

# **Humanity Is Not A Parasite**

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## Introduction

“Humanity is a Plague”, “Humanity is a Poison”, “Humanity is the real virus”, “Humanity is a parasite”. The “Human Parasitism” narrative has grown increasingly common in day-to-day discourse, with folks casually confessing their simmering misanthropy. You don’t have to look very hard to figure out why this sentiment has gained popularity. The impact of modern, industrial human activity on the planet is blatantly apparent and truly global in scope. The disruptions to our flora, fauna, soil, water, atmosphere, and climate cannot be ignored. Despite the empty promises of governments and greenwashing PR campaigns of corporations, the reality of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the persistence of Saharan and Gobi desertification, the unmitigated emission of toxicants into our atmosphere, the commonality of irreversible oil spills, the acidification of our rivers, lakes, and oceans, the deforestation of our old growth forests, the loss of our topsoils, evermore papers and plastics, and the Holocene extinction, cannot be ignored. These are grave affronts to the environment that stain the last hundred years of our millennia on this Earth.

Just as colonialism swept through the continents, so too has environmental destruction, as the violence inflicted upon both peoples and their lands cannot be unyoked. Of course, prior to the era of European imperialism, human activity has damaged parts of the Earth, but this activity has typically been local in scope.

Human activities have also helped cultivate many of the so-called natural environments we seek out today, like the Amazon rainforest.

“Human Parasitism” is not a natural outcome of humanity. Otherwise, we would have doomed ourselves long, long ago. No, this mass destruction is recent. Not embedded in human nature, but distinctly political, economic, and social.

Sir David Attenborough and others go around stoking fears of overpopulation, despite the already declining global population growth rate, provoking existing ecofascist and racist narratives about the impoverished peoples of the world while brushing past the unequal distribution of resources and overconsumption under the socioeconomic system of racial, industrial capitalism that truly fuels this crisis.

The affluence enjoyed by some is the waste that we all suffer the consequences of. The colossal burden of consumerist society, ever-heightened by a mass media obsessed with conspicuous consumption, can no longer be ignored.

Earth is not some lump of resources to be extracted and polluted. It sustains a complex web of life, one that this system is very clearly set out to destroy.

Whenever I hear people lament the “parasitism” of humanity, I think back to a quote by the Communalist Murray Bookchin: ‘Obviously, Man could be described as a highly destructive parasite who threatens to destroy his host, the natural world, and eventually himself. In ecology, however, the word “parasite” is not an answer to a question, but raises a question itself. Ecologists know that destructive parasitism of this kind usually reflects the disruption of an ecological situation; indeed, many species that seem highly destructive under one set of conditions are eminently useful under another set of conditions. What imparts a profoundly critical function to ecology is the question raised by Man’s destructive abilities: What is the disruption that has turned Man into a destructive parasite? What produces a form of human parasitism that results in not only in vast natural imbalances but also threatens the existence of humanity itself?’

## Human Domination

This disruption is not only felt in the environment, but also in our relations with each other. Hierarchical social relationships beget a form of human domination that imbalances both our natural and our social worlds. The patriarchal family is basically the blueprint that planted this seed. Now the capitalists and politicians that dominate us, exploit us, and deprive us, in their self-seeking pursuit of power and profit, will go on extracting, consuming, expelling, and expanding at enormous proportions until the very end.

This very centralised, very urbanised set up is highly burdensome upon our ecosystems, and the dissolution of community and local economy, caused in part by capitalism's competitive and divisive nature, has enabled this capitalist exploitation. Under the euphemisms of "growth" and "progress", we, and every aspect of nature, become simplified and commodified.

In *Seeing Like a State*, anthropologist James C Scott describes how states reduce the complex, "messy" illegibility of human life into simplified, legible formations, ripe for control. For example, the transformation of open commons into private property, the centralisation of water, transportation, and energy systems, and the shift from diverse and fluid local naming customs to permanent state-recorded and tracked identification systems.

I see this simplification in the treatment of our environment too. For example, the standard of monocultures that both feed us and eventually poison us. The immense chemical requirements of industrial agriculture to manage the soil and the so-called pests that arise to regulate its violation are environmentally devastating. Cities are frighteningly standardised across ecosystems, transforming swathes of natural diversity into smoggy, noisy edifices of concrete, glass, and metal. Some cities, regions, or even entire countries are simplified further by their dedication to particular industrial requirements. Some places exist as mere resource depots while others house the people that manage the trade of those resources. These cities are quite bureaucratic in their approach to their immense urban populations. The logistic challenges of transportation, housing, feeding, educating, employing, and entertaining such dense populations tends towards the submission of the individual to the massified. The creative to the standardised.

The systems that run our lives are faceless and impersonal. We have little influence on the everyday political machinations of our societies. We watch as nature is debased. We watch as complex ecosystems, forged over millions of years, absolutely necessary for the support of our own species, are undermined and undone.

The systems of human domination – patriarchy, capitalism, the State and its many institutions – have done well to disrupt our connection with the land and make us complacent.

## The Critical Nature of Social Ecology

This is what makes social ecology so critical.

In its very essence, social ecology is about the relationship between ecological and social issues, understanding that ecological problems arise from social problems, which are caused by social institutions rooted in hierarchy and domination.

Ecology deals with the balance of nature, which includes humanity. Despite the arrogance of some folks, nature viewed in the totality of its aspects, cycles, and interrelationships exists

beyond our claims to its mastery. The issues ecology deals with are inherently political, so by necessity, ecology must be both critical and constructive.

To achieve the necessary harmonization of man and nature, we must create a decentralised and distributed, liberated human community that lives in a lasting balance with its people and its natural environment.

The anarchic implications are clear.

Some may protest that such a society is “unrealistic.” Why think of what we could be when it’s so much easier to limit ourselves to what we are? Surely we should continue along this so-called practical, rational, capitalist, and statist notions of the world?

And yet we have reached its breaking point, and things continue to break down.

These oppressive structures are eroding our humanity, our communities, and our ecologies. In fact, their domination threatens the viability of life itself.

For us to thrive and survive, we need to embrace more anarchic conceptions of society, and especially one of its most essential principles: diversity. Our environments should be varied, complex, and dynamic, as balance, harmony, and evolution in nature and society can only be achieved through organic differentiation, not sterile standardisation.

The communities I’m envisioning are decentralised but socially and economically interconnected, confederating while maintaining the principles of free association for both communities and individuals. For people to be invested in their society and their environment, we must relearn the practice of participation in communal processes. Horizontal decision-making power, responsibility, and the consequences of such must be equally distributed.

Our role in the ecological community must be significantly transformed, most pressingly in the realm of agriculture. Vast factory farms and unsustainable industrial monocultures must be phased out for decentralised polycultures. We must familiarise ourselves with the sensitive subtleties of the land, maintain the health of the soil, increase the sustenance of the watershed, and cultivate diversity of the flora and fauna specific to the regions we inhabit. This can only occur on the human scale.

When it comes to technology, it is absolutely vital that we shift away from the violent mining practices occurring around the globe, scale down the wasteful mass production of many technologies, abolish the practice of planned obsolescence, produce and distribute necessities like pharmaceuticals safely and effectively, explore the possibilities of low-tech, distribute the infrastructure necessary for production and transportation, and develop the machines and tools we do use for durability and multifunction. I don’t believe every technology can, or, should be developed exclusively on the local scale, because I don’t think every community can, or, even should be entirely 100% self-sufficient, but it’s something I believe we’ll be able to figure out better in practice.

Also, renewable energy technology have some issues attached to them, particularly related to the sourcing of their materials and production capacity. So while we may utilise the power of the sun, wind, and water, suited to our regional energy patterns, we should also need to reduce our energy consumption to accommodate the inevitable material limitations.

We seriously need to undertake the task of creating a new way of life, based on a more playful form of labour instead of the ecologically and physically exhausting form of work that currently exists. It will require significant effort to make that quantitative and qualitative shift to both cut down on the amount of BS work being done, by a significant margin and transform necessary

and useful activities from the 9–5 slogs to pastimes we can have a say in, take rests from when needed, and actually enjoy.

Human parasitism, the force that destabilises, regresses, and debases the natural world, is not some inevitability of our existence. To believe as much is to leave room for the corrosive and violent potentials of eco-fascism. It is the consequence of a disruption found in patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, and the State.

Our survival is dependent on shifting toward the practice of anarchic ecological principles that seek to respect, conserve, and preserve freedom and variety between humans, between humanity and nature, and within nature itself. We need to create real communities, capable of bringing out the full potential of each individual and ecosystem and freeing them of the oppressive burdens of authority, so that we can truly “humanise” humanity.

All power to all the people.

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