

Why in Our Descent into "Chaos" We Still Destroy the World

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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It is almost irrelevant what oil prices do now that the economy's growth-balloon has been pricked. The recession and depression will be about scarcity of cheap resources, principally easily recoverable and refinable crude oil that built the present infrastructure. Such petroleum is gone, and soon to go will be the affluence consumers strive for. The nominal price of oil is a misleading distraction and leads to false expectations. Not only are there huge subsidies keeping the apparent price down by perhaps \$50 a barrel; even an extremely low price cannot be paid if one is broke and credit is gone.

It is foolish to think that rising unemployment and intractable problems with food supply and oil supply, coupled with more natural-disasters and wars, will not kick in harder and steadily in the near future. Fundamentally, we cannot escape overshoot of the ecosystem (i.e., overpopulation). The present "calm" is untenable and awaits desperate actions by states, organizations and individuals.

We seem to be poised for a major descent into social upheaval and cultural change, including an intervening period of general violence. "Chaos" is not necessarily or purely violence; indeed it is a law of the universe (see link to a Culture Change article, below).

While cultural transition may be the name of the game, it will not happen without pain when we consider what we have done to the Earth; we have hurt ourselves too. A related crisis is our huge numbers of consumers who lack a close connection to the land. This means chaotic competition will visit, although many of us will sort things out as peacefully as possible.

One graphic exploration into the issues of violence and sudden change in social structure is the recent CBS Television series, *Jericho*. In the small rural town of Jericho, Kansas (fictitious), the people struggle to survive in the aftermath of a nuclear attack on two dozen U.S. cities by domestic terrorists. Jericho's local resources are all that the town has. Soon a neighboring town seems compelled to attack Jericho: war over a new set of important resources involves a salt mine and productive cropland. The story involves the use of horses, self policing, barter, and agriculture done in the absence of chemical fertilizers. But most people are hungry in Jericho, and are worse off elsewhere, which complicates Jericho's situation as refugees move in and need help.

Today's peak-oil discussions often center on this issue of competition and the stresses of cooperation in tough times. For those of us who anticipate collapse, we find our intellectual opposition must rely on hope more than realism. The scenario for optimism simply wishes and hopes for peace, while acknowledging major change such as switching to renewable energy. Being realistic about collapse does not mean that renewable energy, peace and positive thinking should not be pursued. Nor does our descent into chaos mean we will have no positive outcome for more reasonable social relations and treatment of the planet, through culture change.

Illusion of control and separateness

The biggest illusion of control today is in the form of our society's tenuous maintenance of complexity and order. This is exercised on the personal level all the way to the top big-money manipulators and officials. For so many people to get along in a post-Garden of Eden stew, society relies on coercion, brainwashing, lies, and various rewards to substitute for freedom and nature's former bounty. We will soon see how our self-discipline and laws hold the the population at bay when the trappings of technological civilization dissolve and we pay the price of no longer having tribes and "natural law."

The fragmented universe is more in our minds than an actual accomplishment. We live so differently today from 99% of

our existence as a species, in such a way to see no whole. Instead we perceive all things to be separated and subject to our manipulation. Material things surround us in a lifeless, convenient (dis)array. Our culture's philosophical worldview -- Cartesian and Newtonian -- works more and more poorly. Besides driving ourselves insane, the entropy we unleash feeds back onto us.

When petrocollapse hits, in the form of financial meltdown causing an unprecedented depression, and when the climate deals us enough blows, we will be paying the highest price for our illusions of control and our perception of the world as a mere set of material objects. (Non-westernized peoples will be largely exempt.)

When we are humbled and must coexist with the world and what she offers in a harmonized whole we will see there was a better system all along. Working with life is the only way to stay.

Why Do We Destroy Our World?

As we struggle on various levels today to reverse ecological damage, we sometimes forget to ask why we must have the problem in the first place. As one reader named Gary wrote to us on Nov. 12, 2008,

Why do industrialists pollute the world they themselves live in? Why are capitalists so greedy? Why does man seem so hell-bent on his own destruction?

The day before, I was incorporating that basic question into what might be a new theory. I was alternating in my mind between despair over the way we destroy nature, and worrying about my own needs and desires being met. It seemed to be one mindset or the other -- not integrated, I realized.

My notion of a new theory came as I wondered -- trying to relax while feeling some confusion -- "How we can let the world be destroyed?" (By "we" I mean modern people.) At the same time this sad question weighed upon me, I was just as aware of my own desires and goals -- adventure, accomplishment, romance, and having my creature comforts and conveniences. I aspire to enjoy life and I worry about my own problems so much that I successfully put out of my mind, most of the time, the unpleasant realities of our besieged modern world. So I put all these facts together and I pinpointed this:

People allow the Earth to be destroyed and even aid in it because one's own orgasm is more important than the cosmic orgasm. We've become separated from feeling the life force and knowing we are all one with everything. The modern world has minimized the ecstasy of living in the moment, so it is increasingly rare and devalued. We instead strive to better our own conditions, and not the community's (and the ecosystem's). We need pleasure in order to cope with oppression. The system of domination drives people to seek personal relief, allowing general deterioration. At least with collapse and die-off we will get back to tribes and nature, and understand that the personal orgasm (or pleasure, or comfort, or material gain) is not the point of existence -- but this culture has told us that it is! That's our fatal flaw. So to deal with this we now have to be enemies of the dominant culture and its lethal socioeconomic system.

The artist Jane Evershed read the draft of this essay and pointed out, "The suppression of the sexual/sensual self is at the heart of our being out of touch with nature. We have butchered the sexual/sensual in the same way that nature has been butchered." This goes a long way to explain why we have individualized orgasm -- and, by extension or substitution, our personal wants on Earth -- instead of seeing our experience and needs as part of the whole. The

beautiful Earth provides, and all that is required is that we participate in the dance of life instead of sitting back trying to use remote control to gratify ourselves with high-entropy material surplus.

We can synthesize the me-first concept further to say that the dilemma we are faced with is our being saddled with short-term-goal thinking. So how do we lengthen the goal to give ourselves a fighting chance at long-term survival? Maybe once infected with short-term, selfish values there is no cure.

Fasting does get rid of physical and some psychological addictions, so it's worth a try for cultural addictions too. On the macro level we can go on a fast from fossil fuels and most technology, and see what that does. To do so today all alone can almost be suicidal, so, advanced behavior for the greater good must be exalted and supported. Do not be afraid of starting now, if only for the valuable education and friendships to be gained right off the bat.

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Further Reading:

"The natural chaos of our universe" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change e-Letter #120:

culturechange.org

Catton, William. Overshoot (1980)

Jericho, the canceled TV show with a cult following. First episode's link; see entire series for free at:

fancast.com

"Me-firstism — Dominant society treats consumerism's premise as a detail — The war for love", by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change e-Letter #52:

culturechange.org/e-letter-52.html

The art of Jane Evershed:

evershed.com

VIDEOS: youtube.com

culturechange.org

"Fasting for healing and inner peace", by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #92:

culturechange.org/e-letter-Fasting92.html