

Should we short sell the environment or the planet?

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A short reflective essay discussing the likelihood of human nature leading to the destruction of our environment if not the entire planet, thus, implying one could actually profit via a financial short sell of these asset resources. The nature of intelligence in our universe and as a tool for “selfish genes” is considered versus capitalism as a driver of excess resource utilization and growth.

*"Truth is like poetry. And most people f*cking hate poetry."
-- The Big Short, film*

*"Desperately in need of some stranger's hand
in a desperate land...
All the children are insane
waiting for the summer rain."
-- The Doors – The End lyrics*

*"A scorpion asks a frog to carry him over a river. The frog is afraid of being stung, but the scorpion argues that if it did so, both would sink and the scorpion would drown. The frog then agrees, but midway across the river the scorpion does indeed sting the frog, dooming them both. When asked why, the scorpion points out that this is its nature."
-- the Fable of the Scorpion and the Frog*

*"Reality of the problem is that glaciers are sliding into the sea ten times faster than before...
What's the monetary value of human civilization?"
-- Kim Stanley Robinson -- The Ministry for the Future*

*"the emission of greenhouse gases... is causing global warming at a rate that began as significant, has become alarming, and is simply unsustainable in the long-term. And by 'long-term' I do not mean centuries ahead. I mean within my own. And by 'unsustainable' I do not mean a phenomenon causing problems of adjustment. I mean a challenge so far-reaching in its impact and irreversible in its destructive power, that it alters radically human existence."
-- Tony Blair*

*"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine."
-- lyrics R.E.M.*

Is the next clever financial trick or “innovation” to *short sell* the entire global environment or even planet Earth? While it may be difficult to find a market or counterparty to accept your short transaction, logically it may be a sound financial risk or investment. Note that the global ecosystem and environment is, given classic economic parlance, just another resource like “human capital.” Note, however, that this essay is not an indictment of capitalism but, if anything, rather of the track record of human nature and our history of short-sighted thinking. Note too that in the last few years, we have seen hot summer temperatures in Greenland, Australia and California on fire, Pakistan underwater, storms with exponentially increased intensity, and the year-round existence of the Northwest Passage. At the same time, Silicon Valley and heads of venture capital are declaring mankind as the “primitive precursor” to a cosmically significant “superhuman” artificial intelligence. Now while this may sound outlandish, they could be right.

While our instinct is to ignore it, our reality is, even without human intervention, filled with a lot of violence and destruction. The history of our planet is marked by cosmic and terrestrial threats, extinctions, and carnivorous life. Now I am not advocating ignoring the tremendous negative impact of the loss of biological diversity, but might the very existence and success of intelligence be the real “all consuming” entity

versus capitalism or industrialization? Is the success of intelligent beings less about “being selfish” for individual or tribal gain than about an unquenchable desire to understand, to know, to control, to research?

Most humans don't realize that there is little that separates us from a ground hog - from a gene pool DNA perspective. Given enough time, and if necessary, Nature will turn humans into ground hogs, and vice versa, to allow those “selfish genes” to survive in a given ecosystem via Darwin's evolutionary fitness. The tools are all there in the genetic code; it is malleable and has memory and extreme variety. One "might" even argue that gene pools may not even “care” about ecosystems or even planets! This can be considered one of the greatest open questions i.e., do the mechanics of gene pools imply or require them to “care” about the survival of a given ecosystem or are they only focused on the survival of their specific species (genes) and information? There are circumstantial hints (and logical arguments) that gene pools do “care” about their ecosystems. One can consider viruses like E-bola as “warnings” to keep out of Nature's jungle “factory,” where life's “engines” are not meant to be disturbed, or scenarios where viruses act like “circuit breakers” when certain populations have excess older organisms “stealing” resources from the younger subset that is preferred for its ability to continue a reproductive turn rate. But in this paradigm, and since humans have not been wiped out already by Nature or a planetary Gaia entity, likely *intelligence* is valued by Nature and/or gene pools. Perhaps intelligence, akin to our venture capitalist theory, is so valued as a skill or as *the skill* for long-term survival by gene pools, that they might “sacrifice” all other species or even the entire planet as long as our genes have a way to survive.

This leads to the obvious question then akin to what can, or does, Nature “think” about A.I.? Let us pause here to consider as, remember, DNA is “encoded information.” Thus, in many respects A.I. is not only a “brother” to DNA and to life, it may be the adult older brother of it! If, or “when,” A.I. and advanced technology and computation can do more than DNA in chromosomes and organisms (note humans don't exactly require reboots and let us ignore factors like diet and beauty) then might our reality or prevalence for environments and planets change? Perhaps via advanced simulation, resilient and long-term data storage, and high-speed communication it is already very close. Then, at some point, is it possible that our “selfish gene” may not care what “substrate” or environment it uses or is “contained in” as long as its essence (information) continues and prospers? In my opinion this is a different technological Singularity that the one predicated and perhaps and even more significant one.

In terms of can, or should, one short sell the environment or planet earth, well, one can have trillions of dollars of wealth, but wealth only has value in its ability to provide happiness and to exist and obtain goods and services of value. Perhaps in a future with a galactic-scale empire this would be an easy decision but, with our current scarcity of habitable planets, the value of our environment and planet earth remains priceless. Then again...