

Capitalism is Killing the Earth

Community Self-Governance Can Save It

by Ben G. Price

Our climate crisis has its roots in René Descartes' famous declaration, "I think, therefore I am." If thought is proof of existence, then the thoughts that create the proof have importance. So much so that challenging someone's thoughts seems an attack on their lives.

No wonder it is difficult to create positive change through persuasive argumentation. People find it harder to separate themselves from untrue ideas that they have been socialized to believe, than it is for them to learn and act upon better information. Thus, people resist understanding that their fossil fuel-dependent lifestyle is causing mass species die-offs and possible human extinction. They see these facts as existential threats.

The "scientific method" espoused by Francis Bacon is another philosophical paradigm with unconsciously assimilated beliefs that block rather than facilitate solutions to ending our energy production induced climate crisis. Bacon taught that Nature is an inert machine that can be taken apart, understood, in fact enslaved and used to elevate humanity above the rest of the natural world.

This philosophy resulted in ecocide and subjugation of peoples globally, all to make possible the European conquests that account for so many of the harms and horrors for which we now seek solutions. Colonizers found license to plunder in decrees like the Doctrine of Discovery and the Law of Conquest, issued by papal fiat in eager support of Christopher Columbus' lascivious wanderings. With imperial "manifest destinies" pursued with genocidal and ecocidal violence, the world was transformed into "property" by laws giving monopolizing privileges to the few and exclusionary deprivations for the many. The concept of community and self-determination was obscenely violated far and wide.

Our resulting, "scientific" industrial society is wrapped in a legendary system of magic called "capitalism." It has rocked the natural world to its foundations and molested whole continents with its invisible hands. It is hard to deny that a minority of humanity has engineered, and a growing plurality is complicit in this catastrophe.

Addressing climate change systematically requires rejecting our deceptive cultural myths, overcoming our own untested beliefs, and purg-



graphic: CELDF

ing our minds of premises that program us to destroy and be destroyed. There has always been resistance, but it has never been enough. Today we exist in an age of upheaval. People revolt over what are truly existential threats. We must understand where we went wrong and correct the errors of the past.

The solution is not better rules about how much a privileged minority can legally poison Earth and all of us. It is not more consumer goodies for the masses, nor better "regulation" of the forces of violence or the rate of destruction. The solution is to return to every community a power and authority to decide their way in the world, to empower their creativity and capacity to choose, at their discretion and without preemption, how their communities will nurture their own people, while refusing to become resource colonies or occupied lands for the accumulation of wealth and power.

Then, these communities can be woven together, from the bottom up, to form a more decentralized fabric of governance. The solution is community self-governance, limited only by the dictum that in so governing no community of people may deprive another of the same grace, nor may they do enduring harm to the natural world.

Ben G. Price is the National Organizer for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund and author of "How Wealth Rules the World: Saving Our Communities and Freedoms from the Dictatorship of Property."

Addressing climate change systematically requires rejecting our deceptive cultural myths, overcoming our own untested beliefs, and purging our minds of premises that program us to destroy and be destroyed.

Rights of Nature

Environmental degradation is advancing around the world. The United Nations has warned that we are heading toward "major planetary catastrophe." For this reason, there is a growing recognition that we must fundamentally change the relationship between humankind and nature.

Making this fundamental shift means acknowledging our dependence on nature and respecting our need to live in harmony with the natural world. It means securing the highest legal protection and the highest societal value for nature through the recognition of nature's rights. See <https://celdf.org/> for more information.