

A Tale of Collapse and Redemption

Geoffrey Holland

As I sit here isolated from the pandemic at home, I've been thinking a lot about the bigger picture. The world we know has been set back on its keister by a global-scale force of nature. It wasn't done to us. We ourselves are responsible for its unleashing.

In the year 1970, the human population on planet Earth was just over 3 billion. Since then, in just 50 years, the number has exploded to nearly 8 billion; much more than double in just 50 years. Human demands are stressing our planet's rapidly shrinking store of resources to the limit. We are sucking the life out of the only planetary home we have. We are all guilty on a civilization scale.

Consider the Earth's critical life support systems. Humans are overheating the atmosphere with an unrelenting flood of toxic pollutants, causing climate change, and weather extremes with increasing scale and frequency. We're cutting down our forests, exhausting freshwater resources, and squandering precious topsoil. Birds, insects, reptiles, and vertebrates, the world's wild animal numbers are in free fall. We are melting Earth's ice caps. We are stripping the life from our oceans and replacing it with our plastic waste. The natural world is collapsing. It's happening before our eyes.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a consequence and expression of human overreach. It is an infectious wake-up call from the living biosphere we all depend on.

"The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites us all. Humans did not weave the web of life, we are merely strands in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves." - Chief Seattle

We are at a civilization-scale crossroads

When the pandemic subsides, recovery will be a formidable challenge; the most consequential humanity has ever faced. There are two ways to go; back to unbridled, unsustainable corporate capitalism, or we can find the will to chart a new course, away from the looming abyss.

The world's bankers, billionaires, and corporate leaders are leveraging their considerable political power to steer the human quest for normalcy back to 'business as usual'. That means ever more plunder and profiteering at the expense of the planet we all depend on.

The struggle for our minds is underway. Before the pandemic, the bulk of humanity was already living outside of privilege, on survival's edge. Now, with people hunkered down, the world's economic engine has stalled. Billions of humans across the planet find themselves perilously close to the dark abyss. As these marginalized masses have fallen further behind, many have recognized the need for transformative change. Now, we have the urgency, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the old guard struggles to retain political leverage, the masses are less willing to be seduced by hollow media messaging. Good citizens do not want an authoritarian rule, which is where they know ignorance and passive indifference will surely entrap us. What most of our Earth's people want are leaders that are competent, compassionate, and trustworthy; leaders that embrace a life-affirming, civilization-scale vision; a transformative vision that serves the common interests of nature, people, and planet.

"All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort -- a sustained effort -- to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings." - Barack Obama

A new human narrative

As a citizen of planet Earth, the story I would like to see unfold is one of redemption. It would trade in the cultural detritus that is dragging us down, in favor of a world view that fosters dignity for all, and a robust commitment to planetary stewardship.

What if life on Planet Earth was purposely shaped to function sustainably over the long term. Here are some ideas, I would expect to see in a world designed by leaders driven by compassion and common decency.

1. All Humans Would Regard Themselves First as Planetary Citizens
2. All Humans would Share a Common Set of Rights and Responsibilities
3. The World Would Be Gender Equal
4. In the US, a Constitutional Amendment Would Declare 'Corporations are Not People' and 'Money Is Not Speech'
5. The World Would Be Powered Entirely by Clean, Renewable Energy

6. Human Society Would Have Two Foundational Principles – Dignity for All and Shared Stewardship of the Biosphere
7. Love for Nature Would Bond All of Humanity Spiritually
8. The Human Diet Would be Mostly Plant-Based
9. The Global Economy Would Be Circular, with Near-Zero Waste
10. Half of Earth’s Land Would Be Re-Wilded and Protected as Such
11. The Oceans Would Be Cleansed of Human Plastic Waste
12. All of Sea Life Would be Protected from Excessive Exploitation
13. Most Food Would Be Produced Close to Urban Areas, Using Highly Efficient, Cost-Effective, Cooperative Indoor Farms
14. Mining and Resource Exploitation Would Be Tightly Regulated
15. Most Businesses, Banking, Utilities, and Manufacturing Would be Community Owned or Worker-Owned, and Tightly Regulated
16. Every Kind of Media Would Be Public or Worker-Owned and Dedicated to Delivering Honest Information to the Human Community
17. Education Would Be a Readily Accessible Right of Every Human
18. Healthcare Would Be a Readily Accessible Right of Every Human
19. All Citizens Would Be Obligated for Some Kind of Civic Duty
20. Policing Would Be a Well-Respected Profession, but also Subject to Strict Standards That Insulate Citizens from Overreach.
21. Governing Laws and Public Policy Would Be Life-Affirming and Compassionate and Would Prioritize the Welfare of People and Our Earth’s Living Biosphere Above All Else
22. Privately Owned Guns Would Be Strictly Regulated
23. Civilian Ownership of Military Weapons Would Be Banned
24. Killing Animals for Sport Would Be Culturally Unacceptable
25. Synthetic Chemicals Would Be Very Tightly Regulated, Cradle to Cradle
26. The Human Population Would Stop Growing, and Would Gradually Stabilize at a Number that is Sustainable.

Everything on this list is feasible; politically and technically. No doubt, it will not come easy. There will be a struggle. Success will require massive public commitment. But, something along these lines is the only alternative; the only way out of the existential mess we’ve made for ourselves.

*“It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.” -
Madeleine Albright*

The next chapter of our journey

The story I see begins with voters demanding a new political landscape. In the US, citizens choose transformative leadership. Politicians wedded to the 'Status Quo' are swept aside, and replaced by men, and a lot more women, who have chosen to engage in building a new landscape focused on putting the common good ahead of all else. The story will showcase a new President; a female President. She will have the compassion, the persuasive political skill, and the progressive instincts of New Zealand's current Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. Under the new President's leadership, public policy will shift heavily, from special interest toward the common interest. The political influence of the rich and powerful will be dampened substantially. Proper checks and balances to our governing process will be restored and enhanced where necessary.

Using a page out of Franklin Roosevelt's playbook, the economy will be energized by the adoption of a Green New Deal, not just in the US, but the world over. The social safety net will expand, to include healthcare for all, free education for all, equal pay for equal work, and the kind of income protection that will assure no one is left behind.

In this new story, the government will put nature, people, and planet first. Climate change will get the urgent attention it deserves by incentivizing a bold ten-year transition to clean, renewable sources of energy. By the way, that's exactly what we get with a Green New Deal.

Food security will be a priority. Cooperative urban farming, using efficient, high-tech grow systems, will be built in every community, in every nation, in every corner of the planet. Humans will turn away from raising, and slaughtering animals for food. Much of the land no longer needed for agriculture will be revert to control of a common trust, allowing full blossom of nature's beauty and resiliency.

Subplots of the story will reflect the action that serves all the principles illuminated earlier; principles on which we build a life-affirming and sustainable global society.

Not everybody will agree on everything I included in my vision, but most of us do recognize that a new human narrative is a must, and that it should be shaped by common decency.

"We must all hang together, or we shall surely all hang separately." - Benjamin Franklin

What kind of world do you wish for?

The people of Earth are overdue for a reckoning. Let's not put it off any longer. We've been brought to our knees by the COVID-19 pandemic. Let's accept the current cultural disruption for what it is; a warning delivered on a planetary-scale. We have a clear choice. We shape a worthy new chapter in the human story now, or we turn the other cheek and allow events to overwhelm us.

The time for a new beginning has arrived.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead, Anthropologist

Geoffrey Holland is a writer/producer and lead author of *The Hydrogen Age*. He is Dialogue Coordinator for the Stanford Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere - <https://mahb.stanford.edu/category/mahbdialogues/>

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