

More and more I feel we're all on a sinking Titanic. Some of us are rushing for the lifeboats, some of us a trying to plug the holes, some of us are doing whatever we can to deny the reality, and some of us are facing the likelihood that no matter what we do it's all too late, anyway. In that case, the best we can do, like a terminal cancer patient, is to be grateful for each remaining moment we have and choose to live it with joy, compassion, and gratitude.

I recently had a long conversation with a good friend who has been closely tracking the details of climate change for many years (he's a well known author). I asked him:

“We're living on a knife edge, in times of great uncertainty. One way lies systemic collapse into ecological disaster. The other (perhaps involving some degree of the first) is a path to collective waking up and the transformation of our species. Which side do you lean to when you wake up in the morning?”

His response stunned me:

“Without a doubt, I see us falling into total systemic collapse.”

I probed a little deeper, and he revealed he didn't just mean some temporary setback for civilization, but the almost inevitable extinction of our species—within two or three generations! Involving, of course, the great extinction of vast numbers of other species.

I questioned him more, and he talked about how, within 100 to 150 years, climate change will be so rapid and so vast that a band of desolation and desert will circle the planet, with only small regions remaining hospitable for life in places like northern Europe, Alaska, parts of Canada and Antarctica . . . He thinks that all mammalian species will be wiped out, and perhaps most reptiles and amphibians. Possibly only plants and insects will survive.

I had never encountered such a bleak scenario based on what I understand to be a clear reading of the available data. It overshadows even the most pessimistic scenarios I've heard elsewhere. Worse, this may not be a reversible process. It's not as if, in time, the Earth will spring back to life, and the deserts will bloom once again. No, in this scenario, we are already in the early stages of human-induced climate change that will turn our beautiful globe into a permanent planetary desert. It happened on Mars.<sup>1</sup>

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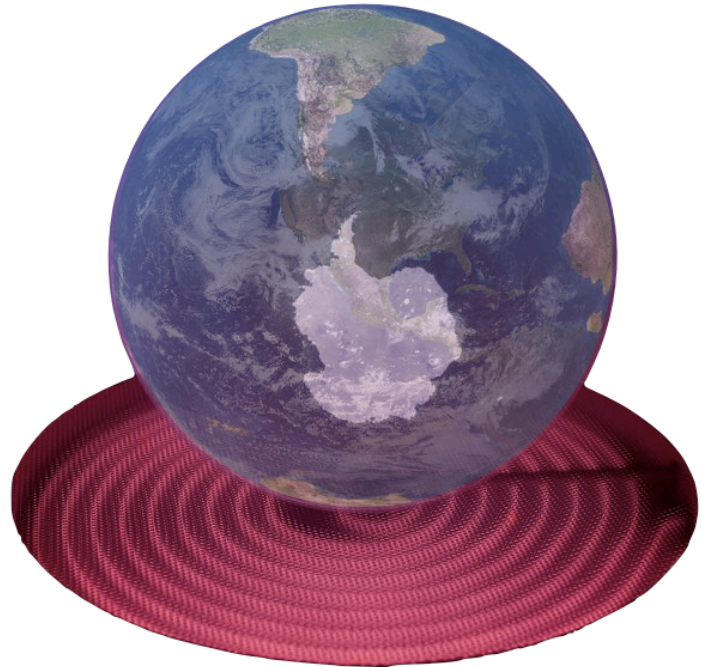
<sup>1</sup> The Mars scenario is only one possibility. Over millions of years, the planet may well recover. A similar hot-house period occurred in the Eocene, 34 to 55 million years ago. However, even if the deserts do bloom again, the chances of humans surviving the furnace are highly unlikely.

We are living through the end days of our species, and for all practical purposes, the end of life on Earth. Sobering.

### **What Would You Do?**

Given this, what are we to do?  
What's the point of spreading such a message of hopelessness?

His response: There is no point. There is *nothing* we can do now to change what is inevitably coming—very soon. He then told me how waking up to this reality has changed his life. For a time, he experienced the existential angst of despair and total hopelessness. And then his “ah-ha” moment struck:



“Yes, it is hopeless. It is all meaningless. And *it means nothing* that it is meaningless. By letting go of all sense of hope, I discovered that I still had a choice: about how to live out my life knowing that it is all over for all of us. I choose to live with compassion and to savor every moment—just like some cancer patients do when the bad news finally sinks in.”

I really don't know what to do with this information. For a few brief moments, I let it in and I felt a deep wrenching sickness in my gut, a profound sorrow for our species and for the millions of other species we will take down with us. But within a few hours, my own denial defense mechanisms began to creep back in, and I find I can no longer actually *feel* the total demise of our species. But intellectually I know it is a strong possibility.

*How would you live your life in the light of this knowledge?*

What would you do (*what are you doing*) when we discover that our planetary Titanic is holed, and that we are rapidly and inevitably going down? Do you dance? Do you panic? Do you rush for the lifeboats (where are they?)? Do you pray (for what?)? Do you offer comfort and solace to your neighbors? Do you head for the bar and get mind-blowingly drunk? Do you stuff yourself with food from the cafeteria? Do you find the most beautiful partners and make passionate love? Do you heroically start giving swimming lessons (knowing they won't help)? Do you jump overboard before the ship goes down (why?)?

*What would you do?*

My friend has decided that the most heroic response is for individual members of our species—better, for our species collectively—to immediately stop extracting *any* resources from the planet, so that, at the very least, we spend our last days minimizing our contribution to the acceleration of systemic collapse. Of course, this would mean not extracting food or water, and so our species would vanish very soon. In doing so, we may give a few more years, perhaps another generation or two, for other species to enjoy. We might, for instance, leave the planet habitable for species that inhabit the oceans, who just might survive the ecological devastation that will sweep the land. However, as he pointed out, the oceans may be in an even more precarious predicament. “They may collapse first. Coral reefs are already dying fast and increased acidity of CO<sub>2</sub> is making life very hard for the microscopic creatures at the base of the food chain. No plankton, no shrimp, no humpback whales.”

It's hard to grasp, isn't it?

### **Last Exit to Nirvana?**

The one ray of “hope” my friend sees in the face of dire hopelessness is an opportunity for a profound transformation in consciousness—along the lines envisioned by Teilhard de Chardin and fictionalized in Arthur C. Clarke’s sci-fi novel *Childhood’s End*. He calls it “The Last Exit to Nirvana.” Without a viable physical body (or planet), human consciousness evolves and “somehow” drifts off into another, transphysical, dimension.

Perhaps this is the fate of intelligent life on any planet—when evolution produces the combination of advanced intelligence with the means to manipulate its environment to suit its own needs (e.g., an opposable thumb). The inevitable result is ecological collapse. The pressure of this breakdown either wipes out the species or pushes it to evolve consciously in such a way that it no longer needs its physical body to function. Planets serve as seed pods for launching consciousness to higher levels of evolution. Perhaps?

At this point, though, such scenarios begin to sound like spiritual science fiction—the mind's ultimate creative response to the realization of radical hopelessness.

Why do I share this with you? To be honest, I'm not really sure. I think it is in the spirit of a dialogue among friends—as we might spend our remaining hours on the Titanic supporting each other to find that “place” inside where the peace of final acceptance resides. What else can we do?

Blessings to you.



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