

## economy <=> ecology

Everyone my very advanced age has seen changes in and on this Earth that overwhelm. There are almost three times as many of us now as there were at the time of my birth. I am guessing that less than one third of our seven billion lives very well, but another third lives in poverty never before known.

In my youth it took at least three weeks to travel, by boat—there were no planes from where I grew up to Europe, two more weeks to America; today that takes less than 24 hours. Today we can know what is happening in the farthest corners of the earth almost instantaneously. As millions of others I have survived five years in a country occupied by a foreign nation. I cannot even count the wars that were, and are, fought during my life time. What we thought unthinkable cruelty half a century ago now is every day normal. I have been poor and well-to-do; now almost poor again.

The changes we had to get used to came so fast and furious that we have lost our balance. I know and understand how others must feel in a world that appears on the brink of collapse. I understand why some people want to go back to the past when, from today's point of view, life is seen easier and simpler. I too would like to be able to live again in the peaceful world of my earlier years, or even the ultimately simple life of who I think of as First People. Wild humans, humans before civilization.

But there is no path to the past.

We began our human existence 150,000 years ago as just another kind of animal, taking no more than we needed, returning if nothing else our excrement: fertilizer for life that would feed us tomorrow.

We explored the entire planet. Our smarts made us adapt to whatever environment we encountered. When there was nothing but snow we made shelters of snow. We made shelters of bamboo, of wood. We ate what we found or hunted. Never more than we needed — knowing we must eat tomorrow.

Then, maybe 10k years ago, we turned a corner. We declared ourselves more than animals. We imagined ourselves apart from nature. We could and would design our own world using nature as a resource, no longer our Mother Earth. We took and took without giving back to or even caring for Mother Earth.

We made an artificial world almost unrelated to the reality of this planet. We could not have done that without changing how we think of ourselves.

We invented ways to acquire enormous power with which we have changed the planet, although on the scale of a planet we are but one of millions of species.

We are not unlike a flu virus, or a bacillus, attacking a much larger, very complex, human organism.

There are scientists who think of homo sapiens, our species, as a cancer: sudden burst of growth, "eating" its host.

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There are many ways to show how a few of the Elite have gathered much of the wealth of this country and the world, leaving the crumbs for the seven billion of us.

A seriously ill economy, perhaps even a sick world economy, we can experience. Most of us do. It is harder to experience and accept that the planet is severely stressed. And yet the two are related: the economy and the ecology.

We do experience the planetary stresses in extremes of climate. We have already had "Biblical" floods, droughts, 100-year storms, tornadoes, summer temperatures, winter blizzards.

More difficult to experience that the planetary ecology is severely stressed by a serious loss of biodiversity. It has been well documented that many animal and plant species are extinguished by severe destruction of habitat. We know there are now seven billion humans, more than there ever were in our entire history. In our own bodies if one kind of cell or bacteria grows well beyond normal and so interferes or stops normal functioning, that is called cancer.

There are scientists who call homo sapiens a cancer.

We, the 99% are rightfully indignant that the 0.01% have stolen so much—too much—of what should have been shared.

But we, "civilized humans," are the minority —probably more than 1%—that plundered the earth for the last few hundred years and plundered ever more severely. Our culture, our so-called civilization, is based on a skewed premise: that we can take without consequences. Humankind's ground assumption has become that we can use this planet as we wish.

We took wood, we took water, without a thought of consequences. We used so much wood for heat and light that we made deserts. Now we eradicate whole forests and so affect the planet's normal circulation: think of forests as the planet's lungs. We still use enormous amounts of water and give it back poisoned. We took iron and a hundred other treasures from the earth to make us live as no life has ever lived.

And still we continue. Our taking requires energy so we *take* more to make the energy to take more, allowing us to live lives now virtually divorced from the planetary ecology.

We have changed landscapes, the skin of the earth. We have dug deep under the skin to get at substances we decided we need to make the energy to make a world on top of the planet.

We're clever. But clever destroys without awareness of what is real. The monumental greed of a few has broken not only a manmade economy but a planetary ecology.

Reality is cause and effect.

As an invisible microbe can seriously affect, even kill, a human organism, a few humans can unbalance and perhaps destroy the planetary organism.

Yes, we can think of the planetary ecology as an organism. A human organism depends on millions of many different kinds of bacteria to function, for life itself. So too all the millions of species of the planetary ecology are needed to maintain a balanced planetary ecology.

For a few thousands years some of us — the civilized us — pretended the planet is here for our use. Forgetting, ignoring, even denying, that the planet is not an object. It is a living organism. Larger and more complex than any organism we can imagine, but alive.

A seriously imbalanced planetary ecology is now burning the world. Melting the snow of glaciers and poles. Our forceful denuding, destruction, of the surface of the earth is killing off thousands of species.

*One* species has found ways to make the power to overwhelm all other species (except the tiniest, viruses and bacteria). Less than 0.01% of all species is eradicating the multitudes necessary for a healthy ecology. Cause and effect: and the few of us are the cause.

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It is the imbalance in economy and ecology that is untenable. Not politics, not a matter of democracy or capitalism, it is an overstretched inequality that seeks equality. That is not a law of Man but a universal principle. I have an image of water that must have a horizontal surface. The greater the difference between levels of water, the greater the force to find that horizontal equality. No economy and no ecology can have one percent dominate ninety-nine percent.

We, humans, may be unable to level the severe imbalances we ourselves made in the world economy and the planetary ecology. So-called geo-engineering is but another kind of hubris, extreme arrogance. Very probably it is too late to reverse global warming.

Climate scientists call that "game over," us taken off the board.

But don't give up yet.

It seems the 99% all over the world is waking up to realize what has been done by us to us. Waking to the threat to our livelihood, to our very lives. We know the enemy, he is the extreme unequal us. The enemy is our application of a gift, intelligence, to whatever whimsey and frenzy imagination can point without consideration of consequences. That goes for economy as well as ecology.

As should be all too clear after centuries of fighting wasteful and ever more cruel wars, the answer is not violence, not force, but a change of mind, a change of heart.

We are not superior beings' we are part of, not in control of nature. We must rethink our place in the All of this planet. We must again live within our means.

That will not be easy because we have become addicted not only to oil, as a previous president said, but addicted to a life style that is extraordinarily extravagant. A balanced level lies well below the American life style. We must learn again that a simpler life is a richer life. We need fewer things. more insight and compassion, less worry and more joy.

That is no new lesson, it is the oldest one there is.

robert wolff, late january 2012

Recommended minimum resources

**economy:** *Green History of the World, the environment and the collapse of great civilizations.* Clive Ponting, © 1991 -- full of figures and statistics

**ecology:** *The Sixth Extinction; the patterns of life and the future of humankind,* Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, © 1997 -- many sciences.

Note that both these books were written more than ten years ago. Since then all the signs of imbalance these authors discuss have worsened by considerably more than 10%. That means the inevitable ending of these out-of-control imbalances is nearer than ever before.

Imbalances balance themselves, our role as humans is to stay out of the way, let go, stop controlling.

And here the latest from Davos, 27 january 2012:

*"Capitalism no longer works"*

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