

Agents of Change: Primal War and the Collapse of Global Civilization

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“Civilization has emerged only recently...and it may yet prove to be an unsuccessful experiment.” — anthropologist Roy Rappaport

I have to be honest. I fear the collapse of civilization. Things are going to get much worse before they get better. There will be no happy ending for civilization and no glorious day when we all chose to abandon it. The realization that we've passed the point of no return will be a shock when it finally hits us. And that time is coming. Very soon.

I fear the collapse of civilization, but I work to make it happen as quickly as possible. Though I want to live without civilization, I know there is a large chance that I won't survive the collapse. But I know one thing: the longer we wait to bring this down; the worse off things are going to get. The one thing I fear more than the peak of the collapse is the state of the world if civilization does not collapse soon.

We need to talk honestly about the collapse of civilization because it is something that affects us. And even more so, it will be the basis for the coming generations.

Coming to terms with the collapse means we have to remember that life is about something bigger than ourselves. We are a part of the world around us and are inseparable from it. That is something that the civilizers know we must not remember. That is why we can make decisions that seriously threaten life in order to keep short term comforts. We simply don't care about what happens outside the very limited being that encompasses 'me'.

The consequences of this way of thinking and being are quickly becoming more apparent. Because of this, we're seeing a lot more talk about collapse in the mainstream. There's a flood of books and media about the collapse of civilizations and our ecological crisis. But they're there because they're filtered. They carry a harsh critique of civilization, but the implicit warning is turned into a boast of our own ingenuity and ability to outsmart the natural world and past civilizations. We are heirs to a mighty empire that shall not suffer the past.

If only we can recycle more, consume less, become less dependent upon oil, and be nicer to each other. If only we drove hybrids and researched hydrogen, sun light and wind as power. If only we could save the civilization we've worked so hard to achieve. If only we could hold onto Mozart, Picasso, wine and cheese and not the bomb. We're full of hope. But hope alone never saved a civilization in the past. Hope alone, never will.

We miss the basic message: what goes up must come down.

Civilization is built and maintained by the domestication of wildness. That is, by turning full ecosystems into a synthetic power source for the supposed benefit of one section of one species. We've ignored something important: the ecological reality that we call carrying capacity and the consequence of ignoring it: collapse.

Carrying capacity is, in the crudest sense, how much life an ecosystem can sustainably support. That's something that comes from thousands and millions of years of evolutionary trial and error. Every bit of life in a given ecosystem has its part to play.

Everything does. Fulfilling that place, or niche, is a part of the being of that life form. We shape each others' reality through all of our actions. That includes humans.

Being a part of community is important. But we've forgotten that. Hiding behind locked doors, afraid of everyone around us and spending the bulk of our lives within boxes keeps us from remembering this. Living off of fields of crops and in closed off villages helps us forget just the same.

Few animals forget this, but occasionally they overstep their place in a community. What happens is what sociologist William Catton calls overshoot. What that means is that a given species or society takes more than it gives: it oversteps carrying capacity. This leads to an imbalance, albeit a temporary one. An ecological imbalance is nothing minor. In a tight knit community, stress in one area sends stress through the entire community. But since carrying capacity is not a concept or a chart or a theory, but a narrow concept for ecological reality, you can only step beyond it so far. What these moments are is a brief flare up of one species expanding at the cost of another until it can no longer support itself. At that point, there is no choice or other option: the situation normalizes itself and things go on as they were.

What goes up must come down.

Civilization is different. Societies didn't just extend carrying capacity in a brief flare. They found a loop hole: they rearranged the community. The reality is the same. Domesticated plants and animals replace wildness. The settled villages replace the wild communities they clear. The community is stressed. Things are no different, but domestication offered a chance to challenge carrying capacity for a longer period.

I say longer intentionally. As much as we've tried to convince ourselves that large brains and god/s have given us some great ability or predetermined destiny, we are not outside of the wildness we are a part of. That is true on individual, community and nation levels. We are born to be wild. But we've stopped acting this way. And like all things, there are consequences.

On a longer timeline, our overshoot will still be a flare. But the further we go, the larger our flare, the harsher the fall will be. This is something larger than a flare. This is collapse.

Though it's become more popular to talk about collapse these days, there isn't really a clear understanding of what collapse means. Most people have the idea that one day we'll wake up and the power won't be on. To them that is collapse: an instant transformation. But there is no reality to that idea. Though we'll likely wake up one day with no electricity or on and off over a period of months: the true collapse will be far less fantastic.

Collapse is a process, not a moment or event. It can drag on or it can happen relatively quickly. The speed is directly relative to the speed a society has overstepped its place. In social terms, collapse refers to a massive reduction or simplification of society.

Stratification, specialization, bureaucracy, methods of statist control, the arts, economic coordination and organization, population, and networks of distribution will

all be significantly simplified. Large scale society breaks down into smaller, more self-sufficient ones. In ecological terms, the environment that a society is maintained off will simply no longer support it any more. In individual terms, the benefits of supporting and working for a society aren't worth the costs.

Collapse affects every part of society. It is social, ecological, psychological, political, economical, and theological in nature. On the periphery of society, it looks like days spent tilling fields where the soil is so thinned and damaged that it washes away, clogging the waterways in the process. It looks like increasing demands to feed a distant population. It looks like the youth being pulled into armies to raid and conquer on the forefront of a desperate and starving society and moved into the towns, villages or cities to keep order among the desperate and starving.

In the periphery and the towns it may look like a massive turn to god/s for help. In the towns, the politicians scramble to try and squeeze their grasp on power. It may look like a looming revolution or a totalitarian iron fist or both. The gap between the elites and the commoners becomes clearer. The health costs of having food that is more filler than nutritious and having even less of it increase. It looks like diseases and epidemics and pointed fingers. The 'Others' are to blame or the anti-social individuals. It may be the height of war or mob type 'justice'.

Or it might look like the height of empire. The worldview of the elites will always refuse to recognize its own end. The literate elites of fallen civilizations rarely record their own demise. Not necessarily because they don't want it to be known, but because they are incapable of seeing it. In the linear world, progress always moves forward. Societies flourish, not fall. That is what they think until the very end.

And we are no different. The environment is no longer willing to support the society that will destroy it given the chance. Collapse is not something that is going to happen to us. Collapse is something that is happening. Collapse is something that has been happening.

What we are seeing now is the peak.

That we don't see the reality that we've created and sustained collapsing doesn't mean it's not happening. Things are different now. Every civilization that has existed has collapsed into ours. Every collapse is relatively similar. But ours is different.

For the Anasazi/Chacoan civilizations of the American southwest, the peak of collapse followed the refusal of the farmers to tolerate the tightening grasp of the elites. The same happened from site to site as the classic Mayan civilizations died off. The temples that have captured the imagination of our modern society have failed to see that the once mighty thrones of kings were later used as toilets by Mayan descendants passing through. No doubt, we tend to miss the humor in it. In North America, you can see this happening over and over again: Cahokia, Hopewell, Hohokam, Inca, throughout the Eastern Woodlands and the Mississippi Valley. You see a society that settles down and over the centuries gardens turn to fields, the forests are cleared as waterways and roads are built, great mounds and temples are built.

And every time, it catches back up. Society pushes too far and collapses. The closer the people are to the earth and their own wildness, the easier it is to return. Sometimes societies try civilization again. So you have small and large flares.

Sooner or later it always catches back up.

This isn't what collapse has always looked like. Our now global civilization has its roots in what is now a part of the Middle East, but once was called Mesopotamia. What once was considered the 'Fertile Crescent.' Here you get the same thing: settlements, growth, deforestation, warfare, expansion, and collapse. But collapse here was different. Here civilization is not such an isolated thing, but a place of multiple civilizations and a wider range of lands and people to take over. The collapse and complete reduction of one civilization was at the expense of another.

The collapse of the Ottoman, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian and other early Eurasian civilizations was the conquering of one empire by another. Civilizations swallowed each other with their past, present and futures. Warfare, conquest and colonization are as vital to this momentum as fields and forests.

Just the same, globalization has been its savior. Without the 'discovery' of central to southern Africa, the Americas, and the South Pacific Islands, this beast would have consumed itself long ago. Instead it has moved from Eurasia across the planet. Our planet.

Our home.

But to the civilizers, our planet is a dead place. To them, it is our resources. The survival of this civilization comes at the cost of all other life. Linear vision has a hard time understanding the true meaning of long term loss. What has happened is that this civilization has spread itself across the entire planet. Now there is no where left to turn. There are no discoveries left. There are no civilizations left. Only one civilization: spread across the planet, organized and run by electronic surveillance, distribution, production, communication and control. As fields worked for centuries turned to deserts, new forests and plains were cleared. As trees were cut, people started digging for new sources of fuel. As that started to run low and be less useful, the civilizers started cutting apart the building blocks of life making both energy sources and bombs. As wildness runs slim, the synthetic landscape and society takes its place.

We've spread ourselves far and wide. We've spread ourselves thin.

It may be one of the greatest ironies that the most powerful civilizations to have ever existed is also the most vulnerable. The civilizations that it is comprised of were saved by places to expand and exploit. Ours, fortunately, is not so lucky.

The consequences of a 10,000 year legacy of destruction are catching up.

And those consequences are catching up quickly. Very quickly. Since the Mesopotamians first expanded their own reach, this civilization has been on borrowed time. It has been saved time and time again by new methods of expanding and toying with carrying capacity. Unlike isolated places like Easter Island where civilization grew slowly and died off rapidly, this civilization had somewhere new to move. Each time, there was some place new to exploit.

That is what has built this civilization and its worldview. The civilizers with their shallow history have mistaken luck for normality. As new places on this planet run out, they've turned more literally than ever before to what was once considered the heavens. The civilizers are no more prepared now than those before them to recognize the reality that they continue to recreate.

We know that the civilizations that left written records weren't seeing the end of their days. We know that even when there was no question that the unending warfare and civil unrest and scapegoat persecutions was all a part of an unraveling empire, those in power refused to see it.

They could not see it.

They could not think that everything they had worked for was coming undone before their eyes. They could not see that their perpetual growth and progression was impossible. They could not see it when it was happening.

Just the same, we aren't seeing it happening. We can't even think of it.

I often wonder how the non-elites viewed collapse. It seems that most often the farmers who were feeding the growing settlements simply didn't see the benefit anymore and the elite could no longer force them. They simply left. Those closest to the earth, the tillers of the earth's flesh, could see what was happening. There was no question that they weren't getting as much out as they put in. They saw the layers of top soil wash off into water ways. They saw the sun drying up the earth exposed after the forests were cut. They saw that the storage houses weren't being filled while they worked harder and faced harsher treatment. They could see a catastrophe that was coming from either the natural world or a spiritual one.

But either way, they could see the end days of that civilization.

They saw this and they walked away. And with this, the fragile house of cards came falling down.

There are always those who could see from the start what was happening. There are always those who could see that the environment was changing. There are those who could see that relationships were changing. There are those who realized this as a result of a synthetic society and those who could only see it as the result of specific consequences of that society. So you get witch hunts, you get persecution, you get genocide, you get warfare, and you get new legislation and powers. The grasp of power always tightens the most when it is the weakest.

But we can't see the true irony here. We get used to looking forward, looking towards the sky, we create god and then we spend the rest of our time trying to become it. We don't look down. We don't look inward. Look back at the origins and spread of civilization. You start with settlements where populations expand. Wild seeds are brought into domesticated gardens. Domesticated gardens turn to fields of crops. Wild animals are herded and bred into stock animals. Villages turn to cities. Shamans turn to priests. Chiefs turn to kings. Open settlements turn into forts. You get cores, you get peripheries. You get elites and producers. You get those in between. You get armies and police. You expand and colonize. You get slaves and masters, workers and bosses.

It doesn't always happen like this. Many societies are content to stick with gardens, villages, shamans, chiefs, and a certain level of warfare. This way of living can remain relatively egalitarian and relatively sustainable for some time. But it has happened like this. Our reality is testament to this. Growth, left unchecked, leads only to more growth. And growth is an endemic disease.

At first only a small number of these societies existed. But they grew. They ran into each other violently and swallowed each other. They spread throughout the world. They became one. They became us. They grew so they could no longer sustain themselves. They needed food, fuel, water, and labor. They cut the forests, they pulled up the coal, they cut open atoms, they pulled up oil and natural gases, they tapped underground reservoirs, and they dammed rivers, and took the rays of the sun. They act like they could do this forever.

We act like we can do this forever.

Those who have always seen the problems with this anti-life of growth have always resisted it. They fought and were fought against. They still fight. They have nothing to lose because without their world, they are nothing. They are those who never forgot what it means to be human. Those who never forgot what it means to be an animal. And for this, they are ignored and slaughtered. I don't doubt that they ever saw the plague and fall of past civilizations any less than they do now. I don't doubt that these 'savages' were ignored any less before than they are now.

I'm left wondering how many of those past civilizations had people like M. King Hubbert. Technocrats and composers of a synthetic reality who saw a fatal flaw and could point it out in the only way technocrats can understand it: the language of efficiency. In 1949, Hubbert realized that the world peak in oil production was coming rather quickly. He wasn't the first to notice, but one of the first to be taken seriously.

At least to be taken somewhat seriously. Hubbert knew that his findings weren't just a figure, but potentially the looming end of the world as we've made it over the last few centuries. The global civilization, carried and maintained by an extensive technological and industrial framework, could not survive without a major source of energy. And probably could not survive if that source of energy wasn't cheap enough.

Perhaps in the 1950's, it was easier to think that this would simply disable the last few centuries of progress and growth. The continued progress and growth have only amplified the outcome: we have torn down and replaced the earlier stages of our civilization. They've become obsolete. We are no longer adding to past technological progress: we are replacing and erasing both the tools and the knowledge necessary to downscale. The future of civilization is dependent upon one thing: another source of cheap energy.

It is looking far less likely that a knight in shining armor will come to the rescue. There isn't much time. Contemporaries of Hubbert have continued both his work and his search for an alternative. One in particular, Colin Campbell, gave a timeline. By his findings, the best case scenario is a sharp peak in world oil production around 2015-2020. The worst case scenario is that the peak happened nearly ten years ago.

So even under the best case scenario, there would have to be a massive change over in the next decade for this system to survive.

Of course this begs the question: is this survival or just more borrowed time? It is inevitable that civilizations will continually outgrow themselves. Perhaps the only relevant question left is what will be left when they can't carry on? What has gone up even farther can only look forward to a harsher fall.

As the end of cheap oil flies back at us, the question that is being asked is if we should draw down our technology and downscale society or what the alternative energy will be. Not many people are really jumping ship. At least not yet. It's not talked about that neither of those choices is really a realistic option or that they are desirable ones. Hubbert and his followers point towards nuclear power as one of the best prospects for alternatives. It may be the only realistic one, but I'd hope more people are able to recognize that it also amplifies the worst case scenario of civil crash by the hundreds.

The civilizers have yet to come to terms with the fact that civilization is and will continue to outgrow itself. Any alternative will eventually run out as all the past ones have. There will be more people, fields will continue to produce less, the quality of crops will continue to decrease, the overcrowding of cities will continue, the need for more and more energy will not end. This is what our glorious future has to offer: more of the same, but always worse than before.

And we've yet learned to distrust the technocrats. They said DDT was safe. They said lead paint was safe. They say work and growth are good. They say pesticides and insecticides are not harmful. They say nuclear power is safe. They say technology is safe when handled correctly. They say technology can be used correctly. They say massive arms build up will keep us safe. They say an offensive defense is better than a defensive offense.

And what have we gained? Physical and emotional disease, social upheaval, psychologically unfulfilling lives, and a bunch of self-depleting junk just to name a few. Perhaps we should start asking what we've lost.

And more importantly, we should be asking what we have to gain.

The peak in world oil production, though extremely significant, does not alone cause collapse. Hitting the peak in world oil production does not mean that global civilization will immediately fall apart and be done with. As I said earlier, collapse is about a process. The peak in oil production is only a factor in that timeline. The end of this society is much more complicated than this.

What the end of the era of cheap and widely available oil does mean is that society has become more vulnerable. I say more vulnerable intentionally. The nomadic gatherer/hunter life that we are born for is successful for one primary reason: it is adaptable. The more options you have and the less baggage you have to keep you from moving on or working with others, the better your chances of 'success'. All the same, horticultural (gardening societies) are more 'successful' than agricultural (field farming societies) because of their relative diversity and ability to trek when necessary.

Disaster, as we know it, is a direct consequence of settlements. Droughts happen. Other plants and animals have high and low points. Hunting isn't always successful. There are plenty of ways that the day to day life of a nomadic gatherer/hunter can be inconvenienced, but none of them are so tragic. You can always move or join up with other bands or eat different foods. If you see early warning signs of severe weather, you can respond quicker. As the recent tsunamis throughout Indochina left a death toll of over a quarter of a million, the gathering and hunting peoples of the Andaman Islands, like all wild beings, knew what was coming ahead of time and responded appropriately.

These same peoples, who have evaded expanding Indian rule for centuries now, were capable of understanding the world around them and accepting what they saw. They were capable of responding. The would-be and current colonizing forces, like their entire kind, have always said that the rule of civilization is inevitable. They're probably not noticing the irony that this kind of event offers.

Weather like this is something that has always happened. It has toppled civilizations before, but not by itself. Settlements make society more vulnerable. Being dependent on certain crops makes society more vulnerable. Having a large population that is not directly involved in basic subsistence activity makes a society vulnerable. A society having overused a great deal of farm land and running low on sources of fuel makes a society vulnerable. All of these things, taken on their own, are very serious in their implications for a society.

A civilization is likely to endure hardship in any one of these areas. Politicians can maneuver their way through drought and maintain order. Just the same, they can handle a large population that has no idea of how to feed themselves. A great loss of lives to a 'natural disaster' or great deal of structural damage can be dealt with.

But when they are combined, any one of these could simply be a trigger.

This is what we need to understand: our global civilization is spreading itself out thinly across the planet. Because of its ultra-exploitative nature, it is vulnerable in nearly every conceivable aspect. We can't see that now. We look out to a world ordered and driven by civilized and technological manipulation. We see a world where politicians can see and hear everything we say, do, and, possibly, think. While power has never been so strong and so consolidated, it has also never been so weak in so many places and so completely susceptible to disabling if only we were to exploit those weaknesses.

In reality, civilization has bred the conditions for its own demise.

The same technology that makes it possible to create a global economy and spread production throughout the world makes it weak. Only a handful of crops serve as the bulk of the world's food supply. As we've seen in the last few years, such selective breeding and expansive trade networks makes them vulnerable. We almost lost the banana last year to a single blight. The Irish potato famine may prove to be a tiny version of things to come.

All major and minor crops are at risk, just as major and minor fuel sources are. Now, we can overlook these things because it wouldn't be hard for most of us to live

without bananas. So we think it wouldn't impact us so much. But the people who make our world possible throughout the global production network aren't so fortunate. And when they lose, we lose. The precious empire of crap will fall when no one is there to carry it forward. I know it's hard, but let's not overlook the sheer loss of life that comes with this sort of thing.

This is just one example. Anywhere we look, we will find more.

Fish and other ocean life are a staple food for a vast chunk of the world's population. Over-fishing and waste from selective fishing have caused some of the most significant loss of life on the planet. By now we should all be at least somewhat aware of the consequences of deforestation. With no trees and no healthy ecosystems, the soil dries up in the sun and washes into rivers, lakes and oceans carrying all the synthetic fertilizers that were supposed to cover up the loss with it. We lose plants, we lose oxygen. We lose oxygen, we can't breathe.

We have to start noticing this because trees share land with us. What we aren't seeing is the loss of life in the oceans that is just as absolutely necessary to life on this planet as the forests. The bulk of the world's coral reef is dying or very close to it. Our economic vision doesn't understand ecological reality. Ecosystems don't work like markets: you can't lose in one area and make up for it in another. You can't lose coral reef and replace it with something new, something farmed or something entirely synthetic. Healthy ecosystems need a real balance: one that cannot be easily or materially reproduced.

And, unlike the markets, running one business dry doesn't lead to an immediate crash. The earth doesn't work like that. By our standards, it happens slowly. So we can go on ignoring it, just like we ignored cancer from DDT, nuclear waste, lead, and the like. By the time we notice, it's too late to do anything about it.

That is, too late to do anything but to stop destroying life and try to learn how to live again. Unfortunately, the stubbornness and determination that we're so proud of keeps us from learning lessons. We're too proud to look to coral reef to see what we are doing wrong.

Like past civilizations, we will one day learn that lament and regret won't redeem us. Only action will.

Learning that we can't live without forests, without coral reef, without wild fish populations, or that we can't live with lead, oil and coal mining, electricity, and DDT doesn't mean that we can find a way out of this mess without changing to the core. Understanding these things and the fragility of the world we create and maintain daily can only lead to a completely different approach to how we live, see and think about the world around us. Faced with a world of diseases, of destruction continually amplified by technological progress, of depression and deprivation, we must come to understand that civilization, with all of its concrete and mental institutions, cannot continue.

The collapse of our global civilization is inevitable. Theories point out that we've passed the peak or are going to very soon and argue for a long and dragging demise

or a quick one. But even the most pessimistic rarely accounts for the fact that the greatest shake ups typically come from those vulnerable areas that we least expect.

And most of us forget that one of those vulnerable areas is: ourselves, the civilized, the humans. Our own self domestication has not changed who we are. What we eat, the way we live, the chemicals we've been breathing, eating, and wrapping ourselves in have all affected us seriously, but, for the most part, our bodies and minds have not changed. Every child is born ready for the 'stone age world'.

We are still animals. We are still a part of the natural world. We are still apart of natural ecosystems. That psychological split that has been instilled in us, the human 'us' versus the wild 'them', keeps us from realizing this, but it is no less true that when talking about ecological reasons for collapse we're still talking about ourselves. This is the part we've forgotten.

Past civilizations have gone through the long drawn out process of collapse. They have been stressed, have warred, have turned against each other, have sacrificed themselves, have prayed and preyed, or simply ignored the end of the world they created.

But the death of civilization is not some wholly external thing. Yet that's the only way we're usually allowed to imagine it, and it's a popular way. We see the end of our world as a battle between God and Satan over human souls and a division between heaven and hell. Nearly every society that has challenged carrying capacity and faces an inevitable collapse of their new system has to create two new myths: their origins and their demise. Both always come at the hands of the gods.

These are important stories/realities. Not only do they set the tone for seeing humans and even particular societies as removed from the rest of life, they set the tone for that progressing worldview. They set the cornerstone for linear and historical thought. For the first time, there is a beginning and an end. This is life, spread out on a line and isolated. History and heritage become important. Sacrifice, most often taking the form of work, becomes a virtue.

What is most important for us here, is the realization that the more a society becomes distanced from the natural world, the more distant their god/s become. The more distant their god/s become, the more external their reality. What you end with is simple: change is out of our hands, the most we can do is pay taxes/tribute and live moral lives. We look to our own legacy in the space of theirs: History. The line replaces the circle in reality and in thought.

When we accept that the creators and controllers of our lives and our reality are out of our reach, we surrender our responsibility and our agency. We can no longer change things. Civilization becomes just as external as the god/s who crafted it. It is something happening to us rather than something that we create and maintain. Something that will end, but not something we can end. Here the domesticators really know what they're doing: they've instilled helplessness into our pathology.

We can except the end of our world, so long as it is god/s taking back what they started. We can say and do nothing, but live in a moral manner. We concern ourselves

with our personal and isolated lives while ignoring the death of the natural world and the decay of our being. We ignore our own agency in the collapse of civilization.

No matter what we do, no matter how much we're trying to save civilization or drag out the process of collapse, we are contributing to the collapse of civilization. But not always in a very preferable way. We do it by living as a part of this self-destructive system and continually denying our own wildness, or we give into our animality, our wildness, and do something about it. I consider this taking part in the primal war: the refusal and resistance to domestication wherever and whenever it has imposed itself on life and the world.

No matter what our choice is, we are destroying civilization. Our choice is really about whether that role is active or passive. Our choice is about the world we live in and the world we want to live in. Our choice is about how and when we're going to get there.

When civilizations collapsed in the past. There were most often periods of horrible blight. People tend to tolerate a lot when they're incapable of seeing what direction they are heading. Like I've said, you get famine, war, desperation, starvation, and just about everything else we see as social ills. The gap between the socio-political have and have nots is at a peak. And in this peak of despair, through the war, bloodshed and finger pointing, those that have not killed each other simply walk away.

At some point people recognize that civilization is not something external to their reality. The hegemonic grasp of the elites erodes in the face of hunger and intolerable oppression. Like the old saying goes: the boss needs us, we don't need the boss. But we can apply that more widely: replace boss with machine, fields, work, god/s, economy, politics, or civilization. We've lived without all of these things and we don't need them. They are killing us. The city and the countryside stand between us and a society that can support the next generations. Work stands between us and life. Progress stands between a healthy livable world and a suffocating one. Those who built the temples of god-kings, those who filled the granaries, those who worked in the fields, those who built roads, cut forests, those who crushed opposition, all of them hit a point when it was painfully obvious that they were putting far more into the system than they were getting in return.

Most of them always knew this. Just like most of us still know this. But what is different is that they realized they could do something about it. Tired of waiting for god, they stopped civilization. Whether it was through killing elites, sabotaging tools, burning granaries, homes and temples, symbolic destruction, ignoring or torching the fields, or simply stopping production through walking away: they took back their agency. They stopped believing that they needed the system like it needed them. They resisted and hit power where it hurts: they rendered it useless.

I think the last point is the most important one. There has never been a revolution against civilization, and if there were, it's not likely that it would be successful. Revolutions are limiting. They seek to make great changes, but both in historical and practical senses they take a certain shape, form and target. To take on the system,

revolutionaries take up that same form not necessarily of will, but because it is the only thing that they know and because the only way they know how to attack is on the systems' terms.

In short, revolutions always become political rather than anti-political. Politics are messy. You can't talk about politics without using the political-legalese and logic. It is a worldview that takes hierarchy, power, and bureaucracy as a fact of life. And the revolutionaries end up taking it in. You get specialists, divisions, leadership (in the form of positions of power or influence), and you get armies. That is because revolutions aim at overtaking a certain system or source of power. They need something simple to get people to join their ranks, to throw their lives on the line, and to get people to come together for one target and many offenses. If you want to take power on, you need a revolution.

But if you want to take power out, then you need something different.

I talk about the war being waged against domestication since it first came about. This is another part of the primal war. It's a war without magnificent battlefields and victories, but a war that is waged through the existence of an imposing order. This war is based not off of ideals about how things could be, but an understanding of how things are. Specifically, it is about an understanding of the wildness within and around us. It is about understanding what the domesticators fear so much and have tried to take from us. It is about taking that wildness back.

Primal war takes resistance and rewilding to be one in the same. There is no platform or proper path; there is no set goal that each individual must achieve. There is no organization, politics, economics, and the like. It looks like people breaking mediation and connecting on their own terms. It can look like a group of people recreating community in the original sense. It can look like people digging up fiber optic cables or derailing trains carrying coal. Or it looks like bulldozers, earth movers, strip malls, luxury homes, and logging equipment in flames. Or it looks like people learning about wild foods and primal lifeways and breaking their own dependency on civilization. Or it looks like the replanting of wild and native species with an understanding of what a healthy ecosystem is. And it is all of these things.

All of this is a part of taking our lives back. It is about breaking our dependency and taking back our agency. It is about understanding our role in a destructive and self-consuming civilization. It is about understanding the inevitable end that we are only making worse. It is about taking action and becoming agents of collapse in an active way.

This is something that is something different than revolution by its very nature. It is anti-political in practice. Rather than attempting to take on civilization in its own terms, it takes an understanding of civilization and how it works and uses it against it. It is about exploiting the weaknesses of the global empire. It is about dismantling power rather than seizing it. That may look like insurrections or it may look like people walking away from civilization. Or it may look like ELF type arsons or armed attacks on key points on the electrical power grid that is the lifeblood of civilization. It takes

active confrontation on every level and a refusal to passively sit back as civilization continues to destroy this planet, our home.

Revolutions have typically centered on a nihilistic urge to simply destroy the old system. More often than not, they've failed on this point. But the nihilistic urge to start over from nothing never goes deep enough. Rejecting 'everything' never goes deep enough. It never leaves that individualism and egoistic worldview that the domesticators created to keep us as concerned tax payers rather than conscious of the scale of our daily lives.

It doesn't break that self/Other split that the domesticators create. It tells us that we are external to the world. It's opposite, biocentrism, does the same thing. It reminds us that we are separate from a world and a wildness which is external to our being and far more important. In attacking that self/Other split, primal war is really about an understanding and love of life and wildness. It is for something rather than simply against something. It is about something you can feel, see and breathe, not just something that sounds nice. It's something that has worked for millions of years.

Primal war spreads from the rage that only a deep love creates. It is about a totalistic and relentless attack on the system that is killing us and our world for all that we can be separated. It demands action, but that is action that comes from within, not from leaders and platforms. It demands that we take the collapse of civilization seriously and take action to bring it on quicker while softening the impact of the crash.

I said from the start that I fear the collapse but I know it is something that is happening, something that must happen. But I don't want to give the impression that primal war is any kind of panacea or that it will make life easier or simply a safe place of refuge. There is no simple solution.

With a deep understanding of wildness comes a return to responsibility. Civilized living is about distancing ourselves from the consequences of our actions. We don't have to see where our trash goes, where our clothes and other crap is made, where our food and fuel comes from. But a world without civilization and without a global technological network is a world where consequence is not something distant. We have to readjust our thought and action to the community level in ecological and social terms.

That takes some serious work.

Walking away doesn't erase the impact of any civilization. It never has. Some have permanently changed the regional ecosystems in negative ways far more than others, but on a long enough time line, this is always temporary. Waterways, protective/offensive walls, homes and temples will be grown over. Even the huge temples of the classic Maya were so overgrown that the first colonizing Europeans hardly noticed them.

However, no past civilization had concrete, machines and nuclear power anymore than they had electronic surveillance and guns. There is no historical precedent for collapse on the scale of our own. Our own collapse is like all the past ones, but amplified

to scale. We will, in time, readjust as a species. We're adaptive and, hopefully, capable of learning from our past.

The immediate period requires a lot more consciousness raising and a lot of concrete razing. There is work to be done everywhere. We should be conscious of what areas of civilization are going to affect us the most a hundred, thousand or million years from now. Is there some way to more safely shut off nuclear power and keep it shut off?

The concrete, steel and glass will always be an issue, but it's one I'm actually a bit less concerned about. The bulk of civilized work is busy work. I'd say even with our proud and 'ingenious' civilization, nearly all work done is maintenance work. The roads always have to be redone, cracks have to be filled, walls needed painted, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides need spread, the lawn needs mowed and the leaves raked. Pushing aside wildness is a daily chore. It's weeding the garden. The willingness of life and wildness to continue existing will always be stronger than the ability of concrete to hold itself together. It has no life and no purpose aside from what we give it. It will fade in time. The frailty of the world that domestication has built is something we can see daily.

There is a concern over the sheer loss of wild life and wild places. There are far less places for us to return to, that much is true. This is usually taken as an argument against collapse and for either reforming civilization or taking steps through civilization for a 'soft landing' rather than a crash. The books flooding the public consciousness on collapse all push for the latter, but there is very little reality to back up such a pipe dream were it even socially possible. What it would look like is more of the same, but with an even larger gap between the rich and the poor. Look at the life of 'luxury' that the rich have built, you think they'll give up golf courses and mansions out of good will for the earth or even their children?

But the earth is strong. Wildness is strong. The only thing holding it back is us. Left untended, healthy ecosystems will return. Granted it will take some time and readjustment, but probably far less than what we would be led to believe. If you look at fields left fallow, you can see how quickly new life emerges. The forests that are left are always trying to spread beyond the lines we place before and around them. Invasive species drown them out, but those invasive species are only a piece of a larger picture. Invasive species are like the civilizations that breed them. They are plants and animals that feed off of disturbed areas. They are the invited guests of the first gardens and have spread through a world where once healthy ecosystems are torn apart and left in shambles. When the disturbance ends, the wildness will creep back in. The earth may not be able to fully endure another 10, 20, 100 years of industrial civilization, but it is strong enough for this.

And it can always use help. We can learn about the native ecosystems and their interconnections. While we can and should never think we are capable of redoing what the earth shaped over millions of years. We can do our best to try and reintroduce and spread native seeds back into their niche.

This demands a trust and respect for life that we have lost to short term vision. And this is where the critique of domestication really hits home: what does this all mean in terms of personal action? We've never really had a hard time understanding that the wild animals around us rarely have a hard time seeking out food in the forest. But when it comes to us, it's almost impossible to imagine. We're incapable of seeing beyond the garden. So we beg the question: is a nomadic gatherer/hunter life preferable or feasible over a return to small scale horticulture? To both, I'd say yes.

Nomadism is what has shaped our reality. It is what a lived ecology looks like. Horticultural societies, compared to agricultural and, especially, industrial agricultural societies, are relatively sustainable. I have no innate opposition to them and no lack of solidarity with such struggling peoples. But if we're talking about the steps we are to take in our own lives, I see a nomadic or semi-nomadic gathering and hunting life as the most ideal. Considering the kind of transitional stages that wild and feral places are going to have to go through, sedentism would amount to suicide. It lacks the adaptivity that a nomadic life carries. It keeps us from over running areas or depleting all life in any particular area. It keeps our social life moving and allows us to split off to keep tensions low. It breaks the possibility for our obsession with property, possessions and nationalism. It is and always has been a breeding ground for anarchy.

And it places wildness over the domesticated. It places the forest before the garden. That requires more knowledge and more effort on our own part, but, most of all, it requires us to once again trust wildness and learn to live without fear of a dark and looming Future and without the need to meet the expectations of History. It requires a return to the moment so that there may be a future. The garden is a short term solution. It keeps us settled and better protected from the changes that come with the seasons.

It keeps us tamed. While not every wild plant or animal serves us the same as crops like tomatoes, potatoes and beans, we have to understand the importance of an entire ecosystem versus selected plants solely for our own good. Gardens make us more vulnerable. And vulnerability has always led to the ills of horticultural societies: a tendency towards patriarchy, warfare, the roots of coercive power, stricter social regulation, the potential for poverty and catastrophe, and less social flexibility.

Of course, these are things that have become core parts of horticultural societies and things they are all more than happy to have in their lives. At the same time, they are almost all identifying aspects of horticultural life. While many of us might not see them as preferable, we'd be arrogant to think these wouldn't arise again in the societies we ourselves may begin to shape. That comes back to our short term thinking. In our lives and our children's lives these may not be an issue, but societies are organic and tend to follow the same flow in the same circumstances. Either way, a horticultural society that we create now, by its nature, will either be far stricter socially and less prone to individual expression and discovery, or it will look like nearly every other horticultural society to have existed.

Or the opposite is true. The short term future will be the true tragedy. Those who benefit from keeping us afraid of each other and our own human nature have always told that without their power and control we would return to our savage nature and return to a world of murder, rape, and pillaging. There is no real grounding for this, but there is always the fear that some have actually instilled this Machiavellian drive for power. So there is the fear of the Mad Max post-collapse society. I have to be honest, it is possible. But in a world of nomadic gatherer/hunters, there is little left for these roaming bandits to loot and little to take over. With no basis for power and nothing left to exploit, they'll fade with the civilization that breeds them.

But where there are gardens there are settled societies and there is a threat. When societies have settled, raids have always been a threat and a reality. The granary and the storage house are still new to humanity. They're not things we're accustomed to and they can be corrupting. We were never meant to deal with property and personal possessions as we've created with settled society. So long as these things exist, that created side of ourselves that our own psyches are incapable of predicting or controlling may arise.

I could always be very wrong. But our own history makes us far less predictable than some of us would like to believe. How future generations live will be based more upon how our societies exist rather than what we think they should look like. That is something we need to consider.

And that is also a practical concern. We need to be thinking about change in terms of generations rather than just ourselves. On a personal level, we could all go feral, but the true 'test' of rewilding doesn't lie within ourselves and our lives, but with the next generations. Some of the questions we need to be asking are about what we will teach them. How will they grow up? This is possibly where we have the most to learn from indigenous societies. It means, at base, a return to wildness and a return to our own instincts. For the next generations, it becomes even clearer that a primary concern ought to be about rebuilding community and bringing civilization down sooner than later.

For any action we take, there will be consequences. If we remain passive or active, there will be consequences. There may not be much time to respond and there may be no real way of telling how much time there is. But we need to understand the reality that has been created, the reality that we continually recreate.

We need to understand what it is we've lost and what it is we are losing. We need to do all of this, and we need to act. Whether or not we ever wanted to be in this position, whether or not we acknowledge it, this is our reality.

There is no promise of greatness. There is no delusion of a perfect world beyond 'the collapse'. There is no easy solution. There is only us and the world we help to create.

The sooner we realize this, the better off we all are.

Rewild. Resist.

NO WAR BUT THE PRIMAL WAR!

The Ted K Archive

Kevin Tucker

Agents of Change: Primal War and the Collapse of Global Civilization

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