Survey: When and How Will Gaia Act?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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"Perhaps there is no Gaia; perhaps Gaia if she exists has no ability or inclination to act; perhaps Gaia is clearly acting already to end the infestation... but for those of us who grew up feeling that nature was all-resilient and not likely to disappear or turn against us, the unthinkable has become the new norm."

When one looks at a blueish star twinkling beyond some silhouetted living leaves in the sky, the beauty and wonder of the natural world speaks to us: this existence we witness as conscious beings is an amazing accomplishment of life on this lucky outpost of the Universe.

Our splendid reverie transforms to a jarring, ongoing realization that hits us first as a rude awakening. Reluctantly, we acknowledge this new era of unravelling and lethal chaos. Typically alone in our contemplation of the tumbling health of our Earth, we graduate to a profound level of despair and near disbelief.

As happy bloggers and dime-a-dozen philosophers, we strive to keep on top of our fast-changing tenure on the Third Stone from the Sun. In keeping with this imperative, together as readers of this biocentric column we now confront -- drum roll here -- the "Gaia Stamp-Out-Human-Plague? Survey". The sole question offered in this study was complex or simple, depending on the respondent: Why isn't Gaia acting to put the destroyer species, Homo Sapiens Sapiens, into its place, or perhaps boot it off the planet? Or has she indeed started to do this?

One might first wonder why humanity was allowed to act so irresponsibly and selfishly in recent centuries, doing in much of the web of life. We wistfully recall Mother Nature's matrix functioning so well for eons, with poetic predictability, until modern human society embarked on its damnable sully-its-own-nest way of living. In the midst of this, there's confusion and doubt: why have so many species gone extinct, if Gaia is both powerful and benign as a wise organism (a.k.a. Earth), loving her creations and self-manifestations?

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Knowing as we might the severe threat to delicate, mysterious ecological balance, compared to just twenty years ago perhaps, some ask: "This beautiful system with all its wonder -- a moon, forests, the stars, etc. -- is here now. How can it be rapidly undone, imperceptibly as well as striking us like a 2x4?"

We are just beginning to see the power of human-caused climate change, but it is nevertheless amply clear. The effects from emissions have at least a two-decade time-lag for showing up. The latest figures reflect a 3% rise in global CO2 emissions from fossil fuels for 2011. Hence, climate scientists have given up on the idea of Earth's temperature rise to be limited to only 2 degrees centigrade. Staggering implications. We feel we must ignore the obstinate minority of deniers. Yet, regardless of the alarming facts accepted by the great majority of people, nothing much changes in our mass behavior or awareness. "Old" values persist; the generating or tolerating of rampant exploitation and domination.

Not discussed at many barbeques or sports bars:

• A great deal more public funding by each nation is spent to prop up fossil fuels industries than goes to climate protection.

• Yet another highway is built.

• Tens of thousands of bunker-fuel burning cargo ships keep bringing massive quantities of manufactured junk (that will soon be headed to the landfill, barely recycled first).

• Humanity keeps failing to get a handle on population growth.

My having long dwelt upon the question "Why is humanity so destructive and stupid?" and "What can change our ways?", I present four key, representative views to begin this lark of a survey. Where did they come from? I might have channeled them from Gaia herself for your amusement if nothing else. I also leave a slot for completion by readers who are not put off by unpleasant reality or an attempt to prod wider discussion.

For this decade-plus running column, in our never-ending search for sense in these times, we move beyond the discussion of what our problem is and how we can best address it. Maybe to no avail, this concern has been raging for several years, intensifying for all who are not oblivious or who are resigned to utter collapse and annihilation. Fortunately, we are able to advance and home in on the question of Gaia's ability or inclination to act. Part of the Gaia Hypothesis by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis is that Gaia, as a living being, can act just as a mammal uses a fever to kill an infection. Perhaps there is no Gaia; perhaps Gaia if she exists has no ability or inclination to act; perhaps Gaia is clearly acting already to end the infestation. Was there a beginning point in the new Gaia-revenge Anthropocene era, possibly Hurricane Mitch in 1998?

It is anti-social and unkind to view humanity as an infestation, unless of course you are the last of a species that has been assaulted by humans and their unrelenting "development" and "progress." But we might utilize the infestation-hypothesis in order to amuse ourselves or find "the answer." Without further ado, here are the composite responses to the question on Gaia's taking decisive action:

(A) Joe Blow, semi-educated and currently employed consumer: "I think your Gaia is pagan BS, or you're some kind of lesbian. What's this assumption about destruction? Either technology or Jesus will save us, so stop bothering me and let me get back to the football game [and commercials] on my big screen!"

(B) Billionaire bon-vivant: "Let's wait and see. Meanwhile we must have economic growth for more jobs. Not that I want a job, or that I care if people have a job or not, but I want them to keep out of trouble and keep buying more stuff so I can get richer."

(C) First Nation elder: "Jan, you can't represent my views! But where I came from, we do revere the Earth as our Mother, and a spirit known as the land cannot be owned or sold. The childish whites have brought their own roof down upon them, but do not quite know it yet. Our traditional ways have been forgotten by our own young, but will revive."

(D) Homeless and deranged, terminally ill without help: "Whaaaat? Can you give me spare change? I lost my wallet. That nut over there took it. I'll tell you about your Gaia. Keep her away from me! They'll come and grab me again and give me more of those weird meds!"

(E) - to be completed by you the reader, sent to a grateful Culture Change immediately. (Don't trifle with Gaia's patience!) Stay tuned for a compendium of responses. For now,

Vaya con Gaia!

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William LeBon, author of Universal Mind Meditation versus Cars, on Culture Change, observed for this Survey

We are Gaia. Gaia created us. How are we acting? We (dominant culture) are waking up to what aboriginal people have known for a long time. The dominant war/materialism culture is immature. It's at the level of kids in the sand box fighting over a toy. Big babies with way too much power. Hopefully we will grow up before we kill ourselves and our home planet. It'll be an interesting show, I'm getting some popcorn. Stay tuned...

Further reading:

The Gaia Trust (Denmark) Gaia 2012 Award winner: Albert Bates (see video of his talk on YouTube Getting back in balance with Gaia, 2010. Learn about the Gaia Trust awards and grants

Widely circulated essay Guided by Gaia, by Jan Lundberg, April 2012

CO2 emissions rises mean dangerous climate change now almost certain
"Research by Global Carbon Project says emissions growth placing world on path to warm between 4 and 6C" -- Reuters /guardian.co.uk, December 3, 2012

Megastorms Could Drown Massive Portions of California
"Huge flows of vapor in the atmosphere, dubbed "atmospheric rivers," have unleashed massive floods every 200 years, and climate change could bring more of them" -- Scientific American, by Michael D. Dettinger and B. Lynn Ingram, Nov. 2012

Fossil fuel subsidies five times greater than climate-finance pleedges, by David Turnbull, December 3, 2012