

We Have Work to do Before Catastrophe Strikes

Musings on My 84th Birthday

Dave Hanson

2020

The most important tasks for those of us who would wear the anarcho-primitivist label, are to wait and watch the acceleration of the collapse of modernity and technology while we learn how to live without them.

Anarcho-primitivism should not be labeled as re-wilding, and considering all the baggage attached to the word primitive, we should probably think of a new label for cultural and ecological organization that has a possibility of survival at the depths of a rapid global, environmental collapse and mass extinction.

Each of us is locked into a time period of three or four generations. My life spans the transition from horses to robots. Lying on my back, trying to sleep with 200 cows on a cattle drive, I watched, excited but with a deep sense of trouble, our first satellite blinking its way across the night sky.

My fear, it turns out, was justified. The trajectory of change over this brief life span is characterized by increasing complexity of technology and by loss of global, biological health. We apparently have not been smart enough to protect the world we share.

The arc of human evolution took a sharp turn with religions, city states and agriculture, all of which were disastrous mutations. The experiment of modernity, beginning about 10,000 years ago, has quickly brought us to the potential end of our species, with the only questions left being how long will this collapse take, and what will be left in its wake.

The most fundamental realities in Ecology have been either not understood or dismissed. Many of those who understand the contemporary emergency are preaching solutions which they must know are futile. Many of them could not give a cogent summary of the laws of thermodynamics. Most of them are faking it and holding their breath.

Catastrophes are not new. As we move into the era of the sixth great mass extinction, we have little reason to believe humans will somehow survive as other forms of life perish. From an ecological perspective, we have no particular value to global health and it is the height of hypocrisy to suggest that the toxic species that brought us to this cliff is now the species that will save us.

Survival in the material world will be increasingly difficult in the years to come, especially for people who have no idea how to live without relentless consumption. The supply chain from earth to body will be interrupted and our skills may become irrelevant, but there are ways to learn and prepare now for the difficult times ahead.

My grandfather could make a harness for a draft horse. I did not need that skill, but wish I could teach it to my grandchildren, who might. Can you grow some food for yourself? Do you know the wild, edible plants near you? Can you build shelter for your family? Do you live in a location where you can get what you need without an automobile?

Do you know and get along enough with your neighbors to share with them? Where will your medications come from if your pharmacy is gone? Can you perform first aid? Can you make shoes? Clothes? Blankets?

Can you stay warm without buying energy? What skills do you have that you can trade for the skills of others? Do you have an idea about how, and where anarchists can learn these things?

About fifty years ago, I lived in the sole village on a small, Pacific Ocean island in Micronesia, home to several hundred people.

There was an airport, used once a week, one jeep, one sedan, two small trucks, and a few motorcycles. There was a one room store that sold beer, a few canned goods, bags of rice and served as a post office.

There was electricity from a generator that ran much of the time, and most homes had at least one operating light bulb. There was a medical nurse trained at the Fiji School of Tropical Medicine.

The island experienced a typhoon with sustained winds over 150 mph that destroyed every private home and killed all the garden crops. It lasted three days and turned the village into a pile of rubble much like what we saw after the hurricane in the Bahamas.

When the wind stopped, the villagers left the caves that had spared them from flying debris, gathered the pieces of their houses and put them back together. They drank rainwater, ate native fruits, tubers, land crabs, chickens, bats and fish, and replanted their gardens. Life quickly returned to normal, with a resilience based on their history of reasonable needs and sharing.

We are crossing one degree centigrade, and cannot precisely predict when we will cross two degrees that will seal the trajectory of collapse. Feedback loops will accelerate the rate of warming and death. We should be searching for models of community organization that will be useful as this deadly edifice of modernity crashes around us.

People who think they are preparing for collapse have some solutions for survival. Using solar power and storing dried food and large quantities of fuel are safeguards against immediate, short term events, but our training and preparation must be for the absence of any and all inputs from outside the immediate community over an indefinite time span.

It is a mistake to think we can individually care for and protect ourselves from others if we store enough food, live in a remote location, and have enough arms and ammunition to protect ourselves from the government or hungry invaders. Urban dwellers, in fact, may have more resources of skills and a better chance of creating supportive communities than those hiding in the woods.

The most difficult aspect of any attempt to look into our future is the question about social organization. Our experiments in religion, government, and human dominion have clearly failed, as has our language and flawed hierarchy of meaning that excludes all which does not fit the narrative of superior human consciousness and power.

A human community aware of its appropriate place in the local biosphere will keep us connected to our global home. We must be anarchistic, small, powerless creatures of the forest, desert and prairie. All leadership must be tenuous and temporary. This communal practice will keep us connected to the web of life in our bioregion, and with an egalitarian local organization, mitigate against our worst impulses.

Our stories, songs, dances and altered states can harmonize our actions to benefit both our own community and this wondrous earth/home of which we are a small part.

If we cannot return to this, we will be gone.

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