



laetus in praesens

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64 Questions for the Environmental Conservationists of the World raising the question as to why they are not effectively addressed

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Produced on the occasion of [Earth Overshoot Day](#) (2 August 2017), namely the date on which humanity's resource consumption in 2017 exceeds Earth's capacity to regenerate those resources in 2017. The date is [nearly a week earlier than in 2016](#).

Questions

The following questions can be explored as a complement to the [30 Questions for the Counter-terrorism Experts of the World](#), written on the occasion of the [G20 Summit \(Hamburg, July 2017\)](#) at which terrorism was a prominent [agenda](#) item. Any focus on "terrorism" can be usefully seen in the broader context of the [sixth mass extinction](#) heralding a new epoch with which such terms as [Anthropocene](#) and [Chthulcene](#) have been associated (Ben Westcott, [Sixth Mass Extinction? Two-thirds of wildlife may be gone by 2020](#), CNN, 28 October 2016). The conclusions of an [authoritative research report](#), indicating that *The situation has become so bad it would not be ethical not to use strong language*, have been summarized in the following terms:

The scientists found that a third of the thousands of species losing populations are not currently considered endangered and that up to 50% of all individual animals have been lost in recent decades. Detailed data is available for land mammals, and almost half of these have lost 80% of their range in the last century. The scientists found billions of populations of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians have been lost all over the planet, leading them to say a sixth mass extinction has already progressed further than was thought. (Damian Carrington, [Earth's sixth mass extinction event under way, scientists warn](#), *The Guardian*, 10 July 2017).

Preoccupation with terrorism, as now narrowly defined, obscures and denatures the degree of terror perpetuated by humans with respect to other species in nature. It also obscures the terror which is in process of being engendered by the effects of climate change on future human generations. The issue of climate change also figured on the G20 agenda, paradoxically associated with the unremitting growth and development which so directly engender environmental degradation ([G20 Hamburg Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth](#), 2017).

Sea levels and temperatures are now acknowledged to be rising much faster than expected with disastrous consequences frequently reported ([Sea level rise accelerating nearly 3x faster than during 20th century](#), *USA Today*, 23 May 2017; [Sea level rise isn't just happening, it's getting faster](#), *The Washington Post*, 26 June 2017; [Latest Study Shows Ocean Temperatures Rising Faster Than Expected](#), *Clean Technica*, 6 July 2017).

1. Fundamental questions?

1. How much worse can the condition of the environment become -- in the light of your unquestionable expertise, irrespective of the resources allocated to your preferred solutions?
2. Are you totally confident that your approach is correct -- and that the challenge has been fruitfully understood?
3. How much worse does the situation have to get before you are prepared to ask new kinds of questions? Is there any recognition that a pattern of [groupthink](#) and [confirmation bias](#) may be inhibiting that possibility -- as became evident with respect to the [intelligence failure](#) prior to 9/11, described as a [failure of imagination](#)?
4. With the current rate of deployment of conservation measures, can it be said that the "efficacy" of environmental degradation, and the obvious inability to curtail it, are increasing in equal measure?
5. After the expenditure of resources on environmental conservation over the past decades, what increased proportion of GDP is it appropriate to expend on conservation measures before questioning the appropriateness of the manner in which they are framed?
6. How should the challenge be reframed -- if it is recognized that it is improbable that the resources you consider appropriate will be made available?
7. Why are the motivations and justification for environmental degradation so frequently framed in terms of the right to human dominion over nature -- especially when so little effort is made to understand those motivations in more fruitful ways, in relation to those of environmental conservationists?

8. To what extent are "terrorism" and "environmental degradation" aspects of the same pattern -- when more generally understood in cognitive and systemic terms?
9. Despite the evidence, why are your many warnings given merely token attention -- thereby framing their expression as a negligible chorus of woe in a dynamic psycho-social ecosystem?

2. Counterproductivity?

1. Is your conviction that you know what you are doing -- as an acknowledged expert on environmental conservation -- to be considered as potentially part of the problem?
2. Is any failure to understand how your initiatives are part of the problem a factor in inhibiting your ability to understand the nature of the solution required?
3. If the current approach is considered to be the most appropriate in the light of your expertise, does this inhibit any ability to seek insights from those who consider that approach to be inadequate?
4. Are those who question your approach in any way to be understood as potentially complicit in exacerbating the challenge of environmental degradation and enabling appropriate conservation measures?
5. Is your strategic posture in highlighting environmental challenges (and remedial measures) counterproductive in its expectation that others must necessarily "dance to your tune" -- as the history of self-righteous religions and ideologies has long demonstrated?

3. Appropriate framing?

1. Is the challenge best framed by endeavouring to mitigate against exploitation of non-renewable resources -- when, paradoxically, their exploitation is acclaimed in many domains: sports, recreation, culinary arts, health products, construction, technological innovation, and strategic thinking of every kind? Politicians and corporate executives, for example, are noteworthy for unabashedly framing their own proposals as necessarily dependent on such exploitation and for deprecating those with alternative perspectives as naive.
2. Are the metaphors by which remedies are framed engendering the most fruitful approaches: "conservation", "sustainability", "exploitation", "renewable"? As with smoking and alcohol consumption, is the situation best framed by a focus on "stopping" or "eradicating" those forms of environmental degradation which you deprecate?
3. Since environmental degradation can now be readily compared to an environmental "cancer", how do you expect to respond to its predicted "metastasis" -- if the "cancer" cannot be stopped?
4. Given the questionable efficacy of conservation measures in response to foreseen catastrophes, can it be argued that such measures can best be recognized metaphorically as "palliative care" in regretful anticipation of various forms of extinction?
5. Does the success of any "war" against environmental degradation depend primarily on the ability to frame those of contrary views as fundamentally misguided and irresponsible -- if not barbaric and inhuman?
6. Have you significantly failed to apply your ecosystemic sensitivities and skills to the psycho-social system which is proving so resistant to your warnings?
7. To what extent are you complicit in framing a collective attitude to the challenge as akin to the tales of "rabbits blinded by traffic headlights at night" or of a "frog in slowly boiling water"?

4. Definitional game-playing?

1. In the effort to understand and constrain environmental degradation, how fruitful is it to avoid all discussion of the historical record of complicity in such processes by those who now deprecate it so vigorously? When did the most righteous of deprecators last engage institutionally -- through the bodies that represent them -- in any acts now upheld as instances of outrageous environmental degradation?
2. Should the all too recent dependence on slavery -- notably by exploitative colonial powers -- now be recognized as having constituted a form of environmental degradation? If not, why not, given the forms of sustainability disrupted by degradation of the indigenous cultures?
3. Is it sufficient to regret the excesses of the past or -- if not carefully forgotten -- even to reframe them as justifiable when they enabled the economic growth and development on which preferred lifestyles currently depend?
4. Why do you take such great care to distinguish environmental degradation from the acts of those engendering such degradation to a far greater degree through intensive farming, cruel and inhuman treatment of livestock, exploitation of animals for medical research, trade in wildlife (especially endangered species)? What efforts are made to investigate and eradicate such forms of environmental degradation and the complicity in their perpetration -- especially given the priority accorded to environmental conservation as so particularly framed?
5. How naive has it now become to claim that many development programs enabled by government constitute instances of environmental degradation -- whether or not they are deliberately exploitative and unconstrained by environmental considerations? Is it appropriate to ignore completely this form of environmental degradation?
6. Given the challenge they constitute, now and in the past, is it appropriate to review the threat of exploitative development initiatives in the light of the environmental consequences they engender -- perhaps to justify their eradication? If not, why not?
7. Should they become apparent, will extraterrestrials be readily framed as exploitative of the planetary ecosystems -- or will humans be so framed by them according to extraterrestrial values (and possibly their sympathy for impact on other species by humans)?
8. Have you, or your relatives, personally engaged in some form of environmental degradation -- of a form which as a professional you would consider irrelevant to any understanding of environmental conservation?

5. Credibility?

1. To what extent does your framing of the environmental situation now exploit modalities which are reducing the credibility of the initiatives you take in the eyes of public opinion?
2. Is it credible to claim adequate understanding of environmental degradation, conventionally defined, when other unacknowledged forms of such degradation may also be significant in that regard?
3. Given that you now have the power to distort the nature of the threat of environmental degradation -- if you so choose -- how can you prove that you have not done so?
4. How can conservation agencies render credible the threats which justify their mandate, when inflating such threats (through false claims or otherwise) offers the simplest means of justifying that mandate, the resources required, and the extreme measures advocated?
5. How long do you expect the population to continue to believe your assertions that conservation measures have curtailed significant processes of environmental degradation -- when it is clearly in your interest to make that claim, whether it is true or not?
6. How can the validity of your claims be established unequivocally -- given the unquestionable need for optimism, the prevalence of fake-news, and the complicity of many authorities?
7. How can environmental degradation continue to be successfully framed as a threat given the rapid erosion of the distinction between such "regrettable" acts (as occasionally reported by the media) and the marketing promotion of environments developed for tourism at the cost of environmental degradation?
8. Will the increasing urgency of climate change lead you to accommodate [radical geoengineering alternatives](#) to the Paris Agreement -- whose unilateral implementation by an isolationist USA is increasingly predictable?
9. Are you complicit in inhibiting effective debate on the consequences of population increase -- as potentially indicated by the negotiation of Catholic endorsement of the Paris Agreement in exchange for avoiding any challenge to the Catholic position on family planning?

6. Foreseeable implications?

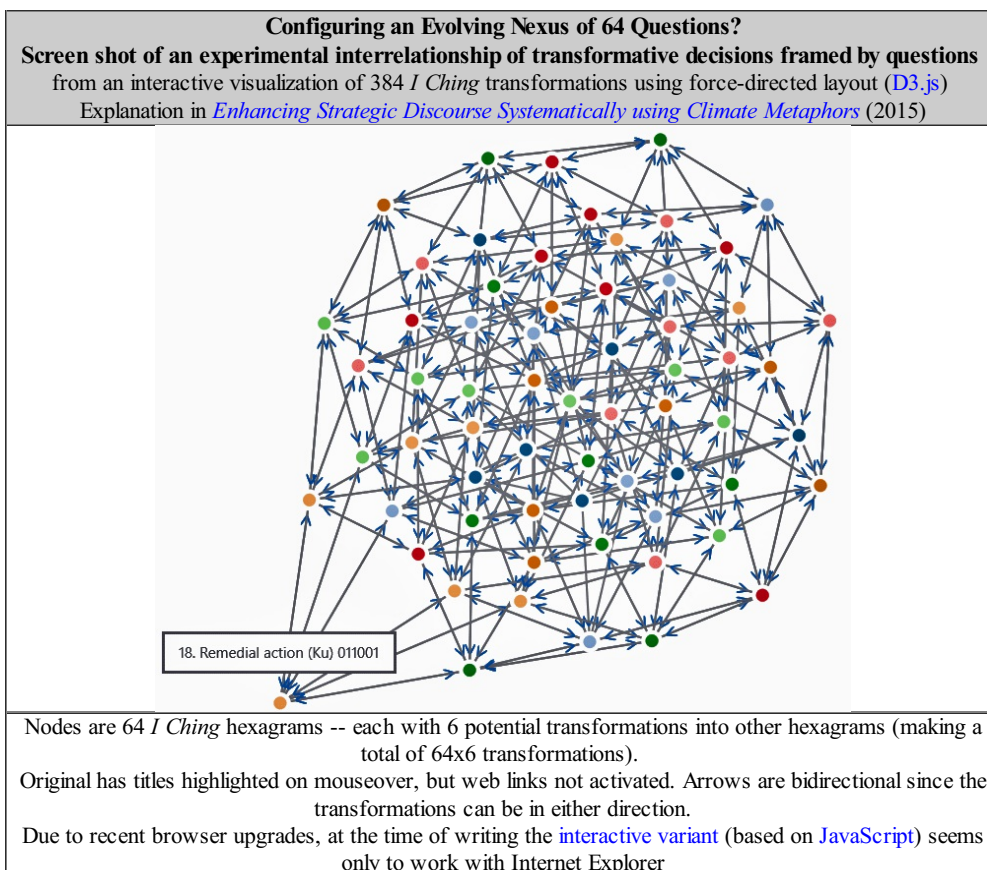
1. Is threat, as exemplified by that of catastrophic environmental degradation as you frame it, now the only viable means of ensuring the degree of collective consensus required for governance of a complex society?
2. To what extent does the unprecedented investment in conservation initiatives (framed as "urgent") now serve as a highly convenient means of obscuring the failure to invest in other initiatives which might serve to reframe and alleviate environmental degradation?
3. Is the investment in environmental conservation, as narrowly defined by yourselves, paradoxically now associated to some degree with the exacerbation of environmental degradation as might be more generally understood?
4. At what point will the general population be "terrified" by the extent of the environmental conservation measures deployed in practice (with your complicity) -- to a greater degree than by exposure to the threat of "terrorism"? Is this a solution to the problem of "terrorism"?
5. At what point will the counter-terrorism strategy you advocate justify the sacrifice of a few lives (under the guise of "terrorism" to be blamed on others) in order, purportedly, to ensure the safeguarding of many lives?
6. With security measures now focusing primarily on the arms and explosives (as used by terrorists in the past), why is it so readily assumed that "terrorists" of the future will not resort to biochemical and genetic modification strategies -- "bioterrorism"? What might be the implications for environmental conservation?
7. Will it become apparent that it is those corporations most deprecated for their toxic environmental policies which achieve most in mitigating catastrophe by ensuring premature death of increasing proportions of the population?
8. Given your apparent failure to frame the challenge more fruitfully, how do you anticipate that the future will judge your competence and complicity -- when considering crimes against the planet?

7. Better questions capable of engendering greater insight?

1. What new modes of information display (as illustrated below) could be used to enable questions (such as those above) to be more succinctly formulated and interrelated in order to engender new thinking in response to emerging catastrophes?
2. Is the prevailing quality of questioning relating to the environment best indicated by the following: Alex Epstein, [6 Questions for Environmentalists On Earth Day](#) (Fox News, 22 April 2010); Rusty Pritchard, [Asking the Right Questions about Environmental Protection](#) (Qideas, 2016); W. J. Sutherland, et al. [One Hundred Questions of Importance to the Conservation of Global Biological Diversity](#) (Conservation Biology, 2009)? Or by the restrictive access to [Environmental Science Critical Thinking Questions](#)? Why the argument of James Weston ([We've been asking the wrong questions about conservation](#), *The Guardian*, 29 July 2013)? What other questions are ignored?
3. Do environmental conservationists avoid the requisite degree of self-critical thinking in their advocacy of radical policies for others -- as implied by the scenarios articulated by [Nadia McLaren](#) ([In the Global Village: options for moving beyond binge, whinge, cringe or sting in local green accounting](#), WHO/NATO workshop on Local Environmental Health Action Plans, 1999) or those of the [Center for Humans and Nature](#) ([Questions for a Resilient Future](#), 2017)? What remains to be fruitfully learned from recent insights into [higher orders of cybernetics and feedback processes](#), as separately argued ([Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives](#), 2007)? **When and where do environmentalists ask searching questions of themselves** -- rather than of others? Is it "conservatives" or "conservationists" who should put themselves to the question?
4. Are environmental conservationists cognitively trapped by their preferred metaphors, in accordance with the adage of [Geoffrey Vickers](#): *a trap is a function of the nature of the trapped*? Is this ironically exemplified by the language of "sustainability", "growth", "development" and "performance" in a period when species are being driven rapidly to extinction

by the quest for [aphrodisiacs](#) to enhance such processes in contexts (metaphorically or euphemistically understood) -- which environmentalists are averse to discuss in terms of their implications for ever increasing population pressure? Is this trap also evident in the confusion between "conservation" and "preservation" -- given the relation of the latter to "condom" in some languages (as noted by *Wikipedia*)? "Conservation" is notably described by *Wikipedia* as *the preservation or efficient using of resources*.

5. The dilemmas of the strategic challenge of "conservation" are curiously framed by an implied "courtship" struggle between the "headless hearts" (vital as a source of funding) and the "heartless heads" (vital to any realistic assessment of possibilities). In the intercourse between them, to what extent does the prevailing approach to "conservation" function as a "conceptual contraceptive"? The contrast is highlighted otherwise by the preference of environmentalists for technical terms -- "sites of special scientific interest", "no-take zones" or "reference areas". As argued by [George Monbiot](#): *if you set out to estrange people from the living world, you could scarcely have done better* (*Forget 'the environment': we need new words to convey life's wonders*, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2017).
6. Rather than preoccupation with the threat of "radioactive" contamination of the environment, should conservationists recognize the extent to which the environment has already become "psychoactive" -- calling for modes of engagement beyond those implied by "safe sex" intercourse?
7. Given the argument for "strong language" (quoted above), can it be said that environmental conservationists tend to hide behind the niceties of "weaker language" -- thereby reducing their capacity to come to grips with the strategic challenges?
8. As with the Emperor Nero, is it indeed the case that environmental conservationists are "*fiddling while the Earth burns*" -- as variously suggested, notably by the Centre for International Governance Innovation?
9. Why is it that the extensive debate on the extent and nature of consensus on the environmental challenge avoids the question of what remedial action could be effectively taken if universal consensus were to be achieved? Might such consensus prove to be of as little consequence in the here-and-now as the belief of those of certain religions regarding their redemption and eventual salvation?
10. When will conservationists address the possibility that governance -- as currently understood and undertaken -- is unlikely to be able to cope with the environmental challenges foreseen -- as remarkably demonstrated by the European response to the migration crisis?



Addendum: A remarkable articulation of the unquestionable mindset of environmentalists is provided by [John Abraham](#) (*The Trump administration wants to bail out failed contrarian climate scientists*, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2017). Under the guise of useful criticism of the dubious proposal by the Trump administration to set up a climate "red team" -- to challenge the acclaimed 97% consensus of the climate change "blue team" -- it effectively argues that peer reviewed mainstream science is necessarily right. Any alternative perspective is therefore alleged to be necessarily wrong and irrational, despite increasing [criticism](#) of that process (*Knowledge Processes Neglected by Science: insights from the crisis of science and belief*, 2013).

Curiously the binary metaphor recalls that of the radical "red pill / blue pill" framing provided in the popular movie *The Matrix* (1999), whose relevance to system change can be otherwise explored (*Psychosocial Transformation by "Pill Pushing"? Model-making, strategic advocacy and the myth of the "red pill"*, 2017). Whether it is the environmentalists or their critics that are best identified with the "blue pill" or the "red pill" is then a matter of fruitful debate. Why many subscribe to a perspective other than that of the "know-it-all's"

has come to be central to understanding the mystery of the election of Donald Trump.

The style of argument recalls the assertions made by other ideologies convinced of their rectitude, whether political or religious. Unfortunately it also fails to acknowledge the nature of paradigm shift whereby the consensus of the past is effectively demonstrated to be "right but wrong" -- right within a narrow framework, but wrong within a broader framework. The future may well compare the current 97% consensus among some with that regarding Newtonian mechanics a century ago -- prior to the surprising emergence of relativity theory. The arrogance of the few faced with the disaffection of the many is a phenomenon science has long demonstrated its inability to consider appropriately.

Of far greater relevance to the set of questions above, and the challenge of climate breakdown, is the style of argument of [George Monbiot](#) (*Why are the crucial questions about Hurricane Harvey not being asked?* *The Guardian*, 29 August 2017). This usefully gives focus to the phenomenon -- neglected by science -- of why the consensus of some does not engender the expected response from the many (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009). In the light of the "heat" generated by the global warming debate, John Abraham's expertise in thermodynamics might be fruitfully adapted to comprehension of its systemic implications -- perhaps in the spirit of the *Hmolpedia: encyclopedia of human thermodynamics, human chemistry, and human physics*, especially given that reference to the latter has been banned from *Wikipedia*.

With the focus by environmentalists on the [ecological footprint of humanity](#), is there also a case for recognizing the extent to which environmentalists [shoot themselves in the foot](#)? Potentially relevant to use of this metaphor is the tragic extent of [environmental killings](#) (*The Defenders: 134 environmental defenders have been killed so far in 2017 while protecting their community's land or natural resources*, *The Guardian*, 30 August 2017).

Resources with related references

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