

# A Case for Humanity's Extinction

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Humanity is experiencing a mass extinction event. It remains uncertain whether human beings will become extinct as a part of this event; though, what is certain is that a distinct shift in human consciousness coinciding with this is underway. This paper will discuss Earth's imminent, sixth mass extinction event, and humanity's role in it. This will include evidenced deficits in individual and community levels of comprehension and compassion. This paper will then outline the need for thought leaders and policymakers to re-formulate a philosophy of ethical decision making amidst humanity's extinction. And lastly, it will argue for a final consideration that we redefine what it means to "go extinct," and consider propagating it.

## **EARTH'S SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION EVENT**

Researchers have evidenced through data and modeling that (Bressan, 2022) the Earth is imminently heading towards its 6th mass extinction event. Accounting for co-extinctions and real time climate change, it is estimated that (Bressan, 2022) one-quarter of the planet's biodiversity will cease to exist within 100 years' time. It is possible that humans will be included in the extinction.

This is the first time in world history that (Bressan, 2022) humanity's actions – namely mining for fossil fuels, consumer carbon output, commercial farming, and other destructive practices – will have resulted in such a large-scale event involving planetary decline. Recent studies (Supran, 2023) have quantitatively evidenced the points at which fossil fuel industry giant ExxonMobile was aware, for decades, the projections relative to negative externalities imposed by their own unmitigated drilling. Those projections were modest compared to the pace of change in climate and global temperatures being observed today. Originally, scientists believed the climate would reach 2° Celsius warming by the year

2100; today, there is (Garthwaite, 2023) a 1 in 2 chance it will happen within the next 37 years. Even if (Garthwaite, 2023) carbon emission rapidly drops to net zero.

Moreover, this information is no longer confined to the halls of academia, to science labs, or to documentaries abstractly pondering the possibility of a calamity one day in the ominous, undefined future. People all over the world are experiencing climate change in a crisis format, in real time. The COVID 19 pandemic was (Gupta *et al.*, 2021) the first major, disruptive pandemic of modern times that has been directly tied to climate change, with more promised as (Gupta *et al.*, 2021) a natural consequence of disruptions to our fragile ecosystem. Wildfires, floods, and increased intensity of seasonal storms have become more common worldwide. And just this summer, the world reached (NASA, 2023) its hottest month in recorded history.

The signs are everywhere. In fact, more than signs, humanity is now experiencing this event firsthand. Though, while we know there is (Bressan, 2022) a human-caused, mass extinction event unfolding, and that (Goodell, 2023) humanity is unlikely to survive a heat-driven, inhospitable planet, people continue to appear unconvinced.

### **COMPREHENSION/COMPASSION DEFICIT**

Despite decades of research and theoretical frameworks, and dire warnings from scientists and activists, there remains an air of exceptionalism amongst most groups relative to humanity's potential for significant decline, or total elimination. In fact, since the COVID 19 pandemic began, people appear even more resistant now than ever to concerns about climate change and other global issues.

In 2020, a study was completed that (Hall) outlined the profound, observed deficit of empathy in Western culture, particularly in the United States. This "empathy deficit" articulated (Hall, 2020) a growing trend of people losing concern for others out of hyper-individualism and capitalist consumer culture. Again, exceptionalism worsened the problem, leaving behind a rapid and remarkable shift in policymaking

relative to social policies, because of (Hall, 2020) these views. This is to say that after understanding the existence of an empathy deficit, leaders decided to embrace it.

From this point on, researchers have noted the deficit in concern and compassion that humans by and large exhibit today. Theories have arisen in an abundance of other potential causes. Some have suggested (Pasquini, 2023) it is a comprehension issue, while others suggest that (Gee, 2021) changes in DNA due to limited genetic variation can be blamed for the carelessness of others. Some have argued this is (Dijker, 2014) a bio-neurological issue – an actual incapability to empathize. Others contend it is (Drenthen, 1999) a Nietzschean sense of radical otherness with nature – a purely philosophical problem.

Though, upon further evaluation, the carelessness of potential human extinction is not particularly new. In a study completed in 2019 – before the empathy deficit study – researchers noted (Snyder-Beattie *et al.*, 2019) a concerning, longstanding lack of care or interest in the potential for imminent human extinction, and most concerning is their reasoning is varied. More evidence is needed to articulate certainty behind the causes of this deficit of empathy, though the relevance is questionable, and perhaps even unethical to investigate further given the knowledge we have that policymakers now accept explanation on this issue as justification for harmful decision making. Nevertheless, the problem is evident: humans either do not understand, or do not care, that we may be among those who go extinct in this imminent mass extinction event.

### **ETHICAL DECISION MAKING AMIDST HUMANITY'S EXTINCTION**

Given what we know, and the consequences of doing nothing, it is incumbent upon philosophers, thought leaders, and policymakers to examine this issue – of humanity's potential for imminent extinction, in conjunction with an observed empathy deficit and subsequent manufactured consent for unethical decision making – to identify strategies to overcome, or at the very least ameliorate, the impact or effect of suffering. This is especially important for communities that have little representation or ability to do so

themselves, such as working class, low income, and communities of color and disability. It is well documented that (US EPA, (n.d.)) these communities will be harmed soonest, and to the greatest extent. Many philosophers and ethicists argue, today, that (Ord, 2020) this is the most crucial moment in human history for us to address this issue for this reason.

Dating back to the mid-20th century, Hans Jonas (Wiese, 2019) argued for the responsibility towards identifying answers and modifications. Jonas's seminal work on moral imperative directed toward humanity's longevity was (Wiese, 2019) one rooted in ecological concerns under early warnings of what was to come. Today, we know (Garthwaite, 2023) the potential for containing global climate change has passed; though, Jonas's imperative applies more broadly as a human rights issue spanning across the globe.

The imperative goes beyond simply helping others and influencing public opinion and policy. It is more so relative to identifying *why* humanity has universally accepted its own potential demise, and *what* we may do to change the course of this thinking, as this may influence some level of adaptation. Some have argued that (Kahneman, 2011) there is a cognitive breakdown in human beings when attempting to conceptualize the extent of global climate change. And then there is the profundity of other possibilities mentioned afore: biological limitations, intelligence, emotional problems, philosophical ones. And yet none of this adequately excuses decision making that is unethical amidst global climate change and the threat of imminent human annihilation. This begs the question: what, if anything, or if it is possible, will convince humanity to care? And more importantly: is that even necessary?

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the answer is to let humanity die. This is not to argue for hastening human beings – *Homo sapiens*, as we are today – going extinct altogether; rather, to propagate a new era of humanity that

examines the empathy deficit and its relation to morality in the context of global climate change, to re-envision empathy and its place amongst ethical decision making.

There is a pervasive misconception in (Decety & Cowell, 2014) popular culture that to have a sense of morality – to do the right things, make good choices, and craft public policy accordingly – that we must have empathy. It is reasonable to understand then that given this misconception, coupled with the empathy deficit, we see more unethical behaviors, choices, and policies at every level of life (e.g., government, society, etc.). Especially as humanity stares into the abyss of global climate change. But what if we are looking at empathy and its relationship with morality wrong?

In an analysis by the National Institute of Health, researchers (Decety & Cowell, 2014) evaluated the empathy and morality connection from a biological and socio-psychological perspective. In this analysis, they found (Decety & Cowell, 2014) that empathy is more complex than we traditionally realized. Rather than a simple notion of “empathy,” researchers noted (Decety & Cowell, 2014) that empathy spans a variety of beliefs, feelings, and actions, and is subjective to the individual’s experience. More than that: they also noted (Decety & Cowell, 2014) that empathy was not necessarily a direct indicator of moral behavior. In fact, empathy and morality both had unique motivators. In other words, a perceived deficit of empathy is no excuse to make bad moral decisions when confronting the climate crisis.

The solution then becomes evident: allow our notions of empathy to fall to irrelevancy, and research new modalities of concern, compassion, and moral decision making amidst our changing world. Let this type of humanity die, so that from it we may craft a new one. One of the most well-known quotes by Nietzsche reads: “Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you” (1998). It is clear that humanity overall has not only become the monster, but is staring into the abyss of this global climate catastrophe. So many social problems and colloquial attitudes and behaviors can be explained in this way: that the nihilism of potential human extinction has

awakened a beast that is passively immoral and dis-compassionate. For so long, we have explained this away by accepting it, rather than considering that the abyss may be bottomless, but this offers an endless cavern of possibilities from which we may craft a new way.



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