

Environmental Collapse and the Pending Death of Civilization

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**World Constitution and Parliament Association
India Chapter**

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2018

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India Chapter
Global Communication Center
7, Jantar Mantar, New Delhi

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Human beings are rapidly heading toward a planet that will no longer support higher forms of life. The implications of living on a finite planet, with a delicately interwoven set of ecosystems comprising its life-giving biosphere, have yet to sink in to most people. These implications are systematically ignored by the mass media (owned and operated for private profit and therefore catering to petty politics and the status quo). These implications are also, by and large, systematically ignored by the governments of militarized “sovereign” nation-states, since these nation-states are trapped, like a dysfunctional family, in a set of power-based relationships that consciously ignores or minimizes what is common to us all: our common humanity, or common biosphere supporting life, our common species being, and our common fate. Our common fate appears to many thoughtful people, at the moment, to be imminent extinction.

To live sustainably would necessarily mean the end of the obsession with growth. Economist Hermann E. Daly defines sustainable development correctly as: “Development

without growth beyond environmental carrying capacity, where development means qualitative improvement, and growth means quantitative increase” (Beyond Growth, 1996, 9). Capitalism is predicated on growth. Every business understands the maxim: “grow or die.” The economic success of nation-states is calculated as “GDP, Gross Domestic Product.” This measure includes all economic transactions, even those involving destruction, such as dealing with natural disasters or production for war and the military. Increase in GDP is supposed to indicate economic success.

However, a chorus of environmental economists has declared for decades (since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962) that you cannot have unlimited growth on a finite planet. Yet the human population continues to grow out of control, every business endeavors to grow, every NGO and institution wishes to grow, and the military might of imperial nations aspires to grow without end in response to the insane declaration of endless war in a world of power struggles entirely oblivious of our collapsing planetary environment.

The immensely complex set of ecological balances that have evolved on our planet over many millions of years created a biosphere with

a rich, life-giving atmosphere, with a wealth of life-giving water sources, and with immense forests, farmlands, and natural resources capable of allowing human civilization to grow and flourish since the discovery of agriculture some 10,000 years BCE. A biosphere is not a set of static conditions, but a living whole of interdependent relationships such as the movement of air and water (rivers and ocean currents), flourishing of forests and their biodiversity, interactions between plant and animal populations, geo-thermal dynamics of heating and cooling, etc. A biosphere will continue to reproduce the conditions that support life as long as its interconnected set of ecosystems remain sufficiently intact to continue to grow the crops, re-fertilize soil, grow more trees to replace those cut down, allow water to absorb wastes and clean itself deep underground, produce adequate photosynthetic plants to absorb carbon dioxide and release life-giving oxygen, etc.

There is a common analogy, one version of which I first heard 20 years ago from environmental biologist John Cairns. If you put bacteria in a petri dish with a sugar solution covering the dish for food, the bacteria will grow (geometrically) to fill the dish. The same analogy could be envisioned as a pair of rabbits

in an enclosed (finite) field. The first pair will reproduce (say 10 new rabbits) the second generation will reproduce (say 100 new rabbits), the third generation will reproduce (say 1000 new rabbits), etc. Each rabbit requires so much grass from the field to eat. Each produces waste in the form of rabbit droppings. It won't be long before the rabbits' need to eat grass exceeds the capacity of the grass-roots to produce new grass. After that point, the rabbits may eat the roots themselves of the grass embedded in the soil. Each root they eat reduces the capacity of the field to support rabbit-life. Soon all the roots are eaten and there is no capacity to support the rabbits. They all die.

It is the same with John Cairnes' petri dish. The bacteria multiply and thrive on the sugar solution until it is gone. In the moments before it is all gone, it may appear that their growth process is thriving and they are a successful bacteria civilization. Then, suddenly, they are all dead. For at least the past century, like the rabbits, we have been eating the roots in the field of nature that supports human life. The ability of the biosphere to reproduce the resources necessary for human life is rapidly declining. The delicate network of air, water, forests, minerals, and geothermal conditions has been seriously disrupted by human activity and our obsession

with growth: economic, military, population, and every other kind of growth.

The disruption has become synergistic. The thickening of the atmosphere through carbon dioxide pollution has caused a thermal cascade of effects in the form of heating and acidifying the oceans, destroying the conditions for the reproduction of fish, phytoplankton, and other foundations of the food chain. It has caused the disruption of climate stability, the desertification of vast portions of the Earth, the dying of forests, the melting of the polar ice sheets, and countless other on-going disasters to the systems supporting higher forms of life. All the while, our human population continues to grow uncontrolled. Some countries even encourage population growth among their citizens.

Mainstream economics might be called the dark (pseudo) science. Economists in “the dark science” do not really know what they are doing. They are very good at creating formulas for the circulation of goods, services, credits, debits, and the extraction of surplus value on behalf of the investors, but they have no clue that economics must be a subset of ecology, as Daly rightly declares. Living creatures, on a finite, delicately balanced planet that supports their life, can only survive and flourish if their

economics mirrors the balances and patterns of planetary ecology. The dark scientists, of course, operate in the service of growth.

Their masters want profits to grow, their nation-states (to which they are without exception loyal) want military power to grow, and the growth of the planetary population is of no interest to them. The dark science is the science of human extinction. It is about how we can most efficiently eat all the roots up on the planet that supports us, making as much profit as possible for the investor class before the entire system collapses and we become extinct. The latter (population growth) is none of their business. Their business is wealth creation for the investor class. Period.

How do we make economics a subset of ecology? The answer is that we have to recognize and actualize the holism of humanity just as ecologists have recognized the holism of the biosphere. As long as humanity remains fragmented into militarized, sovereign nation-states, with absolute territorial boundaries, such holism is impossible. As long as the dark scientists continue to promote the fragmentation of corporate competition and the atomism of capitalism, such holism will remain impossible.

The holism of humanity can only be actualized if we unite under the Constitution for the Federation of Earth. We must end the absurd fragmentation of humanity into some 193 mostly militarized sovereign states. The planet is one, all human beings are one species, and the biosphere is one interdependent reality. Our fate is also one—it is everyone or it will be no one. Our economics can only be a subset of this holism if we have a democratically grounded planetary economics under an Earth Federation government acting for the common good of humanity and the biosphere that supports us. Economics cannot be for the private profit of the few; nor cannot it be in the service of militarized nation-states. Both of these will inevitably continue to violate the biosphere that supports all life. Both of these are leading us to extinction.

The Earth Constitution is predicated upon green economics and planetary ecological sustainability. I have demonstrated this in detail in my 2013 book *The Anatomy of a Sustainable World*. Every aspect of our global economy, from extraction, to transportation, to manufacturing, to distribution, to consumption, to energy use, to recycling, to disposal must conform to ecological principles. There is simply no way this can happen under the

current global fragmentation of warring nation-states and competing capitalist, profit-seeking enterprises. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifying 17 (inadequate) goals to be accomplished by the year 2030, are simply incapable of being realized, since they are set forth to be implemented by the collection of chaotic, sovereign, self-interested, militarized national entities. Even if these nations signed the Paris Climate Accords, they are not bound to accomplish these goals and may even withdraw, as the US did under Trump.

The Earth Constitution binds the nations into a lawful federation, thereby uniting humanity under the principle of unity in diversity. It places the world's essential resources in the hands of the united people of Earth. It establishes governmental agencies to monitor the planet's ecosystems, its technological development, its usage of resources, and its biospheric health. It devises democratic, non-discriminatory ways of reducing population growth in line with the carrying capacity of the Earth. It establishes global public banking to ensure an economics of qualitative, sustainable development (not quantitative unsustainable growth). And it guarantees every person the right to clean water, clean air, nourishing food, and the conditions for biospheric sustainability.

The key, once again, is to actualize the holism that we really are. We are one planetary civilization, one dominant species, one interactive and interdependent reality. Our fragmentation into sovereign nation-states and competing economic corporate entities violates that holism and ensures the destruction of our planetary biosphere. We must unite as a species or die. The Earth Constitution (www.earth-constitution.org) offers a clearcut, well-designed, democratic way to do this. It must be studied and promoted worldwide. It is the clearest, most available, most doable path to a decent future for the Earth and its living creatures.



Dr. Glen T. Martin is Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Radford University in Virginia and founder in 1994 of the Radford University program in Peace Studies. During his twenty-five years at Radford University, Dr. Martin has been active in both national and international work of philosophers focusing on issues of peace. Since 1996, he has been President of International Philosophers for Peace, an organization with members in 25 countries that works to promote the social, political, and economic conditions necessary for world peace. Since 1995, he has also been active in the movement to create non-military, democratic world government under the Constitution for the Federation of Earth. In this capacity, he has been a member of the World Executive Council of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA, www.wcpa.biz) which coordinates a network of tens of thousands of people from 120 countries worldwide in their work toward these goals. On behalf of the Earth Federation Movement, Dr. Martin has travelled and lectured widely with respect to world peace and the need for democratic world government. Since December 2003, he has served as Secretary-General of WCPA, of which currently is the President.

Martin has published or edited seven books and many articles and reviews on a variety of topics in comparative philosophy, the spirituality of human liberation, economic democracy, and democratic world government....(from www.peacefromharmony.org)