

In the beginning the world was whole, and beauty prevailed . . .





Feigning himself Lord Man, he grew ever-more clever. He learned to gather and burn fossil fuels made by ancient geological forces.



Praise was sung incessantly to the new god, Growth.



Believing the self-deception that his kind was sovereign over the others, he taught his children that the Earth had been made for Man's use and profit.



He no longer recognized his neighbors in the community of life, instead calling them "natural resources."



Every day the Earth became poorer. Bit by bit, it was transformed by Lord Man's numbers and actions.



The seas were emptied of fish and filled with garbage.



When the feverish Earth cried out, sending furies to communicate her distress,



Lord Man ignored her sickness until it could no longer be denied.



Slowly, the scales began to fall from his eyes when he saw famine ravage the land.



When he saw precious sources of freshwater disappear.



When the longing that gnawed on his spirit made him recall so many creatures that had passed into oblivion.



Seeing the effects of his hubris, he began to wonder if his empire was secure.

HUMAN TIDE



It is through the sheer mass of a mass society, not simply from malevolence, that the rising human tide has become deadly to the rest of life. The collective weight of a bloated humanity has dire ecological and social consequences. Every pressing problem, from poverty and malnutrition to biodiversity loss and climate change, is linked to human numbers and behavior. In aggregate, the prosaic actions of people—eating, manufacturing, polluting, shopping, warring—have made our species the functional equivalent of a geological force, able to affect even the global life support systems and climate in which our species evolved.

FEEDING FRENZY



To live, every creature must eat. Supplying the food needs of 7 billion people has proven elusive thus far, despite dramatic intensification of agricultural production in the last century. The aggregate "footprint" of agriculture is massive: United Nations data suggest that some 5 billion hectares (more than 19 million square miles) of Earth's land surface are used for croplands and livestock grazing. Despite that huge area converted from wild habitat to feed humankind, nearly a billion people are hungry and another billion persist tenuously, where a small shift in their circumstances would put them at risk of starvation. Across the globe, traditional village-scale agriculture—typically diversified and for local consumption—is being displaced by industrial monocultures grown for the export market. Irrigation is depleting aquifers and dewatering rivers. Livestock production is increasingly dominated by animal factories, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), which are an ecological and ethical tragedy.



We are slaves in the sense that we depend for our daily survival upon an expand-or-expire agro-industrial empire—a crackpot machine—that the specialists cannot comprehend and the managers cannot manage. Which is, furthermore, devouring world resources at an exponential rate. —Edward Abbey

Why should we tolerate a diet of weak poisons, a home in insipid surroundings, a circle of acquaintances who are not quite our enemies, the noise of motors with just enough relief to prevent insanity? Who would want to live in a world which is just not quite fatal? —Rachel Carson



Despite the industry's spin, CAFOs [concentrated animal feeding operations] are not the only way to raise livestock and poultry. Thousands of farmers and ranchers integrate crop production, pastures, or forages with livestock and poultry to balance nutrients within their operations and minimize off-farm pollution through conservation practices and land management. ... Yet these sustainable producers, who must compete with factory farms for market share, receive comparatively little or no public funding for their sound management practices. —Martha Noble





The principle of confinement in so-called animal science is derived from the industrial version of efficiency. The designers of animal factories appear to have had in mind the example of concentration camps or prisons, the aim of which is to house and feed the greatest numbers in the smallest space at the least expense of money, labor, and attention. To subject innocent creatures to such treatment has long been recognized as heartless. Animal factories make an economic virtue of heartlessness toward domestic animals, to which we humans owe instead a large debt of respect and gratitude. —Wendell Berry

The billions of animals that are slaughtered and disassembled each year throughout the factory farm system are viewed as little more than profitable commodities and production units. . . . This mechanistic mindset about farm animals is even encoded in our laws. The important protections against cruelty and mistreatment in our federal Animal Welfare Act apply to pets, exhibition animals, and research animals, but not to our farm animals. —Andrew Kimbrell






Any area of land will support in perpetuity only a limited number of people. An absolute limit is imposed by soil and climatic factors in so far as these are beyond human control, and a practical limit is set by the way in which the land is used. If this practical limit of population is exceeded, without a compensating change in the system of land usage, then a cycle of degenerative changes is set in motion which must result in deterioration or destruction of the land and ultimately in hunger and reduction of the population. —William Allan

Consumerism is not an ahistorical trait of human nature but a specific product of capitalism. —Juliet B. Schor



An aerial photograph of a massive parking lot, densely packed with hundreds of cars. The cars are arranged in long, straight rows, creating a grid-like pattern across the entire frame. The colors of the cars vary, including white, blue, red, and black, adding visual texture to the scene. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the sea of vehicles.

There are some things in the world we can't change—gravity, entropy, the speed of light, and our biological nature that requires clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy and biodiversity for our health and wellbeing. Protecting the biosphere should be our highest priority or else we sicken and die. Other things, like capitalism, free enterprise, the economy, currency, the market, are not forces of nature, we invented them. They are not immutable and we can change them. It makes no sense to elevate economics above the biosphere. —David Suzuki

TRASHING THE PLANET

An increasingly globalized industrial economy strips raw materials from every corner of the globe, delivers them where manufacturing or processing costs are cheapest, and ships the resulting products to distant markets. This economic activity, crisscrossing the Earth in a web of transport routes, is based on abundant cheap energy. Every step generates waste—some of which is dumped into the atmosphere as air pollution; some into local waterways; some into the ground. A culture that treats the Earth as a commodity, as merely a storehouse of resources for human use, is a throwaway culture producing throwaway stuff. That culture's legacy is the endless stream of solid waste—trash—that ends up heaped in landfills, scattered across the landscape, or adrift in massive trash gyres at sea.






Put simply, if we do not redirect our extraction and production systems and change the way we distribute, consume, and dispose of our Stuff—what I sometimes call the take-make-waste model—the economy as it is will kill the planet. —Annie Leonard



Since survival is nothing if not biological... perpetuating economic or political institutions at the expense of biological well-being of man, societies, and ecosystems may be considered maladaptive. —Roy Rappaport



The hungry world cannot be fed until and unless the growth of its resources and the growth of its population come into balance. Each man and woman—and each nation—must make decisions of conscience and policy in the face of this great problem. —Lyndon B. Johnson



Even as a waste disposal site, the world is finite. —William R. Cotton



The laws of thermodynamics restrict all technologies, man's as well as nature's, and apply to all economic systems whether capitalist, communist, socialist, or fascist. We do not create or destroy (produce or consume) anything in a physical sense—we merely transform or rearrange. And the inevitable cost of arranging greater order in one part of the system (the human economy) is creating a more than offsetting amount of disorder elsewhere (the natural environment). —Herman E. Daly



Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans. —Jacques-Yves Cousteau



Human domination over nature is quite simply an illusion, a passing dream by a naive species. It is an illusion that has cost us much, ensnared us in our own designs, given us a few boasts to make about our courage and genius, but all the same it is an illusion. —Donald Worster

WILDLIFE LOST

Humanity's burgeoning numbers and selfish behavior now being the cause of the other species' extinction is the clearest marker that our present course is both unsustainable and unethical. Even while 95 percent of scientifically described species have yet to be analyzed for their conservation status, the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), which tracks the status of imperiled species around the globe, lists some 20,000 species that are threatened with extinction. Given the relative paucity of data about various groups of organisms, the actual number of species on the cusp of oblivion is certainly far larger, and numerous scientific studies have noted the accelerating trend of biodiversity loss. Humanity's assault on wildlife isn't new, but 7+ billion people armed with advanced technology—from bottom-scouring trawlers that mine the seas of fish, to endocrine-disrupting chemicals that affect wild species' reproductive success, to violent poachers decimating elephants for their ivory tusks—are simply more lethal to wildlife now than at any point in human history.



The massive growth of the human population through the 20th century has had more impact on biodiversity than any other single factor. —Sir David King



Except for giant meteorite strikes or other such catastrophes, Earth has never experienced anything like the contemporary human juggernaut. We are in a bottleneck of overpopulation and wasteful consumption that could push half of Earth's species to extinction in this century. —E. O. Wilson

The mountain gorilla faces grave danger of extinction, primarily because of the encroachments of native man upon its habitat—and neglect by civilized man, who does not conscientiously protect even the limited areas now allotted for the gorilla's survival. —Dian Fossey





We need another and a wiser and perhaps more mystical concept of animals. . . . They are not brethren, they are no underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth. —Henry Beston

Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath . . . —Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:19




Good water, good life. Poor water, poor life. No water, no life. —Sir Peter Blake





We have traditionally regarded sin as being merely what people do to other people. Yet, for human beings to destroy the biological diversity in God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by contributing to climate change, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, land and air—all of these are sins. —Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Head of the Greek Orthodox Church

DARKENING SKIES

A large industrial facility, possibly an oil refinery or chemical plant, is shown at night. The facility is illuminated by numerous lights, and several tall smokestacks are visible. A large, bright fire or explosion is occurring in the sky above the facility, casting a strong orange glow. The sky is filled with dark, billowing smoke. The overall scene is dramatic and suggests environmental pollution.

The air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions that are dumped into the global atmosphere at no cost to the polluters are, in the lexicon of economics, "externalities." The reality of course is that we all pay in the end through shortened lives, increased health care expenses, and the quickly rising ecological and social costs of a disrupted climate. A universal human experience is to look skyward at the heavens and to feel a sense of wonder. With the very atmospheric chemistry of the planet altered by our polluting, fossil fuel-based energy economy, will future generations look skyward with hope or with fear?



We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to stop us from seeing it. —Blaise Pascal

CLIMATE CHAOS



Global climate change may be the purest expression of humanity's toxic effect on the biosphere. The unintended consequence of fossil fuel use and habitat destruction (especially of natural carbon-sequestering forests and grasslands), climate change is now observable, is measureable, and portends to get much worse. Steadily rising global temperature and accelerating greenhouse-gas emissions should be a clarion call to action. A few governments have heard that call and are seriously attempting to become carbon-neutral nations; most are dithering and some are actively obstructing collective climate solutions. Almost no one in a position of influence forthrightly makes the common sense linkage between overpopulation and climate change, noting the impossibility of solving the climate crisis without stabilizing, and then beginning to reverse, the human demographic trajectory.



Prophesying catastrophe is incredibly banal. The more original move is to assume that it has already happened. —Jean Baudrillard



The Arctic situation is snowballing: dangerous changes in the Arctic derived from accumulated anthropogenic greenhouse gases lead to more activities conducive to further greenhouse gas emissions. This situation has the momentum of a runaway train. —Carlos Duarte



What has become clear from the science is that we cannot burn all of the fossil fuels without creating a very different planet. —James Hansen