**Decline or Rise?: The actual trajectory of life (revised May 24/2013)**

**Introduction**

Two grand narratives, more than any others, have tussled across history to shape human consciousness- the narrative of apocalypse/decline and the narrative of exodus/progress. These narratives arise from the most fundamental impulses in human consciousness, such as the human fear of death and the hope for something better.

The apocalyptic narrative has inflicted immense damage on human consciousness and human societies. It is a narrative of profound despair. The core themes of this mythology have remained basically the same throughout history, in both religious and secular movements- there was a better past, the subsequent loss of the original paradise and the decline of life toward something worse, a grand catastrophic ending looming ahead, and then the purging of corruption from the world so the restoration of paradise can be inaugurated.

This essay traces something of the descent of this apocalyptic mythology from prehistory into early Sumerian literature, then through the Babylonian epics, into Zoroaster, then into Jewish literature (later Old Testament writing), after that into Christianity, through to 19th Century Declinism and Marxism, and then into the modern world in the movement of environmental alarmism. Apocalyptic mythology expressed through modern environmentalism has resulted in a shameful distortion of science, endless wasteful obstruction of human progress, devastating consequences for millions of innocent people, and needless harm to the world environment.

Fortunately for humanity the alternative narrative of progress has also emerged. Though more deeply rooted in the past, it has been developed as a significant public narrative mainly over the past few centuries. This narrative is based on the overwhelming evidence that life is actually rising and advancing toward an ever-better future. Significant to this progress of life is the fact that humanity has increasingly become a powerfully creative force for good in life. This history-oriented and evidence-based narrative of the rising trajectory of life, liberates the human spirit with hope to continue the rise into a limitless future.

“**On what principle is it that when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us**”, Thomas Macaulay, 1830.

**Getting to the Root of Apocalyptic Thinking**

Over the past 60 years (post-WW2 era) apocalyptic alarms have surged through public consciousness in persistent and regular succession. Population explosion and mass famine, chemical pollution and poisoning, acid rain destroying forests, ocean fisheries collapsing by 2048, deforestation and a denuded planet, species holocaust with half of all species extinct by 2100, agricultural land degradation and food crisis, global warming destroying life, Y2K and planes dropping out of the sky, bird flu, swine flu, economic collapse and ruin, religious end-of-world scenarios, Mayan 2012 horrors, and on and on. One alarm barely fades before another is whipped up and public consciousness is assaulted afresh and traumatized all over again. The endless bouts of alarmism keep people at high alert. Children are even diagnosed with eco-anxiety. As Julian Simon said, the world is viewed as an increasingly frightening place (1).

Arthur Herman calls this widespread tendency to believe apocalyptic scenarios “Cultural pessimism” (2) and he details its development over the 18th and 19th Centuries. This is the belief that life and civilization are degenerating toward something worse, toward some catastrophic collapse and ending. Historically, this has been called apocalyptic belief or myth. It has been, arguably, one of the most dominant systems of human belief across history and it continues to dominate much human outlook today, even in supposedly secular systems of thought. And this is not to deny that many people hold both elements of pessimism and optimism in their outlooks. It is more of the recognition that the negative element has had a significantly damaging impact on human consciousness and progress.

Many have asked why people continue to believe the worst is going to happen despite a growing body of evidence that things are getting better. We have overwhelming evidence from modern progress researchers that detail the striking improvement on all the main features of life and civilization- Julian Simon’s Ultimate Resource, Greg Easterbrook’s A Moment On The Earth, Bjorn Lomborg’s Skeptical Environmentalist, Indur Goklany’s The Improving State of the World, James Payne’s History of Force, Matt Ridley’s Rational Optimist, Stephen Pinker’s The Better Angels of Our Nature, and others.

With the takeoff of GDP in 1820 we have entered the best of times ever on earth with improved health, declining infant mortality, longer life-spans, improved communication and transportation, better living conditions, less onerous work, more leisure time, higher income, improving environmental conditions, and much more. But just as all this improvement and rise was exploding in the early 19th Century, leading thinkers of that same era began to develop theories of the decline and degeneration of modern industrial society. At the best time ever in history one of the most pessimistic versions of apocalyptic outlook was developed and pushed to prominence in public thinking. It claimed that life was sliding down into the worst time ever on earth.

What causes people to ignore the amazing progress of modern life and to persist in pessimism over the future? What is really behind this apocalyptic outlook? Julian Simon touched on this when he suggested, “We may carry psychological propensities deep in our psyche that predispose us to warnings of doom” (3). But what exactly is behind these deep propensities? Others have tried to dissect the cause of this tendency to apocalyptic outlook by pointing to such things as the inherited animal brain, a brain that evolved in a brutal environment of violently shortened life. That environment hardwired animals to live at high alert status, ever watchful and attuned to potential threat and subject to quick arousal by fear. The amygdala in the core old brain is fingered as central to maintaining this state of anxiety and fear. It keeps people on the lookout for threats and easily aroused to alarm. As Greg Easterbrook has said, “Evolution has conditioned us to believe the worst” (4).

(Just a contrary note: John Pfeiffer- The Emergence of Man- disagrees with this claim, arguing that the human brain has been wired for optimism)

The amygdala response of fear and anxiety is the response to the more fundamental fear of death among all living creatures. And this points to something more profound in the case of human beings and their development of apocalyptic explanations. While the inherited brain provides an emotional basis for anxiety and fear, it is human outlook or thought that either calms or intensifies such emotions. Humanity, with its ability to conceive and create ideas, would take fear of death to entirely new levels of intensity than any animal ever could.

A variety of other suggestions have been offered to explain the tendency to believe the worst, such as collapse anxiety- the fear of economic collapse or exhausting natural resources (5). Another symptomatic explanation suggests that the post-WW2 reaction to Boosterism (optimism, positive thinking) led to the view in US academia that optimism was shallow while pessimism was deep (6). David Altheide in Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis speaks of the fund-raising power of alarmism as employed by military and police. News media also use alarm to compete with more general entertainment media for audience share. These are among many symptomatic things suggested that encourage the human tendency to believe doom scenarios.

Others still (Alston Chase, In A Dark Wood, Arthur Herman, The Idea of Decline) refer peripherally to the presence in contemporary thought of the primitive belief that the past was better than the present- an original Golden Age- hence the tendency to believe life is heading toward doom and gloom. But the picture is still left unsatisfactorily incomplete. One senses that we are toying around the edges of the problem and only touching on symptoms and not the real root cause of apocalyptic thinking. The disease is not yet within sight of a robust cure.

Apocalyptic mythology must be properly and fully understood and then robustly countered because it has been immensely damaging to humanity and to human progress toward a better world. Scared people are easily manipulated to embrace all sorts of dangerous salvation schemes proposed to “save life”, or “save the world”. Note how Rachel Carson’s chemical scare led to the banning of DDT and the consequent unnecessary deaths of estimated tens of millions of people, mostly children (see 100 things you should know about DDT at <http://junkscience.com/1999/07/26/100-things-you-should-know-about-ddt/> ). The panics over the use of fossil fuels have led to such things as the biofuels mess that resulted in unnecessary increases in food prices which harmed the poorest people most. The alarm over GM foods and resulting obstruction of GM research is another example of catastrophic thinking causing harm to people. Add here the environmentalist obstruction of improved agricultural technology for Africa due to alarm over chemical fertilizers (7). Environmental alarms repeatedly lead to obstruction of economic development and growth and we all suffer with not only less progress than there could have been but also from damaging impacts to people right now. Note also the spreading fuel poverty in Europe, due to anti-fossil fuel hysteria, and the immense misery this causes for millions of people (see CCNet reports- Cambridge Conference Network).

There is something yet more fundamental that helps to explain this ongoing human susceptibility to apocalyptic alarmism. It helps explain why apocalyptic mythology was developed in the first place and why it continues today. Getting a grip on this will help to properly counter the apocalyptic outlook and liberate human consciousness from remaining elements of this depressing pessimism and its damaging impacts on human progress.

**The Root Cause of Apocalyptic Thinking**

Ernest Becker in his Pulitzer Prize winning book The Denial of Death pointed toward a more foundational understanding of human psychology with his insight that the human fear of death was the primary human fear and anxiety. He urged us to consider what really motivates people to think and act as they do. In doing this, he challenged Freud’s argument that the sexual motivation was the primary motivating impulse of humanity and he opened the way to understanding apocalyptic thinking more fundamentally.

While there are many symptomatic fears and anxieties that influence human outlook to believe doom scenarios, the fear of death is the broader and deeper background anxiety that shapes all other fears. Even Easterbrook, who details dozens of psychological explanations for anxiety over life, acknowledges that death fear is the “baseline anxiety in all our hearts” (8).

**Death Fear**

The fear or terror of death, argued Becker, was the primary thing that motivated people (9). Fear of death “is the basic fear that influences all others, a fear from which no one is immune, no matter how disguised it might be...it is the mainspring of human activity” (10). It is the most basic human anxiety. “This terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression- and with all this yet to die” (11).

Everyone is subject to this fundamental fear. Throughout life it intrudes into every mundane area of life and activity. “The fear of death is natural and present in everyone.... underneath all appearances fear of death is universally present....the skull (even) grins in at the banquet” (12).

Taking Becker’s insights on this fundamental motivation I would argue that the fear of death is behind the creation of religion and most specifically behind the creation of the core religious mythology of apocalyptic.

Joseph Campbell has also made a similar general affirmation regarding the centrality of death in the creation of myth, “In this wonderful human brain of ours there has dawned a realization unknown to the other primates. It is that of the individual, conscious of himself as such, and aware that he, and all that he cares for, will one day die. This recognition of mortality and the requirement to transcend it is the first great impulse to mythology” (13). He adds that “the second great realization of the individual is that he belongs to a social group that lives on after he is gone” (14). He participates in a greater flow of life that lives on and transcends individual death. Whatever one thinks of one’s own life and death, it is part of a larger flow of life that continues to rise and progress after individuals die. That greater life flow does not decline toward an ending. The decay and death focus of apocalyptic misses this greater rising trajectory of life.

The central role of death fear in the creation of apocalyptic myth is supported by other elements such as the primary human impulse for meaning (Victor Frankl). Death fear has played a central role in shaping the human search for meaning because meaning has a lot to do with people conscious of being alive yet facing the potential meaningless ending of all in death.

Also, notable in the formation of the apocalyptic perspective is the primitive view of payback justice that is rooted in ancient drives to retaliate, to take vengeance, and the projection of these views onto early versions of spirits/gods. This became fundamental to later human perceptions of justice as punishment for wrong and reward for good.

The payback orientation would become another central driving force behind the apocalyptic outlook- the belief that there must be some punishment for perceived wrong, and especially a final reckoning or a final all-encompassing ultimate punishment, and a final purging of wrong and the making all things right in a new world order. This would involve the complete annihilation of one’s enemies and all evil. Apocalyptic scenarios are the outworking of this basic drive to retaliate, to seek retribution against others.

And then there is the primitive mind that was oriented to myth and to fantasy that is disconnected from the real world and actual history. All of these factors converge around death fear and contribute to the creation of apocalyptic mythology.

Arthur Herman also suggests that human awareness of the natural stages of human life- decay, aging, and death- may have led people to conclude that the greater narrative of life was also death-oriented. People tend to project the personal and immediate out to define the overall.

Over history people developed varied responses to cope with death. One common response is repression which Becker affirms is a very real phenomenon (15). We cannot hold this fear of death constantly in mind or we could not function properly in life. So we repress it and such repression is necessary and even healthy. However, repression is not entirely successful and hence anxiety still permeates much of our lives. As Becker says, shocks in the real world (e.g. disasters such as earthquakes) jar loose repressions (16). For many people, Becker’s description of the common state of human existence rings true, that man is “a hyper-anxious animal who constantly invents reasons for anxiety where there are none” (17). Any suggested potential disaster (e.g. apocalyptic alarms) forces our repressed death fears back to the surface in new waves of panic. And this makes us susceptible to the salvation schemes of the alarmists.

Another response to death is to throw oneself into some life activity, to engage daily experience as much as possible, some even to the extent of compulsion and addiction. This may involve absorbing the death fear into some heroic life-affirming endeavor, to engage the effort to find meaning and immortality in some life purpose (18). It may involve such things as amassing a fortune, raising a family, or producing something to benefit others. Much of this is healthy response to death. But too often this activity is still darkened by anxiety over the meaning and permanence of what we do. And this ever-lingering death anxiety may explain something of the widespread dissatisfaction and depression in the midst of plenty that has been noted by writers like Easterbrook (Progress Paradox). Becker says this anxiety continues to infect modern secular societies that have largely done away with the traditional supports of religion. Despite the growing secularization of society, humanity’s natural impulse for meaning and the need to resolve the death fear has led to the ongoing endeavor to find replacements for lost religious supports. Modern replacements would include Marxism (19) and more recently environmentalism. These newer systems of meaning have embodied the same core themes as the older religious versions that they have replaced. We are never as advanced and secularized as we like to think we have become.

The most comprehensive response to death and the fear of death was the employment of mythological thinking in general and more specifically the creation of the set of myths that we know as apocalypticism. Apocalypticism has been termed the “mother of all theology” (20), or better, the mother of all mythology, ideology, or systems of meaning. And apocalypticism is most essentially a death-oriented mythology. It was created first and foremost to explain and to resolve death. It encompasses the most in-depth system of mythical explanations and resolutions to death ever formulated. It is the grandest of human immortality projects.

**The Basic Template**

The foundational themes of apocalyptic mythology are outlined below in order to help make sense of what has developed over history (see following section). These elements were not all present at the beginning but various ones were added, revised, and refined over time.

Where others present lists of the core themes of apocalyptic myth that focus mainly on the final apocalypse itself, I believe this truncates the full picture and misses important linkages necessary to fully understand apocalypticism. The end-time punishment and purging of the world makes no sense without clearly establishing the reason for such punishment- for example, that ancient people had ruined the original paradise.

Christians will also present the apocalypse in terms of a great consummation or transformation of all things into a new paradise. And yes, there is the element of hope in such a scenario of a final redemption of the world from all evil, suffering, and death. But that hope is tempered by the larger context that presents apocalyptic ending as a horrific destruction for most people, notably those not included in the salvation of the elect.

There is nothing inspired about the following four themes. They are just my version of a complete apocalyptic template.

**Paradise Past**

First, apocalyptic myth states that things were better in the past in an original Golden Age or paradise. The belief in a paradise past provides a contrast with the imperfect present, leading to the conclusion that things have obviously changed for the worse, and this affirms the core apocalyptic idea of declining life. The present is clearly not perfect and hence something must have gone wrong since the original perfection. This decline demands an explanation and it points in the direction of further decline toward something even worse than the present. The explanation for the decline from the original paradise leads to a devaluation of humanity (fallen, sinful), a central theme of apocalyptic thought (see immediately below). The loss of paradise also explains why there must be a final end-time punishment and purging of the present world. The pure creation has been ruined by humanity and this problem must be rectified and all things made right again.

**The Fall**

Second, apocalyptic myth claims that humanity has fallen from an original perfection into sinfulness and has become a corrupt and destructive force in life. Humanity has ruined the original paradise and has caused all of life to become corrupted and now in decline toward worsening conditions. The original human error or sin also explains why there is death- it is a punishment for the original sin. Here apocalyptic mythology gets the status and meaning of death all wrong. It did not understand that death had always been natural to life since the beginning but saw it instead as a special form of punishment initiated as divine retribution for original sin or corruption.

This profound misunderstanding of human origins and development got things entirely backwards (we have actually progressed from something worse toward something better over time) but it became one of the most universal myths- that humanity had fallen and declined from some original better state. It is a myth found all through Western and Eastern religious traditions. Mircea Eliade notes that in Eastern traditions it is stated that humanity is on a descending or degrading trajectory. In Buddhism this was expressed as “The progressive decadence of man... marked by a continuous decrease in the length of human life” (21).

Subsequent beliefs in inherent human badness/sinfulness are grounded in this myth of fallen and corrupted humanity. Consequently, apocalypticism develops much unnecessary guilt, shame, and fear over something that humanity had no part in consciously starting- our original emergence into a brutal animal-like existence and our natural mortality. This view of humanity as something that became wilfully corrupted and destructive has promoted a devaluation, demonization and hatred of the human race and the conclusion that humanity deserves punishment and even elimination from life. This anti-human element of apocalyptic myth has continued into the present in the central themes of contemporary environmental belief that people are destroyers and human civilization- the expression of our humanity- is ruining life. This may have been the most damaging of all the errors made by the ancients as they tried to explain and resolve their death fears- to have devalued and depreciated humanity as sinful and destructive. They missed entirely the wonder of emerging human consciousness and creativity.

Let me add that the belief in death as punishment adds an unnecessary sting to already burdensome fear of death. It intensifies human fear of death by teaching people to view death as an expression of divine retribution and a foretaste of much worse to come (e.g. beliefs in eternal death or eternal punishment). Through such beliefs there is an intensification of the human sense of separation and rejection. It is unnecessary pain inflicted on already overly-anxious minds.

In general, you would think it should be obvious to most people that the modern understanding that humanity has emerged from a brutal animal past and has become human, and is steadily progressing toward a more humane existence, that this new understanding entirely overturns any mythical perception that we have fallen from some original perfection into a corrupted state. But apocalypticism has never been rational.

**Decline Toward Catastrophe**

Third, apocalyptic myth gets the fundamental trajectory of life all wrong. It states that not just humanity but life in its entirety is now in decline toward something worse than what existed before. It teaches that life is degenerating toward a world-ending catastrophe- an apocalypse- and people deserve this because they willfully fell into sin. Eliade says that in the Indian traditions the myth of decline was expressed in the idea that humanity was presently living in an age of darkness that would end in catastrophe (22). He notes that many traditions across the world took up this pessimistic view that life was tragic and that suffering heralded a coming catastrophe. The present historical moment represented a decadence in relation to preceding historical time and things grew worse as time passed (23). And a great final punishment was looming in the future, a catastrophic ending of all things as the just culmination of the trajectory of decline. This is primitive payback thinking taken to its most extreme expression.

**Purging Corruption**

Fourth, the misunderstanding of death as punishment and the fear of a looming catastrophic end of all set early people off in search of salvation schemes. They believed that it was necessary to propitiate angry deities, to make atonement through sacrifice (24). Such is the origin of salvation theologies/mythologies.

In the apocalyptic perspective the hope for salvation lies in ridding the world of the corrupting element- humanity- in order to restore the original paradise. Also, the present defiled world order must be completely removed to make way for a new or restored Golden Age. The apocalyptic myth of fall, decline, and looming catastrophic ending logically encourages escapism or the abandonment of what it believes is a deteriorating historical process. The present world and historical process is viewed as hopelessly degenerate and becoming ever worse and so the only solution is to abandon it or purge it from the world and then escape to some promised restoration of the original paradise as in the myth of an original Golden Age. This is how the mythical mind resolves the death issue. This myth then encourages resignation, withdrawal, and urges people to irresponsibly abandon real history and its gradual processes of improvement that involves the often distasteful engagement of problems and the hard work necessary to solve them. The mythical mind seeks instead some restored Eden outside this imperfect historical process.

You see this throughout apocalyptic movements over history. The abandonment of home and property to wait on some mountain top for the gods to descend and rescue people from this corrupt and decaying world and to bring in utopia. The latest version of apocalypticism- environmentalism- encourages a similar escapist response in calling for removal of the source of corruption (i.e. reducing the human population) and then retreating from technological progress and industrial society and returning to a primitive past that it believes was better. Environmental escapism then promotes the endless obstruction of human civilization and its progress, which it believes destroys nature, in order to return to an imagined paradise of wilderness conditions.

Also add here the belief in small-band exclusion- that only an elect group of elite insiders will be spared while most of humanity will be destroyed in the great final purging of corruption from the world. Apocalyptic myth incorporates many such strands of ancient thought. It has incorporated the most profound distortions that primeval minds could invent, errors that continue to darken human consciousness today.

Apocalyptic mythology has been developed over history as humanity’s most thorough endeavor to explain and resolve death. This template of themes has persisted throughout the human journey and is repeatedly reformulated in systems of meaning whether religious, philosophical, political, economic, or scientific. New versions employ newer terms and concepts but the core themes remain fundamentally the same, whether in religious or secular traditions- a better past, corrupt humans causing decline, looming catastrophic ending as punishment, and the need to purge the corruption to make way for a new paradise. Apocalyptic myth has become the broad and deeply rooted background template in human consciousness that influences the deep propensities in our psyches to believe doom scenarios.

I do not belittle any human endeavor to resolve the fear of death and to seek some ultimate liberation from all corruption and suffering. But some attempts only make the death fear worse and harm people more than help them. Apocalypticism has never been a useful resolution for death fear and it fails on all of its core themes. It is based on a major distortion of reality and life in that it misses the fundamental truth about life and the world- that all is rising toward something better and not declining toward something worse. It gets the fundamental trajectory and meaning of life all wrong. It is an entirely wrong narrative of life and civilization. There has never been any decline toward worsening conditions from an original Golden Age but rather only rise toward a better future. This is a profoundly important insight for the human drive for meaning and desire for purpose.

**The Damaging Death Focus**

Incorporating the profound errors of primitive thinking noted above, apocalyptic myth failed to properly alleviate death fear by focusing human attention, not on the improving trend of life, but on a grand death-of-all-things scenario known as the apocalypse. This is perhaps the most damaging distortion of primitive minds- to enshrine a grand death at the center of a system of myth as the explanation and meaning of all. In doing this, the ancients took natural fear of death a significant step further by creating a new focus on an ultimate ending of all life. This is death obsession taken to an extreme and it heightens and worsens the fear of personal death. This epitome death scenario then reinforces death in consciousness; it intensifies and traumatizes people with not just a fear of their personal death but with a grand ultimate vision of the death of all life. Apocalypticism thus creates the greatest death myth ever conceived and becomes a death narrative in the extreme.

Consequently, apocalypticism simply can never resolve human anxiety over death.

Christianity is a prime example of this extreme death focus where a great sacrificial death is glorified at the heart of the religion. Death is then presented as the ultimate solution to all things, the source of salvation. You must violently end life in order to attain to a mythical paradise outside of the historical process. You are obligated to worship violent death as the defining meaning of all reality and history. This also reinforces the centrality of punishment or payback in a system of meaning.

The deification of death in religious myth has immensely damaging consequences to humanity as James Carroll has illustrated in his book Constantine’s Sword. He traces the shift of emphasis in Christianity under Emperor Constantine who replaced the life of Jesus (love, forgiveness) with the death of Jesus (violent punishment) as the focus of the Christian imagination (25). It was a shift from a message of unconditional forgiveness to one of a supreme condition of violent payback. Violence, punishment, and death were then made sacred (the meaning of all) and this subsequently inspired Christian violence toward enemies, notably the Jews. Carroll argues that the Crusading impulse to violence was based on the view of death as salvific (26). He traces this line of thinking down to the Holocaust.

In addition to sacralising the death of Jesus, Christianity also presents horrific visions of a final apocalyptic orgy of death in the New Testament book of Revelation. There, violent death is again sacralized as the final solution.

This should prompt us to question what might be the relationship of the focus on a great final catastrophe and subsequent attempts to actually remove the blamed cause of catastrophe- corrupt humanity- from the earth? How does this apocalyptic focus relate to such things as the population reduction movement? When you set these punishment and death ideals before people as the ultimate solution to their fears and concerns, what do you think this does to the human psyche and people’s attitudes toward others who are viewed as the destroyers of the world?

One of the more perverse consequences of a death focus is that it actually encourages more embrace of death. People believing and hoping for a great death of all things as the final solution will even try to promote the onset of the expected final grand solution (i.e. Armageddon). They look forward to and try to hasten the arrival of the purging/punishing of their “enemies” and then their own escape to paradise. Apocalyptic myth has always promoted such anti-human final solutions.

This apocalyptic narrative of a grand epitome death helps to understand why repeated bouts of public alarmism set off panic everywhere among people. Frightened people are then more susceptible to manipulation by alarmists. They will more readily buy into salvation schemes offered to resolve the alarm (to save the world), schemes that almost always obstruct progress and hinder the full expression of creativity to improve life here and now, as well as more extreme solutions calling for the removal of humanity. With apocalyptic scenarios you are dealing with people’s greatest fear and anxiety- death. And with repeated public alarms you are upsetting people’s carefully crafted efforts to construct their own “necessary illusions” (27), the illusions they create to deal with death fear; their personal “immortality projects”. This leaves people defenceless and desperate. In doing this, apocalyptic has always been horrifically damaging to humanity.

This grand death narrative of apocalyptic myth that is repeatedly pushed to the fore of public consciousness may then explain something of modern anxiety, depression, and dissatisfaction in the midst of unprecedented prosperity. A robust response will offer a new story that deals properly with the primary human fear of death. It will re-orient consciousness to the story of ever-improving life, a story that does not end in some all-consuming death of all things.

**A Brief History of Apocalyptic Myth and Progress Narrative**

The history of human thought, belief, or mythology presents these two strains of developing narrative that have significantly shaped human perspectives more than other lines of thought- apocalyptic myth and exodus/progress narrative. Both tell a story about the fundamental trajectory of life. Apocalyptic mythology claims that life is declining toward catastrophe and ending or a great death-of-all scenario. Progress narrative, on the other hand, points to overwhelming evidence that life is rising/progressing toward an open future and unlimited life.

Getting the foundational trajectory of life right is critical to getting the meaning of life right. Therefore, the struggle between these two narratives is a struggle for the essential truth of reality and life, the fundamental meaning and purpose of all. It is also a struggle between the fundamental orientations and emotions of despair and hope. Is life about degeneration toward an ultimate death and meaninglessness which promotes resignation and escapism, or is it about rise toward ever-improving life which inspires human engagement now to explore and ensure that this progress continues?

The origins of these two opposing narratives may derive ultimately from the dualism of chaos versus order that is found all through early mythology. The belief in the emergence of order at creation may offer the first glimmer of an understanding of progress while the belief in the ever-present threat of chaos may express the earliest sense of apocalyptic thinking (more on this below).

Another way of understanding these two narratives is via their latest expressions in the modern era- the historically more recent decline theories and progress research. These two developments pretty much encompass the substance of the two grand narratives. The formal development of thought on these two approaches has occurred mainly over the past few centuries. There is the development of Progress thought beginning weakly in the 1500s and then gaining more traction in the following centuries (see, for example, The Idea of Progress by J. B. Bury). The Declinist movement builds mainly in the 19th Century and has tended to dominate over emerging progress optimism (see The Idea of Decline by Arthur Herman). These grand narratives have been in conflict repeatedly over history and the pessimism and despair of apocalyptic mythology has often overwhelmed the hope of exodus/progress thought.

This grand narrative struggle may be illustrated in the story of early progress thinker Albert Spencer whose optimism was based on the evolution of civilization. Spencer offered Darwin the insight that “gradual perfectibility was possible for human beings” (28). But Spencer’s optimism was deflated when he was told “that the second law of thermodynamics, the so-called law of entropy, implied that endless progress was not possible, since all energy in the universe must eventually dissipate and life itself cease” (29). On hearing this, Spencer’s spirits sank and he conceded several days later to feeling, “staggered...I still feel unsettled....out of sorts” (30). Poor fellow. It appeared to him that the laws of reality ultimately damned progress and he then gave way to cosmic despair.

In the following let me intentionally skip and hop in great bounds across the history pond lilies just to give some sense of the lines of descent of these two narratives.

**Apocalypticism Emerges**

Neanderthals exhibit the earliest awareness of death and the hope to transcend it in their burials with supplies for an afterlife (250,000- 50,000 BCE) (31). This is the first evidence of death awareness spurring mythical thinking and it gives some idea of how apocalyptic thinking may have started. The Neanderthals had also lived through several inter-glacials followed by descents into ice ages. This would have given them the experience of a better past followed by deteriorating conditions, the experience out of which apocalyptic perceptions are created. Also, the cyclical nature of warming and cooling in climate may have contributed to the later perception of apocalyptic cycles (endless cycles of renewal and then decline), a belief that first appeared in Indo-Aryan mythology.

John Pfeiffer offers a peek at some of the earliest elements that could have formed apocalyptic thinking in the scramble among Neanderthals for special status based on claims to esoteric knowledge (32). He suggests that emerging specialists- sorcerers, shaman- may have created legends of a glorious past as part of their claim to special knowledge. That past “could have been a time without ice, of perpetual summer... (with) vast herds of giant bison, horses, and reindeer...such grand illusions are generally not kind to the present” (33). Where you have myths of a past Golden Age you also have belief in the subsequent decline of life to its present apparently worse state. Original Golden Age myths make the present appear to be a degeneration from something believed to have been originally better. Apocalyptic myth naturally generates out of such thinking.

Pfeiffer points to another notable element in the development of early myth. Based on the cave art at Lascaux, France, he argues that religion emerged as an instrument of social control by early shaman. He suggests that the shaman’s claim to special knowledge was used to terrorize and manipulate their fellow tribe members into submission and obedience. They became “specialists in the art of social control” (34). As evidence of the shamanic employment of fear to control others, Pfeiffer notes the use of anamorphic art- the appearance that painted animals moved in flickering candle light- to scare people in the depths of dark caves.

Now if the Neanderthals, or other early humans, held Golden Age myths, and the corollary idea that life has declined from that better past, then some early innovators of myth may have envisioned life declining toward some horrific ending, toward some grand punishment. This would have further enabled the shaman to alarm and manipulate people. Once alarmed, people will willingly enslave themselves to whatever salvation schemes are offered in order to escape the looming end and punishment. Apocalypticism takes normal fear of death to even higher levels and permits elite manipulators more leverage over people.

The use of frightening myth to manipulate others makes a line down through history and continues even today in self-imagined secular movements such as environmentalism. Here we find the same terrorizing of people with alarms of catastrophic end-time punishment along with proposed salvation schemes to placate angered deities (i.e. an angry GAIA). This irresponsible use of fear to manipulate and control others is an expression of the base impulse to dominate. It is a perverse assault on human freedom.

If Pfeiffer is right about the myth-making of Neanderthals and other early peoples, then apocalypticism may be one of the oldest and most prominent viewpoints in the history of human thought and outlook and a key element in creating religion as a means of social control. It may indeed be the mother of all theology or mythology.

**Early Sumerian Mythology**

Whatever the eventual conclusions on the pre-history era, we find the development of recognizably apocalyptic themes in the great civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indo-Aryan or Indo-Iranian region. One common theme developed in all three areas was that of chaos threatening to destroy the order of life and human society (35). This mythical idea stated that life and civilization had been created out of an original chaos but the chaos remained as a background reality and endlessly threatened to destroy the created order. This perception would establish in human consciousness the baseline fear of something malicious behind all, something threatening and catastrophically destructive. As with many early perceptions of the ancients this was entirely wrong-headed because order, increasing order and not chaos, is the fundamental reality behind the cosmos, life, and civilization.

This idea of a threatening and destructive force behind life would continue to be refined over following history. It has been arguably one of the most damaging ideas ever conceived by ancient minds and it has powerfully shaped all subsequent human psychology and outlook. It fuels the felt need to seek salvation solutions to placate the threatening reality. This central apocalyptic idea, perhaps more than any other single human belief, has taught humanity to fear life, the world, and the cosmos.

Others have pointed more specifically to the theme of combat myths in Sumerian chaos/order mythology as perhaps a fundamental root of apocalyptic thinking (36). In these myths it is once again a chaos monster that threatens the order of creation or society. A young, heroic god is chosen to slay the chaos monster and restore or reaffirm order. This theme continues down through later versions of apocalyptic theology in the topic of a good God (Light, Truth) defeating an evil god (Darkness, Lie) in a complete and final battle (the apocalypse) that punishes and purges all evil from the world and then makes all things new, establishing a paradise for those who obeyed the Light and Truth. This is central to Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian accounts of apocalyptic myth.

There were other more general strains of mythical thought in the Mesopotamian/Sumerian civilization. We get the earliest human writing around 3000 BCE (cuneiform notations of temple commerce) and the earliest human literature beginning around 2600 BCE, and then continuing through the following centuries. This literature featured epic poems and stories and in those we begin to see the broad outline of the apocalyptic template (37). The Mesopotamian poets were already detailing the perception that a corrupted people had sinned and angered the gods, and in later versions, that they had ruined the perfect creation (38). And it should be noted that some have said that we may assume that what appears in the earliest human literature represents what was believed in the pre-literature era. It is a continuation of previous oral traditions.

The first clear statement of apocalyptic myth may be the Eridu Genesis (Gilgamesh poems), circa 2150 BCE, that describes the Great Flood. It is the first written record of an oral tradition going back to at least 2800 BCE when the Euphrates flooded the surrounding region (39).

**Babylonian Flood Apocalypse**

Following this we have the Babylonian Flood myth of Atrahasis which is dated at around 1650 BCE and is the fullest Mesopotamian account of the Great Flood. It states that the gods were tired of working and so created humanity to toil in their place (this idea of humanity created to serve the gods, and not permitted self-expression, is a crucial blow to human freedom right at the beginning of formal written mythology). Eventually, people multiplied and made too much noise. The god Enlil, in particular, could not sleep with all the chatter so he tried to find some way to eliminate people. He then came up with a flood apocalypse to rid the world of humanity. But the god Enki warned a man named Atrahasis to build a boat to save his family and the animals. The outcome of this threat was to learn that man’s existence was precarious, that people must take care not to annoy the gods, and to limit human self-expression (40).

The later Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh (circa 1300-1100 BCE) is based significantly on the Atrahasis story. Here the king seeks to overcome death and meets Utnapishtim (also named Ziusudra) who has survived the Great Flood and has found the immortality that Gilgamesh is seeking. Utnapishtim was rewarded with eternal life for saving human and animal life from the Flood.

This early apocalyptic story-telling fits the larger mythological context of the chaos monster threatening life and civilization, with a hero defeating the threat (combat mythology). Utnapishtim defeats the flood apocalypse to gain immortality in a rebirth of humanity.

Interesting in these accounts is the perception that people had already multiplied too much and needed to be subject to population culling and elimination. Little has changed since as contemporary apocalypticism is also based on the understanding that too many people today- overpopulation- are the cause of some looming apocalypse.

The crime of those early sinners was that they were too noisy and this disturbed the gods (41). This is no sillier than Adam’s curiosity and desire for more knowledge being punished as sin. Ancient punitive deities appeared to hate human freedom, self-expression, and independent creativity. In response to those early sinners the Mesopotamian gods retributively threatened to annihilate all humanity via the first apocalyptic scenario of a great flood, as noted above. It has been suggested that this particular liquid form of apocalypse may have arisen out of experience with regional Mediterranean earthquakes and tsunamis, or Mesopotamian flooding (42).

The threat of punishment and destruction naturally evokes fear in people and the felt need to engage salvation practices or schemes such as the barbaric practice of placating angry spirits with systems of blood sacrifice, even human and child sacrifice.

This primitive response of appeasement, and the resultant systems of sacrifice, has led to incalculable waste of time and resources over human history as people have tried to respond to an endless series of proposed threats, whether perceptions of angry deities threatening punishment, exaggerated crises or non-existent problems, or the outright mythical concoctions of apocalypse. The psychology of aroused fear and sense of obligation to appease has been expressed throughout history in such things as the felt need to return to simpler living or asceticism (self-denial of some form), to punish oneself in some manner, or to make some sacrifice (43). This costly waste of time and resources is still evident all around us today as people, alarmed by myths of retribution from threatening forces like GAIA, or “an angry planet”, are then urged to embrace contemporary salvation schemes such as opposing human progress and enjoyment of prosperity, or unique to our time, engaging extravagantly expensive alternative energy schemes in order to save the world.

Another wasteful consequence of fearing the threat of punishment and destruction, noted earlier, is the felt need to seek salvation by abandoning the historical process for some promised utopian alternative (a restored paradise). Instead of fully embracing this life and world to improve it gradually, people are urged to seek escape to a mythical and instantaneously re-installed Eden.

Also notable in the Mesopotamian tradition was the idea of a favored few being spared destruction and granted immortality such as in the story of Utnapishtim and his wife who were saved into paradise (44). This theme continues all through subsequent versions of apocalyptic mythology in the perception that only a few elect are brought into the restored paradise after the great majority are destroyed in the great apocalypse (45). It is the ultimate expression of the base payback urge to get rid of your enemies.

Further notable in the early Indo-Iranian civilization is the development of the idea of cycles of decline, followed by a new start and then a new cycle of decline (46). This pattern of endlessly repeated cycles of decline and renewal would re-emerge in Greek and Roman apocalyptic thought. And perhaps some residual element of this perspective of endless cycles of decline helps explain why, after the endless series of failed historical apocalypses, people are still willing to embrace the next proposed apocalyptic alarm all over again.

**Zoroaster**- The formal development of apocalyptic theology

Zoroaster (approximately 1200 BCE) took the varied strands of previous apocalyptic themes and brought them together in the first formal outline of apocalyptic mythology. Notably, he presented apocalypse as a great consummation, transformation, or salvation for true believers. His theology then shaped subsequent Jewish and Christian hope for a grand consummation or transformation of life.

The Zoroastrians also took the earlier chaos/order dualism that was found all through ancient mythology, refined it further, and expressed it in terms of good versus falsehood, light versus darkness, and a good God versus an evil God (two primal spirits)(47). This oppositional divide was also applied to humanity. Those who followed the good spirit (Ahura Mazda) were in antagonistic opposition to those who followed the evil God (Angra Mainyu). The followers of the Truth stood in opposition to the followers of the Lie. This perception of people in exclusive and irreconcilable conflict with other people of differing outlooks has done immense harm to the human family over history. It also fuels the perverse hope of payback by those who see themselves as the chosen elect specially favored by a God that promises the annihilation of the majority that oppose them.

Zoroaster further offered the first clear statement of a fall from original purity and perfection into corruption: “The primal character of creation had been light, wisdom, and truth, into which, however, darkness, deception, and the lie had entered...” (48).

The Zoroastrians then introduced the powerful new apocalyptic concept of the final end of this world and its historical process. There would be no cyclical renewal of history after an endless series of apocalypses but rather the decline of this corrupted historical process toward an ultimate Judgment. This was presented as a final ending, a final purging of evil from the world. It would be the great end-time consummation or transformation of all things.

The human longing for something better than the present state of the world is a primal human impulse. It is behind all the multi-varied human endeavors to improve life on this planet. And it is critical to distinguish this valid hope, and its expression in the historical progress of civilization, from the perversion of this impulse in apocalyptic utopianism. Apocalyptic has always misdirected this natural human desire toward an irresponsible search for salvation that seeks to abandon and destroy the present historical process and opt instead for some divinely and instantly installed utopia that will need no further development or progress. This distinction between valid desire for progress and some irresponsible short-cut to utopia is critical because unfortunately, some apocalypticism researchers reject all expression of the human impulse for a better world as misguided and dangerous utopianism. Fearful of aberrational abuse, they become dismissive of all human desire for progress.

Apocalypticism also misdirects human hope toward payback schemes that involve ridding the world of most people. In dualist thinking this means the majority that are viewed as one’s enemies outside of one’s personal belief system.

Some have pointed out that Zoroaster and Paul presented a more universalist version of apocalypticism in that all people would eventually be included in the great end-time transformation of the world into a new paradise. But it could be argued that John’s version in the New Testament book of Revelation is more widely accepted in the public consciousness- that a few elect are saved while most people are destroyed as the enemies of truth.

Norman Cohn notes that the Zoroastrian perspective has had a powerful influence on Jewish apocalyptic literature and Christian apocalyptic theology and hence on European civilization and the wider Western consciousness (49), which in turn has influenced the entire world. You can trace many elements in contemporary apocalyptic thinking back to the primitive origins noted above.

**Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition**

The Jewish apocalyptic writers absorbed and continued the main Zoroastrian themes and this may be attributed to Semitic origins in Persia or a Jewish exile in the same region. The normal processes of trade and communication could further explain this cross-fertilization of ideas.

Like the Zoroastrians the Jews also emphasized that there would be no gradual improvement of this historical process but a direct intervention by God to enact a total and final transformation of the world (50). The present imperfect world order would be instantly purged and replaced by a perfect new order. The lead-up to the transformation of the world would be a time when God’s fury would be unleashed in burning and destroying his enemies (51). And note here the shift from water to fire as the chief purging element in apocalypse. This end-time judgment would also be preceded by a time of deterioration where health and vitality declined, life spans grew shorter, and there would be overall degeneration (52).

Others note that the Zoroastrians (Persians) contributed a mythical perspective to Jewish thinking that was formerly more oriented to history (53).

Bob Brinsmead has suggested that apocalyptic thinking developed later in Jewish writing (around 165 BCE). See the Brinsmead essay detailing this history at number 155 in the Sources.

The Greeks then adopted a version of apocalypticism much like the Indo-Iranian version. This was expressed in the prominent Greek myths of cycles that begin in a golden age of uniformity and order but then degenerate toward chaos and ending, only to begin all over again in an ongoing series. These Greek myths of degenerating cycles were passed on to the Romans (54).

**Christian Apocalyptic Theology**

The emerging Christian movement absorbed Jewish apocalypticism into its core belief system and this enabled the success of Christianity in Roman culture which held the same basic myths. The entire Christian salvation theology was built around the four core apocalyptic themes of original perfection (Eden), corruption and fall of humanity (ruin of paradise and original sinfulness), decline toward final judgment and punishment (world-ending catastrophe), and escape/salvation to a restored paradise.

Ancient combat mythology can be seen in the Christian belief that God would eventually defeat Satan in a final battle that would end the presence of evil once and for all.

Christianity also reinforced the dualistic emphasis of previous apocalyptic thinking with views of necessary conflict with the larger society and antagonism to a world governed by satanic forces. This resulted in the demand for Christians to keep apart from this defiled world, to be other-worldly, pure, ascetic, and separate (55). Christianity further refined and emphasized the belief that salvation required the complete destruction of everything that had gone before in order for a new redemptive order to emerge (56). This belief that the present historical process was corrupt and had to be destroyed in order to make way for a new utopian order has re-emerged recently in Paul Ehrlich’s environmental apocalypticism with its demands for the removal of the present corrupt economic order and the introduction of an entirely new social order. The complete destruction of the present world order to make way for utopia was also advocated in the Marxist version of apocalypse. This is primitive mythical thought of the most damaging kind.

Christianity also moved away from Greek/Roman cycles to a more linear view of history and reinforced the Zoroastrian vision of a final end of the world (57).

As Cohn and others have noted, Christianity has been the main vehicle conveying apocalyptic myth to the Western world and the Christian expression of apocalypse has arguably shaped Western consciousness as much as any other system of belief. Others also affirm that apocalyptic myth is the heart and soul of the Christian belief system. James Tabor (see his new book Paul and Jesus), for instance, argues that the New Testament is mainly Paul’s material. Christianity, as we know it, is therefore Paul’s version and according to Tabor an apocalyptic perspective influences all that Paul said or did (58). Paul’s central theme of grand end-time consummation or transformation makes Christianity essentially a religion of apocalypse. This is the core of the argument that Christianity has been the main vehicle through which apocalyptic mythology has been reinforced in modern consciousness. As Tabor says, “(Paul) is the most influential person in human history, and realize it or not, he has shaped practically all we think about everything...the West in particular” (59). He argues well for understanding these deeper roots of our culture.

The impact of these primitive beliefs on human worldviews and lives has been profound and widespread. But it all dissipates into meaninglessness when you come to grips with the fact that there is absolutely no historical evidence of an early fall and decline of humanity or looming future apocalyptic ending and punishment of all. The Christian belief system is built largely on the above noted profound errors in ancient thought. The adherence to subsequent salvation schemes is about solving problems- the fall into sin and threatened ultimate punishment- that have been manufactured out of nothing. They simply do not exist. The same can be concluded about modern environmental myths of decline, looming apocalypse, and proposed salvation schemes. This leads to wasteful endeavors to solve problems that have been exaggerated to frightening proportions, or that do not even exist.

Consequently, apocalyptic thinking has never liberated people from slavery to death fear but in adopting the core theme of ultimate or epitome death it has only intensified human fear of death and enabled many alarmist manipulators to take advantage of that fear over subsequent millennia. Only a historically based narrative of life and an understanding that life has always risen toward something ever better, can liberate from this fear and enslavement to wasteful apocalyptic salvation schemes.

(The preceding material advocates no ill will toward Christianity. The Christian movement is to be affirmed for bringing to us the insights and teaching of the historical Jesus. It needs to be pointed out however, that there is the above noted tension between the teaching of the historical Jesus and the larger context of Christian theology with its emphasis on apocalyptic thought. There is serious debate- Jesus Seminar research- over whether the historical Jesus actually adhered to the apocalyptic stance of his mentor, John the Baptist. I am simply recognizing that apocalyptic mythology has entered all the major religious traditions over history, influencing their overall outlooks. In the line of descent from the ancient roots of apocalyptic thought and down to the present, Christianity has played a central role in bringing the apocalyptic perspective into modern Western society, and hence to the entire world)

**Exodus/Progress**

The other grand human narrative that stands in sharp contrast to apocalyptic thought is the story of the exodus/progress of life toward a better future. This narrative arises out of the natural human hope for something better and eventually finds sound affirmation in historical fact. While apocalypticism is oriented to a mythical view of life, the exodus narrative is oriented to actual history and the historical evidence of the fundamental rise of life and its progress.

As noted earlier, some of the first glimmers of progress thinking may be evident in the early beliefs in the creation of order out of chaos, order being a development from something worse toward something better. Or early progress thinking may be evident in the belief that new generations of gods were becoming stronger than previous generations of gods. Joseph Campbell has also noted the progression away from brutality and toward kindness and mercy in early accounts of the pharaoh gods (60).

The emerging view of the fundamental trajectory of life and civilization as progress was weakly understood in early Greek thought in the recognition of the ascent of humanity from primitive barbarism to a more civilized state (61). Unfortunately, this nascent belief in progress was overwhelmed by the more dominant Greek belief in degenerating cycles. Exodus hope was also evident in Jewish prophetic thought (62) but again was eventually overwhelmed by the more dominant apocalyptic perspective of the Hebrew religion. This pattern of burying exodus hope with apocalyptic myth continued in the Christian tradition also. Christian hope suffered significant distortion and became an apocalyptic hope that longed for the annihilation of its enemies in a great Armageddon bloodbath that would then restore the lost original paradise. It was an apocalyptic hope that rejected the gradual historical process of progress toward a better future in this world.

There is little clear advocacy of progress thinking through the Medieval Period, according to J. B. Bury. Overall, he says that it was impossible for the idea of progress to appear in the Middle Ages because “the whole spirit of medieval Christianity excluded it” (63). It is not until the Renaissance/Enlightenment period that we find modern formulations of the concept of progress (16th to 18th Centuries, and on). But just as the modern understanding of progress was being developed it was once again assaulted by a more dominant and widely accepted belief that life was in decline, a belief that has gained momentum over the last two centuries (notably 19th Century till present). Hope in progress has once again been challenged by a notably dominant belief in decline.

**Declinist/Degeneration Theory**

Declinism, also termed “degeneration theory” or “cultural pessimism”, is the latest historical version of apocalyptic mythology and it continues to shape much contemporary thinking. While presented as a more secular system of thought, it is still as profoundly religious/mythical as all other versions of apocalyptic. The influence of Christian apocalyptic thought is detectable all through Declinist theory and hence all through modern movements like environmental apocalyptic.

Declinist theory is an effort to reform apocalyptic myth as ideology with a supposed scientific basis, such as in eugenics “science”. But its stance is quite evidently anti-science as its own proponents have clearly stated.

When you immerse yourself in the details of this developing 19th Century ideology of decline/degeneration you begin to experience the upside down world that is mythical apocalyptic thinking, where black is called white, right is called wrong, and progress is viewed as decline. The good produced by human progress in technological society is portrayed as evil and destructive. Human creativity at its best is deemed destruction at its worst. The takeoff into the best time ever on earth (64) is demonized as a slide into the worst time ever on earth. Such is the distorting impact of the apocalyptic mindset. It is a call to embrace primitive madness at the very emergence of rationality and enlightenment in the scientific era. It reminds one of Paul Ehrlich’s statement, “Even if I am wrong, it is the right thing to do”. Apocalypticism is a profound abdication of common sense and reason. It is a mythology that has turned the brightest minds into Chicken Little squawkers.

This latest historical surge of apocalyptic thinking at the very time that humanity takes off into the amazing progress of the modern era creates the sharpest contrast and exposure of the anti-human, anti-history, anti-reality, and anti-progress nature of apocalyptic thinking. It exposes the profound denial of historical evidence and actual reality that is behind the apocalyptic outlook. Remember that all apocalyptic prophesy has a consistent 100% historical failure rate. We have already experienced that numerous times in our own era.

**Herman’s Presentation of Declinism/Degeneration Theory**

Arthur Herman details the relentless 19th Century argument of Declinist theory that Western civilization is a destructive, corrupting force. It causes decay and degeneration in human society. “The modern world and modern men are trapped in a process of deterioration, exhaustion, and inevitable collapse” (65). And modern man is helpless to prevent the looming disaster as Western culture is moving toward catastrophe and destruction (66).

The apocalyptic template here? Primitive people were considered to be more vital and noble, superior men of the soil, rooted in nature, men of power with the will to conquer. Declinism claimed that the Aryans typified this original vitality and superiority. They were farmers, villagers, rural people living in harmony with nature. Racial Degeneration theory- a subcategory of Declinist theory- argued that modern industrial progress has made people worse. It has caused a fall from primitive vitality, “a morbid deviation from an original type”(67). Declinist theory claimed that “Technological civilization separates us from our roots in nature” (68). Modern progress has produced weak, comfortable, mediocre and dysfunctional people. Technology, in particular, has contributed to the worsening state of modern people. People in technological society have fallen from an original paradise of vital primitive existence.

The anti-science element is stated clearly throughout Declinist material. It is claimed that the vitality of pre-rational people with their magic and myth was lost as moderns adopted rationality and reason. The emerging scientific intellect has ruined the spiritual and moral vitality of original primitives. “Technology and science degrade the human spirit” (69). Western technological society, Western rationality, and materialism have ruined spiritual health and caused a decay of social and moral values. In making these arguments Declinism moans the loss of the mythical perspective.

This developing theory of decline affirmed a nostalgia for the pre-modern past, the original golden age of primitive life- life that was myth-oriented, rural (declinism is anti-urban), low consumption, and fostered harmony with undisturbed nature. The logical solution to the threat of decline was to rid the world of the cause of decline- decadent modern civilization. This was believed necessary to clear the way for a restoration of the original golden age of primitive agrarian living (70).

Declinist theory then posited a looming catastrophic crisis and consequently demanded drastic action to save life. It called for violence, or the employment of “original primitive vitality”, to remove corrupt civilization. Nietzsche spoke of the “will to power” that would “serve as a hammer to break and remove degenerate and decaying races to make way for a new order of life”, (71). While Declinism believed modern civilization was corrupt and would soon collapse on its own, it also believed that violence should be employed to remove the degenerate civilization and bring in a new redemptive order. People could hasten the arrival of the apocalyptic ending and bring about the restored paradise of primitive existence. Forceful intervention would restore lost spiritual values (i.e. myth) that would once again be made primary in the place of rationality and science.

This call for violent intervention to remove corruption and bring back a restored Eden mirrors the essence of Christian apocalypticism which teaches a catastrophic divine judgment to destroy evil and to inaugurate the kingdom of God (72).

Eugenics was built on Declinist/Degeneration theory and argued that racial degeneration must be stopped by employing coercive state intervention (73). Forced sterilization was necessary to halt racial decline. Eugenics eventually suffered its own decline but was later reborn in modern population control and reduction programs enacted to purge the cause of environmental destruction- people.

Eugenics also tried to create its own “science” based on physical or racial features. Like all forms of apocalyptic myth it embodied the anti-human essence of apocalyptic thinking- that humanity is corrupt, the cause of decline in life, and must be removed from life.

Herman devotes a final chapter to modern environmental apocalypticism which now encompasses and continues the core themes of cultural pessimism or Declinist theory. He notes Paul Ehrlich’s pessimistic views that modern technological progress has enabled more population growth which then places an intolerable strain on earth’s resources (74). Ehrlich’s response is coercive population control through forced sterilization programs. And Ehrlich, like all authentic apocalyptics, envisions even more. He wants to end the Western technological system and replace it with a new environmental model of sustainable development, a new world order to save the planet that he calls “a new civilization” (75), which is actually a call for a return to primitivism. As Herman says, “the primitive and pre-capitalist societies stand as the new model for the future”, (76). They represent the original Golden Age.

Herman shows that this new environmental apocalyptic belief differs hardly a whit from German environmentalism under the Nazis with its valuing of nature above humanity. That pre-WW2 German environmentalism appealed to mythical Aryan reverence for nature. SS recruits were taught “a reverence for animal life... that reached near Buddhist proportions”. And this reverence for animal life was promoted “even as euthanasia programs became compulsory for ‘useless mouths’ among humans” (77).

German environmentalists saw modern technological capitalism as the principal enemy. As Ernst Niekisch stated, “Technology is the rape of nature. It brushes nature aside...when technology triumphs, nature is violated and desolated. Technology murders life and strikes down step by step, the limits established by nature”, (78). This back-to-nature, anti-technology view became central to the anti-modern element of contemporary environmentalism, according to Herman (79). He adds that this anti-industrial environmentalism is the most successful child of the New Left.

Modern environmental apocalypticism takes the anti-human element of all apocalyptic myth to new extremes. Herman catalogues a variety of statements on this virulent anti-humanism: “Man is the only creature not rooted on the planet- he is the unwanted late-comer...the ultimate stranger...a locust-like blight on the planet (80)...man is the late-coming gate-crasher- and the gates he crashes are the gates of paradise. ..(man is an) intruder into (the) garden of Eden...the human being is an afterthought, an intrusive late-comer”, (81). This ideology demeans humans as insignificant creatures (human needs do not matter) and rejects the idea of human progress or improvement (82). Environmentalists then take cultural pessimism in a startling new direction, says Herman, but one typical of radical environmentalism and it is the claim that primitive man was more sophisticated and advanced in his dealing with nature (83). Hence, the advocacy of some environmentalists for the rejection of civilization and return to primitive hunter/gatherer subsistence living (84).

Peter Salonius illustrates this advocacy for restored primitivism in his argument that all human use of nature since the emergence of agriculture some 10,000 years ago has been destructive and exploitative. It has all been wrong and now “to reach sustainability, the world will need to reduce its population to that of the hunter-gatherers, and go back to living on the resources the natural ecosystem can produce” (85).

Herman ends his environmental chapter with the comment that Al Gore pushes cultural pessimism to another new extreme, concluding that the human community was doomed from the start (86). The not surprising outcome of this pessimism-that the civilizing process is a process of corruption (87)- is, as Tocqueville noted, a sapping of the will to achieve. “Pessimism turns to fatalism and the only option is resignation and withdrawal” (88).

These then are the main themes of Declinist/Degeneration theory which have continued into the present as the latest historical version of apocalypticism. Declinism was constructed to demonize modern humans and modern human progress as destructive. It provided the basis for much modern perception of industrial technological civilization as a corrupting force in life. According to Herman, Post-WW2 environmental apocalypticism adopts this ideology of modern civilization in decline as implicit conventional wisdom.

Marxism was also presented as a new comprehensive explanation of degeneration during the 19th Century and it adhered to the same basic template of apocalyptic themes with its beliefs in an original Golden Age, a primitive paradise-like society of mutual cooperation, a subsequent decline toward capitalist corruption, and a future purging of the corruption in order to restore the original primitive harmony and bliss. The influence of apocalyptic thinking on human perception is widespread and deeply ingrained.

**Post-WW2 Apocalyptic (C)**

(Note: Most people share the concern for the preservation of wilderness/forests, the protection of species, the maintenance of clean air, water, and oceans, and the preservation of healthy soils. But this is something other than “environmentalism” as a more extremist movement that relentlessly appeals to alarmist scenarios that distort the actual state of the varied elements of nature and its resources. This leads to fear-motivated policy responses that then have unintended consequences that actually harm instead of help nature. Again, note the biofuels fiasco (fear of CO2 and the push for alternatives to fossil fuels) and consequent increased deforestation. The case made in the following material argues against the irresponsible use of exaggeration, the abandonment of careful empirical science, and the use of unwarranted alarm to panic people into ultimately damaging salvation schemes. Also, while not all alarmism is full-blown apocalypticism in nature, enough of it does out-rightly claim that the end is nigh, or points clearly in that direction)

New alarmist movements are repeatedly accepted and readily believed by people because they resonate with the deeply embedded template of ancient apocalyptic myth and stir afresh the associated emotions of fear, guilt, and the perverted hope in the saving effectiveness of an ultimate purging of some corrupting force. People continue to respond to new bouts of alarmism because the alarms resonate with this most primitive mythical system to ever have structured human psychology, perception, and outlook.

This helps to explain why apocalypticism has again re-emerged in the post-WW2 era as a dominant perspective that now influences modern human outlook and national public policy across the world, often in economically damaging ways. The post-war apocalyptic movement has become one of the more potent assaults ever on humanity and human progress. This is all the more confounding, and in need of further explanation and response, when we recognize that human progress toward a better future reached new heights in the post-WW2 era. Despite this striking progress, a new generation of apocalyptic pessimists were successful in promoting the view that overall things were actually getting worse than ever. As someone said, they made the central debate of our times whether humanity was good for the planet or not and they came down firmly on the side that humanity was a curse on the earth.

Another reason the post-war apocalyptics were successful was because they based their arguments for doom on a non-scientific approach that focused on short-term reversals to long-term trends, isolated situations that did not represent greater overall wholes, and anecdotes that did not correctly represent larger populations and trends. By ignoring a sound approach to data that showed the very opposite, they were able to promote the distorting myth that humans were destroyers, and that human progress was a destructive force on earth. Their shoddy science was often couched in extremist apocalyptic language with debasing appeals to fear and despair, notably so in Paul Ehrlich’s case (89). See the following section on Apocalyptic Method for further detail on this apocalyptic or mythical approach to data.

While appearing more sophisticated in terms of language used and concepts employed, the post-WW2 apocalyptic movement- specifically environmental apocalypticism- once again repeats the same primitive themes of all past apocalyptic systems. It maintains the belief in a better past (man in primitive non-corrupting harmony with a pristine wilderness world), a decline into modern destructive consumer civilization, a looming collapse of life toward a catastrophic ending as punishment (retribution from an angry GAIA), and a restoration of the original paradise of primitive life once again in harmony with nature. This new green religion has replaced traditional religion across much of Europe. But these supposedly secular alternatives are still profoundly religious viewpoints at core. “Every society....is a ‘religion’ whether it thinks so or not...no matter how much they may try to disguise themselves by omitting religious and spiritual ideas from their lives....there will never be anything wholly secular about human fear. Man’s terror is always ‘holy terror’” (90).

The fear of death does not permit people to relinquish their need for explanations (systems of meaning) and resolutions to the death issue. Whether viewed as secular or sacred, people will return again and again to viewpoints that they instinctively hope will help them understand death and overcome their death terror. It is unfortunate that the apocalyptic death myth has fulfilled this role for so much of human history.

**The Unique Focus of Modern Apocalypticism- Limits**

The unique emphasis of the Post-WW2 apocalyptic movement has been the theme of violated limits. This emphasis incorporates the view that all elements of the physical world are strictly limited. Ecosystems are limited, all natural resources are limited, and the entire biosphere is limited. The apocalyptic alarmists have then told the world this story- that notably increasing populations in the Post-WW2 era, achieving ever higher standards of living, were consuming too much of earth’s rapidly decreasing supply of resources.

The alarmists claim that this destructive violation of the limits of the natural world by technological society was now causing the collapse of earth’s basic processes and ecosystems. And all is now heading toward some catastrophic ending. Post-war apocalypticism saw only one remedy, just as all apocalyptic alarmists have believed over history, and that was to remove from the earth the cause of collapse and catastrophe, the destructive humans. Salvation is to be found in ridding the planet of the curse of humanity and this meant population control and reduction programs with some extreme elements even wishing for a radical removal of most of humanity (e.g. Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Society calling for an 85% reduction of the human population). Apocalyptic alarmists have also called for an immediate return to primitive living conditions with low resource consumption because only a drastic halt to progress and reversal to primitive conditions would save the world and restore original paradise conditions.

Like past apocalyptic movements this post-ww2 movement is intensely anti-human and uniquely anti-human progress in that it believes modern technological society is destroying life. And typical of all apocalyptic distortion this story has been promoted in denial of the evidence on the major resources and trends of life which show ongoing progress toward improved conditions.

The contemporary focus on violated limits is not entirely new. Many primitive societies held views of “limited good” based on their experience of situations where local resources were run down from overuse. The mistake is to extrapolate these local situations out to explain all of life and history. Limits is a very primitive and distorting view of life and resources.

The post-WW2 limits advocates further buttressed their views with a perspective on the Second Law of Thermodynamics and entropy (closed systems, dissipation and decay, growing disorder) that they believed gave their views more scientific credibility. Environmentalists even developed an ecological version of the Second Law.

Other themes that are employed to buttress the apocalyptic worldview include the idea of balance and stasis in nature. Rachel Carson (see below) appealed to this particular theme and claimed that technological societies with their chemical breakthroughs in pesticides were upsetting nature’s balance. This idea of stasis (non-changing) is important to note because of the repeated generation of panic over even slight changes in the varied aspects of nature. Alarmists claim that these changes signal shifts or tipping points toward some decline and catastrophe. They are shifts away from an optimal static past.

The belief in stasis is essential to apocalyptic thinking or logic. Once an ideal has been established (i.e. original Golden Age) then any subsequent change is corruption of the original perfection. Bury notes this same perception in Greek thinking and it has continued down to the present. It is notable in environmental thought where a past state of nature is considered optimal and nature is believed to exist in stasis or balance. So any change is degradation from the optimal past. It is movement toward something less, toward something worse because the best already existed in the past. With this view of original perfection or paradise everything since is viewed as decline. You cannot win with such apocalyptic dogmatism. Original perfection is an impossible standard and subsequently can never be met by anything less. All that follows is decline from that perfection. Hence, the environmental argument that any change in past ecosystem states is something that signals decline to worsening conditions.

Alston Chase (In A Dark Wood) has responded well that there is no balance in nature, no static optimal state in the past that we can consider the healthy norm for nature. Nature is in constant flux and ecosystems undergo ongoing and massive change. But environmental alarmists who ought to know more about nature continue to argue that any change is degradation. Further, environmentalists have promoted the background assumption that wilderness (e.g. climax forest) is the optimal balanced state that must take priority and be preserved everywhere.

Another contributing assumption is that of German monism or holism which, along with ecology, was developed and merged in the work of Ernst Haeckel. Monism in ecology came to mean that all individuals and species were equal parts of a larger whole, the ecosystem. None had special status which came to be interpreted that humanity had no right to appropriate the resources/habitat of other species (see Appendices for notes on the debate over “wise use” versus “wantonness”, and the legitimate human use or change of nature). As noted above in Herman’s material, a more extreme environmentalist position here claims that humans are an unwanted intruder, a curse, or pathogen to be purged. This devaluation often moves toward outright animosity toward humanity and human civilization and calls for a radical culling of the human population.

A further basic assumption employed in contemporary apocalypticism is that of the belief in the moral superiority of a low-consumption lifestyle. Primitive living is considered more vital, such as existence in agrarian and tribal societies which are viewed as more advanced societies that exist in harmony with nature (noble savages having little impact on the environment). Such primitivism is considered soul-strengthening. It enhances spiritual health. People seeking a better life with better living conditions that use more resources are condemned as greedy, morally weak and defective, destructive, and therefore deserving punishment. Desiring such progress subjects people to what is believed to be justly deserved guilt and shame. This religious/moral belief argues for self-sacrifice as essential to salvation.

With these and other themes the post-war apocalyptic movement gained new levels of success in convincing people to accept their story of doom. There were too many people living too well and using too much of Earth’s resources. Those resources were now facing exhaustion and collapse. We and our technological societies were destroying nature and all was heading for collapse and catastrophic ending. The only remedy was a quick and radical retreat to primitive living standards. This story became widely propagated and accepted as conventional wisdom in the post-war era.

The varied alarms of the post-war era can be viewed as phases in one larger continuing movement. Each new alarm brought its own unique features while maintaining common apocalyptic themes. The post-war era became dense with environmental activism in response to rising concerns over environmental issues (oil spills, pollution) and legislative/policy responses were proposed to counter what was perceived as a worsening environmental situation. And legitimate environmental concerns existed. But too often things were exaggerated all out of proportion to actual dangers and the public was repeatedly alarmed by groups advocating particular agendas for social/political/economic change, agendas that were openly anti-human and anti-human progress. This was the most serious mistake of the environmental movement because it is specifically economic and technological progress that enables us to properly care for the environment. Lack of such progress exacerbates environmental degradation. This critically important relationship has been denied by apocalyptic alarmists and the opposite view, that economic progress destroys the environment, has become conventional wisdom. The correct relationship of progress leading to environmental improvement has been expressed well in the Kuznets Curve or Environmental Transition research (more on this later).

What ought to concern us is the ongoing attempt to portray human progress and the problems sometimes associated with our progress in exaggerated apocalyptic terms- crisis, catastrophe, collapse- which distorts entirely the true state of things and prevents rational debate over actual problems that we need to deal with. No one would deny that genuine environmental problems exist but exaggerated alarmism expresses little more than dogmatic anti-human and anti-progress extremism at its worst. It tries to swamp rational argument/discussion with fear-generating hysteria that is an assault on freedom; a blatant effort to manipulate and coerce others to adopt the extremist salvation schemes of the alarmists.

The apocalyptic outlook has always been entirely wrongheaded in its understanding and explanation of the fundamental nature and trend of life. It has been especially wrong in its devaluation of humanity and human endeavor as destructive. Yet it repeatedly resurfaces in new movements like the one we are currently still suffering through. We are not likely to embrace a more complete liberation from the endless onslaught of apocalyptic alarmism until we understand the deeply rooted perspective behind it, the core beliefs that shape the deeply rooted propensities in our psyches that make us susceptible to alarmism. This makes it all the more important to offer a new narrative that more correctly portrays the true state of life. This is what Julian Simon and others have tried to do.

**Brief History of Post-WW2 Apocalyptic**

The following people are significant for being more widely known and representative of much more going on in terms of environmental alarmism over this time period. Each added unique emphases to the developing Post-WW2 apocalyptic movement. These capsule histories are not meant to be comprehensive but to simply note apocalyptic themes that keep resurfacing in modern thought.

**Osborn and Vogt** (91)

Pierre Desrochers and Christine Hoffbauer state that Paul Ehrlich’s Population Bomb climaxed a debate that had developed in the 1950s and 1960s. This debate was shaped by the writing of Fairfield Osborn (Our Plundered Planet) and William Vogt (Road to Survival). According to Desrochers and Hoffbauer, Osborn and Vogt’s arguments and concepts revived the Malthusian perspective and became widely accepted as conventional wisdom throughout the world. They built the foundations of modern eco-catastrophism, shaping the issues, outlook and rhetorical style of this modern apocalypticism.

Desrochers and Hoffbauer note that the central argument of Osborn and Vogt was that the natural world was limited. There were insufficient resources and too many people trying to access and use those limited resources. This created a catastrophic situation made worse by technological developments and greed. Modern technology enabled more people to access declining resources and this made everything worse. According to Osborn and Vogt, the physical limits of earth and its ecosystems set absolute boundaries on the extent of human development. Human progress was limited in a finite and increasingly fragile planet.

Osborn and Vogt argued that population growth and the demand for better living standards was the main cause of environmental destruction. Population growth was exceeding the carrying capacity of the land. Humans were consequently wreaking havoc everywhere. And human civilizational progress was causing ecological collapse.

There was a significant moral element to the argument of Osborn and Vogt, marking their viewpoint as a religious and non-scientific one. They stated, for instance, that people cannot violate the physical laws of God without punishment. They added that the human misuse of land goes back to the beginning when man and nature became out of balance (a fall into sin). But a day of judgment was coming. This placed their argument firmly within the narrative framework of primitive apocalyptic mythology. They also expressed a personal dislike of profit and technological change, a scepticism of scientific advances and technological innovations, a dislike of free markets and popular consumerism which they referred to as the “wasters psychology”, and a preference for frugality.

There was also a strong devaluation of humanity or anti-human element within their general anti-progress outlook- “a disregard for the value of most human life” and blaming a lack of intelligence at the root of human destructiveness. Consequently, they believed that it was better to let people die and decrease population than to let them live and starve themselves to death. In Osborn’s case, these anti-human views derived from his father, a eugenicist and Aryan enthusiast. His father helped develop the relationship of eugenics to environmental conservation. This was part of a move to make eugenics more legitimate by drawing attention to overpopulation and the destruction of natural resources. This emphasis on the unsustainable demands that more people placed on supposedly rapidly depleting natural resources formed the heart of modern environmental ideology.

Osborn and Vogt are credited with reviving the work of Malthus in the US. Desrochers and Hoffbauer claim that they shifted the post-war atmosphere from optimism to pessimism and taught people to think less of possibilities and more of limits. Their arguments became conventional wisdom as they fed modern doubt about limits to growth and pessimism over human progress.

Vogt in particular focused on the limited ability of soil to produce more crops and he dismissed the human ability to make improvements to this resource. He denied that technological advances could enable people to expand such limits. But between Vogt’s book and Paul Ehrlich’s book, significant advances in plant genetics and plant productivity overturned this myth of soil and plant resource limits.

**Steady State Economics (Ecological Economics)**

Another contributing line of thought to post-war apocalypticism was the developing theory of steady-state economics (92). Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen is credited with the modern formulation of this theory though proponents- stretching credulity- claim that it has roots in Adam Smith. Georgescu-Roegen made his break with conventional economic theory in the 1960s and eventually published his first work in 1966. Protégés of his, such as Garret Hardin and Herman Daly, continued his work in further developing “ecological economics” (93).

Steady-state economics argues for a stable or non-growing economy that does not exceed what it claims is the natural and limited carrying capacity of earth. This theory is based on the belief in unsurpassable biophysical limits to growth. It relates these physical limits to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Georgescu-Roegen developed this relationship in his 1971 book The Entropy Law and the Economic Process where he claimed to show that the Second Law governs economic processes. The entropy law determines what is possible in an economy. Steady-state theorists argued that the economy was an open subsystem of earth’s ecosystem and the ecosystem was finite, non-growing and closed. The economy functions by taking useful (low-entropy) raw materials and energy and giving back waste (high-entropy) material and energy. Simon offers a response to this Entropy Law perspective in his Grand Theory (see below).

Economic growth in this closed earth ecosystem then causes climate disruption, habitat loss and species extinctions, diminishing natural resources, struggle over limited resources, and increasing disparity. To prevent environmental degradation from economic growth, steady-state theorists argued for maintaining an economy at a stable, sustainable level with stable population (or decreasing population if needed to find the sustainable level) and stable consumption with decreased liquidation of natural resources and less waste deposition in the environment. The steady-staters argued that the economy should respect biophysical limits and not excessively disrupt ecosystems and ecosystem services. It should be sized to balance with nature and protect resources and the processes of Earth.

There was also a significant moral aspect to the argument of the steady-state theorists. They, along with other progress pessimists, viewed human progress and growth as destructive of nature. They believed there should be less emphasis on material good and more emphasis on mental, cultural, moral and social progress. John Maynard Keynes, another philosopher claimed by the steady-staters, claimed that avarice was a vice. Keynes presented his own definition of the limits to growth based on the argument of diminishing returns. Others argued for the significant moral benefits of lower consumption and more equality in distribution of resources- more for future generations, less natural resources for humans, and more room for nature. Joseph Schumacher (Small is Beautiful) proposed Buddhist alternatives and argued the primary concern should be for natural stock maintenance, balance, and stasis in ecosystems.

Critics popped the steady state balloon in pointing out that technological progress and gains in efficiency overcame limits to growth (e.g. CO2 emissions decreased over time per dollar of GDP, along with decreases in resource intensity)(94).

Also, increasing levels of atmospheric CO2 sparked a significant increase in world Net Primary Production of 6.17% over the period from 1982 to 1999. This resulted in a greener world, a healthier biosphere, and overall more plant mass that has benefitted animal life and human crop production (95). It appears that “unsurpassable biophysical limits” are, well, surpassable.

**Rachel Carson (Wikipedia)**

Then along came Rachel Carson who makes a unique contribution to the development of the post-war apocalyptic movement. Her book, The Silent Spring, is considered the milestone marking the birth of the modern environmental movement. Some have said that her real legacy was the new public awareness that the environment was being damaged by humans. And whenever this charge of damage comes up we need to ask for clarification as to whether we are talking about change to the environment, something unavoidable and virtuous most of the time, versus actual damage in some form from carelessness or excess (again, see Appendices on the human use of nature).

Carson emerged to become the mother of the modern fear of chemicals, which was her unique contribution to the more general doubt over human progress. Her book claimed that earth was under assault from chemical poisons. The outcome, she said, was a shocking and dangerous reduction of earth’s natural resources and balance. We were upsetting earth’s ecology. The delicate balance of nature was being upset by chemicals.

The striking thing in her presentation is the fact that she sets a particular tone in her first chapter. She appeals directly to the core structure or viewpoint of ancient apocalyptic mythology, the very ideas that shape the deep psychological propensity in our psyche to believe in doom scenarios. Carson begins her book by telling the story of a small town existing in paradise-like conditions until its fall into the curse of the chemical age. As one reviewer said, “Carson is using a very old narrative framework, the most famous example being the narrative of the fall as described in the Judeo-Christian Bible. Before the fall into sin, Adam and Eve enjoyed the garden in complete harmony and bliss. After the fall, they were sent out....Carson uses that very powerful narrative framework to describe the world as it exists in harmony and bliss before the fall into massive use of poisons in the environment” (96).

The authors of thebestnotes.com also state that Carson uses the language of melodrama to inspire admiration for the beauty and harmony of nature and repugnance for reckless destruction by chemicals. She then claims the earth is in desperate need of protection. As with all scares, there is often a relationship to an actual problem that exists but these problems are exaggerated out of proportion to factual reality. We need to acknowledge where there has been carelessness, ignorance, and resulting damage. But we also recognize that we have learned, corrected our mistakes, and improved our approach over the long term. And we need to show how important chemicals have been to protecting life from the hugely damaging impact of natural pathogens which kill more life than anything else.

**Paul Ehrlich** (97)

Paul Ehrlich of Population Bomb fame further ratcheted up alarm over the destructiveness of people and their progress and took his alarmist views to an even wider audience. He is a significant figure in advancing the post-war apocalyptic movement. Ehrlich, like his alarmist predecessors, was grounded in the assumption of natural limits. He repeated the Malthusian portrayal of catastrophe arising from population growth outpacing agricultural production in a world where available resources were nearly at their limits. He focused mainly on what he believed was the increasingly dire state of the environment and food security, arguing that growing population places increasing strain on all aspects of the natural environment.

Ehrlich had been directly inspired by the writing of Osborn and Vogt. He took their debate to a wider audience employing more apocalyptic language to intensify fear. He claimed that available resources were at their limit and catastrophe was imminent with a potential massive disaster coming in the next decade or so. This apparently affirmed the widespread belief in the 60s and 70s that increasingly catastrophic famines were on their way.

Critics of the Population Bomb say that it focused on spectacle and exaggeration at the expense of accuracy, ignoring the already apparent errors in Osborn and Vogt’s analysis. Charles Rubin said that Ehrlich was largely unoriginal but he wrote in a clear emotionally gripping style that made his book very popular. He avoided “mind-dulling statistics” to “roar like an Old Testament prophet” of apocalypticism (98). His style of writing explained the enormous audience he attracted. The critics conclude that using an alarmist tone and emotional appeal were the main lessons that the present generation of environmentalists learned from Ehrlich’s success.

Ehrlich’s call was to rapidly bring population under control, reducing the growth rate to zero or negative. He proposed far more radical solutions than Malthus had, such as not sending food aid to starving countries that were not implementing population control programs.

While Ehrlich was spreading alarm, human progress was producing more food than ever before as Norman Borlaug had set off the green revolution in crop production. The death rate was also declining, people were consuming more calories per person, and the root of famine was understood as due to political instability not food shortage. India, which had been the focus of Ehrlich’s alarmism, experienced a dramatic and suddenly improved food situation in just a few short years. This was due to India becoming a democracy and to Borlaug’s technological discoveries.

**Limits To Growth** (99)

Another notable phase in the ramping up of post-war apocalyptic alarm came with the publication in 1972 of The Limits To Growth by the Club of Rome group. This group continued the alarm over population growth and unchecked economic growth within a world with finite or limited resources. Their unique contribution to the post-war apocalyptic movement was to use computer modelling to create scenarios of collapse and catastrophe.

They employed five variables in their models- world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion. They entered some of these as growing exponentially- population, capital (industrialization), and pollution, while technology for expanding resources (food production) only grew in discrete units.

Their scenarios were adjusted to affirm human destructiveness and the inability of humanity to creatively respond to limits. They portrayed the alarmist scenario of how exponential growth (population, economic growth) interacts with limited natural resources. They used examples like deer populations overgrazing a range and causing environmental destruction. This of course, ignores entirely the human creative response and ability.

As with other unscientific apocalyptic alarms, the predictions of the Club of Rome have failed at the usual 100% historical rate.

Other alarms in succeeding decades continued the effort to ramp up fear. They were a continuation of this same anti-human, anti-human progress movement. Alarmists were determined to show that humanity was bad for the earth. Too many destructive people were consuming too many resources which were in danger of collapsing. People were destroying nature and all was heading for a catastrophic ending. We heard this apocalyptic message repeatedly in forest disappearance alarms, ozone hole alarms, acid rain alarms, species extinction alarms, fisheries collapse alarms, peak oil alarms, agricultural land degradation alarms, and global warming alarmism. All pointed to the destructiveness of human technological society for consuming too much and destroying nature in the process.

The alarmist movement consistently ignored growing bodies of evidence that showed the exact opposite story to be true. While problems existed, there was improvement on all the major trends and resources. More people gaining higher standards of living, and consuming more resources, did lead to temporary resource shortages. But with prices of those resources increasing in response to shortages, there was the further response of more exploration and the discovery of more resource supplies, or the shift to alternatives. This led to an ongoing long-term decrease in resource prices and all were better off in the end.

The true story of life on the planet was missed entirely by the apocalyptic alarmists. Evidence revealed a world trend of long-term progress toward an increasingly unlimited future. We have discovered not violated limits but ever-expanding resource supplies in a generous universe. Apocalypticism distorts utterly this basic trajectory of life which is overall progress toward something better.

We now have the scientific tools to properly evaluate whether humanity is good for the planet or not. Simon made some critical breakthroughs here with his emphasis on finding the true state of things by looking at the long-term trends. This soundest of scientific evidence shows convincingly that humanity is the best thing that ever happened to earth.

**Apocalyptic Methodology**

Modern apocalypticism as detailed in Herman’s book on Declinism- The Idea of Decline- bemoans the loss of what it calls the more vital primitive existence and the primitive outlook. Declinism openly derides the modern rational scientific outlook for undermining the primitive mind. The mythical orientation of this apocalyptic movement has subsequently led such sub-branches as environmental apocalypticism to develop a distinct method to support their vision that humanity and human progress are destroying life. This method is ahistorical in that it downplays, dismisses, or denies outright actual historical data and historical trends that show the true state of things on earth. A mythically oriented mind cannot confront the hard data of history and its long term trends that would expose its irrational claims of a grand decline of life toward catastrophe. Adherence to proper scientific methodology would show the exact opposite to be true.

Instead, the alarmist/apocalyptic method appeals to short-term data series that are reversals to longer term trends. And it appeals to isolated cases that do not represent greater overall situations. It also uses anecdotes that do not represent larger general populations. Alarmists extrapolate these aberrations out to longer trends and larger general situations to make the case that things are getting worse, when all the main long-term trends and overall situations show that life is improving. As Bjorn Lomborg says, they degrade science by picking bits out of context and basing their case on aberrations that do not reveal the true state of earth (The Sceptical Environmentalist).

Lomborg offers one of the most thorough treatments of the unscientific method of alarmists in the first chapter of his book, Skeptical Environmentalist. Julian Simon had also touched on this method in various places in Ultimate Resource.

For comparison Lomborg presents proper scientific methodology in his argument that to assess the true state of anything we need to use the best data sources available and we should then look at the most important elements or characteristics of the world to get at the true state of the earth (100).

The alarmists, he says, have told us that pollution is worsening, species are being slaughtered in massive numbers, topsoil is disappearing, the entire biosphere is being destroyed, wilderness is disappearing, and in general ecosystems are collapsing. Human progress is destroying life on earth. But, he counters, a look at the major indicators shows something quite different- the human condition has vastly improved with more food, better health, long life, and overall higher standards of living. And the main natural resources are not collapsing as the doomsters have claimed (101).

He then says that the correct method for assessing the true state of anything is to focus on the long-term trends. This requires looking at how things were in the past and how they have progressed till now. This gives us insight into how things are likely to progress into the future (102). As Simon said, if there is no good evidence to the contrary, then we can safely assume the long-term trends will continue into the future.

To the contrary, alarmists will appeal to a single, local incident or situation and then extrapolate this out to make claims that it represents an overall world situation. From these isolated “hotspots” they generalize out to larger wholes (103). An example here is the severe erosion that occurred on a small plot of Belgian farmland (0.11 hectares). Even the researcher on that plot warned that it did not represent any larger situation. But alarmists seized on that to insist on making sweeping conclusions of doom about the larger worldwide soil degradation situation based on only that single local example (104).

Another example of making generalizations from a single local situation would be that of the iconic polar bear floating on a small ice floe. The picture of this single animal was employed by alarmists to make the claim that it represented the overall situation of polar bears going extinct as global warming melted their habitats. But a check of the larger general situation and long-term trend revealed that polar bears have increased from about 8,000 some fifty years ago to about 25,000 today. This reveals a long-term improvement in their situation, not a decline toward collapse.

Others appeal to short-term reversals in longer trends and make general conclusion from these about the longer trends. An example Lomborg offers here is the fact that food prices have decreased over the past few centuries. However, there was a short reversal in this trend when wheat prices increased from 1994-96. Alarmist Lester Brown took this short term reversal to claim that we were heading for disaster. But this short reversal could be explained by the breakup of the Soviet Union and consequent decline in yields. This did not mean that we had reached the limits of plant productivity as Brown claimed. After the reversal ended, the price of wheat continued to decline once again (105).

Lomborg says that short-term reversals are bound to occur in long-term trends but these 2-3 year reversals do not change the overall trends which show the true state of things.

Yet another example of this shoddy method of appeal to short-term reversals to build a case for doom scenarios is that of Professor Pimental of Cornell University, a well-known environmentalist. He took a short-term reversal in the long trend decline of TB rates, a reversal from 1990-95 when TB rates increased. He used this short reversal to claim that human disease in general was getting worse. After this 5 year reversal the long-term decline in TB rates continued. As Lomborg says, Pimental presented the public with a distorted and misleading picture of disease (106).

James Payne (History of Force) also referred to this tendency of people to generalize short-term local aberrations out to larger wholes and called it the fallacy of “presentism”. He noted that people tend to take their present situations or experiences and use them to define all of life and history. It may be some localized natural disaster that leads people to believe that particular event finally signals the looming end of all. Presentism leads people to perceive that whatever has gone wrong in their present situation means that everything is getting worse and the catastrophic end of all is near. For example, the ancient Sumerians took their experience with local Mesopotamian flooding to create myths of a great Flood that would destroy all life.

A further example of appeal to an isolated case to make general claims and conclusions about overall situations would be the alarmist appeal to the collapse of Easter Island society and the use of this to make the argument that all human civilization is heading toward similar collapse from exhausting natural resources (107). But while individual societies have collapsed over history, the overall human civilization has progressed significantly and continually over the entire history of humanity. As a result most people now live longer, are healthier with less disease, have ever higher living standards, and access to more resources, not less.

In summary, the long-term trends of the main features/resources of the world show no degradation or looming collapse, whether forests, fisheries, agricultural land, or species.

So Lomborg’s argument is sound that we should go to the most credible sources of data for information on the longest term trends in order to get to the real state of earth and life. This evidence shows that human economy and progress is not destroying life. The choice that alarmists have put before humanity, says Lomborg, is the choice between economic growth and a greener world as if these were in conflict with one another (108). But the long-term evidence shows something very different from the doomster vision of apocalypticism. Human economic progress does not destroy life but enables us to improve it.

**Sample of Post-War Alarms**

**Population Alarm**

The population alarm reveals the devastating outcomes of apocalyptic logic: that imminent catastrophe demands that you rid/purge the earth of the cause of looming catastrophe- human beings. The population alarm and consequent population control response is a striking example of the anti-human heart of apocalyptic thinking.

This apocalyptic logic is now presented in more sophisticated concepts of biophysical limits, footprint theory, and increasing population growth resulting in too many consumers exhausting resources. But underlying this contemporary sophistication we find the same old primitive themes of corrupt people destroying the paradise of wilderness life, decline toward catastrophe, and the need to purge the corrupting force with coercive intervention if necessary in order to save life. And when you repeatedly terrorize people with scenarios of imminent collapse and looming catastrophe and then call for desperate measures to “save the world”, well then don’t be surprised when people widely support responses that have had immensely damaging consequences for many others.

Arthur Herman offers perhaps the most notorious 20th Century example of apocalypticism promoting violence toward humanity in the case of Hitler. The apocalyptic viewpoint that incited Hitler also informed the eugenics movement and then modern population alarmism. That viewpoint was termed racial degeneration or racial pessimism, the idea that humanity was degenerating from a more vital original type. In the German version the more vital original human was Teutonic or Aryan. In the pre-WW2 era the Germans believed that a tainted or corrupt race (Jewish) was polluting the original civilization and the people of Germany with commercial capitalism(109).

Hitler emerged at the time when apocalyptic thinking and its panic over looming catastrophe was widespread in Germany. As Herman recounts, his generation was the first raised on cultural pessimism. Leading thinkers like Oswald Spengler had declared that if people did nothing then Germany would be dragged to extinction (110). The panic over looming catastrophic ending incited people like Hitler to step forward to save the nation from catastrophe and to take extreme measures to do so. As Herman notes, the fears of racial degeneration led to appeals for state solutions believed necessary to “save civilization, regardless of the cost” (111).

The Holocaust was theultimate logical response to the alarmism over racial degeneration or decline. “The Nazi genocide represented an extreme solution to what seemed an extreme crisis: the threat of Jewish pollution and racial catastrophe. The Holocaust was implicit in every theory of racial pessimism. To Heinrich Himmler and his associates there was no irony. In order to save the Aryan race from the destructive forces of technological civilization what choice did they have?” (112). Hitler and his crew, and their salvation scheme or final solution, were the inevitable products of apocalyptic thinking and logic.

The eugenics movement similarly adopted the view that modern humans had deteriorated or fallen from a more vital original type. Then in an endeavor much like Osborn’s father’s efforts, eugenics was again connected to environmental concerns by one of the fathers of modern environmentalism, Ernst Haeckel. He argued that deteriorating humans had become a destructive force in technological society and were thus ruining nature. Again, the eugenics movement did not entirely disappear but was absorbed into the modern population alarm and reduction movement.

Grasping the relationship among the basic themes of apocalyptic belief helps to understand the logic that leads to the radical anti-humanism of the eugenics and population control movements. The apocalyptic response to looming catastrophe is that we must act drastically to save the world and this involves ridding the world of the destructive threat that is humanity, or whatever subsection of a general population that is considered to be the corrupting enemy. Population control logic also assumes that if people are essentially corrupt and destructive, then more people means more corruption and destruction. It is simple arithmetic.

The internal logic of this apocalyptic belief system is tight and leads inevitably to this anti-human conclusion. People like Hitler grasped this logic and decided to act in order to save his threatened world. He believed that he was doing the right thing, a good and necessary thing. His response to the apocalyptic vision was to act to save himself and his chosen group. He re-enacted an archaic historical pattern of violent action to eliminate destroying enemies in order to save something greater. And he believed that this was necessary as the only common sense response to apocalyptic alarmism. There is the need to face the continuing banality of this sort of evil logic and to present it in the starkest terms. People frightened by apocalyptic visions of looming collapse will believe those visions and will then support the radical anti-human solutions or salvation schemes that alarmists offer them.

**Brief History of Human Population Culling**

Robert Zubrin has written an unsettling summary of the Post-WW2 population control movement titled The Population Control Holocaust (113). He says that this movement is supported by a core ideology of anti-humanism. A more detailed history of this movement is Matthew Connelly’s Fatal Misconception which traces “the evolution of population control through early 20th century eugenics movements and the ‘population bomb’ hysteria of the 1960s and 1070s to its culmination in large-scale attempts to cut birth rates in poor countries” (114).

Zubrin rightly grounds this post-war population alarm in its Malthusian roots. Malthus advocated the unscientific idea that population growth expands rapidly beyond the resources needed to support the growing population. And this leads to large-scale starvation and catastrophe because people lack the ability to respond creatively and resolve the resource shortages.

The post-war control movement, while rooted in Malthus, really took off with Ehrlich’s alarmist book The Population Bomb, says Zubrin. He adds that the US Congress responded to population alarmists like Ehrlich and appropriated money to fund first domestic and then foreign population control programs. The rationale for this during the Cold War was that the population of poor nations needed to be cut in order to reduce potential recruits for the communist movement.

An Office of Population was then set up in 1966 under the direction of a Dr. Ravenholt who viewed pregnancy as a disease and aggressively set out to sterilize and abort women throughout the world. These population control campaigns caused immense suffering through the use of unapproved and banned drugs and defective intrauterine devices. In a short time Ravenholt’s programs transformed the “US non-military foreign aid program... from a mission of mercy to an agency for human elimination”.

By the 1970s, says Zubrin, the US was using control of food supplies to coercively impose population control on a global scale. Population control had become the core strategic interest of the US and it had become a cruelly inhumane movement that was notably racist in that it was directed at the non-white populations of the world.

India initially took the brunt of population control measures, especially it’s lower class untouchable population. The country would only receive food aid on condition that it enacted severe sterilization and related population control measures. Paul Ehrlich even argued for letting India “slip down the drain”.

In the late 70s/early 80s China became the focus of the “(most) forceful population control program since Nazi Germany”. The Chinese were just beginning to adopt concepts of carrying capacity, natural limits, and other ideas central to modern environmental alarmist theory. The Chinese engaged in such a brutal program of population control that it repulsed even some of its US funders (e.g. babies born outside of China’s one-child policy being left to starve in ‘dying rooms’).

Zubrin ends his account of the population holocaust stating that it “has resulted in billions of lost or ruined lives”. He exposes well the underlying anti-humanist ideology that was grounded in the belief that world resources are limited. This belief in the stinginess of life results in making every person the enemy of every other person in the struggle over limited and scarce resources. “The ultimate outcome of such a worldview can only be enforced stagnation, tyranny, war and genocide. The horrific crimes advocated or perpetrated by anti-humanism’s devotees over the past two centuries prove this conclusively”. And he so correctly concludes that “only in a world of unlimited resources can all men be brothers”.

**Response**

Any response to population alarmism should include the background fact that there is no evidence of decline or degeneration in humanity but to the contrary overwhelming evidence of human improvement over time. The evidence of human progress in technological society shows that people are becoming more intelligent, more creative, and more capable of resolving problems such as apparent resource scarcity. This is especially important to note in response to the alarmist argument (e.g. Ehrlich) that humanity is incapable of responding to the predicted food shortages and limits to food productivity.

One of the more striking accounts of human creative ability in light of apparent resource limitations is that of Norman Borlaug and his discovery of new high-yield grains. In his discovery we have a great example of how human progress in technological society saves nature- the relationship of improved environmental conditions being dependent on economic growth and development. Borlaug is credited with saving an area of forest equivalent to the Amazon in size due to his helping people to grow more productive crops on the same land. Alarmists have insistently discounted such human creativity which is the key unlimited factor that resolves natural limits issues. This is human imagination, learning ability, and problem-solving applied to the same resources as before. The Borlaug green revolution with its explosion in crop productivity, and with GM foods promising more, powerfully answered the famine scares associated with population alarms. To make the case for a population alarm you have to ignore such creative human response to emerging problems.

Also, Borlaug and his colleagues are the products of population growth. And how many other similarly creative people are not allowed to be born because of the ongoing population control programs?

A further response to these population alarms, fed by such irrational assumptions as the exponential projections of the Club of Rome (people standing shoulder to shoulder), is to note that they neglect natural feedback mechanisms such as the “demographic transition” which also emerges out of human progress. This involves the following related responses- improving economic/political conditions permit women, in particular, more opportunity for work. The progress here includes declining mortality rates which initially produce increasing population growth. But after a lag period, continued human progress is then followed by more freedom of choice for women who then choose to have children later in life and choose to have fewer children. The overall eventual result is declining birth rates and declining population (115).

This demographic transition does not require state enforcement- coercive, centralized control of people. It is a natural and free human response. It affirms Julian Simon’s argument for trusting ordinary people to make the best choices for their own lives. Such free choices result in the best overall long-term benefits for all life.

We should remember that this population alarm becomes a problem precisely because it is couched in the distorted view of a limited natural world, of limited natural resources, and silly exaggerated scenarios of unchecked exponential population growth with no relation to natural feedback mechanisms like the demographic transition.

Alarmists continue to fight population growth and progress, notably in the developing world. These committed pessimists simply do not grasp the critical importance of population and progress to solving apparent limited resources and other environmental issues. They then obstruct and short-circuit the very process that improves and saves life.

Julian Simon has argued the following regarding the benefits of more people, “It is... clear that countries with more people produce more knowledge...we find that a larger population is associated with more knowledge and productivity, because there are more potential inventors and adopters of new technology”, (116). The best evidence supports population growth as a positive, creative force in life (for more detail see the later section “A Grand Theory”). Initially, this may seem counter-intuitive because of the false assumptions beaten into public consciousness as conventional wisdom. We may even feel embarrassed accepting Simon’s arguments on population because we have all been cowed by alarmist story-telling and what appears to be alarmist logic or common sense. But it is reasoning based on wrong assumptions and wrong evidence.

**Global Warming Alarm**

The roots of interest in CO2 and how it influences climate go back to the 19th Century. But the movement to create public alarm over CO2 was built mainly in the post-war apocalyptic movement with its wider stirring of hysteria over human progress in technological society. The climate alarm has become the latest phase in the larger overall post-war demonization of humanity and human progress. It has been promoted as the mother of all post-WW2 alarms.

Throughout the history of this developing alarm you can observe the same themes drawn from the ancient template of apocalyptic thinking. Once again, there is the theme of fall and decline evident in claims that humanity is destroying nature by violating limits. This time the violated limits theme is made in terms of overwhelming the atmosphere with excessive CO2 and thereby pushing nature out of balance and into decline. Hence, life is now deteriorating toward an imminent catastrophe. Note the language of catastrophe regularly employed by modern environmental alarmists to ramp up panic- “ecological implosion... unprecedented collapse on a global scale... (life) irretrievably mutilated...” (117). And then there follows the usual apocalyptic escapism noted in environmentalist calls to halt or abandon human progress (i.e. cut back drastically our energy use) in order to save the world from the looming catastrophe. There must be a return to the assumed less-damaging existence of the original primitives.

The **Aig.org** site (118) sides with the alarmist position but still presents a detailed and fairly balanced portrayal of the history of this warming alarm. It notes the initial effort to build alarm over CO2, the early push for funding, the use of isolated weather disasters (e.g. heat waves, droughts) to arouse public fear, the endeavor to build an international consensus and how this helped obtain further funding, the blaming of humanity for causing climate catastrophe, the further promotion of the threat of imminent disaster, the use of well-known people to gain more attention (e.g. Carl Sagan), the endeavor to raise further hysteria in the media, and the Salvationist calls for limiting our use of energy.

**Response**

The scientific response to the global warming alarm has been extensive and thorough on many fronts. In addition though, there is still need for a more robust counter in terms of the wider themes of apocalyptic which underlie all these alarms. There is the need to point out the apocalyptic template behind all alarmism and then effectively counter it with themes from the actual historical narrative of life. It is the deeper narrative that people hold that shapes how they view life, how they view evidence, what data they will accept or dismiss, and how they respond in terms of social policy. Without this foundational corrective response many people will continue to fall for more of the same old alarmism as it repeatedly emerges in new versions.

The varied scientific approaches that come to mind in response to this particular alarm include that of the larger context of CO2 and temperatures over the long term history of Earth. See, for example, Ian Plimer’s treatment of paleo-climate history in Heaven and Earth. We are still in an ice-age era (past 3 million years) with abnormally low average temperatures compared to past eras on Earth which has been entirely ice free for 75% of its history. This ice-age era has been a time of intense climate change with massive glaciations interrupted by shorter inter-glacials, and a lot of other minor warming/cooling periods interspersed along the way. Climate change on Earth is the norm and it is never-ending.

Also, there is the fact that in this ice-age era we have experienced abnormally low levels of CO2 compared to past eras of Earth’s history. The low levels in the pre-industrial past (250-300 ppm) have stressed plant life which has now rebounded in response to healthier levels of atmospheric CO2. Plants prefer 1000- 1500 ppm which are the levels that farmers use in greenhouses. Remember also the previously noted increase in Net Primary Production and consequently healthier biosphere (a notably greener Earth). See also the opening statement of the Oregon Institute of Medicine’s Protest Petition (119).

There is ongoing research and debate over the status of CO2 influence on climate, among other natural factors such as the Sun/cosmic rays and ocean decadal oscillations. Some researchers note that the 1975-1995 mild warming period was one phase in the larger trend of rebound back from the Little Ice Age of 1675-1715 toward a more normal and warmer world. Taking all these facts into consideration, there is no scientifically sound reason to fear a warmer world and rising levels of CO2.

As noted earlier, there is also the issue of unscientific belief in environmental stasis. In the warming alarm this is expressed in the view that nature was in balance with some past lower level of CO2 as optimal (pre-industrial lows). Change in CO2 levels is now seen as decline toward something worse. Once again we find the same old assumption of humanity as the cause of disruption, decline, and looming catastrophe. Hence the endless fear-mongering over the need to halt and reverse human progress as the solution to save the world.

Further, warming alarmists have made political calls for world centralized planning to counter the claimed destructive impact of human technological society with its fossil fuel consumption. Associated with this has been the attempt to rebrand CO2 as a dangerous pollutant, a poison to life. This is an abandonment of basic science. It is a form of insanity. We are talking here about the very food of all life (CO2), the essential material of all life (carbon). Following this, there has been the demand to regulate CO2 which has been called a politicized attempt to halt capitalist society through proxies. And what are the impacts of this anti-CO2 crusade on the poorest people, obstructing their progress and consequent ability to improve their environmental situations?

On the plus side- response to the warming alarm could include the fact that the free market US shift to natural gas has led, in a non-centrally planned manner, to significantly lowered CO2 emissions. This, again, emphasizes how human progress in free society provides the best solutions for life, if one accepts in the first place that increasing CO2 is an environmental problem that needs resolving.

We could also mention Bjorn Lomborg’s concerns for calm and rational debate regarding public spending priorities and better uses of available funding (120).

The global warming alarm, though containing its own unique emphases, shares the same common apocalyptic themes of all other alarm movements, especially those of the more general post-war limits movement.

**Other Environmental Alarms**

With global warming hysteria apparently having peaked and now cooling, and shifting to a more general climate change alarm, we are being told that, perhaps, the next big environmental alarm will be bio-diversity loss (i.e. species extinctions)(121). This alarm has already been around for decades; surging forth now and again in relation to other environmental alarms but it is apparently gaining new major scare status once again. It is being claimed that we are going through the “world’s sixth mass extinction” (122). It is also being claimed that species extinctions are continuing at up to 1,000 times or more the natural rate and some even claiming that one half of all species will be extinct by the end of this century (123). And it is human activity that is responsible for this latest holocaust. Humans are carelessly not seeing the “catastrophe as growing thousands of species are pushed into the dawnless night of extinction” (124). We are engaged in the “First Mass Murder of Life” (125).

The species extinctions alarm has been developed as follows: people note that human activity in furthering progress results in habitat loss (e.g. deforestation). This includes extending agricultural land for crops, human built environment (extending urbanization), transport (roadways), and industry (resource extraction, development). Alarmists then claim that habitat loss directly leads to species loss, a correlation that has never been proven. Yet this correlation is central to the alarmism over the claimed species holocaust. A further association made here is that pollution from human industry (e.g. CO2 causing global warming) is also damaging nature and killing species. In fact, some claim that climate change from global warming will kill more species than anything else. Explosive, unsustainable population growth is also pointed to as the essential cause of the extinction crisis.

Once again, apocalyptic alarmists are trying to make the case that progress in technological society is destroying nature. It is the same old concerted and ongoing endeavor to portray humanity as a destructive force in life.

**Response to the Species Holocaust Alarm**

Species extinctions have shown no strong relationship to habitat loss (see the IUCN study of 1992, Tropical Deforestation And Species Extinction, T.C. Whitmore and J.A. Sayer). And this should be obvious in the fact that most species alive today have survived far greater disruption than anything humans have caused in the 100,000 year cycles of repeated ice-age surges across the continents. Species- adaptable and resilient, not fragile- have survived by migrating up and down slopes and north and south across continents.

Julian Simon devotes a chapter (Ultimate Resource, Ch.31) specifically to answer the species extinction alarm and the unproven correlation between habitat loss and extinctions. He begins, noting that species extinction is a key issue for the environmental movement. To preserve species, environmentalists such as Paul Ehrlich have called on governments to reduce human activity, specifically “to cease developing any more relatively undisturbed land”. Simon responds that this is a call to slam the brakes on progress (126).

He then tackles the exaggerated claims of massive species extinctions by noting that the actual data on observed rates of species extinctions are wildly at odds with claimed rates of loss. He is careful to note that we ought to be concerned over species loss and we should guard the survival of all life but this must be balanced with other valuable things such as human life and civilization (127). Some species loss will be inevitable in our progress and we should be careful and minimize this as much as possible. But while improving our approach to nature, we also need to recognize that what extinction that has occurred as a result of human activity has been wildly exaggerated.

Simon then takes a closer look at the exaggerated claims of species loss in Norman Myer’s Sinking Ark and points to the “guesswork” that these claims are based upon. Alarmists have consistently argued that species loss can be correlated with habitat/forest loss. Meyers (128) claims that “according to the theory of island biogeography, we can realistically reckon that when a habitat has lost 90% of its extent, it has lost half of its species”. Simon counters that this is pure speculation, and nothing more.

All of the authors of the IUCN commissioned study confirmed that “the rate of known extinctions has been and continues to be very low” (129). There is no evidence of massive or increasing rates of species extinctions. The IUCN has recorded only 784 extinct species since 1500 until today or about 1.5 per year (long-term historical average). Bjorn Lomborg suggests a possible higher rate of extinction but still not catastrophic in any way (130).

A striking US example is then provided that invalidates the claimed habitat loss/species loss correlation. When the “forests of the Eastern US were reduced over two centuries to fragments totaling 1-2% of their original extent…only three forest birds went extinct…why, then, would one predict massive extinction from similar destruction of tropical forest?” (131).

Another example that challenges this claimed correlation is found in South America: “The coastal forests of Brazil have been reduced in area as severely as any tropical forest type in the world. According to calculation (the habitat loss/species loss correlation), this should have led to considerable species loss. Yet no known species of its old, largely endemic, fauna can be regarded as extinct” (132).

This evidence convincingly establishes that nature is not fragile as alarmists claim but is adaptable, resilient, and extremely durable. Life does not collapse and die in the face of human engagement and use. There is no convincing evidence that humanity needs to retreat from progress.

**A Grand Theory**

One of the more beneficial and liberating outcomes of human consciousness and its creative abilities is that it enables humanity to overcome all natural limits. The perception of the natural world as inviolably limited is at the heart of the post-war apocalyptic movement. This perception has been reinforced repeatedly in the environmental scares over population, energy, and other natural resources. The limits perspective is tightly pair-bonded with a devaluation of humanity as corrupt, lacking in intelligence, blinded by greed, unable to resolve limited resource issues, and hence, overall a destructive force. This coupling misses entirely the unlimited creative ability of humanity which bursts forth endlessly all throughout history.

Julian Simon offers a well-thought response to this limits thinking and human devaluation on pages 59-83 of his book Ultimate Resource. This section contains his Grand Theory on humanity and natural resources and what the long term evidence shows is really happening in the world.

He starts by noting that science has enabled humanity to attain undreamed of abilities to create new materials, to even assemble atoms and molecules into new materials with new properties. Ceramics is one example. “We can create new materials to replace natural resources”, he says (133).

The application of unlimited human creativity to resources and our ability to come up with new uses and re-combinations, makes the quantity of any resource a non-issue, says Simon. Because the quantity of new ideas and new uses and inventions is infinite, so resources are not finite in any way that can be known (134). When we add the infinite potential of human creativity, it removes all limits on resources. The apocalyptic and limits perspectives have consistently devalued and denied this infinite creative potential.

The ultimate constraint on energy or any other resource is information, says Simon, and as “we can increase information without limit” so there is no definable limit to resources or any other aspect of our existence (135). Admittedly, he says, we can know the quantities of some resource that are available in any given year according to how we use it. But this rough limit in the present does not apply over the long term because resources have increased continually, becoming ever more abundant. So Simon concludes, finite is not a meaningful concept in relation to resources. We don’t know the bounds of any resource. Boundaries have always expanded over history (136) because the limitlessness of the human mind has continually and increasingly created limitlessness in the physical environment.

**Evidence of Surpassing Limits**

I have gathered some information in the following examples that illustrate Simon’s argument that the application of unlimited human creativity to resources makes the quantity of any resource a non-issue. Alarmists have claimed these resources, along with others, were facing collapse from overuse but the evidence shows there is no convincing basis for such alarm.

World Fisheries: With increasing population there has been increasing consumption and stress on various species, impacting about 25-30% of all wild fish species. But as we have become aware of problems we have devised adequate solutions. The aquaculture industry has now grown significantly to take pressure off wild fish stocks. Note the relative stability (and sometimes decrease) in total wild catch numbers over the past decade (137), while the aquaculture industry expands to meet the demands of a growing population. And further in relation to this, we are now using more non-fish inputs for aquaculture which also lessens pressure on wild stocks (138). Also, when stress is removed from various over-fished species they rebound, just as the East Coast Cod fishery is now recovering (139). There will be no collapse of world fisheries in 2048, as alarmists had formerly claimed.

World Forests: With population growth there has been significant forest clearance over the centuries. But we have learned to take pressure off this resource by developing the tree farm industry and we have learned to use wood more efficiently. As a result of our experience and increasing knowledge (creativity) we have, over the past 70 years, maintained world forest cover at roughly 30% of earth’s land area (140). This despite world population increasing almost threefold over the same time period.

World Soils: Human creativity in overcoming limits has been impressive here with technological breakthroughs (e.g. genetic modification of plants, fertilizer inputs) enabling us to produce more crop on the same or less land. This increased agricultural productivity has resulted in returning significant areas of land to nature such as in the US where some 56 million acres were returned from 1980 to 1990(141). And with a growing hydroponics/greenhouse industry, agricultural soil will become less of an irreplaceable resource in the future. Add here the fact that alarmists often ignore such things as soil regeneration rates and net loss when they put forth their scenarios of looming collapse.

It is instructive to recognize in relation to these natural resources that over time with more people, more economic growth, and more consumption, we are learning to have less impact on nature (a smaller footprint). We need to use these natural resources for our progress but the more we progress, the more we are able to ‘save’ these resources, or find alternatives. And there is no end in sight to this process because there is no end to human imagination, ideas, and inventiveness.

Simon then continues to the heart of his Grand Theory and new vision of natural resources. He states that the more people there are and the more resources we use, the better off we become and there is no practical limit to improving our lot forever (142). We create new knowledge, new technology, and this makes it easier to access more resources or create new resources and this overcomes temporary setbacks due to local resource exhaustion or population growth. Simon investigated case after case where doomsters said things were getting worse due to increased population and increasing resources scarcity and he found that things were not getting worse but were actually getting better.

He then focuses on the necessary societal context in which human creativity thrives and this involves the political/social/economic relationships and institutions of a free human society (143). William Bernstein (The Birth of Plenty) similarly notes the vital social institutions and practices that promote human creativity and progress. They include protected private property rights, the right to receive reward for creative effort that is critical to the incentive to improve and protect property, the protection of freely entered contracts and investments (a credible legal environment), the freedom to trade, free communication and transportation, a rational and not mythical approach to life, and schools and libraries to store and pass on accumulated knowledge. These institutions, along with others, established to protect freedom, enable people to become more creators than destroyers.

We are not now at a turning/tipping point in resource history, says Simon. All evidence from past long term trends reveals that resource availability will increase not decrease (144). We continue to develop a body of knowledge and a social context that enables us to improve our resource situation not worsen it. So with confidence we can expect to observe more not less resource availability over time. We are not at some turning point caused by a propensity to destroy rather than create. We have consistently proven over the long term that we are more creators than destroyers. And we will continue to improve our creative abilities over time as we learn and grow.

**The Second Law**

Then Simon focuses on the Second Law of Thermodynamics and how it has been misused to buttress the limited resource perspective (145). He says that doomsters have employed the Second Law in a vision of the human condition inexorably declining toward something worse. The Second Law and entropy state that in a closed system used energy is dissipated and creates increasing disorder in that system over time. Doomsters, assuming the world is a closed system, then argue that the more fuel we use, the sooner we will come to an end due to the lack of energy to maintain our ordered existence. They argue that entropy is the supreme law of nature and governs all that we do. But this is a political and not a scientific argument, says Simon, and usually accompanies calls for central planning and government control.

He then asks, is the Second Law an appropriate model for human activity and natural resources? While it works in a closed system like a laboratory, it is unclear how it would apply to human interaction with nature, he argues. Earth itself is not a closed system, what with energy from the sun entering along with other material from space such as cosmic rays and dust. So with energy and resources, there are no practical boundaries and therefore entropy is irrelevant to us. He notes that even the physics community is unsettled on this issue of the Second Law and entropy (146). We cannot assert that resources are finite, says Simon, when we still know so little about our physical world.

And where the Second Law implies increasing disorder, says Simon, all our observations record a long term increase in order no matter what we look at. The greater long term emergence of life reveals this increasing organization toward something more ordered and advanced. So also human activity in civilization has always resulted in more complex and ordered systems whether more complex language, law, society, or built environment. Everywhere we see more order not less over the long term (147). All evidence shows increase in order, consistent with the view that earth is not a closed system. So the concept of entropy, concludes Simon, does not apply. Our order can grow indefinitely.

Therefore, the Second Law (and entropy) is not the defining feature of reality as doom-oriented people would claim. Increasing order is the more dominant element of reality. See also the argument by Huber and Mills in Bottomless Well regarding the necessary use of fuel (“virtuous waste of energy”) to increase order, which is a fundamentally positive trend in life.

Simon then quotes this beautiful summarizing comment, “The new scientific view.... assures us that there are no limits to what we and our descendents can hope to achieve or to become” (148).

**The steps and responses involved in resolving natural limits**

There are a set of stages and responses outlined by Simon that are involved in surpassing natural resource limits and thereby supporting the rising trend of progress. Wilfred Beckerman has similarly commented in his books on these steps and relationships (149). They are valuable to understand in order to counter violated limits perceptions.

Increased population growth results in more people consuming more resources as all seek higher standards of living which is a virtuous thing and not to be condemned as greed. This initially results in resource shortages and consequently rising resource prices. These higher resource prices stimulate further exploration and discovery of resource supplies. Higher prices also stimulate the development of new technology to access resources as well as the development of alternative resources. Previous resource supplies that had been too expensive to access then become accessible. The Canadian oil sands is a good example here. With the rise in crude oil prices it became economically feasible to develop these non-conventional oil supplies in the oil sands and similarly massive shale oil reserves.  Alternatives were also found and accessed as in the shale gas revolution that we are living through now. So new reserves of previous natural resources are found and developed, along with the development of alternatives. We will see this same outcome repeated with methane hydrates (the Japanese are making breakthroughs here), which may offer energy supplies for the next 1000 years, at least in the US situation (1500 years in the British situation). And there will be more as we are just beginning to scratch the surface of our planet. As Simon argues, where is the evidence this process is coming to an end?

This process of discovery of new resource supplies, along with new technology to access and process such resources, eventually results in declining resource prices which is a long term trend over the past few centuries. In the end all are better off than if there had been no shortage in the first place. This response pattern of steps and relationships has been repeatedly observed in real history. It is a repeated pattern of surpassing natural resource limits and furthering human progress.

**Economic Growth Saves Nature**

Let me add here a further critically important relationship and outcome of this process of economic growth and development- that of improved environmental conditions. This is vital to answer the environmental alarmism that has become so dominant in the post-war apocalyptic movement with its charge that human progress destroys resources and nature. The Kuznets Curve (similar to the “Environmental Transition”) offers a good summary of this long term relationship between human progress, with its increasing prosperity, increased knowledge and creative ability, and a better environment (150). In early industrialization there was environmental damage but over time with increased wealth humanity has created improved technology, better approaches, more efficient use of resources, cleaner production, and so on. We need to view the initial damaging impacts of human progress in the longer term historical context. The initial damaging impacts are a temporary and fully resolvable thing. With time and further progress we lessen these initial damaging impacts and decrease our footprint. Again, Norman Borlaug is a good example here of progress in technological society saving the environment. By creating high yield varieties of grains he enabled farmers to produce more productive crops on the same land. This resulted in the protection of nature as we did not need to cut down more forest to grow less productive crops.

To summarize the Kuznets curve- with increasing income levels and after initial damaging impacts, when people are able to meet their basic needs, they then turn to improving their environments. This is because all people are natural environmentalists and care for nature around them. The Kuznets research affirms that growing prosperity, or human progress in technological society, is the best way to protect and save nature. To the contrary, poverty or lack of progress ruins nature. It is critical then to encourage human progress in creating higher living standards for all people in order to enable them to protect nature more effectively.

So an entirely new relationship has emerged in history that directly counters the relationship claimed by the apocalyptic alarmists and limits believers. They have alarmed the public with the narrative that increased population and increased economic growth destroys nature. The very opposite has proven true in actual history- human progress in economic growth and development leads to environmental improvement and protection. Environmental improvement and protection therefore depends on human progress.

**The Wonder of Being Human (John Eccles)**

The post-WW2 apocalyptic movement has persistently tried to obstruct human progress with this message that humanity is essentially destructive, modern technological society is violating nature’s limits, and imminent catastrophic collapse is now looming on the horizon. Such is the latest incarnation of apocalyptic mythology.

Julian Simon responded to this despair-generating narrative by spending a significant amount of thought and comment arguing that people were more creators than destroyers. He did not engage the complete template of apocalyptic mythology and history, or make any specific comment about the anti-human core of traditional apocalyptic belief, but he was intensely aware that what he called “doomsters” had devalued humanity as destructive. And he responded in the most effective manner possible by pointing to what John Eccles has called “the wonder of being human” (151). Simon did this by using his book, Ultimate Resource, to show that the net impact of humanity on the world was creative, positive, and cause for celebration.

I join Simon in countering the distortions of apocalyptic alarmism with a response that points to the evidence that humanity is the best thing that has ever happened to Earth. Contrary to the apocalyptic narrative, conscious humanity has released into life the most powerful creative forces for good imaginable and the main features/trends of life affirm this.

**Humanity an Essentially Creative Entity**

The emergence of consciousness into early human life sparked two important new processes in the larger trajectory of already progressing life. Both are expressions of an authentically human consciousness.

First, consciousness generated original human impulses such as compassion and the desire for something better. While early people stumbled around trying to figure out what life was to be about, their basic human impulses eventually sparked their exodus out from animal existence and toward a more human existence. This exodus is far more than leaving one physical location for another such as in the great exodus out of Africa. It is the exodus from primitive life toward human civilization. It is the endeavor to make life more human or humane- the novel trend of humanizing life. Joseph Campbell pointed to this in his comment that the civilizing process was about conquering the animal in us in order to live as human (152). It is in this process of humanizing life that human creative potential shines brightest.

Secondly, the emergence of human consciousness was also the opening of life to infinity. It was the beginning of the irreversible historical process of overcoming natural limits. Humanity with consciousness gained new learning capabilities that enable people to comprehend and solve problems, to learn from past experience and correct mistakes, to creatively invent new technologies and approaches and thereby overcome resource scarcity issues. This is also essential to making the world a truly human or humane place.

If we had to isolate out the one key factor critical to resolving the limited resource issues that are so central to modern apocalyptic thinking it would be this fact of human creativity and notably as it is exhibited in technological progress. This is at the root of the endlessly growing ability to solve all problems that arise in life. Human creativity breaks open the way to infinity, to an unlimited future, to unboundedness. Yet this creative potential is the very thing that is discounted, dismissed and even demonized outright by apocalyptic declinists; this very thing that liberates us to save nature.

The fundamental mistake of the apocalyptic outlook has always been to devalue humanity as a fallen destroyer and then to deny this wonder of human consciousness. Apocalypticism has opted instead for the distorting myth that fallen and degenerating humanity has caused decline and degeneration in life. It has missed entirely what the human adventure in life is about.

Environmental alarmists, in particular, need a fresh appreciation of the wonder of our common human consciousness and its valued contribution of empathy to life, because this is the answer to their concerns regarding nature. With developing and maturing consciousness we have become increasingly aware of right and wrong, and aware of our impacts on life, both good and bad. We have introduced meaning and value into life, things that never existed before. Nature does not care for life or any of its animal species or plants. It has mindlessly and violently eliminated 95-99% of all species over history. But our compassionate consciousness now counters that blind carelessness with efforts to protect all species, proving that we are not a corrupt, ignorant and destructive species, but a profoundly caring species. And we can fulfil our empathic impulses with our unlimited creative ability. Without human consciousness and its essential compassion there would be no meaning or value extended to all life as there is today. This is a unique contribution of humanity to the world and something all life has longed and waited for (see, for instance, the last 40 pages of Greg Easterbrook’s A Moment On The Earth).

And remember that in the long span of life, consciousness has just arrived on the scene and it is just beginning its growth and development. It has yet infinite potential to be explored and expressed.

What are some of humanity’s other creative abilities? For one, consciousness enables humanity to perceive life rationally and to thus overcome the distortion of the mythical perspective. It helps to locate human understanding in the actual historical process with its long term trends and not in some fantasy ahistorical world. It then enables people to reason from relevant fact to rational conclusions.

Further, we are learning to build the social context and institutions that support a humane existence and unleash human creative potential. We have also learned to accumulate experience and knowledge and pass it on to future generations for their benefit. This process of growing understanding and practical capability appears to take on exponential aspects as it moves forward in history.

These historically developing creative skills give humanity the open-ended ability to endlessly improve life. Human creative ability is then a genuinely limitless ability, infinite in its potential and realization in history. It springs from desire and imagination and it produces knowledge, all impulses and outcomes which have infinite potential. This points convincingly toward an open and unlimited future. Where human creativity is given freedom to operate there are no strictly closed systems dominated solely by the Second Law and entropy.

**Countering Apocalyptic Distortions: The Progress Story**

The basic themes of a more accurate story of life can shape the propensities in the human psyche in completely new ways- propensities to hope, courage, and to embrace life and the future. And nothing is more important in this story than a radical new valuation of humanity. This is not about a restoration of the Western/Christian anthropocentrism with its view of man at the center of creation. That view carries with it the baggage of charges of domination and exploitation of nature (humanity against nature) and it was embedded in the apocalyptic template of myth. The progress story of life is about a new valuation of humanity, with consciousness and its essential compassion and unbounded creative abilities that can endlessly improve life. This story is about discovering some sense of the wonder of being human, of the growing magnificence of humanity, and to see that a proper valuation of humanity counters the key apocalyptic distortion of fall and degeneration.

**The Core Themes**

The basic themes of the progress narrative are set in a four-point framework below to counter the same template of core apocalyptic themes.

**First- No Golden Beginning**: The history of life reveals that there never was a better past, an original golden age from which life has since declined. You would think this does not have to be stated so explicitly in the age of evolution but it does because the theme of decline from original paradise still persists all through modern human outlook, in both religious and secular traditions. Only an ahistorical mythically-oriented mind can still affirm this distortion of apocalyptic fall and decline from a better past. To the contrary, nature since the beginning has been “dark nature” (Lyall Watson) full of randomness, violence, natural disaster, and hideous disease. All things started out much less developed and then over history have been progressing toward something better. And while there is a natural level of progression in life toward something more organized and more complex, there is no natural progress toward a more humane world aside from human consciousness. Nature on its own has from the very beginning been mindless and inhumane. Conscious humanity brings the most striking kind of progress to this dark nature with our empathic impulse and endeavor to humanize life.

**Second-No Fallen Humanity**: Along a similar line of perception, humanity was never an originally more vital type that became corrupted and then began to decline, degenerate, or deteriorate toward something worse. There was no originally vital man, or noble savage. Original or ancient humanity was violent and animal-like. The life-span of early humans was short (average 20-30 years), with miserable living conditions (nasty), and endless violence between small bands (brutish) that were engaged in struggle for locally limited resources and sought to eliminate competing others. Early humans had an underdeveloped ability to overcome resource scarcities and out of their experience they formulated views of resources as limited (limited good, zero sum). If some took more, then others lost out. This view of life as scarce and stingy resulted in violence toward others over resources. There was also little motivation to make any serious progress as anyone gaining more was coerced to redistribute to others, hence the flat GDP rate over past millennia. The early history of humanity was not a pretty thing.

So apocalypticism got the story of humanity entirely backwards- that we were originally something better and then fell into corruption and have become something worse over time. Apocalyptic mythology then blames humanity as though we were responsible for causing a fall into imperfection, for becoming something less than what we originally were. But contrary to this myth of historical degeneration, humanity has actually become ever more humane and creative. Stephen Pinker (The Better Angels of Our Nature), James Payne (A History of Force), and others, have provided detailed historical evidence that we humans have become less violent and more empathic over the long term trajectory of life (e.g. decreasing rates of violence over history). Our exodus out from animal existence and freedom from violent animal drives is the greatest liberation movement in the history of life. This advance is essential to a truly accurate portrayal of human history which is one of endless progress, and not degeneration toward something worse. This reverses the apocalyptic perception entirely. While we started out brutal and animal-like we have become ever better (more human) over our history.

And contrary to the apocalyptic myth that life spans are becoming shorter, they are actually becoming longer over history.

To further counter the specific charge of post-war apocalypticism that our progress in technological society dehumanizes us and enhances our destructive capability, take a closer look at the long term evidence which shows that progress in technological society actually humanizes people more. We have initiated a civilizing process that has been a humanizing process producing ever better people. Long term studies on human civilization note, for instance, that commerce, trade, and urbanization encouraged early people to learn to live together more peaceably (e.g. Paul Seabright, In The Company of Strangers). They learned to engage in mutually benefitting activities that required them to rein in more violent impulses and to resolve conflicts peaceably. You don’t kill the man you trade with for salt or you will suffer the curse of blandness. This has been referred to as the “moralizing influence of gentle commerce”. Interestingly, as noted earlier, this increasing peacefulness (a marked decrease in war and violence) reached a new apex in the post-war economic boom just as modern apocalypticism took off with its claims that civilization and humanity were becoming something worse than ever before. But apocalypticism has never paid much attention to sound historical evidence.

We continue to grow in our ability to discern what it means to be truly human and as a result we continually learn and improve ourselves and our sensibilities. We have endlessly improved our approach to life. Rather than becoming more degenerate destroyers of life, we are becoming ever more compassionate creators. There should be no guilt over our still being imperfectly human, but continually improving, in a long-term historical process of growth and development.

**Third- No Decline Toward Catastrophic Ending**: From all available long term evidence we can confidently conclude that there is no looming imminent catastrophic end of life. And especially notable in regard to our age with its own unique version of limits apocalypticism, there is no evidence of the exhaustion of natural resources and coming collapse of those resources.

With the modern liberation of human creativity we have discovered that instead of fixed natural limits in life, life is incomprehensibly generous and unlimited. It is not the stingy reality of violated limits and rapidly exhausting resources that apocalypticism has been telling us. Scarcity is not the defining feature of natural resources with conflict toward one another as the inevitable consequence. Instead, the more that humanity has engaged the world and its resources, the more we have discovered the infinite generosity of life yet to be explored. This opens up a vision of generosity that invites all to abundance. We can create more than enough for an increasing population to live well. And this fundamental generosity of life enables the ongoing humanization of life.

Further, the scandalous generosity of life directly counters the apocalyptic distortion that there is something malicious, threatening, or punitive behind life. This has long been a core assumption fueling apocalyptic terrorism, and it has been one of the most damaging and enslaving ideas ever conceived by early human minds, that there is some angry entity, whether God or GAIA, behind life that must be appeased by sacrifice. This is a grotesquely false perception. We can now safely affirm with the old shaman who said, “Do not be afraid of the universe”. There is no looming punishment for our developing but still imperfect humanity (the apocalyptic myth of retaliation against fallen, sinful humanity).

We are always just getting started in this venture into generosity and infinity. Our progress is always just beginning into an ever more open and unlimited future. The shale gas revolution of the past few years following close on the peak oil scares is a great illustration of the fallacy of apocalyptic thinking compared to the actual reality of life’s generosity opening up ever new arenas of plentiful resources. Still ahead are vast ocean methane reserves and then truly infinite resources such as dark energy, which Arthur Clarke suggested we might begin to access in this century.

These first three themes robustly expose the declinism that is at the heart of apocalyptic mythology. And this is the most significant difference between the old apocalyptic myth and the new progress narrative of life- the correct perception and proper explanation of the fundamental trajectory of life. Few things are more essential to the human quest for meaning and sense of purpose than to get this fundamental direction of life correct- that life is not defined by original paradise followed by decay, decline and some ultimate ending (death), but, rather, life is most essentially defined by rise and progress toward more order and complexity, and toward more humane expressions of life. Toward something ever better. It is a trajectory that is open, unlimited, and non-ending. Getting the true nature of the beginning of life and the basic direction of life right is a significant step toward getting the narrative of life right.

The long term rise and progress of humanity in civilization is set within a much grander background of improvement. Here again I would emphasize something that Simon has consistently pointed toward- that we should always step back and rationally view the local, the isolated (the single), and the immediate in their long-term context. All local events and isolated situations (especially downturns, setbacks, disasters, or problems) must be understood in terms of the greater trajectories of progress that they are part of.

There is no greater long term context than that of the larger universe story which is the longest of the long term trends of progress toward something better. The universe began in a more chaotic and disorganized state and with cooling it has gradually organized toward something more complex and advanced, something better than the earlier universe. So also with the entire history of life, which organizes from something less developed toward something more complex and advanced (“Progress, then, is a property of the evolution of life as a whole by almost any conceivable intuitive standard, including the acquisition of goals and intentions in the behavior of animals”, E.O. Wilson) (153).

All three grand emergences and trajectories- cosmos, life, civilization- offer the same overwhelming evidence that everything rises and progresses toward something better than what existed before, and this trajectory is irreversible and has no observable end. There is no intimation in past historical evidence of any potentially emerging trend of decline toward catastrophic ending that would counter this progress. This gives profound meaning to existence and life and it effectively slays the monstrous distortion of apocalyptic mythology (Declinism).

**Fourth- No Need For Escapist Salvation**: In response to the last major theme of apocalyptic myth, we can conclude that there is no need for radical intervention to rid the world of some imagined cause of destruction- humanity or human civilization- in order to save life and restore some mythical Golden past. This anti-human logic of apocalyptic myth with its demand for obstruction and even violence toward humanity has always been entirely wrongheaded. There is no sound evidential reason to fear human progress and its impact on life. And correlated with this there is no sound reason to abandon this historical process and retreat to primitivism or opt out for some utopia. Rather, all evidence urges us to fully engage ongoing exploration, development, and growth, and continue our progress in this present historical process. This is the only “salvation” response that we need to embrace.

**The Life Impulse- From Limits To Infinity**

With consciousness we now possess an irresistible impulse for life, “an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression...a life-longing and reaching out for plenitude of meaning” (154). Coupled with the desire for purpose, this life impulse has always driven us to seek something better than what exists now. It has compelled us to explore what we cannot even yet imagine fully. This impulse for life is not just a desire to exist, but to experience something much more life-affirming, something incomprehensibly better than what exists in the present (it is something far more profound than just a primal survival drive). This is essential to what it means to be human. This profoundly human longing for something better urges people to keep searching, to press further and further into the unknown in order to discover that better future. It drives human endeavor in all areas.

The apocalyptic mind has never understood this primary human impulse for life or the wonder of the consciousness that generates it. Consumed with death fear and notions of primitive payback, the ancients chose to define life and its meaning in terms of death myths and deterioration. Hence, the subsequent creation of apocalyptic mythology which has completely derailed human understanding of what life is about and instead dominated consciousness with a sense of corruption, failure, decline, looming threat of punishment, and the meaninglessness of ultimate ending in catastrophe. These dark themes have fed endless fear, resignation, despair, nihilism, depression, and withdrawal from life. They have also stirred animosity, conflict, and outright violence toward others.

There are significant theological/philosophical inputs important to understanding and resolving these issues of life, death, consciousness, and human psychology that are beyond the scope of this paper (155). Perhaps the most significant element needing further exploration along this line would be the historically developing understanding of the new humane ideal of unconditional response toward others. This effectively counters the payback orientation that is a central driving force behind the apocalyptic outlook as (a grand end-of-life as punishment). See my essay “From Retaliation To Unconditional Love” (156) for detail on the historical shift that has humanized our views of ultimate reality, as well as the Brinsmead essay noted just above at number 155.

Apocalypticism, even in its secular versions, is a religious belief system and needs to be answered religiously, philosophically, as well as scientifically.

But, for now, it is enough to offer a minimal position on our fundamental life impulse and affirm the fact that it springs from the wonder of consciousness and seeks expression in the historical process in this world.

And this is the point- whatever our personal beliefs may be regarding ultimate meaning, all of us hold the responsibility to express our own impulse for life in this present historical process. We take our empathy and desire for something better, along with our personal creative abilities, and we engage life in myriad ways to create something better than what exists now, to humanize it more. And this is what people have been doing since the beginning, exploring the unlimited potential of life and it’s longing for the infinite, for something incomprehensibly better, and doing this within an imperfect but always improving historical process.

The powerful human impulse for life and meaning has suffered far too long under apocalyptic distortion and obstruction. Apocalypticism has always discouraged its fullest expression with threatening myths of decline and the ending of life. Not comprehending the significance of this life impulse, apocalypticism has then misdirected the human desire for meaning and purpose into escapist salvation schemes that oppose progress, try to abandon the historical process, and thereby harm life.

We all sense the imperfection of life and long for something better. But our response should not be to abandon or destroy the present historical process for some instantly or divinely installed utopia. Rather, we ought to embrace this world process and work to make it something better over time. We need to invest our life impulse in the here and now.

Our basic impulse for life needs something far better to encourage its fullest expression. It needs a life-affirming narrative of hope, a story that points to something genuinely open, unlimited, infinitely generous, something with infinite possibility set before it to inspire the fullest exploration and expression of its potential. This is what Campbell referred to when he spoke of “visions that fool people out of their limits”, (157). The exodus/progress narrative provides this hope and liberation, not by fooling anyone, but by presenting a proper historical appreciation of the true wonder of being consciously human and the infinite potential of human creativity. It provides a new template of themes against which to evaluate declinist thinking and then to properly inspire those deep propensities in human psyches.

Up to this point in history, despite the obstructionism of apocalypticism, humanity has done exceptionally well in expressing this powerful impulse for life by continually creating something ever better than what has existed before. And with our developing human values- our ever-improving sense of humane/inhumane- we have expressed this foundational impulse for something better in the most notable of new life trends, the endeavor to humanize all life.

We are still discovering that this impulse for life is truly infinite in potential and that in all directions (“Boiled down to one sentence, my message is the unbounded prodigality of life and the consequent unboundedness of human destiny”, Freeman Dyson)(158). Just as one century ago no one could have imagined what is mundane today, so a century from now, or millennia from now, no one today can even begin to imagine what will be mundane then in an ever better future. While infinite may seem to be an excessively powerful concept to apply to anything living in physical reality, anything less will not fully capture or express the true nature of human creative potential.

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**Appendices: The Human Use of Nature**

Wise use versus wantonness- understanding the environmentalist devaluation of humanity and the human right to progress.

One of the assumptions supporting contemporary environmental ideology is that of holism (noted earlier). This concept states that humanity has no special status in the larger world ecosystem. Humans should therefore remain in balance with other species, leaving ecosystems undisturbed at some more optimal wilderness state. Humans have no rights to use or change other species’ resources and habitat. Some extremists (Salonius, noted earlier) argue that all human use of nature since the emergence of agriculture some 10,000 years ago has been exploitative and destructive. It has all been wrong and “now the world needs to reduce its population to that of the hunter-gatherers, and go back to living on the resources the natural ecosystems can produce”.

An even more extreme position here claims that humans are an unwanted intruder, a curse or pathogen (virus, cancer) to be purged from the world. This devaluation, in its most extreme form, shows outright animosity toward humanity and human civilization/progress and calls for a radical culling of the human population.

These pathological currents in environmental thought flow through and infect wider public perceptions significantly.

Others, taking more moderate positions, argue for more reasonable views on the human relationship with nature. For instance, it is helpful to make careful distinctions between the human use of nature that is necessary and unavoidable (“virtuous” in the process of increasing order, to use Huber and Mill’s term in regard to the use and waste of energy, Bottomless Well) and that which is excessive, wasteful, and destructive.

These are legitimate distinctions and are part of legitimate ongoing discussions.

In our progress we will change elements of nature on the surface of the planet. And we need to admit that in our endeavor to progress over past history there has been human carelessness, excess, and damaging impact on nature. But in net terms (long-term, overall) we have learned from our mistakes, taken corrective action in subsequent engagement of nature, and become ever more careful in our treatment of nature.

We are even lessening our footprint as we progress further. Simon has noted, for instance, the fact that on 97% of the US land area that is not built-up (non-urban) there is a decreasing human presence. This lighter footprint can also be seen in the fact that the US has returned some 100 million acres of agricultural land to nature over the past century, and in the related fact of re-growth of forest areas.

Part of this discussion over the human impact on nature includes the recognition that the very concepts of nature and natural resources are the creations of conscious people. Nature only has value as conscious people assign their differing values to it. And we all bring differing values and views to our perceptions of nature and the human engagement of nature. As noted above, some would like to see a world covered in wilderness without any visible human impact. Others, often wealthy Western elites, would like to see vast areas preserved in natural conditions, denying others access for their benefit.

Others still, perhaps a majority (especially in the lower income brackets of humanity), accept varying levels of human engagement that change nature for human use. They understand that further growth and development is needed to lift people out of unacceptable poverty. These people accept the need for human engagement and change of nature in order to attain improved living conditions where they might then be able to act on their environmental concerns. There are ongoing struggles over how to accommodate our varying positions on these things.

While there is ongoing disagreement we should not accept the environmental contention that humanity must feel guilt over the human presence in the world and over most of the human use/change of nature. Some environmentalists have argued that wilderness alone is the optimal, healthy state for most of nature (e.g. climax forest). It is the natural state that should be preserved wherever possible. In regard to this, reference is repeatedly made to the fact that we have cut 50% of the world’s forests over the past few centuries. The assumption here is that this area of forest should have been preserved intact as wild forest. As noted earlier, Alston Chase (In A Dark Wood) counters this assumption by noting that nature has always undergone massive and ongoing change and this has been beneficial for the health of ecosystems. There is no single, static (e.g. wild, undisturbed) healthy state in nature.

And it should be recognized that most of us do hold legitimate concerns about such issues as deforestation and the protection of wild/green spaces. However, our concerns try to balance issues of quantities involved, actual environmental needs, and the human need for progress. Also, remember that even the footprint alarmists (Footprintnetwork.org) admit that out of a total of 13 billion hectares of land area on Earth, only 169.5 million hectares are built-up land area. Farmland is not included here as it quickly reverts to nature when not used, and is still classified as natural area.

Further to this issue, others have noted that even wild animals do not always prefer wilderness. There is evidence that animals prefer domesticated environments to wild ones, just as humans do. Yan Martel (Life of Pi) says that animals prefer zoos/game farms with more secure food supplies, protection from predators and territorial warfare, and more comfortable living conditions (i.e. protection from weather). As one reviewer of the book Life of Pi noted, zoos have been portrayed as dreadful, inhumane places for animals made to live freely in open wilderness. But just as we have created safe and convenient homes filled with survival necessities, we have also done the same for animals in zoos. And just like humans, animals prefer the security of life in stable environments with regular patterns compared to the dangerous unpredictability of the wild.

The above reviewer at Sparknotes.com says that the lead character Pi defends zoos against those who would rather the animals were kept in the wild. He argues that wild creatures are at the mercy of nature, while zoo creatures live a life of luxury and constancy.

He adds, “Growing up in a zoo shaped his (Pi’s) belief system, taught him about animal nature, and imbued in him many significant lessons about the meaning of freedom. Zoos are places of habit: there are chores that the keepers must perform every day, such as feeding and cleaning the animals and their cages, as well as animal rituals. Pi establishes early on the orderliness of the zoo and the comforting sense of regularity it gives him. Animals prefer the consistency of zoo life just as humans accustom themselves to the rituals and abundance of modern society, their own sort of zoo. Zoo animals rarely run away, even if given the opportunity, and they enjoy the abundant water and food. In the wild, by contrast, life is a constant battle for survival, a race against the odds and other creatures. Death is a constant presence and possibility. All of us living in modern society are essentially zoo creatures, defanged and protected from the wilderness waiting for us beyond the enclosure walls” (<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/lifeofpi/section2.rhtml>).

And apparently, animals will rarely exchange their new domesticated homes for wilderness even when given the opportunity. To illustrate, some studies have found more species of birds in German urban areas than in surrounding wilderness areas. So even animals express the preference for the humanization of life (domestication over Dark Nature). They affirm our choice to abandon wilderness as soon as we were able to comprehend the issues- gain some common sense- and do so.

From this information we could counter that self-proclaimed environmentalists are not the sole legitimate spokespersons for animal life in their argument for the preservation of majority wilderness conditions everywhere. Nature appears to prefer the humanization of life just as conscious creatures do.

Unfortunately, the environmental argument for the protection of most of nature from human engagement has been employed to obstruct necessary and legitimate human progress. Such obstructionism then harms overall environmental protection by leaving many in poverty. The obstructionists use apocalyptic exaggeration about the real state of forests, soils, fisheries, species, and pollution to scare people away from solutions that would actually result in the proper preservation of nature.

We have not engaged nature perfectly, but the overall and long term evidence shows that we are doing well in learning how to correct mistakes and preserve natural resources. The long term trends show that we are not exhausting the world’s major resources and they are not in danger of looming collapse and catastrophe. We are learning to engage and use resources ever more carefully (more efficiently with less waste, less damage). And it is specifically our post-war economic progress that has enabled us to develop the technological society that enables us to “save” nature and the world. Technology, based on limitless human knowledge and creativity, has become the exponential element in the mix that enables us to surpass all natural limits and to do so in a less damaging manner over time.