness with a kind of quantum social leap, bringing a higher order of awareness out of the chaotic profusion of climate disintegration, in order that we may actually feel Her trauma as our own, and thus finally, actually respond as if our own lives depended on it. It is one thing to say “they do” in our heads, and quite another to really feel it in our heart. With a gut-punch like the Coronavirus pandemic, Gaia is sternly prodding us in that direction. And, as Dr. Scilla Elworthy pointed out in the inaugural collective healing summit:

***We are capable of affecting very large systems
because we are connected with very large symptoms.***

The kind of open awareness in which trauma heals, in other words, is humanity's superpower in responding to the climate crisis. As Dr. Christina Bethell asserts in the introduction to O'Brien's book:

“Healing our climate requires we heal and change individually and collectively... As we awaken to the possibilities and need for safe and nurturing connections and a sense of meaning and mattering, research suggests that we will naturally begin to reset our course toward flourishing and tap into our potential to transform our collective

trauma into the inspired collective action we need to heal our hearts, our hope, and our climate.”



With this new appreciation for the power of awareness to resolve climate trauma, let's take an even deeper dive into foundational awareness theory. Here is the profound lesson Buddhism can teach us in these troubled times.

In Buddhist cosmology, awareness is described as primordially unconditioned, completely uncontrived, because unlike our sense consciousness or other ordinary states of mind, awareness is not the product of causes and conditions — *and yet it's always present*. As one would expect in a psychosphere.

Awareness is called 'beginningless' because it transcends the limited dimension of time. Buddhism posits a fourth dimension of time, actually, which is beyond but also inclusive of past, present, and future. This dimension is referred to as indeterminate time, and it's with that kind of quantum view of time that we can conceive of *awareness-qua-awareness*.

Consciousness, in this tantric context, is simply a kind of fractal collapsing of the quantum wave of universal awareness, which we experience subjectively, and identify with. Awareness is the medium of conscious experience in the same way that the electromagnetic spectrum is the medium of various radio and television stations. Our **brains act as transceivers**, tuned into the frequency of our conscious mind-stream, able to transmit and receive signals to and from anywhere within the psychosphere we inhabit.

Intrinsic awareness is said to have only two qualities: luminosity and knowingness. The felt sense of awareness we experience as intuition, synchronicity, or non-dual absorption in meditation, are actually transpersonal by nature. These elevated states of consciousness, in other words, can be attributed to

this largely unexplored (in the West) connection we have with intrinsic awareness. This primordial sense, which modernity paves over with ego-centered subjectivity, comprises the pervasive substrate, or implicate order, in which all of our individual minds are collectively embedded. It connects us consciously within what Ecopsychologist Andy Fisher describes as “one flesh”:

“All phenomena interweave as a single cloth or ‘common tissue’ [that] are mutually informative in their commingling with one another... because they are of the same elemental stuff.”

This view of psychophysical reality accords quite well with quantum physics, as confirmed by Heisenberg himself:

"The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine, and thereby determine the texture of the whole."

This pervasive *ground of awareness* also accords well with Jung’s notions of the collective unconscious, except it turns out to be more accessible than Jung supposed. Indeed, tantric practitioners have been plumbing its depths for almost three millennia, and Indigenous people the world over have been utilizing Gaia’s sacred plant medicines to connect with this realm even longer than that. Western psychology is itself rather primitive, by comparison, as our clunky instrument of objective empiricism is not well-suited to the task.

While we're never really apart from this primal awareness, like fish in an ocean, it is nonetheless true that most of us in the modern world find ourselves perpetually distracted from it - especially to the extent we get caught up in the Great Acceleration’s consumer culture. It remains quite accessible, however, whenever our minds drop down into the brain’s theta wave frequencies — in deep reverie or meditative states, with contemplative immersion in nature, or even in

dreamless sleep. Indeed, quite apart from experimentation, it is this transpersonal realm where most great scientific breakthroughs occur.

Theta waves, as we've already noted, are coherent with the planet's own electromagnetic field of awareness. This explains why, when we slow our walking down in nature and synchronize our breathing with that slower pace, our mind slows down and we sense the symbiotic relationship we enjoy with the forest around us and the soil under our feet. Mind follows the breath, and when we slow it down, we drop into our somatic senses and feel entrained or attuned (atonement, at-one-ment, or *maitri* in Sanskrit) to our natural surroundings. This kind of "forest bathing" is quite therapeutic, providing a simple method for connecting with human nature. Once experienced, it can be replicated anywhere - even on the cushion, in silent refuge, simply by remembering the experience (since memory, too, is associated with theta waves). In sum, we can relate to the psychosphere as an ocean of theta waves in which we are immersed.

Make no mistake - this eco-therapeutic solo work, too, is a form of quantum climate activism. The only way we will ever come into proper relationship with Gaia collectively is if enough of us individually, and in community, make the effort to come into proper relationship with our own true nature. This is because when we act against Nature, we suppress and eventually deform our connection to human nature. That was essentially Mary Shelley's point in writing *Frankenstein*; that scientific method represented the potential for creating a more monstrous version of us, quite apart from our natural selves.

Dukkha in Buddhism, or all the suffering and unsatisfactoriness associated with mundane life, is said quite simply to result from our failure to re-cognize (re-orient), appreciate, and act upon this intrinsic awareness. Similarly, trauma - more familiar to the Western mind - derives its power and effect over our behavior from our inability or unwillingness to re-cognize and appreciate it. Once we become

sufficiently aware of our unresolved trauma, however, once we overcome our self-imposed taboos, we discover that by opening old wounds and allowing our heart to break, removing the scar tissue around our wounded, aggrieved inner self, we're finally able to move through our dysfunctional patterns of behavior into higher levels of personal integration (integrity) and well-being. We recover a kind of wholeness that is naturally fulfilling.

So trauma has its purpose. It's a portal into a more holistic spirituality — a 'relationship with' vs. a 'power over' orientation. By confronting our traumas collectively, as Thomas Hübl encourages and facilitates (his first three on-line symposiums were joined by nearly two hundred thousand people around the world), or as we've done culturally for George Floyd; and, by demanding resolution of our common traumas through some form of truth and reconciliation, we find that we're more than capable of overcoming our oppressors, that their hold on power collectively rests upon our own tolerance limits — both generationally, and as a species.

It's not unlike what Buddha was talking about with karma, just at a much larger scale. These patterned behaviors that cause problems in our lives can be released, and the energy bound up in them can be liberated. Through our own mindful and therapeutic engagement with awareness, we alter the relational field. Relationships can change quite rapidly in this hyper-connected world. As Hübl points out, trauma wants to heal, and “[w]hat seems to be in the way IS the way” — a great lesson for social and climate activists.

Climate trauma is being felt at the biospheric level by all of us now. Gaia's trauma is our trauma. This felt sense of existential distress is triggering all of our individual, epigenetic and cultural traumas at the same time. It commands our attention because we're all, at some primal level, aware of the grievous, ongoing wounding of our irreplaceable life source.

How could we not be?

Indigenous people have been like the canaries in our coal mines in this regard. They've been [trying to convey this felt sense of global distress](#) to us for decades now, even before the scientists began sounding the alarms. And yet we still resist the necessity of acknowledging this new and previously unimaginable form of trauma as our own. To the extent that we're cut off somatically from embodied feeling and empathy, we're still able to externalize the threat and dissociate from it. To the extent we become embodied and aware, this becomes a [personal existential crisis](#).

For example, as reflected in the way the media and mainstream psychologists talk about "climate change" and "eco-anxiety," we prefer to think ourselves affected by, but still somehow separate from, this superordinate, biospheric trauma. It's a reflexive psychological defense by which we protect, or contract around, our own wounded sense of small self, or our own broken hearts. That is, we know that we can't feel one without being confronted by the other, and our perceived sense of overwhelm activates our limbic (primal) defenses of flight, freeze or fight, and all the related psychological dis-ease.

As already intimated, to willingly open ourselves up to that connection with all that is alive in the world demands that we learn to live with a broken heart. And this, in turn, calls into question the strength of our spiritual container, our faith. Which is why the best, most persistent climate activists tend to be those people with the strongest spiritual containers. They're not afraid to face and openly grieve those things we are losing. By contrast, activists with the weakest spiritual containers tend to burn out after a relatively short span. I've witnessed this over and over in my decades on the front lines of ecosystem protection. It always looks like hope that ripens into despair because it isn't grounded in an appropriate, all-encompassing spiritual worldview.

For all of the above reasons, I offer the following conclusion, gleaned from four decades of engaged eco-activism grounded in progressive spiritual development: The best way to scale the walls of inaction in the face of climate and biodiversity breakdown is by recognizing that Gaian Awareness is our superpower.



Universal solidarity grounded in Gaian Awareness is guaranteed to give us the strength and resilience to face into the storm of climate chaos. It won't be easy -- it's too late for easy -- but this is how we can all become spiritual midwives delivering [Kelly's Gaianthropocene](#) from the unnatural upheaval of the (clearly misguided) Anthropocene.

~*~

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche is a contemporary Tibetan master who, like the Buddha, ran away in full bloom from the palatial monastery he inherited from his father, also a high lama, to live as a beggar and meditate in nature. His experience taught him that every practice for training our minds “is about waking up and becoming conscious of a universal reality that transcends the contents of our individual minds.” Which is why our worldview is inseparable from our spiritual container for processing climate trauma and grief.

Yongey further asserts that each of us can access this universal reality through “mere awareness.” *In Love with the World: A Monk's Journey Through the Bardos of Living and Dying* (2019).

So simple - yet so demanding!

But we don't all need to go live in the woods in order to discover the magic of awareness. We literally share it boundlessly with every sentient being, including

the ultimate ‘mother sentient being,’ Gaia. It takes constant effort, in fact, to keep ourselves separate from this ground state, forever constructing a solid sense of self out of what is only ever other. Anyone who’s ever been privileged to spend extended time in unspoiled nature - ‘alone’ or at least with an intimate other - already knows exactly what it feels like to communicate non-verbally and non-conceptually with Gaia. After awakening under the bodhi tree, the Tathagata (‘He thus gone’) was challenged by Mara to prove the authenticity of his unbounded, selfless expansion in consciousness. In response, he touched the ground of his universal seat with extended fingers, and uttered these six words that still have the power to astonish:

“Let the Earth be my witness.”

{{Gaia is said to have quaked in response, and let loose a rain of flower petals}}

How many of us are ready to let the Earth stand as OUR witness? This is our moment of truth, and we’re being viscerally challenged to prove our own worth as a species. Civilization hangs in the balance. If we prove unworthy of our status as Earthlings, civilization comes tumbling down and the darkest of ages dawns. We really don’t want to go there. The immense and pervasive suffering that would attend such darkness is unimaginable. We know this.

Clarity of awareness has the chthonian power to open our mind up into this radically different, ‘indigenous’ way of relating to ourselves, to our close others, to the trees around us, to the biosphere at large, and to the living meta-organism we in the West have named Gaia, who some call Pachamama, and who all intuitively recognize as our Mother. *That is a powerful relationship*, as any Freudian would have to admit! It is an evolutionary reorientation of self that is revolutionary in the context of the ego-centered consumer culture that is killing us.

This theory of Gaian Awareness is bound to be controversial in the context of both religion and the Rights-of-Nature movement. But the time has come for us

to recognize Gaia's personhood, whatever the implications, up to and including her natural sovereignty over us. I have it on good authority that She's no longer willing to be considered a metaphor! *She's a meta-organism*. One that's tired of being objectified and exploited.

Stated in a language we can all comprehend, Gaia wants to live. Just as she originally and organically gave us life, now it falls on us to honor and protect her viability. For if Gaia does not possess an inherent right to life, then there is no point in having rights in the first place. That is true, *natural* sovereignty, unlike all the phony sovereigns we've propped up over the course of history.

Questions Left to Ponder

All of these cultural stirrings are oriented towards the same existential question we must answer for ourselves and as a species: *What does it mean to be human in the Anthropocene Epoch?* And in answering this question, what is the role for human beings that is presently being forged in the fiery cauldron of climate trauma?

While it's not the province any one person to answer these questions, I can't resist pointing out that the one thing we humans are quite adept at from an evolutionary standpoint seems to be the cultivation and application of self-consciousness. Isn't that what *seems* to set us apart from all other species? Could it be, then, that through this near death ecological experience already underway, Gaia is accessing the conscious organelle of the human species in order to advance her own evolution, by becoming aware of Herself in a new way?

I realize that is controversial, and prone to anthropocentrism, but it is at least worth pondering. Wouldn't it be amazing if the Gaian Awareness that is now

dawning in our collective consciousness turned out to be integral to Gaia's own awakening? Maybe this is what the individuation for a planet might look like!

As Brian Swimme first asserted in his influential documentary *Journey of the Universe* (2011):

"We live in that time when Earth itself begins its adventure of conscious self-awareness."

Why *else* would Gaia have refrained from simply shaking us off as a harmful viral strain by now? Stated alternatively, as Harvard's William Ury so beautifully puts it, why else would so many of us feel so called to become activated cells in Gaia's global immune defense system?

Even though it may appear to us presently as an abyss, we may well be standing on the brink of Gaian [r]Evolution.

Who are we?

We are Greta. We are the Sunrise Movement. We are George Floyd, crying out for our Mother under the crushing weight of intolerable oppression.



(((((We are Gaia)))))



Gaia: Perfect Mind

I am the first and the last.
I am honored and I am defiled.
I am holy to some and dead to others.
I am Virgin Earth and I am sacrificial lamb -

I bleed oil, breathe fire, vomit plastic,
my body quakes in anger!

I am Mother of all, Destroyer of worlds,
 Forgiving and relentless.
 Fragile. Resilient.

I am the members of my family.
 Barren, with many offspring.
 I grieve the loss of my children,
 Ivory billed or single horned,
 In water, in air, on land and beneath.

All my children are related
 In equality.

I am awareness itself,
 All conscious being
 swims in my oceanic womb.
 I am knowledge and ignorance...
 the silence that is incomprehensible
 and the sentience that overcomes forgetting.

I am the voice whose sound is mellifluous
 the healing light, the radiant heart,
 and the very cells of my body
 Cry out in despair.

My Children! My Children!

In my weakness, do not forsake me,

and do not be afraid of my power.

For I am she who exists in all fears
and strength in trembling.
I am she who is weak,
and I am fallen ill -

This pleasure palace cannot stand.

I am senseless, I am all wise.
Why have you conspired against me
in your counsels?
How can you profit
off of my spoils?

Don't you know that I am you?
Don't you realize that we are dying??

Feel my pain now.
It is no longer an abstraction,
nor just a mental affliction.
Feverish, damaged lungs,
Filling with water,
Heart breaking sadness.

I shall be silent among those who are silent.
And I shall appear and speak through
those who are brave.

How have you warred with me?
 Why have you forsaken your Mother -
 Your life source. Psyche! Eros!

I am the one whom you have called Eve.
 and now you have called Death...

You, Pluto. With uranium and plutonium,
 Draining my blood, gouging my lungs,
 Extracting my very bones for your
 Apocalyptic funeral pyre,
 Upon which you sacrifice lambs and children.

You, PLUTO!

HERE I STAND!

Gaia, Perfect Mind!

I am the one whom you have pursued,
 and I am the one whom you have seized.
 I am the one whom you have scattered,
 and you have gathered me together to exploit.
 I am the one before whom you have been ashamed,
 and you have been shameless to me...

I – I am godless,
 and I am Gaia.

I am the one whom you are awakening to,
though you have scorned me.

I am the unlearned,
and still the children learn from me.

I am the first peoples that you have despised,
and you dishonor me by killing them that protect me.

I am the one whom you have hidden from for too long,
and now you appear to me.

Now my time has come.
My children speak for me.

LISTEN! Listen to their voices.

Wherever you hide your self,
there I will appear.

Whenever you appear,
I myself will hide from you...

I am the power and the right.
I am the darkness and the light.

Now I enter into the midst of your prison,
which is the prison of the ego,
the great objectifier, that deadens.

And I say unto you:

*"Whoever hears my voice,
let them now arise from the Deep Sleep."*

This world is not inert, not lifeless matter,
and there are no things.

This world is consciousness first,
in which Mother and Child are One and All.
All is relational. Come into proper relationship.

All Our Relations.

* * *

And Pluto wept, and shed bitter tears.
Bitter tears he wiped from himself, and he said,
"Who is this who calls my name?
and whence has this light come to me while I am in the chains
of this dark prison?"

And I, Gaia, said unto this broken and corrupted man child:

*"I am the intelligence of the Natural World,
of life itself - your true Life Source;
And I am the memory and thought of
your own Human Nature...
Pure, luminous and aware.
A flame that never is extinguished,
Rooted in me like a great tree.*

I am the Tree of Life.

Arise and remember...
and follow your root, follow your heart,
which is I...your Mother.
Pachamama. Gaia.

Now become aware
of our deep and umbilical
connection -
Become Awareness in ME!
Now go forth in Nature,
And sin no more!"

Chapter SIX:

ONE EARTH: INDIVISIBLE



Regenerating Human Nature

"EARTH IS ALIVE. WHAT IS ALIVE, WE CAN LOVE. WHAT WE LOVE, WE WISH TO SERVE. WHEN WHAT WE LOVE IS SICK, WE WANT TO EASE ITS SUFFERING AND SERVE ITS HEALING. THE MORE DEEPLY WE KNOW IT, THE BETTER WE CAN JOIN ITS HEALING."

~ Charles Eisenstein

A Climate Trauma Informed Perspective

For this concluding chapter, we will pivot to the future, with the guiding question being “what then shall we do?” Not so much collectively, though certainly in solidarity, but rather from our standpoint as relatively sane individuals operating within an increasingly traumatized collective. Since this chapter represents a shift of perspective towards an uncertain and disconcerting future, I feel it important, both in the interest of full disclosure and for context, to begin by confessing my own intuitive sense for how the Great Dying 2.0 is likely to unfold as we, the willing, the climate crisis’ adults, lean into this existential challenge.

When I began this book, in the Prologue, the idea of a Great Dying as applied to humans, not just wildlife, may have seemed over-reactive, coming as it did at the outset of what is, for us, an unprecedented pandemic. Waves of mortality from pandemics in a newly filled up world just seems more reasonable to expect, however, than a once-in-a-lifetime event. More recently, economic historian Adam Tooze made the same observation for the [NY Times](#):

The coronavirus was a shock, but a pandemic was [long predicted](#). There is every reason to think that this one will not be a one-off. Whether the disease originated in zoonotic mutation or in a lab, there is more and worse where it came from. And it is not just viruses that we have to worry about, but also the mounting destabilization of the climate, collapsing biodiversity, large-scale desertification and pollution across the globe.

All of these destabilizing factors are inter-related, with each other and with Gaia’s self-regulating defense system. Even this initial pandemic of the post-Holocene climate era, which many expected to go away with the introduction of a vaccine, continues to come at us in waves, with the fourth wave currently gaining terrible force. [ed. note: now into 6th] “Winter is coming,” as they like to say in

Game of Thrones. And the Coronavirus is out-smarting us. We humans are not just a bloated population after decades of exponential expansion, both numerically and spatially. We're quite a vulnerable population now, too. An easy target, when you think about it from the perspective of transmissible pathogens. And Gaia has a whole host of such pathogens at her disposal.

She should at least have our attention by now.

Generally, I try to avoid predictions about our anthropogenically driven climate. I've been watching scientists get the future wrong for decades now, which is to be expected with the advent of a new specialty as complex as climate science. More to the point, I have great respect for the radical uncertainty that is inherent in our 'experimenting' on a living organism as vast and mysterious as Gaia. At the same time, I share Greta's, Extinction Rebellion's, and probably your own dismay over the maddening inertia of those who are most responsible for placing the planet in peril by ignoring science and risk management. One might think that the risk of human extinction would be motivation enough to enact fundamental changes. Obviously, then, the system is rigged.

But we are legion - 70% or more of the general populace worldwide agree that dramatic action is required on the climate front, and we generally avow our readiness to make the necessary sacrifices. The other 30% have been carefully and carelessly groomed to deny reality. Because they're forced to repress the largest trauma on the grandest scale, it's no surprise that they act out in the most childish ways, throwing tantrums and taunting death.

But what's really stopping the rest of us from acting? Are we not a significant, potentially overwhelming majority of the human race?

This is a question worth pondering, and we'll return to it again.

So in the interests of full disclosure, I'm a long-term optimist, or at least a 'possibilist' in the sense William Ury speaks of. I have great respect for the

wisdom of Jane Goodall's admonition that privileged people like myself have a *moral* obligation to those without a voice to be optimistic in the ways we engage the climate issue - whether we're actually *feeling* optimistic or not! Cynicism is a selfish choice, a form of personal grievance more suited to Trump's death cult, since it carries a dangerous seed of self-fulfilling prophesy. As with despair, there is really no place for cynicism in the climate movement, in spite of its attention-grabbing prevalence. With the exception of politics, of course. Being cynical about politicians is just being realistic in the context of crisis, and necessary it seems until they prove us wrong. We cannot afford to stop holding their feet to the intense heat of climate fires.

So, in spite of my avowed optimism, at this point it still should come as no surprise that I think things will have to break down a lot more than they already have, with the attendant derangement that we're already witnessing, before we'll finally muster the collective willpower and critical mass to embark on massive regeneration and re-arrangement of our relationships in the natural world. We've already passed through the threshold of yet another Dark Age. The tragically unnecessary human and other-than-human suffering in the world is already at intolerable levels, and thus all our efforts can't help but have the appearance of planetary hospice and biodiversity triage.

So what? Are we to allow our actions and inactions to be determined by appearance and projection, knowing how deceptive appearances tend to be, and how what we project is invariably tainted by our own shadow? After all, we may be a long way from critical mass, but we're already embarking on regenerative paths, we're already engaging in intersectional reconciliation, and we're already planting the seeds of climate recovery. There will never be a good reason to abandon these necessary efforts.

As the adults in the room, we cannot afford emotionally reactive responses to the trials and tribulations of the world - especially to human travails. While human extinction is still a rather remote possibility, population decline is not. And if a necessary “correction” from Gaia’s side involves a population decline of hundreds of millions or even billions of humans, that necessarily implies unimaginable suffering and losses to come. Birth is painful and messy. The most productive stance, in my experience, is to be a short-term pessimist and a long-term optimist, based upon an informed faith in the natural world and great compassion for every living being. As the Dalai Lama likes to remind us, all beings are born with the seeds of their own destruction.

To counteract emotional reactivity as the world continues to deteriorate and unravel around us, it is incumbent on each one of us individually, and/or in tandem with our intimate other(s), to build and maintain our spiritual container in whatever ways we find conducive to living honestly and compassionately with our hearts broke open, knowing full well that our hearts will be pinged repeatedly once we’ve made the choice to walk the path of truth, reconciliation, and recovery. It’s that spiritually grounded broke-open-heartedness that will ultimately see us through the Great Contraction that’s likely to unfold over the course of our children’s and grandchildren’s lifetimes.

That was the whole point of “Planetary Hospice: Rebirthing Planet Earth,” which begins with this quote from ancient Greece:

*“Truly the gods have proclaimed a most beautiful secret:
death comes not as a curse but as a blessing to men.”*

And it’s that same growing spiritual resiliency and moral fortitude that will rebirth us out the other side as well, having plowed all our adversity into the path of recovery, learning from our failures and mistakes.

That willingness to accept what cannot be changed is what makes us *real* to one another. It allows us to love what is broken from a place of our own humble brokenness, or vulnerability. And just as we find in hospice, we'll always be able to find consolation - joy, even - in the quiet moments, because of our integrity, our concern, our empathy, and our growing solidarity in the face of the greatest of adversities. There is no greater adversity than death and dying, after all. Coming to terms with mortality and impermanence is what spirituality is all about - it's what makes us human.

So we wisely decide to embody light in an age of increasing darkness. We are Earth Guardians, and we're Light Keepers, at the most critical time in the procession of human development. What a privilege!

As I've already noted, it is both learned humility and faith that sustain me in all my cognitively generated hopelessness. Taking my cue from Emerson's natural law of compensation and Thoreau's vision of the foundations of Earth, I have faith that all that *needs* to break down — meaning the destructive constructs of modern civilization, like the excesses of capitalism and vestiges of colonialism — will in fact break down *long* before the foundations of Earth give way. And we humans will be forced to adapt with more constructive approaches.

This is the message I have consistently received in communion with Gaia, and that I hear from wise Indigenous elders as well. She is patient, she lives in deep time, and while her trauma is our trauma, her distress does not seem to reflect the heightened levels of our own individual distress.

I find comfort in that maternal fortitude. Our distress is existential. Hers is transactional. And her love for us is tough love, free from attachment.

In other words, we might say that the laws of nature require that global economic breakdown will happen long before global ecological breakdown, despite any and all appearances to the contrary. Given our current political climate,

and the hold that consumerism has on the quietly desperate masses, it's hard for me to believe that great global economic dislocation will *not* be required in order for a great global ecological consciousness to finally and firmly take hold of our collective senses. And seeing how dire (but *far* from hopeless!) things look ecologically right now, I anticipate that the global economic house of cards will likely tumble down long before these "roaring twenties" peter out. Followed by an even "greater" depression than those precipitated by the Civil War and the severe drought and dustbowls of the 1930s, along with the resulting global dislocation, population decline, breakdown of borders, a predictable mad scramble for scarce resources, *ad nauseum*.

I would dearly love to be proven wrong, of course. And I will do whatever I can to avoid these tragic outcomes, and to facilitate a less messy birth of a new ecological era. Wouldn't it be grand? But the point is it doesn't really matter how things unfold - there's a good chance *all* of our predictions will ultimately be proven wrong, and the future will be full of surprising twists and turns. What really matters is how we respond. I intend to continue working on behalf of that nascent shift of consciousness no matter which way things break in the short term, because I have faith that human nature is ultimately humane, that the healthy seeds we are planting now in the collective psyche will take root, grow, and eventually flourish, and that the resulting shift in collective consciousness is an absolutely necessary part of any positive outcome without regard to foreseeability.

None of us may live to see that final, quantum leap in collective humane consciousness, but again - *so what?* We can still be an integral part of it, which permits and even empowers us to die with peace of mind and love in our heart no matter the state of the world at that time. That's all any of us can reasonably ask for at the end of life on the cusp of a new era.

And yes, I could also end up being wrong about the long-term survival of the human species. But even in the midst of *that* unfathomable prospect, the struggle to midwife a more humane species into existence *itself* makes life more meaningful, and is clearly the appropriate response to the day and age we happen to inhabit. And besides, there won't be anyone left to say "I told you so" if they do turn out to be tragically correct!

In emotional reactivity, there is only torment and frustration. With humane and compassionate (spiritual) response-ability, there is empathy and true contentment. That's the way towards individual fulfillment during a time of great collective spiritual crisis, not in being a 'nattering nabob of negativity' or clinging to worst-case scenarios. The eternal beauty of "right action" from the Buddha's 8-spoked wheel of dharma is that it is not dependent on future outcomes.

So I really felt the need to get that out of the way here before going on to describe how we can and will regenerate human nature in this quasi-terminal stage of human development. Otherwise, what I have to say could come off sounding pollyannish. To better illustrate this perspective of innate resiliency and transcendent faith in the natural foundations of Gaia, I will share a short allegory from N. Scott Momaday's grand offering to Gaia, *Earth Keeper* (2020):

The force of life is very great... Some years ago the prayer tree at Rainy Mountain was struck by lightning. It burned and turned black, but it did not fall. There had not been time to speak of the tree to Man-ka-ih, the storm spirit. The tree seemed to be dead. But a long time afterward there appeared a tiny sprig of green on a charred limb, and then the hidden life of the tree burst out in a hundred leaves. It was a wondrous sight, and I wept to see it. I believe that the earth gave of its irresistible life to the tree. How can we give thanks in return?

XR Rx: Our Shared Responsibility for the Climate Crisis

The more pertinent question for us as we face into the storm of climate chaos is the question of personal and collective moral responsibility. I think this aspect of the crisis is almost as confused now as the science seemed to be in most people's minds a decade ago. Collective responsibility, something that has clearly been in short supply, is intimately interconnected with ethical notions of personal responsibility. In other words, if we all had a clearer sense of our own individual responsibility in relation to the climate crisis, we would be more responsive collectively.

If you've been paying attention to the crisis, you've likely seen some version of this headline in recent years: *90 companies responsible for two-thirds of historical greenhouse gas emissions*. The implication, which I've seen expressed by even the most intelligent activists, is clear: "Don't blame me for not doing all I can to reduce my carbon footprint - blame the 90 corporations who are responsible for the crisis." But how can this kind of finger-pointing possibly lead to the radical changes that we know are now urgently required to avoid a global nightmare?

What does it even mean to blame a corporation for fossil fuels emissions? Let's place that exculpatory quote in the previous paragraph in some kind of non-twitter context. Picture if you will a person standing at their local Chevron station filling up their tank while laying the blame for global warming on Chevron, or maybe going home and turning on their AC to beat the heat while blaming coal producers for the excessive heat. I'm reminded of the famous line by Charlton Heston's character at the end of the movie *Soylent Green*: "SOYLENT GREEN IS PEOPLE!" Or in this case, "CONSUMER DEMAND IS US!"

Yes, those 90 corporations are people, too! Not in the perversely privileged, constitutional sense of the Supreme Court's pronouncement in *Citizens United*; but rather, in the sense that it is '*We, the people*' who:

1. Charter corporations, giving them life;
2. Work for corporations, granting them agency;
3. Buy stock in corporations, lending them capital; and,
4. Buy and use corporate products, keeping them viable.

Just as you should not be able to blame livestock production for the biodiversity crisis while eating a Big Mac, or blame tobacco manufacturers for your lung cancer while taking another drag of your cigarette, so we cannot shift blame for the climate crisis to those 90 carbon intensive corporations while we continue to patronize them as we did before (funny how these claims never come with a call for boycotts!). They are us, after all. And we are Gaia, too.

In this new era of pervasive interdependence and interconnectivity, the idea that we can in some way exonerate ourselves of any moral responsibility for this shared crisis by pointing elsewhere, the idea that we could know what we know and still not change anything in the way we relate to the world, is both obscene and intellectually indefensible. It's nothing other than toxic attachment to our fossil-fueled affluence.

Indeed, when our children do this - as with "he started it!" or "everyone else is doing it!" - we have no problem telling them this does not excuse their own conduct. Why should it be any different for us in relation to our carbon footprint? So once again, we can see the need here to act like adults in responding to this existential crisis, and not like immature, spoiled children.

We broke it. We must own it. Only then can we hope to fix it.

For me, that's the whole point of the Anthropocene.

It's well worth diving a little deeper into this, as I'm sure we can all offer up arguments to the contrary (and likely do, in our own mind's rationalizations). Because what we're really talking about here is an ethical question. Fortunately, there is a valuable collection of clear thinking on this subject in the 2012 book

Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future, edited by Allen Thompson, a Professor in Philosophy at Oregon State, and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, an Ethics Professor at Case Western Reserve (and author of *The Ecological Life: Discovering Citizenship and a Sense of Humanity*). In particular, we will hone in on Ch. 10 by Professor Thompson: “[The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate.](#)”

This is so critical for us to understand *and embody* in our activism.

Thompson begins by pointing out that the sense of feeling *personally* responsible for the global climate signifies the advent of “a *new* environmental virtue, because it is well suited to express human moral goodness in the emerging Anthropocene Epoch (Crutzen 2002).” It’s important to begin here, as there is no solid basis for blaming others for our crisis, at least without having first considered and dismissed the underlying logic. Still, “[g]lobal warming threatens our contemporary form of life, the basic ecological conditions to which all life on Earth is adapted, and the moral status of our self-conception as humanity.” What does it mean to be human in the Anthropocene, in other words, echoing Pope Francis on this seminal point. This is a question for each one of us to answer.

Thompson characterizes our default mode of assigning blame for problems, like blaming the 90 dirty corporations, as a “distributed sense of collective responsibility” or “group fault,” which derives from our understanding of legal liability. Pursuant to this legalistic notion, we may consider ourselves responsible for certain consumer behaviors, but we have a much more difficult time relating that sense of personal responsibility to the vast scale of harms we see with climactic events. Understandably so, as we are mixing apples and oranges here. Under this kind of ethical consideration, we fail to appreciate any personal obligation to reduce our own impacts, and we also fail to hold the group

responsible as a whole, since “the serious harms are genuinely the product of many hands.” If everyone is at fault, then nobody is at fault - how convenient for us!

It’s easy to see here why we might absolve soccer moms of responsibility for the climate crisis, or even consumers generally, while pointing the finger of blame at the 90 evil fossil fuel producers, who appear to us as other than human. And we see where this kind of reflexive thought leads, don’t we? 2021 was the hottest year on record with the sharpest increase in emissions ever, and we’re on pace to beat that in 2022.

For these most practical of reasons, Thompson concludes that the notion of *shared responsibility* (sometimes referred to as *political* responsibility) applies with much more moral force to our personal relationship with the climate crisis. This idea of shared responsibility differs from distributed responsibility in critical ways, not the least of which is that it’s *forward-looking*, rather than looking to blame someone for the present results of past actions. Which is precisely the orientation we need to adopt in response to an accelerating existential threat. Suing and even imprisoning or executing corporate CEOs and their enablers will provide small consolation when civilization crumbles and we join the sixth great extinction event. Activists need to call out and emphatically reject the faulty reasoning and ineffectiveness of distributed responsibility as applied to the climate crisis.

Shared responsibility, as with a group of people facing a tsunami wave, “seeks not to reckon debts, but aims rather to bring about results” - something that has been monstrously lacking on the climate front.

“Unlike a blame model of responsibility, [shared] responsibility does not seek to mark out and isolate those to be held responsible, thereby distinguishing them from others, *who by implication are not responsible*... Most accounts of collective responsibility aim to distinguish those who have done harm from those who have not...

[Shared] responsibility, on the other hand, is a responsibility for what we have *not done*.”

Isn't that radical?

Again, let's use the simplistic example of a group of people facing a tsunami, which is an apt metaphor for climate trauma. Under a distributed responsibility model, they would just stand there arguing about how they got there, and whose fault it is that they're about to be subsumed by the ocean. With a shared sense of responsibility, they'd shout things like "PUT ON YOUR LIFE VEST!" or "HEAD TO HIGHER GROUND!"

Only one of these groups has a chance to survive the tsunami.

This is the *most critical point* we can make right now in response to climate chaos, and in relation to each other - especially in a time of great political polarization and paralysis. Shared responsibility for this existential crisis we are facing is the equivalent of positing that each and everyone of us is responsible only for what we have *not* done or are not doing. And with that pragmatic orientation, by considering and taking individual actions *en masse*, we gain the force of moral suasion in pointing out what our political leaders are not doing - as with Gandhi's Salt March, or Cesar Chavez' lettuce boycott.

As Thompson characterizes this ethic of shared responsibility, *each one of us* assumes personal responsibility for the climate in a partial way:

“the specific part that each [of us] plays in producing the outcome cannot be isolated and identified, and thus the responsibility is essentially shared.”

Leading not to the paralysis by analysis that seeks to minimize personal responsibility or assuage feelings of guilt, as with distributed responsibility, but rather to the kind of universal solidarity that is engendered by holding the question “what, then, *shall we do?*”

“Finding some to blame, it does not thereby exculpate others; **people are guilty primarily for what they have not done**... the moral status of background conditions (e.g. consumerism) is brought into question... Responsibility for the outcome does not belong strictly to some individuals or to some collectives: humans have a shared moral responsibility for global climate change.”

And then, what we choose to do is not so much measured by the intended result, as with say voting for Democrats or the Labor Party, but rather by the *actual* results measured over time.

Can hardened activists even begin to appreciate the crucial difference in these two ethical stances? It's natural of course, from the standpoint of shared responsibility, to look first to our political process for solutions (which is why it is also referred to as political responsibility). *But we've been doing that*, and not much else, for decades now *with no slowing of emissions*. And so we should not feel like we've discharged our social and moral responsibilities to the global climate by the mere fact that we show up for marches, display catchy bumper stickers, and vote green/blue. That is just how we assuage our guilt in the blame game.

Rather, even if we've already changed our diets and switched to a hybrid vehicle, the question from a shared sense of responsibility remains the same: “What *then* shall we do?” Our sense of personal responsibility becomes just as relentless as the crisis itself, and we don't find time to blame others, since that is a rather fruitless endeavor. Instead, we interact with and influence others, seeking and spreading new ideas that are responsive to our shared sense of crisis.

Since we've already accepted personal responsibility with our embrace of shared responsibility, we know that in addition to continuing to advocate for the necessary political, institutional, and structural changes, we are also compelled

now, by the inactions of our political leaders and the resulting absence of easy solutions, to do all that we are able to do in our personal lives to conform our behaviors, in ways that are rationally responsive to what we already recognize to be an existential threat. Because if we are not doing all we can do, then we don't really believe that it is existential. And if we are doing all that we can do, then that is all we can do - that is self satisfying. And it builds resiliency, because we will no longer feel psychologically overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis, especially if we begin to find the kind of solidarity in our local communities that can produce visible changes - like getting our socially conscientious grocers to stop using so much plastic, just to cite one example. These kinds of changes only appear to us to be small if we assume that our actions do not have nonlocal impacts.

With a sense of shared responsibility, everyone continues to feel personally responsible in their daily lives, taking numerous small ethical actions and sharing those ideas with the collective. [Jane Goodall speaks](#) to the heart of shared responsibility with her own vision of ecological consciousness:

“When there's several million, and hopefully billions, of people making ethical choices in the impact they make every day, then we start moving towards a world that we can feel a little bit happier to leave to our children.”

This is in stark contrast to the individual's role under a presumption of distributed responsibility, where everyone is waiting for top-down solutions, waiting to be told what to do by those in charge, or waiting for our peers to make the changes we know are necessary ourselves. It's time for us to take charge of our own fate.

Plus, great psychic energy is released when we exit the blame game and, like the climate adults we now are, accept this kind of shared responsibility. Christina Feldman, author of *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World*, [sums this psychological benefit up](#):

“Rarely are words and acts of healing and reconciliation born of an agitated heart. One of the great arts in the cultivation of compassion is to ask if we can embrace anger without blame. Blame agitates our hearts, keeps them contracted, and ultimately leads to despair. To surrender blame is to maintain the discriminating wisdom that knows clearly what suffering is and what causes it. To surrender blame is to surrender the separation that makes compassion impossible.

Compassion is not a magical device that can instantly dispel all suffering. The path of compassion is altruistic but not idealistic. Walking this path we are not asked to lay down our life, find a solution for all of the struggles in this world, or immediately rescue all beings. We are asked [instead] to explore how we may transform our own hearts and minds in the moment. Can we understand the transparency of division and separation? Can we liberate our hearts from ill will, fear, and cruelty? Can we find the steadfastness, patience, generosity, and commitment not to abandon anyone or anything in this world? Can we learn how to listen deeply and discover the heart that trembles in the face of suffering?”

The Rise of Indigeneity: Embodying our Shared Responsibility for the Climate Crisis

“Native American societies have a lived sense of the unity of all living things, as expressed in the Native American phrase ‘all my relations,’ which has been called a prayer and a cosmology in one breath.”

Dr. Leslie Gray, Native American Psychologist, Shamanic
Psychotherapist, and founder of [Woodfish Institute](#)

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According to the [United Nations](#):

Although Indigenous Peoples constitute less than 5% of the world's population, they safeguard 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, thereby playing a key role in climate protection. Indigenous peoples often have a spiritual connection to nature, which ensures that they take the protection of their habitat seriously.

Such common values include Indigenous Peoples' *holistic* view of and *sympiotic* relationship with Mother Earth – a relationship in which life thrives on the recognition of an inalienable interconnectedness and delicate balance.

My own decade-long journey into the heart of the climate crisis has been much more than a personal quest. From my own side, in fact, it has felt impersonal from the start, because it arose from the meditation cushion, where I've learned tried and true methods from well qualified dharma teachers to counteract 'self.' Once one finds quiescence, an open spaciousness free from thought, on the cushion, one is then free to listen to whatever bubbles up from beneath the incessant waves of self-consciousness. It is there, in that awareness that is other than my self, that the phrase 'planetary hospice' popped into my head; there that the *affective force* of climate trauma first hit me like a stab to the heart; and, it was on my morning cushion and on my more meditative nature walks that I slowly came to intuit that this larger, vastly more intelligent organism, the actual source of my small life and yours, was also the source of these fully formed ideas transmitted in the fertile silence of meditative absorption.

I'm not nearly smart enough to have come up with any of these ideas on my own - ideas like planetary hospice, repressed collective climate grief (the topic of my first book), climate trauma, and now this concluding idea of a '*postmodern holistic indigeneity*' that has emerged in the writing of this last chapter. And, of

course, we never come up with any ideas on our own. Instead, these kinds of ideas always arise non-locally. As soon as I had written “Planetary Hospice,” I discovered Guy McPherson (“Nature Bats Last”) and Carolyn Baker (“The Life Boat Hour”) were already using the term. Similarly, I learned after the fact that “climate trauma” was already a term in literature, and was probably coined a full decade earlier by social justice advocate Gillian Caldwell in the midst of her own personal climate crisis.

What I *am*, however, is open enough to be able to write about these kinds of critical and timely ideas, rather like a Gaian scribe, and due to a life-long love affair with mountains and rivers, animals and trees, I’m Earth-connected enough to advocate for Gaia’s health and well being. And I seem to be grounded enough in my good-enough meditative discipline to keep these chthonic lines of communication open - a task made easier by two experiences with the entheogen 5-MeO-DMT in July of 2019 and January of 2022.

Ultimately, I’ve come to understand that what I am is *natural* enough. That’s my only real qualification for writing a book on climate trauma, reconciliation and recovery. I’m an old-school transcendentalist in what has become a grotesquely individualistic age where people and personalities become more important than the ideas they espouse. So it seems that as long as I keep listening to Gaia, she keeps talking!

And this is what is coming through now, as I conclude the arc of my decade-long climate crisis research and writing under smoky skies in the midst of a prolonged global pandemic: *I am indigenous to Earth.*

This is not the same thing as being Indigenous. That’s why I feel it is so important to capitalize the word when referring to First Peoples. Nonetheless, I’ve come to understand through this long advocacy relationship with Earth that *it is indigeneity* I’ve always felt, though it is only now that I am beginning to name and

identify with it. It's important, of course, to point out how my indigeneity is different than being Indigenous. I am not rooted to a particular place where my ancestors are buried. In fact, because of my settler lineage, I still do not identify with any one place. I'm a poster-child for the post-world war 'nuclear family,' having traveled *in vitro* at 8 months from the place of my conception (PA) to the place of my birth (Chicago).

I grew up on rough-and-tumble city streets, not in nature, moved to a swanky Wisconsin suburb in my teens, attended college for eight years in the Shawnee National Forest of Southern Illinois, over 300 miles away from home, subsequently relocated to the high desert and alpine mountains of southern Idaho, and spent most of my career in the still wild Rocky Mountains of Colorado and Montana. After a stint in California, I now live on Puget Sound, on the ancestral lands of the Snohomish people. I've also spent months on end hiking in the New Zealand Alps and Kashmiri Himalaya, while circumnavigating the globe as a young man.

So I am rootless in a post-Beat kind of way, with the soul of a wandering mendicant, almost the opposite of what we associate with Indigenous. But I nonetheless find myself in a lifelong relationship with a living planet. It is long past time to acknowledge the nature of that relationship - and here I speak for the millions of settler stock like me who have broken free from our conditioning to establish close, embodied relationships with Nature.

Perhaps owing to settler guilt, and out of deep regard for my Indigenous elders, brothers and sisters, I've only *slowly* come to see this as my idiosyncratic path of indigeneity to Gaia - as opposed to a specific place - because somehow she hid the true nature of our relationship from me all these years!

Now having journeyed whole-hearted through planetary hospice, having processed my own climate grief and epigenetic trauma, only to then find myself engulfed by our collective climate trauma, having found solace and healing

thereafter in a vital, growing global community and, finally, having been nurtured all along by a quantum awareness that is umbilically connected to Gaian sentience - *only now* have I organically arrived at this psychophysical gnosis (though it appears to have been waiting for me the whole time!): we non-indigenous, privileged human beings of Western Civilization, we who bear the lion's share of responsibility for ongoing mass extinctions and the end of life as the world has always known it, are now being called upon, and compelled by Gaia's trauma, to recover our *own* sense of indigeneity. This, I have concluded, is what it really means to grow up and evolve in a time of existential chthonic threat: to become indigenous to Earth in the midst of ecological collapse.

What a glorious charge! What a sacred task. In the midst of chaos and trauma we are called to awakening and healing. Of course! And of course, this would precipitate a new kind of relationship. A higher order of relationship (though not in relation to Indigenous people themselves). How else to counteract the doomsayers, collapsarians and religious fanatics? How else can we break our addictions and reform our identities?

It won't happen overnight, of course, but it is already happening. Like the Lakota notion of the "good red road," amplifying our own indigeneity represents the most effective pathway for non-Indigenous people to come into proper relationship *with all our relations*. Which is precisely what it will take to restore any kind of ecological balance in the Anthropogenic Era. Climate Trauma arises in relationship, after all, and discovering our own indigeneity is a natural corrective for healing those damaged relationships, one that is responsive to both the existential crisis we face and the spiritual crisis that brought it about.

This postmodern take on indigeneity isn't some new phenomenon so much as it is a new way of thinking about what we know is already working, and bringing into coherence the numerous strands of the reformation that are already emerging

from those who hear the cries of the world. Not only are we being called by Gaia to this sacred task, *Indigenous peoples themselves* are calling us home, as evocatively and faithfully set forth by the Canadian writer/activist Peggi Evers:



“All humans have the right to return home, and become indigenous to this earth, to become real human beings living their full potential as caretakers of life, to become people with big hearts living in cooperation with each other and with other forms of life.”

~ Arkan Lashwala

(Excerpted from [First Nations on Ancestral Connection](#), Stone Circle Press)

As my Dakota friend and spiritual teacher/healer Dallas Gudgell points out: "Embracing postmodern indigeneity while looking to and quietly following Indigenous leaders (the ones generationally connected to place) is the bridge to Unity" between Indigenous people and the rest of us. There is even a [Native-led Indigeneity Program](#) now from within the visionary Bioneer movement to help us develop our own indigeneity. From their web page:

“Indigeneity assumes a spiritual interconnectedness between all creations, their right to exist and the value of their contributions to the larger whole. At the core of Indigenous thinking is that coexistence relies on the ability of all peoples’ and living things’ voices be heard and heard equally.”

~ LaDonna Harris, Founder and President of Americans for
Indian Opportunity

For reasons that will become clear later in this chapter, this is the wave of the future for the climate movement. This is how we face the storm, no matter the difficulty, and re-learn to inhabit planet Earth.

This resurrection of our Human Nature from the ashes of Industrial Civilization necessarily begins with the collective moral imperative of humility - no, make that ***RADICAL HUMILITY!*** - due to the vast scale of our accumulated mischiefs and the cascading mayhem that we've now unleashed. (Note: core indigenous values will be highlighted in this discussion with ***bold/italics***, for ease of reference). As Thomas Hubl says, "humility is born of our strength to be vulnerable." Our humble reorientation begins with shared empathy for the other-than-human world, whose severely depressed populations are suffering biologically in unprecedented ways *short* of extinction, owing directly to the ecological disruption and climate chaos perpetrated by non-Indigenous peoples.

Significantly, any indigenous reformation of Western Civilization must be anchored in a collective, sincere, and publicly expressed contrition over the ruthless genocide our progenitors have perpetrated on the inhabitants of the Americas. Indian Americans are still 4 million strong (50 million in Latin America), and we owe them a fair accounting for the broken treaties and the perpetuation of intolerable economic conditions on many Native American Reservations today.

The beauty of Rep. Barbara Lee's Racial Justice Commission, set forth at the end of the chapter 4, is that it provides a public forum to begin righting the wrongs of slavery and the genocide perpetuated on the very people whose ecological wisdom and spiritual guidance we now need in order to survive climate disruption ourselves. Truth and contrition precede reconciliation, though we're seemingly stuck at the truth stage here in the U.S. right now. As Fernando Pairicán, a Mapuche historian at the University of Santiago, states:

“For every act of genocide, there needs to be economic, political and social reparation. Only then can we move towards self-determination, equality and the restitution of lands to Indigenous peoples across the Americas.”

These kinds of truth and reconciliation processes are how we show younger generations that we are grownups capable of dealing with an existential crisis. It’s a kind of collective shadow work that remains to be done here, but is at least underway.

And, of course, it is in all of our interests to restore as much as possible Indigenous sovereignty over lands, as even in their dispossessed state Indigenous people remain responsible stewards for 80% of existing biodiversity. This idea of returning lands to tribes might seem impractical to some, but after a career of fighting the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management on behalf of wildlife, I can attest to the lousy job they’ve done in terms of conserving biodiversity. Logging and grazing has resulted in a paucity of important indicator species like sage grouse, fishers, pine marten, owls, goshawks, many kinds of woodpeckers, and beavers - to name just a few of what should be common species.

And while climate is certainly a major factor in the unnatural “wildfires” (actually, ‘climate fires’) that have become an annual spectacle, mismanagement of forests set the stage for these climate catastrophes; e.g., by thinning out forests through logging, in the name of reducing wildfire threat, the forests actually have become over-dry and susceptible to the higher winds that drive destructive fires. Turning our national forests and grasslands back over to the tribes, with an emphasis on managing for wildlife like beavers and bison, would have *profound* effects on the climate, as we will explore more fully later in this

chapter. So there is both a scientific basis and self-interest in doing the right thing by returning lands to Indigenous people.

Without this kind of spiritual maturity as our moral foundation, along with liberating the repressed emotional energy through reconciliation, any attempts at cultivating Western indigeneity will be rightly viewed as inauthentic and, in all likelihood, would prove to be ineffective. But with that energy and on that firm ground, a new world and a universal solidarity is well within our reach. In this new world, which can only emerge from the detritus of the old, we can all feel empowered to become indigenous in new and meaningful ways that are supportive of climate and species recovery. That is shared responsibility in action.

As the U.N. clearly states:

*“Recent reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) stress the urgent need for transformative change to reverse the impending ecological crisis. With only a limited window of time to bend the emissions curve, adapting to changing climate conditions, and halt the rapid decline in biodiversity, **the values and wisdom of indigenous peoples can help societies achieve this transformation.**”*

By learning to see our Indigenous brothers and sisters as our spiritual elders on this relational path, by becoming their political and spiritual allies as they throw off the societal chains of colonialism and oppression, and by soliciting their assistance in seeking out Gaia as our ally, we can reconcile our shared traumas and direct the energy liberated in that collective healing process towards climate recovery. In a society and culture where we’ve become so disembodied and disconnected from the natural world and our own true nature, and at a critical time when so many are still reflexively dissociating from climate trauma, regenerating and cultivating a new kind of indigeneity - one that emerges naturally from our

growing sense of *shared responsibility* for the climate, for our bioregions, and for our locally inhabited ecosystems - represents the missing piece, and the social glue, in the global puzzle of climate reconciliation and recovery.

Defining Postmodern Indigeneity

Out of regard for our 300 million or so Indigenous brothers and sisters around the world, [who are rising up](#) and shedding the shackles of oppression in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, and mindful of the problems with cultural appropriation, I'm compelled to begin afresh with the commonly accepted definition of *indigeneity*:

/inˌdijəˈneɪdē 1. **originating or occurring naturally** (in a country, region, etc); native. 2. innate (to); inherent (in).

[from Latin *indigenus*, from *indi-* in + *gignere* to beget]

So we can at least appreciate from this generic definition that indigeneity is not limited to Indigenous Peoples, who by definition originate from the land. For the rest of us, indigeneity is more a matter of “*occurring naturally*” on the land, wherever we happen to be living, and of striving consciously to become “*innate to*” the land - which means, to become one with the essential character of our chosen habitat and the non-human beings we still share that habitat with or have displaced. As Kiowa elder N. Scott Momaday points out, “[s]omething of our relationship to the earth is determined by the particular place we stand at a given time.”

While indigeneity is traditionally rooted in a given place, we of settler stock are more nomadic by nature, and thus our indigeneity - which we can think of as “postmodern” - will always tend to be fixed less by the place of our birth than by a confluence of time and place in the context of our relationship with a region, the whole country or, increasingly, the entire planet. Indigeneity also traditionally

arises from a relatively *unchanging* landscape, whereas postmodern indigeneity will necessarily be connected to rapidly changing landscapes, giving rise to an even more interactive dynamic than the traditional role of ‘tending to’ the natural world. As most of these landscapes have already been greatly altered and are now out of equilibrium, traditional Indigenous knowledge of pre-settlement conditions becomes even more relevant to our purposefully adaptive behaviors. In looking to become more indigenous ourselves during a time of great ecological unravelling, we must acknowledge an even greater responsibility for the landscapes we inhabit, owing to the deleterious impacts we, our ancestors, and our economically driven land management agencies have had on the land.

In cultivating and embodying our own indigeneity, we’d be wise to begin with the idea of honoring “all our relations.” This will serve as a powerful antidote for our habit of objectifying “all my things/properties” along with centuries of objectification of women and black, brown and yellow lives as slaves. And of course, by starting from an explicitly *relational foundation*, we are already borrowing a key core value of the traditional Indigenous worldview. Mindful of the immutable stains of pervasive colonialism, we must vigilantly guard against appropriating Indigenous cultural traditions as our own - either without proper attribution or, for more sacred traditions, without permission.

This doesn’t mean, however, that we can not still find inspiration in traditional indigenous ways of being with, and relating to, the natural world. To the contrary, in cultivating our own sense of indigeneity it would seem disrespectful and foolish *not* to so honor Indigenous wisdom, and not be curious about the stories that inform their worldview. It’s a matter of learning from, not taking from. As Seminole (Ojibway) Elder, former Vice Presidential candidate, and [Honor the Earth](#) Executive Director [Winona LaDuke](#) advises us, “the presence of these traditions in the Native community provides a yardstick against which to measure

your own values, your own way of life, and your own choices” — or in this case, our own indigeneity.

At the same time, in this process of generating postmodern indigeneity as a corrective to Western civilization’s lethal legacy, we reformed settlers can also avail ourselves of some uniquely adaptive *advantages* in naturalizing our relations at this particular time in our species’ story. We’ve accomplished a lot of good along the way of screwing things up. While our developing Western cultural indigeneity will clearly have much in common with traditional cultures’ indigeneity, being grounded in many of the same core values, it will also be marked by some very important differences.

We’ve already alluded to the different relationships settlers have with place and time. When First Peoples first generated indigeneity eons ago, it was in close relationship to their immediate natural environments — on the order of what we would now call an ecosystem or, if they were more nomadic, a bioregion. They were never required to think or act *beyond* those immediate horizons. We now embark on cultivating postmodern indigeneity already entangled *with the entire planet* - a relationship we intend to restore balance to - and we do so with the still-fresh and unfolding science of a living, largely self-regulating meta-organism which we are integrally enmeshed within. This scientific ‘discovery’ may be old news to Indigenous people, who intuited it long ago, but it is nonetheless inspiring for our modern psyches to confirm this ancient wisdom with our own ways.

This globalized worldview affords us the unprecedented and unique opportunity to regenerate a *holistic* indigeneity based on *rationally* knowing how we actually are interdependent with the whole Earth - not just as a matter of faith, mythology, or religion, but as a matter of proven scientific fact. We know with confidence that we are conscious agents operating within an intricate and awe-inspiring web of life *that has its own intelligence and wisdom* to impart to us, just

as we wish to offer healing aspirations and regenerative intentions in return. In other words, the perspective of postmodern indigeneity begins by urgent necessity at the outer reaches of the enveloped world, and from that more expansive perspective - that of the solar system - is oriented inwards, through successive holons, like the atmosphere, biosphere, lithosphere, etc., toward whatever bioregion and ecosystem we happen to inhabit. This contrasts with more traditional forms of indigeneity, which are oriented from where one's people are buried, looks out towards the horizon, and has a different relationship with the skies based on that more grounded orientation.



This difference in orientation is critical to postmodern indigeneity, as it is our larger relationship with Gaia that is now closing in on all our other relations, compelling us to take in the global situation in order that we may know how to respond individually, to relate to Gaia locally, in our daily lives. I realize the idea of “local ecosystem” might sound foreign to someone who lives in a big city. But big cities, too, have birds and bees, flowers and trees, open spaces and squirrels. Rooftop gardens are a big part of the solution to global warming, and we all have the ability to connect to the natural world via the intimate relationships of our dietary choices. Most people have some capability for growing our own food, either vertically on their decks, in community gardens that are springing up everywhere, and by converting green spaces wherever we find them. For those with yards large or small, it is a radically indigenous act to kill your lawn, learn what plants happen to be native to your ecosystem, and learn permaculture.

That kind of food sovereignty can an important first step in reclaiming our indigeneity, in solidarity with Gaia and Indigenous people everywhere. It's a way of beginning to assert a lifestyle that is not hold us hostage to consumer culture. I remember my surprise when I learned that Russians had one of the healthier diets on the planet. After the Soviet Union collapsed, people had no choice but to become as self-sufficient as possible, and that meant growing their own food - without the aid of pesticides, herbicides, or other poisons.

This is whole-Earth based indigeneity from the perspective of the very people who have traditionally viewed the world as ours to roam, map and claim. So in a sense, the uprooted characteristic of a postmodern, holistic indigeneity is 'innate' to us. We're not incapable by birth of becoming indigenous to a place, since it is part of our evolved human nature, and there is no place indigeneity can not be cultivated. However, our sense of place today has become global in scope because of our one great accomplishment, viewing Earth from the moon, and is becoming more so because of our one great predicament, resolving biospheric trauma before we assure our own extinction. That said, each of us is free to define our indigeneity as broadly as we care to, so long as what we are including is Earth-friendly and regenerative of life. Intention is everything here.

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a reliable elder and teacher of Indigenous ways to non-Indigenous people. She's a classically trained scientist. and Professor of Environmental Biology at the State University of New York. Professor Kimmerer is a tribal member of the Potawatomi Nation, and serves as the Director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment. She stakes out a clear marker for cultivating our own indigeneity:

“For all of us, becoming Indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.”

Dr. Kimmerer then goes on to counsel that the most important thing we can do in generating indigeneity is to “*listen to the plants.*”

In the context of holistic indigeneity viewed as a natural remedy for climate trauma, let’s scale this advice up to encompass our listening more closely to the bioregions and ecosystems that we inhabit, and then scale it up again, taking it to include the need to listen to Gaia herself. Imagine the good that would flow from humans pondering what Gaia is trying to convey to us with this pandemic. We can see the radical humility that is inherent in this kind of respectful attitude towards the natural world. It is tantamount to letting the world shape us in her image, rather than trying so hard to shape her in ours. It is the humility of acknowledging that no, we do not control the basic powers of the universe. We are, instead, subservient to the powers of Nature.

To be indigenous is to engage within an ecological community of subjects, as the naturalist Wendell Berry puts it, rather than to compete with, exploit and oppose a world of objects, as with our current management paradigm. No matter how many times we activists tried to tell the Forest Service that “wildlife management” was an oxymoron, they just couldn’t see the living forest through the monetized trees. Instead of seeing wolves, for example, as a keystone species in riparian, montane ecosystems, they view them as a threat to privately owned cows grazed on public lands! The same with the most sacred wildlife species on Turtle Island: buffalo and bear. The management agencies don’t manage our public forests and grasslands as natural wildlands. Instead, they act like zoo-keepers and robber barons, managing them on behalf of ranchers and hunters. Indigeneity involves a true, participatory stewardship orientation in stark opposition to the

subjugating orientation of manifest destiny (management) and extraction of “natural” (i.e., commodified) resources (exploitation).

‘Listening to the plants’ can be taken in another important way, as well. Indigenous people have from time immemorial learned about their natural world in direct communion with Gaia by ceremonially ingesting entheogenic plants. Yes, Gaia has a voice. ”Entheo-“ refers to an internal, divine power of certain plants. We can think of this as ‘*entheogeneity*’ if we like.

At the same time that Gaia is in crisis, millions of people from all walks of life are feeling called to enter into sacred communion with her, mostly in supportive circles that form every night up and down the West coast here in the U.S., via sacred vines, mushrooms, and other medicinal plants whose knowledge has been gifted to us by the Indigenous cultures of the Americas. Let's face it, at this point we need all the divine intervention we can get! This sacred journeying has become so popular and respected that it is of no interest to the DEA or other law enforcement agencies, and is quickly following cannabis on the path of decriminalization and legalization.

This is not a coincidence!!

Because nearly everyone who journeys in this way, almost without exception, learns in an embodied, heart-centered way what Gaian intelligence really means, and comes away with a profoundly changed relationship towards the natural world. Given how much catching up we have to do relative to our Indigenous brothers and sisters when it comes to proper relationship with the natural world, and given that we are now in ecological emergency mode, these sacred circles need to be encouraged and acknowledged, if not honored, as a viable way of fomenting holistic indigeneity.

This significant trend of entheogenic journeying to the source is also supported by the success we are seeing in the mental health profession with

entheogen-assisted psychotherapy for those afflicted with PTSD and/or drug addiction, as well as for people facing life's final journey. And thanks to synthetic forms of entheogenic substances that cut right to the quick, such as the so-called "God molecule" 5-MeO-DMT, there is [great promise for utilizing entheogens in a traditional therapeutic setting](#). How popular would psychiatrists be if they could induce mystical experiences as part of a regular course of treatment?

“Are you feeling disembodied or disconnected from Nature? Are you feeling dissociated from the climate movement? Maybe Huachuma from San Pedro’s cactus is right for you! In shamanic and micro-doses, Huachuma has been proven for eons to make you feel on with all that is alive. Talk to your psychotherapist today. See if entheogenic treatments are right for you.”

These are the kinds of medicines we actually *need* in a time of existential climate crisis - not those more popular and spirit-numbing antidepressants, opioids, and anxiety drugs pushed on a vulnerable public by Big Pharma. Or maybe what we need is Big Pharma to start mass producing empathogens (like MDMA) and entheogens, with their commercials on the evening news promoting the more compassionate, empathic and harmonious society which would result from such a rational prescription for our true, underlying ailments.

Listen to the plants.

Biodiversity of plants and animals is clearly a core concept and should be considered the lodestone of any postmodern indigeneity. It is incumbent on all of us to become increasingly aware of our symbiotic relationships with forests, grasslands, savannas, mangroves, sagebrush, riparian habitats, and other types of ecosystems; the roles that keystone species play in shaping these landscapes; and, the importance of repairing our relationships with those focal species, turning to them as allies in our efforts to restore our local ecosystems.

To illustrate this point with just one example, there was a time when beavers were honored by settlers as nature's engineers, and it was even illegal to kill them in the new Territories. Then ranchers took over, eradicated them from most streams, and now we have widespread droughts and water shortages giving rise to ecological disruption and destruction. We all should learn to *love* beavers, and tell ranchers to knock it off!

Journalist [Ben Goldfarb](#) details some of the beaver's superpowers:

Beavers support carbon sequestration. Blue carbon is a very hot topic right now and beaver dams and habitat are big stores of blue carbon. They're fantastic pollution control agents. They're basically creating these little settling ponds where nitrates, phosphorus, heavy metals and pesticides can settle out, and that's actually guiding a lot of beaver-based restoration in the Chesapeake Bay watershed which is really impacted by agricultural inputs.

Another really big one that's become increasingly exciting as some of the peer-reviewed research has come out to support it is the role of beavers during wildfires. They create these fantastic fire refugia and firebreaks on the landscape, these wet areas where the vegetation is really lush and thus doesn't burn. This is something that beaver folks had always kind of anecdotally observed, but within the last year or two there has been some great research that proves that point. The notion that you could support safeguarding communities from wildfire by restoring beavers in the surrounding wildlands is suddenly something people are talking about, which is tremendously exciting.

Beavers are incredible agents of restoration and positive change on the landscape. They accomplish so much and prove that our efforts to restore nature are not futile, and that positive change really is possible. Beavers are a wonderful, hopeful species at a time when a lot of people need hope.

I could just have easily chosen bison, sea otters, whales or wolves to make this point. Ecologists tell us that [restoring just 20 large mammal species](#) to their historic habitats could revitalize ecosystems and boost biodiversity across almost one-quarter of the Earth's land area. This speaks to the critical importance of a core indigenous value that actually protects biodiversity during a time of accelerating extinction: ***Biophilia*** ~ “a love of life and the living world; the affinity of human beings for other life forms.”

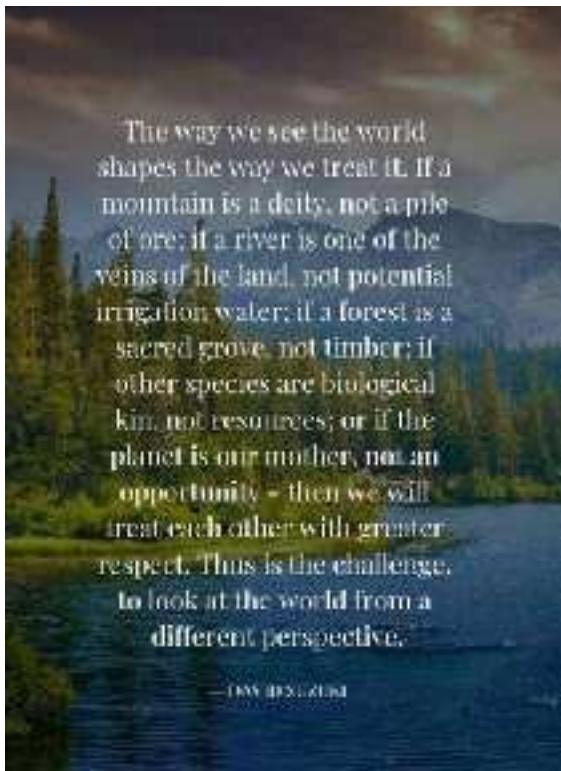
As we learn to see these shifts in orientation as personal and collective expressions of our own indigeneity, other natural alliances will begin to take shape on the land and in our communities as well - think of the positive impacts farmers' markets have had on communities as a product of the "eat local" trend. In time, the moral impetus and natural solidarity of our allied efforts will organically gain synergistic force, building the momentum needed to regenerate more natural, balanced, and functional landscapes. This is the vision behind the One Earth climate proposal for restoring biodiversity and reversing climate change, which we'll get to shortly. The point is that we need to involve rather than exclude humans from ecosystem recovery efforts, in sharp contrast to the management regime that views humans apart from nature instead of as a part of Nature.

With holistic indigeneity, humans are encouraged to learn better ways to live in community with their nonhuman relations. “Man against Nature” is the old, destructive paradigm. Human(e) Nature and holistic indigeneity are the new, regenerative constructs.

“How are we to ward off the immorality of ignorance and greed, the disease of indifference to Earth? Perhaps the answer lies in the expression of the Spirit, in words of a Sacred Nature.”
 ~ Kiowa Elder N. Scott Momaday

Significantly, as part of restoring all our relations, Robin Wall Kimmerer encourages us to consider the power of words in how we address Nature. Just as we've been learning to do in relation to shifting gender identities and intersectionality, we need to speak more mindfully of our natural environment in relational terms as we set about repairing that relationship in a natural way. Let us refrain from continuing to bad-mouth Nature as a collection of "its" and "things." Dr. Kimmerer sagely refers to this as the "*grammar of animacy*" ~ granting *beingness* to what we have heretofore thought of as living "things." Plants and animals, soils and forests, are no more things than we are:

"Saying *it* makes a living land into 'natural resources.' If a maple tree is an *it*, we can take up the chain saw. If a maple is a *her*, we think twice."



Similarly, instead of saying "there is a mountain" or "here is a river," a grammar of animacy would counsel "Mountain is there" and "River is here." The way we use words really matters, and should reflect the way we are seeing the world afresh, as a living being. Acknowledging a natural presence for natural beings places us immediately in a relational context, like the tiny figures in a Chinese scroll painting, as opposed to seeing ourselves outside of the painting, deciding how the land suits us and what we can do to it.

As the Dalai Lama likes to say, the 'self' is a linguistic construct. And quantum physics teaches us that there are no things in the world after all ~ only

relations. So Dr. Kimmerer's grammar of animacy is a way of reconstructing our 'self' in holistic relationship with the natural world. Which is urgently needed at all levels right now. This *animacy* too, then, becomes a foundational component of postmodern indigeneity, building into it the necessary bridge with Indigenous cultures and thinking that will facilitate more fruitful dialogue and collaboration.

A postmodern indigenous person might have occasion to speak generically about the planet, inclusive of us, but would never again be heard to talk about "*the earth*." That term creates a linguistic barrier by rendering her an object apart from us, as something that we have explored and conquered. Rather that we would speak respectfully, even reverently, in relation with her *being-ness*, as with referring to her as Gaia, Pachamama, Aluna, or Mother Earth.

To honor Gaia's sentience, we would even create an intentional silent space for her to fill in our discussions about the climate crisis, the biodiversity crisis, and in sharing our grief - not just inviting her to speak as a pretense, but actually *listening* for any intuitive echoes of her voice within the participants' collective psyche. By speaking and listening in this way, we academics and scientists, we policy makers and activists alike, would thereby create a cognitive and linguistic bridge for communicating with and learning from our Indigenous brothers and sisters as well, because now we would be speaking in their mother tongue, metaphorically at least, with language that includes rather than excludes the other-than-human dimension, intentionally creating a positive feedback loop that is prescriptive and ecologically constructive, rather than divisive and destructive.

The relational worldview that underlies indigeneity finds modern support in Heisenberg's startling discovery that mind and matter arise interdependently, such that physical reality and matter itself is responsive to mental intention, orientation, and interaction. Thus, quantum awareness, which substitutes a relational view of the world for our default of objectifying the world, provides a solid empirical

foundation for the development of a postmodern, holistic indigeneity. This relational awareness is made manifest to us with quantum applications like the world wide web, drawing us all into a kind of virtual hive, an ever-present manifestation of global psyche, as well as with the global economy, by which what happens in a meat market in China or a rainforest in Indonesia ripples through every American strip mall and grocery store. At the same time we are developing this new non-localized and relational awareness, of course, we're also experiencing the world as it has never existed before, due to accelerating climate chaos and biospheric trauma. So it becomes an adaptive behavior, which is natural to us.

Just as the whole world has become interconnected, in other words, and just at this time of existential threat, we are awakening individually and collectively to a felt sense of the grievous wounding of climate trauma. It feels personal to us. It is precisely because of this growing sense of interconnectivity and interdependence that so many are striving so hard to drive us all apart. But as a matter of organic necessity, they will not succeed, for the organic response to a world coming apart at the seams is for all of us to come together in a new way, in the very midst of the maelstrom we've created. The new way in which we're feeling biologically called, and being drawn together, is beginning to take root in this growing sense of holistic indigeneity, whose many seeds have been planted and well-tended by countless others for many decades now.

In truth, what I am naming here is being voiced by many others, though with different names that are subsumed by the idea of holistic indigeneity. It is Deep Ecology and the Work that Reconnects. It's the [ecological consciousness](#) that Australian ecopsychologist Glenn Albrecht posits will transform the Anthropocene into [the Symbiocene](#). It's Andy Fisher's "Ecopsychology in the Service of Life" as well as the radical interdependence of David Abram's *Spell of the Sensuous*. It's the re-enchantment of Nature evoked by Dr. Craig Chalquist's [Terrapsychology](#),

and it's the emerging, radical identity Sean Kelly predicts will initiate us into the [Gaianthropocene](#). There are many other examples like this, all wonderful epigenetic expressions of this emerging indigeneity blossoming in response to our collective spiritual crisis. Every effort, every movement that strives to bring us back into proper relationship with Mother Earth is a post-modern expression, renewal and resurrection of indigeneity. We need to own that, too.

So holistic indigeneity is both very new and very, very old. It's human nature. Say what you will about the human race, but we are nothing if not adaptive, and we have a way of rising to the occasion when pressed.

Of course, remembering that the antidote to hubris is humility, it would be a grave misunderstanding to think that by labeling it 'holistic,' this postmodern indigeneity is somehow superior to traditional Indigenous wisdom. That would be a remnant of our colonialist attitude. At most, postmodern indigeneity is additive to and congruent with Indigenous psyche, which has been around for at least 30,000 years! We're in the process of rediscovering, not reinventing, the wheel of indigeneity here, as there has always been something innately indigenous deep in our collective psyche, stretching all the way back to our common ancestors on the African savannah.

What postmodern indigeneity represents is not yet another assertion of superiority, but rather a sincere attempt to un-colonize our minds by adapting Indigenous ways of being in the world holistically to a world system that we ourselves have already broken. Holistic indigeneity represents a substitution of the kind of relational worldview Indigenous people have always held for our own outdated Western ways of thinking that developed along very different and ultimately flawed philosophical and psychological trajectories, and are no longer supported by our own sciences. We can think of it as a kind of re-Enlightenment that corrects for the philosophical errors of Descartes and Bacon.

If postmodern indigeneity is to emerge securely from a more ethical, renewed sense of shared responsibility for the climate and biosphere, it will need to be grounded in the moorings of our dominant Western civilization - like scientific (not materialist) thinking, logic, and evolution. As suggested by [educator Dr. Brad Kirshner](#), a scholar who has given serious thought to these kinds of ideas:

“[T]he question for humanity is: how to facilitate our ongoing emergence and the increasing complexity of our social world in a way that enables right relationship between different perspectives and ways of being? ... The integrated emergence of our future calls for *an integrated indigeneity*, a cosmopolitan indigeneity, an integrated nomadic cosmopolitanism...”

(I would note here that one definition of "cosmopolitanism," for those who might object to the term on its face, is "at home all over the world.")

Now, borrowing once again from Indigenous wisdom, and recognizing the urgency of the existential threats that we face, we must discuss the most vital characteristic of our emerging holistic, integrated indigeneity, which can be summed up in one loaded word: ***Reciprocity***.

Reciprocity as a Meta-Concept

I'm guessing that most people reading this will think of themselves as relatively humble - even the confident and assertive among us - and quite immunized from infection by the kind of hubris that views man as dominating nature or humans controlling the basic powers of the universe. Life in this world, after all, has a way of humbling us. But if we in the dominant culture are to begin asserting our own indigeneity in a way that is both congruent with and different from that of Indigenous people, while at the same time recognizing that ***radical humility*** is a core value we share with our respected elders, then *what can serve as a true and reliable measure of our (continuing) humility in relationship with the*

natural world? How do we guard, in other words, against the epigenetic and (engrained) cultural hubris that is the legacy we've inherited from our (mostly) European ancestors?

We carry that hubris in our genes, after all, and we've been conditioned our whole privileged lives by a competitive and repetitive consumer society. Just think of the "rugged individualist" cowboy myth that remains quite popular, when the reality of Western settlement was quite ruthless, racist, and inhumane. Or the very idea of American exceptionalism politicians seem obligated to assert, often to excuse the senseless slaughter of women and children. It's why cultural appropriation is such a problem - we're thoroughly conditioned in the capitalist world to see something new and foreign that we like, to take it, and then to claim it as our own. It's the entire foundation of the consumer culture we're immersed in.

We settlers are, in a word, *takers*. It's what we do. It's how we got to where we find ourselves now. Consider the very land that you're standing on. Taken. And that engrained, encultured sense of white entitlement is the reason my Indigenous friends have a hard time imagining a world of reconciliation, reparations, and equality between the races. Who could blame them? It is up to us to prove them wrong, not for them to prove themselves of having been worthy all along.

This is where *reciprocity* comes in, because it isn't just a correct political view, or even a core value, so much as it is a learned *attitude* that is reflective of a lived worldview. Native American psychologist and shamanic psychotherapist Leslie Gray poignantly sums up the importance of this reorientation in attitude:

“[T]o restore our personal and collective sanity we need an earth-based spirituality, to rediscover a universe of living beings intimately related: the biosphere as our family. This family has values: respect for life, harmony with nature's cycles, gratitude, balance, and above

all, reciprocity—*don't take anything without giving something back.*
This is the key.”

Reciprocity above all. To become indigenous, we must practice reciprocity. It's a moral imperative that infuses spirit and reverence into our daily practice of relationship, with or without regard to religious belief. And I mean *practice* in its literal sense, because this emphasis on reciprocity isn't really part of our culture or our social conditioning. In fact, it's rather contrary to our conditioning.

By acknowledging ourselves as coming from a long line of takers, we change the dynamic with an ethical commitment to the holistic practice of *taking-and-giving*. We rarely think of giving when we take, and we take what is given (or not) constantly in our lives. And yet to be considered indigenous to a living planet and to find our place on that planet, giving must become just as strong a *habit of mind* as our reflexive taking has become.

Every time we receive a benefit, such as a delicious, nutritious meal, driving on a paved road, turning on the internet, or getting packages delivered during a pandemic, we express our indigeneity by pausing to consider where this food or this road or this service comes from. We silently thank all those who helped bring it into our lives, from the field workers who harvest our food to the hourly employees who lay blacktop in the heat of the sun, or the garment laborers who make our clothes in some distant land. These are all gifted to us in one way or another, as we clearly benefit from their efforts in ways we have learned to take for granted, as a matter of personal entitlement.

What psychology adds to this is that people who practice an attitude of gratitude are generally more happy. In fact, intentionally exercising our 'gratitude muscles' improves our overall physical health, raises our energy levels, and has even been shown to relieve pain and fatigue for people with neuromuscular disease. See, e.g.: Seligman, M. (2002).

And, of course, we acknowledge our connection to Gaia in the meals we partake of throughout the day - the nutrients and rainfall, the plants and photosynthesis, the relatively stable climate in the growing regions. Just being more intentional in the way we give thanks for our food is a powerful way of reorienting ourselves towards reciprocity. It turns out to be a relief for us to replace our hungry, often greedy attitudes with *relational gratitude*. As described by indigenous thinker Stephen Jenkinson, reciprocity is like recognizing that, from a holistic perspective, what we receive creates a hole somewhere in the universe, and we reciprocate by feeling obligated to fill that hole with our intentions, if not by the actual act of giving back. It helps to add some small ritual act, like making offerings of water or setting a tasty morsel aside to offer to our winged relations afterward.

A beautiful expression of indigenous reciprocity is embodied in Roshi Joan Halifax's simple prayer for offering a meal:

Earth, water, fire, air, and space combine to make this food.

Numberless beings gave their lives and labor that we may eat.

May we be nourished that we may nourish life.

In this simple meal blessing, we can see earth, water, fire, air, and space.

There we see plants, soil, pollinating bees, insects, human labor, and an infinite chain of relationships.

We, too, are made up of earth, water, fire, air and space.

All of us are interconnected with the sun, moon, wind, and rain, and will someday return to the mother elements.

And all of us are also connected in the stream of basic goodness.

Let us see this food as medicine, as our connection to Earth, and enjoy it thoroughly!

We can see how adopting this more ethical way of thinking might, in time, begin to affect everything we do, exposing everything we've always taken for granted in the light of our awakening indigeneity. We begin to see with new eyes. And we can appreciate how integral reciprocity is to indigeneity. This is the shift in consciousness that is emerging, lotus like, from the muck of industrial civilization.

To our modern, conditioned sensibilities, this can perhaps sound trite, like a kind of virtue signaling. Do not be fooled by the simplicity of this gesture of giving back for everything we take — it's actually quite a radical move for someone conditioned their whole lives to be a global consumer rather than a global citizen. What would it really mean not to take anything without the intention to give something back?

Think about the things we usually don't think about, like filling up the gas tank, turning on a computer or home theatre, or even taking a glass of water from the tap after flicking on the kitchen light and peeking into the fridge. The first thing that becomes really clear is *just how much we are taking* from the world. In order to decide what and how to give back in return, we really begin to animate and give life to this idea of "all my relations" ~ we begin to perceive all the many intricate and even exquisite connections that give rise to an expansive feeling of familiar relations.

We begin the process of relating to all our relations in our mind's eye, re-animating our world with simple imagination, which helps dislodge the boring old mind that has been conditioned our whole lives to objectify everything. Again, listen to our wise elder Leslie Gray, who as a shamanic psychotherapist has a foot in both worlds, explaining why reciprocity is the most fundamental Native American value of all:

“[D]on’t take anything without giving something back. That may seem simple, but it isn’t. Had we included that value in the prevailing culture from the beginning, I dare say we would not be in the ecological mess we are in today. Reciprocity and gratitude are necessary values for us to have [in order] to be proper caretakers for this place and to use its resources well and replenish them to keep the cycle of life going... Native people have always tended the land, whether by controlled burning to avoid disastrous wildfires, or by burying fish beneath corn to regenerate the soil, or by rituals of gratitude toward Earth to reinforce behaviors of reciprocity. I believe these practices teach us about the healthiest way to be here, the healthiest attitude to have toward our home.”

Climate psychologist Merritt Juliano helpfully describes this idea of "[Emerging Reciprocity](#)" in relation to her practice of growing her own food, which is a direct form of indigeneity many of us who’ve sunk our fingers into the soil are already familiar with:

“Most of us in the modern world have either passively or actively participated in the destructive practice of industrial agriculture. The difference between my backyard husbandry and industrial agriculture, however, is one of relationship. Acknowledging this relationship and interdependency gives rise to overwhelming gratitude for all that I take from the other-than-human without permission, and all that we need as a species to endure... There is no longer a relationship between us and that which we depend on. This is in stark contrast to indigenous cultures who hold deep respect for the land they inhabit, as well as the plants and animals they consume... There is a felt experience of connection as I greet them in the mornings and hold space for reciprocity, exchanging what was once a dark and lonely one way path of consumption for a rich and lively two way pathway of gratitude and care.”

And here is a good place to challenge everyone who has the space to either start a garden or re-consecrate their existing garden plot as a “climate garden,” a

place to daily and seasonally cultivate indigeneity in relation to the whole Earth. As we will see later in this chapter, this kind of indigenous cultivation and conscious relationship with our local ecosystems - up to and including agro-forestry and various forms of regenerative agriculture - will necessarily become the wave of the future, as it is a matter of shared responsibility for all of us to come back into relationship with the natural world in a way that collectively draws carbon down from the atmosphere. When it finally dawns on us collectively that this is the only way to actually turn this climate Titanic around, then we will see that there is a role for all of us to play in the cultivation of this neo-indigenous, ecological culture. In much the same spirit of the “Victory Gardens” that became so popular in support of the allied efforts to prevail in WWII, we should now popularize “Gaia Gardens” and “Climate Gardens” as individual expressions of our collective commitment to reorient ourselves towards Nature.

To cultivate indigeneity by sinking our fingers into the soil is a *naturally* humbling mindfulness practice. The word “human” is derived from the Latin word *humus*, “the dark organic material in the soils, produced by the decomposition of vegetable or animal matter [that is] essential to the fertility of the earth.” In stark contrast to the hubris of mowing a lawn of Kentucky bluegrass, when we are tending our gardens, we naturally give thanks for the nutrients in the soil which are taken up by the vegetables we grow, and then into our bodies, all due to the generosity of the sun, wind, and clouds, and then taken up in our own bodies in order that we may live. The microbes we absorb by handling soil (don’t wear gloves!) are more effective anti-depressants than pharmaceuticals are. There must be a good reason for that!

What is good for Gaia is good for us, and what is good for us is good for Gaia. Gaia literally holds the cure for our climate crisis. As fitness guru Aubrey Marcus reminds us:

“You are comprised of: 84 minerals, 23 Elements, and 8 gallons of water spread across 38 trillion cells. You have been built up from nothing by the spare parts of the Earth you have consumed... You are recycled butterflies, plants, rocks, streams, firewood, wolf fur, and shark teeth, broken down to their smallest parts and rebuilt into our planet’s most complex living thing. You are not living on Earth. You are Earth.”

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify!

Contemporary philosopher [Cynthia Kaufman](#) asks:

“Is it possible to build a society where people have enough to live well and also feel that they have enough? Or are we doomed as a species to stay on the hedonic treadmill that keeps us wanting more consumer goods, even as we destroy the natural world to get those things? Are we doomed to make ourselves miserable trying to make ourselves happy?”

Reciprocity, radical humility, and simplicity could be called the holy trinity of postmodern indigeneity. A key component of reciprocity is to take only what we need - a rather foreign and dangerous idea in a consumer society! Of course, from a place of shared responsibility, each of us is responsible for distinguishing wants from needs, and conspicuous consumption from wise use. But what is obvious is that we’ve become accustomed to living quite beyond our means, and a refined sense of shared responsibility should give rise, mindfully, to a moral obligation to downsize our lives.

Simplifying our lives should not be viewed as a deprivation, either. The truth we all should’ve learned by now is that things don’t make us any more happy than clutter, complications, endless distractions, or the pressure to earn enough money to support all of our unnecessary entanglements with them do. Quite the contrary, in fact. Ask anyone who has voluntarily downsized their lives if they are not happier with their simpler lives. This is not a new revelation. When the Buddha was asked to tutor a king, one of the simpler truths he imparted was that the

greatest wealth of all is to be content. The corollary is that the more we have, the less content we become. It is also proven that the more choices we have, the less satisfied we are with our choice. In my own personal experience, I have never really known a rich person who I would trade places with. In other words, the consumer society is built on a lie.

What is desperately needed is competition and peer pressure in the process of simplification, to elevate the value of simple living, motivated both by a desire to reduce our carbon footprint during a time of climate emergency *and* to become more happy and content with our lives. Even as the world at large continues to unravel, there will still be contentment in knowing that we are doing our part. With the advent of unnatural weather, wildfires, and flooding, we're all becoming much more aware of the long-term consequences of our relatively extravagant lifestyles. How is it possible, then, to be happy and content in our conspicuous excess knowing that the cumulative result is widespread death, extinction, and misery?!?

As consumers, we have the power individually and collectively to demand less, not more. To demand products that last, not those that are built to be replaced every year or two. And, of course, at the systemic level we must advocate for more equality. The obscene wealth gap, in the U.S. especially, has made a mockery of the American Dream, and produces nothing but toil and trouble for all concerned. Even the wealthy become increasingly unhappy with increases in the wealth gap, as we see most plainly with a celebrity culture and plutocratic government.

Does Donald Trump seem like a happy human being to you?

So what would enlightened selfishness look like? Consider the logic of "[Consumerism, Inequality and the Climate Crisis](#)" from Dr. Kaufman:

"Having important social decisions be driven by insatiability and profit is leading to environmental devastation, poverty, and low levels of happiness. Making a shift toward a society that works for people and

the rest of nature involves freeing people from the pulls that tie them to a need for more.”

So *of course* downsizing our home is the way to go. *Of course* going solar, and replacing our lawns with *Gaia Gardens* that produce food for our families and friends, flowers for the bees, milkweed for butterflies, bird baths and squirrel feeders will make us happier. And of course every neighborhood without yards should have a community garden, even if on the roofs of tenement houses. Of course trading in our gas guzzlers for EVs, bikes, using (improved) public transport, curtailing our time on social media, reading real books again, learning permaculture and educating ourselves about the ecosystems we inhabit, working fewer hours, freeing ourselves from the crushing weight of consumer debt... *of course* these and related efforts will increase our happiness quotient and improve the quality of our lives in the short term. And collectively, they will improve the quality of our children’s and grandchildren’s lives in the long term.

Again, what is stopping us? A lack of shared responsibility for the shared consequences of our shared lifestyle on a planet we share with all other beings.

It’s obscene, really. Shameless. We can do so much better.

So in the short term, a program of indigeneity based on simplicity, radical humility and reciprocity will make us more happy - or at the very least, less unhappy. Less depressed and demoralized (an apt term). And in the long term, such a course of action makes sense in terms of what social scientist Jem Bendell calls “positive deep adaptation.” Simplifying our lives is an appropriate response to the dislocation we know is coming from climate chaos. When we begin to downsize and simplify our lives, finding pleasure once again in the simple things of life (like making a salad from ingredients we’ve grown ourselves), we have the deep consolation of knowing that we are coming back into proper relationship with Gaia during her time of crisis.

That is the heart of indigeneity. And especially as we build or become part of existing communities of people who are reforming their lives in similar ways, there is some peace of mind that comes from knowing that the connections we are building are sturdy, time-tested and resilient, and that our chances of being sustained and supported, even as the situation in the world at large continues to deteriorate, are improving. We feel a little less vulnerable. We're not triggered as easily as we were before we embraced a simpler life. We learn to self-regulate in ways that are coherent with Gaia's own self-regulating rhythms.

Indigeneity is the natural remedy and spiritual elixir for climate trauma. It permits the kind of universal solidarity that easily translated into political actions. This is how we can come back into proper relationship with the natural world.

Systemically. In community. Mindfully, with Gaian awareness. With integrity. Sadly, it will not happen in time to save all the species that need to be saved, and we will still need to grieve the losses to come. But this shift is already happening. As we will see after a brief summation of the core values we have now explored here.

A Shared Ethical Commitment to Holistic Indigeneity

So in summation, here are the core values of the postmodern, holistic indigeneity that will, in time, regenerate the world in the Symbiocene or Gaianthropocene era:

Shared responsibility

- for the global climate;
- for our bioregions; and,
- for our locally inhabited ecosystems.

Radical Humility

- Empathy for the other-than-human world;
- Contrition over genocide of First Peoples;
- Reparations for broken treaties, stolen lands, colonial injustices.

Relational orientation

- All our/my relations;
- Quantum worldview;
- Symbiotic/empathic human nature.

Holism

- Integral beings of Gaia's biosphere;
- Inward orientation from space vs. outward orientation of place;
- Communion of subjects vs. competition among objects.

Biophilia

- "a love of life and the living world"
- "the affinity of human beings for other life forms"
- Symbiotic relationship with biosphere;
- Promotion of keystone species as reparation for biodiversity crisis.

Entheogeneity

- Communing with Gaia via sacred plants;
- Participating in Sacred Circles;
- Increasing psychotherapeutic applications.

Animacy and literacy

- Granting *being*-ness to what we have heretofore thought of as living things;
- Natural Life Source vs. natural resources;
- Acknowledging the presence of natural beings with our words.

Reciprocity

- No taking without giving;
- Asking forgiveness (for *givenness* from beings)
- Adopting an attitude of gratitude.

Simplicity

- take only what we need;
- A lifestyle choice;
- More happy!



“All of us are indigenous members of Earth Community equally - there is no higher placement of a master over another - and it is high time for all of us to become Indigenous again.”

~ Vandana Shiva

Indigenous Earth::The One Earth Climate Proposal

In this chapter, I have repeatedly contended that we effectively have no choice now but to become indigenous if we are to resolve our collective climate trauma in a way that reconciles us with Nature and plots a path of climate recovery. This is not mere speculation on my part. It's actually sound science. It is already too late to presume that by replacing fossil fuels with clean energy sources we can stop global warming. As George Monbiot put it in his eulogy to COP26:

The end of fossil fuels will not, by itself, prevent the extinction crisis, the deforestation crisis, the soils crisis, the freshwater crisis, the consumption crisis, the waste crisis; the crisis of smashing and grabbing, accumulating and discarding that will destroy our prospects and much of the rest of life on Earth.

Even if we stopped burning all fossil fuels tomorrow or in 2030, the climate would continue to warm. And of course, as we all know, we are not going to stop burning fossil fuels in 2030. It will reasonably take us until 2050 or longer to convert the world's energy system to some combination of solar, wind, hydroelectric and nuclear power (I abhor nuclear power as presently constituted, but am cognizant of recent advances in [clean nuclear fusion](#)).

The reason this will not be enough is a matter of physics and land use. There is simply too much carbon in the atmosphere already, and Gaia's natural ability to absorb carbon has been dramatically crippled by the anthropogenic changes we've made to the landscapes, beginning with conversion of forests to mono-crops that depend on fertilizers and pesticides to sustain yields. This wholesale destruction and degradation of habitats and soils has given rise to the other existential crisis - the biodiversity crisis. And because Nature is Nature, the only way we can resolve the climate crisis is by solving the biodiversity crisis.

The good news is that [we know how to do this](#). The takeaway is that whether we do this now or later will determine what and what does not survive the Anthropocene. And the only way the solution to the biodiversity crisis has a chance to succeed sooner rather than later is if parochial attitudes change to reflect the core values of indigeneity outlined above. It is a matter of when, not if. The longer we wait, the more difficult it will become.

A new kind of rational political movement is emerging with the ascendance of Extinction Rebellion, the Sunrise Movement, AOC and Greta Thunberg, one that is being led by women - and especially BIPOC women - ascending to power who are determined to take the radical steps that are called for by the nature of this crisis. As if in response to the call of wise women in politics, professionals in the streets, and children on strike, some revolutionary scientific thinking, decades in the making, is also emerging right now, in the run-up to the adoption of new international biodiversity conventions. Leading scientists are proposing an exciting new strategy that could compensate for the inadequacies of the Paris Accords.

This new science makes it astonishingly clear that our greatest potential ally in reversing climate change is Gaia herself. Rather than having to geo-engineer our way out of this crisis with a Pandora's box of hubristic and unproven technologies, which are guaranteed to have unintended consequences, all we actually need to do is to work with the natural world to unleash her unlimited potential to capture and recycle carbon from the atmosphere. The bonus for doing so is that, if we follow the leaders of this new ecological and regenerative approach, we ourselves will become healthier in the transition, and most other species will benefit as well, potentially even halting the Sixth Great Extinction in its tracks.

The Green New Deal is just a prototype or legislative vehicle for climate solutions that are already emerging from the ground-up. The youth-led Sunrise Movement may have changed politics forever by storming Speaker Nancy Pelosi's

office in November of 2018, demanding - along with their fearless new leader-elect from Standing Rock, the Notorious AOC - that Congress enact a Green New Deal. As Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts remarked when he introduced a GND resolution with AOC during the following session of Congress, it seemed appropriate that the Sunrise Movement's "national tour is beginning right here in Boston [] because we are the city of revolutions." As I write, many of the core provisions of the GND had been proposed in the Democrats' \$3.5T reconciliation package, though it now appears it will require more gains in the 2022 midterms before it becomes law.

While still nascent, the beauty of the Green New Deal in America and Extinction Rebellion in Europe lies in the utter simplicity and unambiguous morality of their demands: tell the truth; keep it in the ground; take action to decarbonize our economy now; go beyond politics; and, end economic inequality. It is a framework, in other words, for rebuilding society to meet the demands of the climate crisis itself, thus proving itself worthy of the "New Deal" moniker. One of the Five Freedoms that underpin this global framework for climate justice is the "freedom to live" based on the premise that "[t]here is enough on our Earth for people everywhere to have what they need to live well."

Again, from the perspective of a shared responsibility ethic, we can appreciate the importance of cultivating holistic indigeneity - and in particular, the practice of reciprocity - by which the more privileged citizens of the world learn to only take what we need in every area of our life. The adage never grows old: to live simply, so that others may simply live. That is indigeneity expressed beautifully.

This may seem like an absurd prospect to those who've been brainwashed by the corporate culture of capitalism, which favors instead an "every man for himself" mentality - with women and children last. But to see the truth in the

assertion of a fundamental freedom to live, we need only consider that we could feed the entire world population *7X over* if we just grew crops for people instead of cows. In other words, we'd be able to return vast croplands to habitats in areas that retain high ecological potential, reversing the trend towards extinction and dewatering landscapes in the process. Becoming vegetarian or vegan, or at least avoiding factory farmed meats (e.g., hunting), is thus one of the most radical expressions of holistic indigeneity available to us, and increasingly popular with younger people especially.

This would also free up lands for reparations in the Land-back Movement. While many people reduce the climate and biodiversity crises down to overpopulation, the truth is that, as a matter of science, it isn't 8-10 billion people that is too much for Earth to support. Rather, it's the *70 billion factory-farmed animals* that are slaughtered each year, with half the planet's arable land required to support them, that have wiped out over [80% of all wildlife and half of all vegetation](#) in my lifetime.

It is against these emerging demands for truth and life that two truly revolutionary scientific movements are co-emerging: the "rules of life" and the "planetary diet" movements. Taken together with the Paris Accords, and incorporated into the framework of a flourishing climate justice movement, we can quickly arrive at a *Global Green New Deal* - beginning with the reformulation of the U.N.'s (currently expired) Biodiversity Conventions. To distinguish a Global Green New Deal from the American version, let's just call it a "Natural New Deal" here. The logic of this label will become quite clear by considering how closely these two new scientific developments are linked, as will the crucial roles to be played by cultivating a sense of shared responsibility and holistic indigeneity .

As already stated, it is because of our unconscionable delay in responding to the climate crisis that simply phasing out fossil fuels will not be enough for

civilization to continue. And when it comes to drawing down CO₂ from the atmosphere, ecology trumps technology:

“The cheapest, most effective way to suck greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere is to rely on nature. Nature does this for free. Trees, coral reefs and the ocean itself are much better vehicles for removing greenhouse gases than anything engineers have ever invented. And it doesn’t cost us anything, except to protect it.”

This according to no less an expert than Eric Dinerstein, one of the architects of the ambitious *Global Deal for Nature* first announced in the journal *Science Advances* in 2019 by an international team of scientists. As Newsweek’s science reporter [Aristros Georgiou summarizes](#) it, their proposal “aims to help ensure that climate targets are met while also conserving the Earth’s species.”

To fully appreciate the compelling force of this Natural New Deal, it is crucial to appreciate the fruit of a related decades-long effort by scientists from various disciplines trying to understand the rules for life here on planet Earth. In a [2019 documentary](#) based on the book *The Serengeti Rules: The Quest to Discover How Life Works and Why It Matters* (2017), we learn that the most effective way to reverse humankind’s heavy handprints on the natural world, and to heal entire ecosystems in a relatively brief span, is to simply identify the keystone species for any given ecosystem, recover their populations, and permit them to recolonize as much of their range as possible. By taking this kind of local action on a global scale, we can help reverse climate trends as well.

Even with a plant-eating keystone species like the wildebeest, this kind of targeted population recovery has a cascading effect on all life throughout the ecosystem that happens to *include revegetation* – otherwise known as “carbon capture” or “climate [drawdown](#),” because plants suck up CO₂ and turn it into carbon and oxygen. This keystone carbon effect is as true for riverine ecosystems

in Yellowstone – where an unanticipated boon on the reintroduction of wolves was that stream side vegetation rebounded with elk afraid to linger in easy predation zones, greatly benefiting birds and fish – and for kelp forests along the Pacific coast (which disappear when otters are removed) as it is the broad savanna of the Serengeti. Similarly, as already noted, [beavers can become the solution](#) to an increasingly arid Western U.S., creating new habitats for many other species while dramatically increasing the moisture retention of vast landscapes.

Recent discoveries have found that whales could be a YUGE ally in climate recovery as well. [One study](#) suggests that every year, sperm whales help sequester as much carbon as 694 acres of U.S. forests do. Who needs a trillion trees when a million whales could do the trick? Or six million bison across the vast, mostly fallow and desiccated, grasslands of the Midwest?

Bison, a proxy for Indian genocide but now our national mammal, once numbered 60 million. Thundering herds spanned the North America's Central Grasslands across what are today tribal lands, public lands and private ranches, stretching from Canada to Mexico, including the [Buffalo Commons](#) of the Great Plains states. There are still approximately [500 million acres](#) of these degraded grasslands which, if restored ecologically, could draw down ***twice as much carbon annually as currently emitted by the U.S.***, the world's largest greenhouse gas producer.



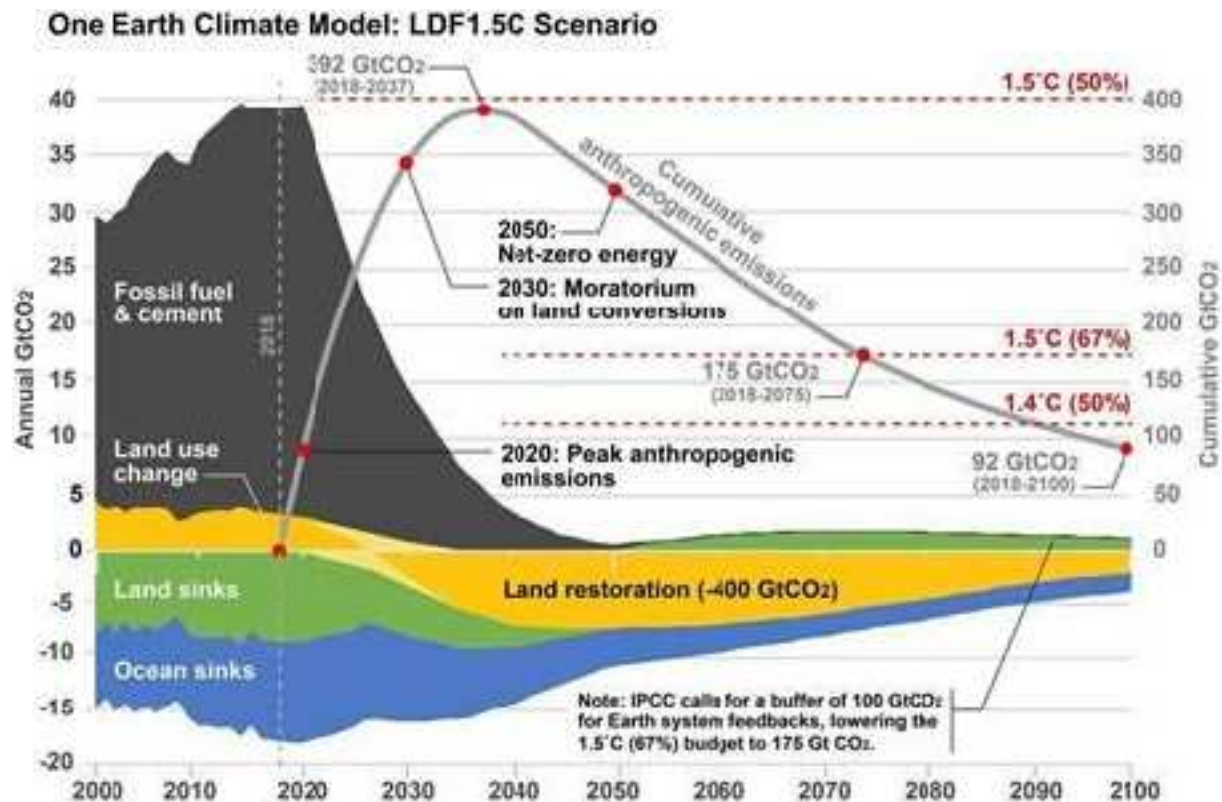
How dramatic is that? And that's just one keystone species - though perhaps the most charismatic here on Turtle Island. And since the heroic, Indigenous

inspired and led [Buffalo Field Campaign](#) succeeded in forcing public lands agencies to allow bison back onto their Spring migration and calving grounds west of Yellowstone National Park in Montana, private home owners have been more than happy to cohabit residential areas with these gentle giants. The cascading ecological benefits of having bison recolonize their former range would include restored sage grouse populations - sagebrush being the "mother of all habitats" in North America from a biodiversity standpoint - along with prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, burrowing owls, and a host of other species and plant biomes. BFC's co-founder (along with Rosalie Little Thunder) and long time coordinator Mike Mease has been telling people for years that bison up and down the front range of the Rockies would create a new Serengeti — if we only would let them.

As *The Serengeti Rules* of life reveal, the slow recovery of wildebeest populations over the last several decades, following the removal of a livestock pathogen that had drastically reduced their numbers, has benefited all other species, both predators and prey, and counter-intuitively (as they are herbivores) resulted in a dramatic increase of forests and grasslands that had become relatively scarce and more arid in the wildebeest's absence. Prior to this discovery, it was always presumed that top predators were the keystone species. But in the Serengeti the wildebeest populations turned out to control top predators populations, not the other way around.

The Global Deal for Nature represents a comprehensive approach to the climate and biodiversity crises. Based upon an idea that originated with E.O. Wilson's "half-Earth proposal," the Global Deal superimposes 840 eco-regions on the globe, proposing full protection of the 30% of the planet that is biologically intact by 2030, providing a kind of seed-source of terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats – with another 20% to become the focus of climate stabilization efforts to reduce land-based climate impacts. Getting from 30% to 50% is crucial

to offsetting the carbon overload that is resulting from the delayed implementation of the Paris Accords, as is illustrated in the following graphic:



As already indicated, the 30% reserves require only formal recognition and protection of existing, intact (though under assault) eco-regions, both marine and terrestrial, and many countries are already taking actions along those lines. This is a realistic, feasible first step. The other 20% will apply to already developed areas, creating climate stabilization zones where the rules of life learned from the Serengeti, Yellowstone, and subsequently many other areas of the world can guide ecological recovery and the anticipated CO₂ drawdown.

Efforts are already underway that would support such transitions. For example, ecologists are already identifying grassland areas that could be recovered with the addition of bison to the lands, working with local tribal interests to help restore the kind of symbiotic relationship between humans and buffalo that existed for tens of thousands of years before the Indian Wars of the late 19th Century.

While the idea of humans supporting keystone species may seem attractive on paper, anyone who has lived in the West for long knows that the parochial attitudes that resulted in the near complete extermination of bison, wolves, prairie dogs, beavers and other wildlife species that were so abundant when Lewis & Clark first floated up the Missouri River to Montana still persist. Those attitudes are what prompted a former boss and hero of mine, Jon Marvel, to persistently point out that what ranchers defend as their 'way of life' is, in honest truth, a 'way of death' by which they mercilessly eliminate any critter they can't monetize, or that competes somehow with those they can (e.g., prairie dog holes and beaver dams present hazards to cows and pasture).

This is the whole point of asserting that a new kind of indigeneity that relates to nature more holistically will be required for our civilization to survive increasing levels of climate chaos. Fortunately, however, attitudes *are* slowly changing, and there is now even a plan in place to accelerate this sea change in how we relate to our local ecosystems and the species that are meant to inhabit them along with us. The G20 recently agreed to fund and implement a “[UNESCO Earth Network](#)” initiative that is breathtaking in scope. Beginning with World Heritage Sites, this global training and education initiative will establish a “network of experts [who] will support capacity for ecosystem management and restoration in UNESCO sites, adaptation of ecosystems to the effects of climate change and support for youth and local communities,” all in support of attaining the 30/30 goal.

A “[World Heritage Site](#),” of which there are currently 1154, is an area of unique ecological (or cultural) significance accorded legal protection by an international convention administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). There are 24 such sites in the U.S., including jewels like Yellowstone, Glacier and Yosemite National Parks.

Reaching out and educating the youth in these areas is a great strategy for beginning to change parochial attitudes and, thus, the way we relate to our local ecosystems. But this initiative is not just limited to the UNESCO sites - that's just the starting point. The intention is ***“to sensitize and train 100% of the world's population to environmental challenges, so that each individual is able to become a guardian of our Earth.”***

Yes, you read that right! The intent is to make us all Earth guardians!

According to UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, in her 2021 message to the G20 Summit :

“We have a unique opportunity to draw inspiration from the Network of sites designated by UNESCO *to rethink our relationship with nature*. Supporting and training youth in ecosystem restoration and conservation, in the transmission of a living natural and cultural heritage, is essential.”

And when the kids show real promise, they will be supported with scholarships and other opportunities to take leadership roles in their communities.

Brilliant! That's how you change parochial attitudes over time.

I'm guessing you're probably hearing of this for the first time, as it was not picked up by our pandemic-obsessed media, and it is not clickbait like “end of the world” stories and “eco-anxiety” tropes. In spite of that lack of notoriety, this is a truly revolutionary initiative, and it's well suited to addressing the existential crisis we are facing. There have already been plenty of [successful pilot projects](#), as well, so this is something that can be scaled up as quickly as funding permits.

This just happens to be the most encouraging *political* news I've come across in all my time researching and following the climate crisis, beginning in the 1980s. And it is being put into place in advance of the adoption of the new biodiversity conventions, which have been postponed once again due to pandemic concerns. So when the world finally gets around to adopting the One Earth Climate Proposal, or

something along those lines, and when everyone commits to the 30/30 and 50/50 benchmarks, concerned scientists will already have a running start.

When I say this is the most encouraging political initiative that I've seen to date, it's because this is the first global initiative that actually addresses *the social disease* that is afflicting us - our dysfunctional relationship with Gaia - rather than just endlessly addressing the proliferating symptoms of our malady. And we live in a youth-obsessed culture. So if you want to change the culture of dissociation from Nature, a culture that wants to sacrifice every wild creature on the altar of animal husbandry, what better way to begin than by reaching out to, educating and empowering our young people about the ecosystems they inhabit?

Another major obstacle to the kind of stabilization and recovery effort that will be required to offset the slow pace of transforming our energy system is our existing, outdated industrial agriculture regime. Our pervasive crops-for-cows monoculture, which relies on harmful levels of fertilizer, and our soil-killing chemicals have managed to crowd out wildlife on half the planet's arable lands in a relatively short span of time. About a third of the topsoil has already been degraded worldwide, and according to the [UN Food and Agriculture Office](#), if current rates of degradation continue all of the world's topsoil could be gone by 2075.

Fortunately, thanks to the compassionate genius of Vandana Shiva's "[Soil not Oil](#)" campaign, as well as her leadership in founding the visionary NGO [Regeneration International](#), there is a growing grassroots transition towards agro-ecology and other soil and climate friendly solutions to our existential crisis. Unfortunately, they are forced to do battle with the giant agribusiness conglomerates who, like fossil fuel companies, have long long had a stranglehold on politicians and political agencies. They need more than our help. They need us to become allies, which is yet another way of expressing our holistic indigeneity.

As [Dr. Brad Kirshner](#) puts it:

As we innovate to integrate our indigenous humanity, we must tap into our agricultural roots to foster a sustainable future: decentralized, small scale, sustainable organic farming, prioritized toward the health of soil and water is imperative. But as individuals we also have much more to do. We can't all be farmers, and we don't have to be. We need a vision and path for growth that is rooted in land and community, yet fluid, decentralized, and changing over time.

The freedom to live is relevant here, too. It's up to climate-conscious consumers to demand a healthy, earth-nurturing food supply, favoring local farmers markets and organic produce in everything we buy - which is easier now than it has ever been. We must be indigenous in the way we shop and eat, as food is our umbilical connection to Mother Nature. Already, millions of us are choosing every year to [change our diets](#) in response to the everyday trauma we feel in our gut. And plant-based meats are now being made that taste very much like meat, thanks to the breakthrough with the blood of beets!

This is a big deal, because I've learned the hard way that eating meat in this culture is a religiously engrained sentiment. Most Americans will react more emotionally and self-righteously to having their meat-eating habits questioned than they will if you question their belief in God! And I find this to be true across the political spectrum. When you consider that most of the world's major religions started out as rules about animal sacrifices and ways of preparing meat, or strictures against eating certain kinds of meat, these religious attitudes are maybe not that surprising.

It's really encouraging that young people are much more amenable to these kinds of healthy lifestyle changes, but there are a whole lot of baby boomers out there who are still quite attached to the diet they've grown up with. Listen, Boomers: according to [one estimate](#), a *single hamburger patty* requires 14.6

gallons of water, 13.5 pounds of feed, and 64.5 square feet of land to produce, and contributes 4 pounds of carbon dioxide and 0.13 pounds of methane to the atmosphere. Researchers at the [World Bank Group](#) estimate that intensive livestock production is the largest single contributing factor to the climate crisis. So kudos to Burger King and other fast food giants for introducing meatless alternatives, and I'm all in favor of laboratory grown meat as well. This is not a religious issue for me or for most of the younger generations - it's a survival issue.

According to a [report from an international commission](#) of experts published in the medical journal *Lancet*, we can feed every human being on the planet today a healthy diet *without having a negative impact on the environment*. But to do so “a global transformation of the food system is urgently needed.” So a critical point to make here is that we can and should multiply the benefits of climate-responsive dietary choices by appealing to the more selfish interests of those who are not motivated to change their diets in order to save the planet. At the very least, we need to persuade them to eat meat-substitutes. It shouldn't be that hard.

Healthwise, meat-based diets turn out to be a bigger killer than tobacco, which probably has more to do with the way meat is produced than anything else. Even so-called “grass fed” cows end up at factory farms getting pumped up with chemicals before they are slaughtered (never mind the ecological damage they wreak on public lands). If we all changed our diets to a more healthy, plant-based, whole foods cornucopia, we would prevent *20% of adult deaths per year*, saving over 10 million lives annually.

Oh, *is that all?* Averting more than a Holocaust's worth of dietary carnage every year?

“A global shift to a plant-based diet is a win-win for both human health and the environment,” Dr. Neal Barnard, president of the [Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine](#), told [ABC News](#). “Animal products are not only major

drivers of our planet’s top killers — like heart disease and obesity — but they’re also major drivers of what’s killing the planet itself: climate change, land use, water use, and air and water pollution.” Looking at the vast potential contained within this problem, Elizabeth Kuchinich, the policy director for the [Center for Food Safety](#) in Washington, DC (and wife of former Ohio Congressman Dennis Kuchinich), points out that “recent data from farming systems and pasture trials around the globe show that [regenerative organic agriculture] could sequester more than 100 percent of *current* annual CO2 emissions.”

So there you have it – the solution to the climate crisis is staring at us right in the mirror! Armed with this knowledge, why *wouldn't* we change the way we feed our families? Put all of this together, and you get a:

Natural New Deal for Planet Earth:

- **Tell the Truth:** It is [Climate Trauma](#), not ‘change,’ and we are in a state of emergency more pressing than world war;
- **End subsidies** for fossil fuels, industrialized agriculture, and industrial fishing, while encouraging healthy, whole-foods diets with tobacco-like ad campaigns;
- **Keep it in the ground** – a global ban on fossil fuels exploration and extraction is long overdue;
- Subsidize **alternative energy** sources and research;
- Adopt the Global Deal for Nature into the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, and tether compliance of the Convention to the **Paris Accords**;
- **Boycott factory farm meat** (over 90% of all meat), demand that fast food restaurants phase out meats with plant-based burgers and lab-grown meats;
- Bring pressure on governments to aggressively convert industrial/chemical agriculture to **regenerative organic agriculture**;

- **Ban industrial fishing** with a view towards reviving small, *sustainable* fishing operations, and begin removing plastics from the oceans as quickly as possible by whatever means necessary;
- Observe the Serengeti **Rules of Life** by reintroducing and/or reviving **keystone species** around the world with local support and expertise (e.g., for my ecoregion, that means bringing back bison on grasslands to restore the vast prairie lands where industrial monoculture farms now dominate, while restoring small farmers with regenerative programs);
- Upscale the **Earth Guardian UNESCO** ecosystem education and outreach program as quickly as feasible.

Make it so! We have all the solutions we need not only to survive the coming ecopalypse, but to reverse global warming, end the 6th Great Extinction, and thrive in a new, ecological global culture. To accomplish this, we must all become indigenous to Earth.

This ecological consciousness, which reconnects our idea of what it means to be human to our home planet, our local eco-region, and Indigenous (earth-based) wisdom, and which builds universal solidarity in a spiritual way, without regard to religious differences, is at the heart of the quantum shift that is now occurring in response to our global climate crisis. All that is required, really, is for enough of us “Earth Guardians” to see this natural healing potential, to learn to view the world in terms of relations and not things, to express this natural worldview in compassionate ways in our communities and in our culture, and to demand this from our political leaders as our natural birthright. This kind of quantum climate activism, as expressed in our own unique development of global indigeneity, is something each of us can do right now that will resonate non-locally around the world.

At 7-going-on-8 Billion, we humans are now meant to become Earth's *uber*-keystone species in this, the Gaianthropocene epoch. As activist David Suzuki says, "In a world of more than seven billion people, each of us is a drop in the bucket. But with enough drops, we can fill any bucket." By accepting shared responsibility for the terminal state of our home planet, and by elevating our human nature over our warring nature, in time we can all thrive and so can all life. It's the only *humane* alternative. By continuing to avoid the moral imperatives of the climate crisis, by contrast, we will surely perish.

Fifty years ago, humankind witnessed Earth rising over the moon's barren horizon. In that moment, we realized she is alive. Now it is time for us to rise up and meet her on her own terms.

She is calling us home.



"You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith, and hope. In such an event, courage is the authentic form taken by love" (Thomas Merton).