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"Gaia *versus* the Anthropocene: Untimely Thoughts on the Current Eco-Catastrophe."

Sagan, Dorion

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Embracing science but suggesting an alternate explanation for global warming, the essay provides a thermodynamic and historical perspective on eco-destruction. From a long-term evolutionary perspective, caution is raised about the repetition of human exceptionalism implied by the popular term "Anthropocene," which hyperbolically frames humankind as the first organism in evolutionary history, and uniquely dangerous at that, to threaten global life. In fact, cyanobacteria preceded technological humanity, altering Earth's atmospheric composition orders of magnitude more than humanity has. The extreme resilience of Gaia, planetary life taken as an open thermodynamic system with environmentally regulative tendencies, has undergone dramatic changes in the past, such as the production of an oxygen-rich atmosphere. Genetically nimble life, recycling matter on a planetary level, has evolved means of tempering the tendency of organisms to exponentially reproduce. Ironically, these means, some which appear to have evolved to titrate hypergrowth in animal clades via senescence, have so far escaped ecologically rapacious humans. Thermodynamically, modern technological humanity, for all its self-regard as an intelligent life form, resembles a ravaging fire or intrinsically short-lived storm system. Long-term human persistence in the global ecosystem will require changes in our epistemology, economics, and ecology.

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