

# COUNTERPUNCH

## The Earth on Fire

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Evangelos Vallianatos

The Greeks thought the Earth was the oldest of the gods. Demeter, sister of Zeus, was the closest of the Olympian deities that resembled Gaia (Earth). Every fall the Athenians sponsored the Eleusinian Mysteries in Eleusis, a small polis near Athens. Greeks from all over the Greek world participated in the Eleusinian celebration of Demeter, goddess of wheat and agriculture. Those who entered the place of worship took an oath not to reveal the secrets of the mysteries. None did.

However, what has come down to us is that Demeter-Earth blessed the wheat seeds in the ground for a prosperous harvest. The Greeks were convinced that the land and the natural world were sacred and indispensable for civilization.

The Greeks were not alone in worshipping the natural world. Other civilizations like the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Persian and the Chinese considered the natural world and the Earth sacred.

### **Clash of civilizations**

The blow against this view of life came from the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The resurrection of Greek science during the Arabic and Western Renaissance of the eighth-tenth and fifteenth-sixteenth centuries respectively took place in a Moslem and Christian world wedded to the pernicious one-god injunction that man could do as he pleased in the natural world. Thus the more power science and technology gave man, the more destructive his footprint among animals, plants, trees and waters.

### **The twentieth century ecocide**

The twentieth century saw the apotheosis of the human control of planet Earth. The two world wars spread man's merciless mechanical and chemical ferocity to forests, deserts, mountains, land, animals, birds, seas and oceans.

The golden bullet of the war chemistry was DDT: a weapon against insects that nearly abolished the majestic eagle and contaminated nature and human food for decades.

But what has been exacerbating the destructive human footprint on the planet is the excessive and thoughtless burning of fossil fuels for energy.

Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gases from fossil fuel burning capture solar heat, preventing it from escaping to space. The result has been the slow but inexorable rise of global temperature above the limit of pre-industrial age. This global warming comes from climate change caused by anthropogenic (human-induced) actions like the burning of petroleum, natural gas, and coal.

Scientists have been studying climate change for decades. They keep warning policy makers the world over. They tell them in diplomatic but unambiguous language that continuing with their countries' addiction to fossil fuels is a prescription to dire ecological and public health effects. They point out that human presence has been detrimental to plants, crops, insects, birds, animals, and fish. The resulting extinction rates are uncomfortably high and definitely unsustainable. Ecosystems are threatened with collapse.

It's like the Earth is on fire: taking decades to engulf the continents and countries with violent storms, floods, hunger, pathologies of harm and higher temperature.

Even the vast oceans are getting warmer because they absorb most of the greenhouse emissions of the industry, petroleum-fueled militaries with thousands of warplanes and tanks, billions of civilian cars, millions of factories, including the cruel animal farms for billions of food animals and industrialized agriculture.

This climate crisis or climate change or global warming is like a gigantic Earthquake shaking people up and threatening their civilizations. Its effects have been seeping into people's homes through television or surging droughts, intense rains, waters and winds of storms and hurricanes, and near apocalyptic forest fires burning for weeks and months and destroying gigantic groves of trees and towns or homes near them.

Despite the violent message coming from the disrupted, exploited, poisoned, and warmer natural world, the United States under Trump and most other countries are locked into a dangerous routine of business as usual.

The fossil fuel companies are primarily responsible for this suicidal orbit. They care less about our lives, the life of the Earth, much less the lives of our children and grandchildren.

### **America's environmental crisis**

The story of how and why a country like the United States is paralyzed by climate change and those who own fossil fuels is of great import. It has found space in newspapers and, sometimes, television. There are even some great books denouncing the corruption that keeps the fossil fuel companies so strong.

One of the eloquent voices against petroleum is Larry Schweiger, for decades an environmental insider from Pennsylvania. He presided for ten years over the National Wildlife Federation, and managed PennFuture, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

His book, Climate Crisis and Corrupt Politics: Overcoming the Powerful Forces that Threaten Our Future (Universal Publishers, 2019), is timely and urgent. It tells a personal and national story of enormous interest.

In the mid-1960s, Schweiger came across the horrendous pollution of Lake Erie and decided to dedicate his life to understanding the environmental crisis and fighting those who were destroying the natural world. His decades experience with environmental organizations gave him a unique opportunity to see behind appearances.

He denounces the deceit and irresponsibility of the fossil fuel companies that purchase the enemies of the environment (natural world and public health). These include the US Chamber of Commerce, the Club for Growth, the American Petroleum Institute, the Cato Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council and politicians at state and federal government. He is even unhappy with the apathy of environmentalists.

“America has denied the climate crisis for decades and delayed meaningful action for far too long, and now we are out of time,” he says.

Yet he does not give up or wish others to give up by delusions that it’s too late to save the planet. He is a fighter for his children and grandchildren. He wants to leave them a better place than the one he inherited.

“This is our legacy moment, and perhaps our last chance to right a stupendous, and persistent wrong. Regardless of your faith tradition or worldview, we must all agree that wrecking the climate system is a profoundly moral, profoundly spiritual, and intensely ethical issue. There has never been an environmental threat in the history of humankind as profound, and far reaching as the climate crisis. Yet with dimwitted cruelty, a climate denying Congress has been parading itself as acting responsibly,” he wrote.

Read Larry Schweiger’s book. It’s a passionate telling of America’s environmental history, which gave Schweiger facts and wisdom. He is convinced the scientists are right about the climate monster unleashed by fossil fuel burning and political corruption funded by the petroleum, coal, and natural gas companies.

Capitalist ideology of putting money above every virtue does not make things any easier. In fact, that’s the engine that explains the abomination of Trump and the Republican Party that would rather cripple the future for millions of children than tax and put out of business the fossil fuel killers of our beautiful and sacred Earth.