

Those Extinguishing Life Count on Shakier and Shakier Status Quo

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Our lives are precious, and all life is sacred. But pathological individuals, including many sitting atop modern society's pyramid, seem to disagree. As modern society did not fundamentally address or solve the 20th century's crises and atrocities, the 21st century may have as its hallmark the accelerated or even final extinguishing of life. Yet, extinguishing life as a personal and elitist tactic goes back millennia to the dawn of civilization.

Who are the extinguishers of life today? Is it eco-terrorist BP, murderers with handguns, Islamic suicide bombers, Israeli forces, insensitive invaders of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the corrupt officials in Africa seizing food aid for themselves? Perhaps "of course," but those who are extinguishing life are actually ubiquitous and quite numerous. Not only are major players often the most hidden ones, but there are millions participating on many levels -- for the practice extends to nearly all of us:

"We have met the enemy and he is us" (Pogo, by Walt Kelly).

A more blaming approach says:

"The planet is not dying. It is being killed. And those killing it have names and addresses." (Utah Phillips, folk musician)

To most modern people, "lives" are limited to humans and perhaps their own pets. Such is our anthropocentric culture. But species extinction is raging out of control, greater than any time during humans' presence on Earth. So the "extinguishing of life" applies to both human and other species. It matters that non-human lives count just as much, not just because of their intrinsic value and rights, but because humans are part of the web of life being torn to shreds. Plus, humans have generated causes for their own particular extinction.

Such as our common situation is, anyone habitually supporting the status quo, even if based on fear of a worse unknown alternative, is supporting the extinguishers of life. To be fair, those not going out of their way to prop up the status quo, because they live simply by necessity or voluntarily, are more the victims rather than the perpetrators. Survival these days almost always requires at least some indirectly harmful behavior.

Regardless of our level of awareness and participation in the extinguishing of life, not taking action to oppose the extinguishing of life is what the major extinguishers count on: conformity, obedience and comfort with the status quo, despite today's mounting threats to one's own and our collective survival. Joining in society's main goals – individually making money and consuming – is what the extinguishers count on, so that everyone (or enough of us) is in the game. Then we can all be guilty and depend on the continuation of life-extinguishing practices and related false values.

The corporate "infotainment" media carefully present a façade of respectability for corruption and failing institutions of society. Common beliefs have been molded, although they are subject to being burst. Happiness is promoted as something obtainable through shopping, working for corporations, paying taxes, and enjoying technological diversions. More and more people sense that this cannot last. Being passive about state violence and general inequity has been a problem for centuries, but this trend has extended to passivity over our rapid ecological degradation and extinction of species. Threats to us all of all kinds have intensified and proliferated, such that many young people have no hope at all for long lives or attaining a peaceful, healthy existence. If young consumers' technotoys were taken away they might initially be at a loss to communicate, but they could unexpectedly take matters into their hands. Many would have to lose weight in the process.

Increasingly common is the expectation of both collapse and the possible extinction of humanity. Such feelings are not paid heed by the extinguishers or the corporate news media, or even much of the "progressive press," so there are little data to rely upon. This must be a disappointment for those who tend to "study the problem" (e.g., via research grants to quantify destruction of habitats) when it could be well-paying work. But by just examining the topic, action could well be encouraged by studies and dissemination of findings. However, instead, perhaps the Last Poets' dictum will apply: "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

How the extinguishers of life work

The extinguishers feel they always must have things their way. One doesn't want to meet such people, even if one is an extinguisher him/herself. It is sometimes hard to tell who they are, when they can choose to remain in the background, pulling strings that cause or extend wars, for example. The major extinguishers of life carefully appoint front men and women who use a whole mythology and propaganda-structure, such as the corporate news media and top levels of government (which includes the military).

When one doesn't want to see this picture, it is easier to tolerate the super rich and the well-connected aggressors. For we hope they will leave us alone by just enjoying their money. But great wealth was originally created primarily by organized, brutal theft and exploitation of both people and nature. Even today, the trail of a dollar's circulation from its original creation or earning can reveal unsavory prior action(s) that would repel anyone but an extinguisher of life.

Extreme wealth has always been generated through vast numbers of people made poor. In so doing, the land, air and water are also exploited, as if they were infinitely pristine. Extinguishing life is practiced to a tremendous extent by unwilling workers serving their masters and the system. This extends even to children who are given goods and services that are ultimately anti-life. Thorough conditioning and regimentation in school, church, mass media, the military, etc. reinforce this system. Control is buttressed by the profusion of laws that benefit mostly the elite who have in various ways always had the power of life and death over others. Such a "negative view" flies in the face of the image of the happy-go-lucky rich person who, once you get to know them, is so nice. Indeed, top extinguishers of lives are often relatively passive, even unwitting, going with the flow of their billions of dollars, often promoting more economic growth.

It is primarily population growth and excessive per capita consumption that spell economic growth. The top economic classes are the ones who really benefit (materially only) from economic growth. With today's huge population, it is natural that the top of the pyramid frequently turns and shifts somewhat, reacting to this and that, with severe consequences for the rest of us. For example, investing heavily in Walmart's expansion in Mexico served to drive millions of Mexicans out of their small businesses and added massively to immigration to the U.S. A lame defense of such an outcome could be to point to the fact that Walmart is where most people, in the U.S. at least, purchase their music recordings. Happy consumers all?

Just as being a happy, kind consumer does not spare one from the blame or the consequences of extinguishing life, waving the flag (i.e., being a loyal citizen) does not absolve one from contributing to the extinguishing of life. Nor does it protect anyone from powerful extinguishers of life. The U.S. flag cannot justify the killing in Afghanistan, Iraq or Pakistan. The U.S. punitive or self-defense rationale after 9-11 is getting old. About one million people have died in Iraq since the 2003 U.S. invasion. This is not to say that Saddam Hussein was not one of the extinguishers of life on the world stage. In any case, one day there may be massive retaliation against U.S. citizens who have been overpaying for extinguishing life on a massive scale abroad, putting terrorism to date on a minor scale.

Most of the extinguishing of life is not overtly political. Rather, our lifestyle and purchasing do direct harm and prop up the major extinguishers of life. The idea that BP is a legitimate institution is to accept extinguishers of life operating in one's back yard, such as the Gulf of Mexico. The world has seen how corporations, protected by government, proceed to wreak havoc in pursuit of profit. But we are conditioned to believe, and forced to accept, that profit is a rightful pursuit with almost no restrictions or limits. And the poor of the world have been given a sop, that a corporation or politician cannot act high and mighty in public; smiling faces and nice clothes is what people see on television and in the print media. So BP continues to exist and exercise authority in the Gulf and everywhere else it illegitimately owns property.

BP (Bow to Petroleum)

Dissolving BP or seeing it self-destruct would only be a first step or window-dressing, were it to happen. As the number-one contractor for the U.S. military, BP's demise would be inconvenient at first but other players can rush in to help extinguish life on the other side of the world in the name of democracy and security.

The consequences of accepting long wars of choice and entities such as the BPs of the world are deadly and spiraling out of control. When it comes to climate change, this is hardly ever even story number 3 or even number 10 in the corporate news media, when there are other events to grab attention (World Cup, General McChrystal, etc.). One day if there are any people to look way back upon today's society, they will marvel at how we could ignore what was going on all around us, that which we had caused, while we paid undue attention to façades such as President Obama.

There have been no arrests in BP's Gulf crime, and no one can be heard calling it eco-terrorism. As technologies involving chemicals and radiation are unleashed and habitats are razed with a compliant government apparatus, a technofucker or a wetlands-paving developer is usually a preferred citizen, because financial clout talks louder than reverence for life on Earth. "Defend the Earth, Go to Prison" -- that is the true policy in the U.S. and in the entire industrialized (civilized?) world. The top domestic anti-terrorist thrust in U.S. law enforcement is to target environmental activists who were accused of using direct-action and non-violent (against living things) tactics. In support of this crackdown, many Wonder Bread consumers are afraid of a non-existent socialist threat, namely "tree worshippers" who are to be attacked as pagans and un-American. Non-extinguishers of life, go home! Stop threatening my freedom to consume and enrich the despoilers!

On the very personal level there are extinguishers of life against one's own family members (a subject very close to home for this writer). This is generally rare in a peaceful society, but in the U.S. predatory behavior in and against one's family for financial gain is common. To dispossess someone can shorten his or her life. The U.S. is at peace at home, supposedly, while fighting wars overseas. However, a country that is killing people overseas (civilians included, directly and by devastating the infrastructure) is going to have a parallel set of behaviors domestically. So life is extinguished on both fronts.

So much violence of various kinds goes on in so many parts of the world that it is considered acceptable for "security" to rely on more violence and murder. There is little questioning of this, nor objection, as apathy and helplessness predominate. But when the extinguishers of life are tolerated, they may come for you next. At that point your options and defenses will probably be few, with little help from others. For "divide and conquer" makes resistance unlikely and difficult. Stepping forward to speak out can result in being crushed. Is there any hope, then? Thinkers on collapse are divided:

The self-induced implosion of the growth-economy will have immense social impacts and implications. Much of the killing and destruction happening today is only possible through oil and petroleum-dependent technology. Large populations have been achieved through petroleum's cheap abundance applied to agriculture and the entire food system. But as critical oil supply is inevitably pinched and alternatives are not in place, there will be a die-off of unprecedented proportions for the most dependent consumers. The loss of life may involve much carnage as modern society collapses. In its place might come a less-able killing apparatus and a return to more peaceful pursuits for subsistence. Collapse, then, may have a bright side, although the unknown side effects can contribute greatly to extinction of humans and other species.

Surprises have always been in store, and will surface more rapidly. The failure of complex systems is inherent in their design or at least in their interdependence with other complex systems. The BP rig and well blowout are an example; nuclear bomb blast or nuclear plant meltdown are inevitable occurrences ahead; climate disaster has been ensured. The list goes on, and the only remarkable thing about these "surprises" is that they are surprising to the many who led their precarious lives so obliviously. General socioeconomic collapse should not be a surprise, but it might be so to many who are just trying to keep their heads down and not take any responsibility for, say, the plastic plague or the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

Conclusion

Yes, the extinguishers of life have names and addresses, but the enemy is really us – as petroleum industry investment banker Matt Simmons suggested to a Pentagon audience in 2006 (see Culture Change Letter #134). We need a paradigm shift along the lines of culture change.

The need has been building. With century upon century of oppression on a widening scale, as land rights, water rights and local self-sufficiency have shrunk along with the forests and top soil, the extinguishers of life are running out of maneuvering room in an ever more overcrowded world. They can pull off a last hurrah of astounding atrocity, but their hold is unsustainable for several reasons. Meanwhile, intensifying madness and sadness for the majority will result in massive chaos, and the rich might not be spared without an awakening toward wealth-redistribution and valuing the real wealth: healthy, bountiful nature for all to share.

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