

Homo destructus

Our home in the stars so often ransacked
Homo destructus had forced us to act
So quick to breed
Killed - not to feed
Our ancient ancestors counter-attacked

All rounded up for a new rebirth
Transported far to a fertile Earth
A gauntlet they ran -
- Neanderthal man
Homo destructus; victor or serf?

That was a million Earth years ago
Call us inquisitive, we need to know
A long stellar trek
In order to check
What occurs when you let primitives go

Five light years travelled to view their progress
Earth is an angry and war tangled mess
Our crew now lay savaged
Our ship also ravaged
Homo destructus sees no welcome guest

That primeval race that we once left to swarm
With clubs and flint axes their weaponry norm
Strangely ironic
They're now atomic
And *Homo destructus* remains true to form

—Terry Flood

PREFACE

My journey of writing this book started innocuously enough with trying to find a stray puppy a home. I came across this 6-week-old puppy abandoned and alone in our park. We took him home, got him treated, and started looking for a home for him. It was not easy and took over a year. But along the way, I discovered the suffering of and cruelty to stray dogs and cats and the exploitation of bred dogs in puppy mills. I then stumbled onto the gross mistreatment of animals raised for food and fashion on factory farms and the gruesome treatment of animals in scientific experiments and entertainment. I turned vegan overnight.

Along the way, I also came across the documentary *Earthlings - 10-Year Anniversary Edition*. While I had seen many videos of the brutality on factory farms, the cruelty towards animals across pets, food, clothes, entertainment, and science was very difficult to watch. I did watch it, though, at one go. It is also what spurred me to write this book. You can find it on YouTube. Please watch it. If you do not watch it, you turn a blind eye; if you do, you will likely not consume animal products. Then you do not need to read this book.

But if you do neither, White Man wins again – much to everyone’s loss. It was first through military might [Conquests], then presumed racial superiority [Colonization], and now economic hegemony [Capitalism]. The last also gave rise to puppy mills, factory farms, and intensive agricultural systems that significantly accelerated environmental degradation. Factory farms, especially, considerably alter land use with a cascading effect on habitats and wildlife and a commensurate reduction in the Earth’s biocapacity to support us. Doomsayers [scientists] portend the extinction of the human race within this century.

Animals do not have much of a say, unfortunately, but people do not say much, either. That is the real tragedy of our times. Incidentally, animals do "talk," and it is because we do not hear what they have to say that we believe they do not — that they are "voiceless." It is curious that many white people, especially women, also raise counter-voices to nearly everything. Women often lead many humanitarian organizations particularly in the animal welfare space. Still, the mammoth progress engine continues to rumble along unimpeded and these voices have negligible impact. I guess women also still do not have much of a voice. Yang continues to rule.

INTRODUCTION

This book originated from a blog I had started to raise awareness about cruelty to animals, an outcome of the journey I had begun over a year ago to find a rescued puppy a home. It starts with a question: Have we lost the plot? Earth moved from nothingness to chaos over 14 Bn years, mainly in the past 200 but especially in the last 50. The rest of the book is in three parts. It covers companion animals, animals primarily raised for food, and wildlife, the most profound yet the least visible of all. Issues highlighted by PETA cover animals used for fashion and science.

Part I covers companion animals closest to most urban dwellers. Why do we obsess over breeding dogs when there are so many stray animals in need of homes? However, addressing the homeless animal problem has many challenges, although insights from around the world provide hope. The condition of dogs in puppy mills is horrific, but animals in labs have it the worst.

Part II discusses the gross mistreatment of billions of animals each year on factory farms. It begins with how we recently changed our relationship with animals and came to treat them as property. We look at various industries: poultry for meat and eggs and mammals – pigs, goats, sheep, and cattle for milk, meat, and leather. We also look at the incredible journey mammals made over millions of years, an origin story of how mammals – and man – came to be. Our overexploitation of natural fisheries and resultant fish farming closes our food fancies. It ends with the veganism paradox, i.e., its limited impact on reducing animal cruelty despite its long history and growing recent impetus.

Part III begins with a clarion call: is it past the point of no return for us? It deals with our emergence as an "unprecedented global superpredator" and our impact on wildlife. It has the most expansive ramifications for the planet, all life forms, and us. It is a vast topic, and the book provides an overview of four key themes: (1) The mass extermination of megafauna across continents during the colonization era, (2) The rate and scale of deforestation and its impacts, (3) The Holocene or Sixth Extinction, the first unnatural, i.e., manmade, and (4) Defaunation, i.e., the reduction of wildlife populations through habitat destruction, hunting, and fishing.

In the end, the book comes full circle with the same question it began with: Have we lost the plot? While the range of the book seems large, the theme is constant. We do not have much regard for the animals that cohabit with us, nor do we give any importance to those that do not. We are Speciesists. Speciesism is the belief that animals are inferior, and we can treat them as property or objects for personal gain. Speciesists also draw convenient non-existent distinctions, show outrage at cruelty to companion animals, and turn a blind eye to mistreating animals used for other purposes and those out of sight, i.e., wildlife*.

* *Speciesism definition thanks to the PETA website.*

PROLOGUE: NOTHINGNESS TO CHAOS

Albert Einstein [1879 - 1955] said, "The indifference, callousness, and contempt that so many people exhibit toward animals is evil first because it results in great suffering in animals, and second because it results in an incalculably great impoverishment of the human spirit." Einstein said this perhaps 90 years ago, but it is as accurate today, in fact, far worse. Commercializing nearly everything has meant we use animals as property in puppy mills and factory farms and overexploit wild animals.

But why do we exploit animals without considering that they are living, thinking, and feeling beings? In other words, they are sentient, like us. More importantly, are we but a natural consequence of evolution, or are we unique in some way? Are our actions distinctive, making us stand outside and apart from the natural system, i.e., did we lose the plot? To understand this better, we must go back to when it all started 14 billion years ago.

The origin of the universe

First, there was nothingness.

The universe formed 13.8 billion years ago from the "Big Bang," starting as a tiny, dense fireball that exploded, expanded, and stretched. It then cooled sufficiently to allow the formation of subatomic particles and later atoms, which were then propelled outward. Giant clouds of these coalesced through gravity, forming early stars and galaxies. The Earth solidified and became habitable 4.5 billion years ago.

Life emerged soon after, about 3.7 billion years ago. But how did life come about? And how did it evolve to become us? Life arose from an accidental chemical reaction, death was an active choice, and humans became the apex predators due to evolutionary development. It is humbling to think that we are merely accidental evolutionary outcomes, that Earth has carried over four billion extinct species, and is estimated to have close to 10 million currently. More so because we might not have been here but for some natural events that eliminated more assertive species [dinosaurs] and made room for previously diminutive ones to flourish — mammals. To think, we might have never been.

The origin of life

There are many theories on how life began. Still, since it is difficult to prove them, no entirely accepted idea exists. Some assert it came from a distant world, although it does not explain how it originated there. Aristotle and the ancient Greeks believed it arose from non-living matter or another different form. Yet others that it appeared through biogenesis, i.e., every living thing came from a pre-existing living thing. It again does not explain how the first came to be.

However, the leading argument today is abiogenesis, i.e., it arose from inert chemicals. The Miller–Urey* and similar experiments demonstrated that most amino acids, essential chemicals of life, could be synthesized from inorganic compounds in conditions related to early Earth by passing electricity or exposure to radiation. Some of these combined to form proteins, which then came together to form the first single-celled organisms.

** In 1953, American chemists Harold C. Urey and Stanley Miller tested the Oparin-Haldane theory and successfully produced organic molecules from some of the inorganic components thought to have been present on prebiotic Earth.*

Unless God created the universe and everything in it over six days and declared the seventh day holy! The Beginning [Genesis 1]: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation.... Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly across the vault of the sky.... Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds.... Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness." God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over every living creature."

But we do not know how much of either is accurate nor do we know which version to believe. It doesn't matter for each person is to their own. Following so, my stand is apparent throughout the book. What is more important is the implications of our beliefs, especially in the context of this book. If we believe the evolutionary argument, it keeps us humble before nature; we maintain a healthy respect for animals. If, on the other hand, we consider the religious one, it puts us above it and disturbs the balance. We today use animals for our purposes without regard to their well-being. We took "subdue and rule" quite literally.

The origin of death

The origin of death is more interesting because we rarely stop to consider it, taking it as a given. But it was not always so. Life was immortal for nearly 2.5 billion years because it reproduced asexually. One organism split into two, two became four, and so forth; they created copies of themselves. While it is the most efficient form of reproduction, the main drawback was that animals did not change. The environment, however, did over the millennia.

Sexual reproduction emerged as the solution 1.2 billion years ago, which helped organisms adapt to a changing environment. It brought two distinct gene pools together, creating progeny "fitter" or better adapted than their parents. Despite being far more inefficient – only half the genes pass on, and half the progeny can bear offspring, it is the most dominant form of reproduction in most multicellular organisms today.

Fitter progeny, however, made the parents redundant and death was a natural consequence. Incidentally, death is programmed in our cells, called Phenoptosis or Programmed Cell Death [PCD], not merely a matter of wear and tear. This deliberate death helped keep species' populations in check, reduce resource competition with the offspring and, most importantly, maintain the natural balance.

It is why we [humans] used to die at about 25-30 years of age from the earliest times up until 1900 CE. But humans feared death and were obsessed with longevity in more recent times. We now live to be 73, and crossing 80, or even 90, is not uncommon, primarily due to medical advances. It is the main factor leading to exploding populations. Combined with ever-increasing consumption, it is the main reason for the over-exploitation of resources and animals and a disruption in the natural balance.

The origin of human dominance

So, how did humans get to the top of the food chain? The origin of human dominance is purely evolutionary rather than the common belief that we are superior in some way, determined mainly by religion that disputes "common descent." It allows us to discriminate how we treat people and animals and is most likely a convenient explanation to indulge our growing desires.

Humans diverged from chimpanzees seven million years ago. Walking upright on two legs is a defining feature that makes us human and distinguishes our entire lineage from all other apes. Our early ancestors climbed trees and walked on four legs when on the ground, like modern-day chimpanzees. By five million years ago, our ancestors had developed the ability to walk on two legs, but their gait was quite different from ours, and their skeletons retained some features that helped them climb trees.

Homo erectus, or "upright man," appeared 1.8 million years ago. His anatomy was very much like our own. He was the first to have the long legs and shorter arms that would have made it possible to walk, run and move about as we do today. He had a long reign that lasted till about 100,000 years ago, possibly even 50,000 years ago.

Becoming bipedal compromised speed but offered many advantages. It freed up two limbs from locomotion, which led to the separation of the "opposable thumb." It gave us the "power-and-precision grip," which allowed us to make and use an increasing variety of tools. It allowed us to carry things, reduced energy costs associated with movement, and sexual dimorphism in food gathering. The added advantage of height provided a superior benefit in finding food over long distances in the savanna.

Modern humans, or *Homo sapiens*, are much more recent and have been around for only the last 200,000 years. We formed societies 50,000 years ago and learned to be cooperative. We lived as hunter-gatherers for 40,000 of those years. Hunting and gathering provided another significant advantage and proved decisive in our survival. We became agriculturists 10,000 to 12,000 years ago and also domesticated animals. We created villages and shifted from a nomadic way of life to a settled one.

We established civilizations 5,000 to 6,000 years ago and built cities. We found God about 2,500 years ago. Western Europe went out to colonize the world 500 years ago. As part of their "Civilizing Mission," they destroyed pre-existing ways of life. Much of this was carried out under the banner of Christianization. The Industrial Revolution occurred in Western Europe 225 years ago. Capitalism won more recently, and we created gross inequality, leading to ever-increasing strife. We also caused unprecedented environmental damage and decimated wildlife like never before.

Now we have chaos.

Thanks to:

1. *Wikipedia > Human history*
2. *Wikipedia > Hunter-gatherer*
3. *Wikipedia > Colonialism*