

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: A flat earth and the Hell of Tartarus

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Published Date: 04:33 AM September 23, 2019

Section: opinion

Word Count: 721

Content:

The scene conjured in my mind is of a flat earth with a landscape entirely of a vast ocean, at the edge of which is the abyss. A solitary ship with all of humanity on board drifts, with no island in sight upon which it could anchor for safety. But, instead of maneuvering the vessel away from the abyss, mankind is steering it toward the precipice.

The cramped passengers who are exposed to the elements on the upper deck are experiencing the increasing fury of the winds and the intensifying turbulence of the waters as the ship heads in the cliff's direction. But merriment continues undisturbed in the sheltered confines of the luxurious lower decks.

These are the images that percolate in my mind when I read articles and view images of how human beings are making our world increasingly uninhabitable, how the human race is driving a dreadful number of flora and fauna to extinction, and how mankind is pushing itself to extinction.

Scientists estimate that "150-200 species of plant, insect, bird and mammal become extinct each day." A United Nations agency is sounding the alarm that we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction in the history of our planet. Experts are issuing the warning that what's happening is "greater than anything the world has experienced since the vanishing of the dinosaurs nearly 65 million years ago."

Heart-wrenching images of threatened wildlife proliferate on the internet. There's a picture of a mother orangutan trying in vain to ward off a heavy equipment that just felled a tree that the primate has been using for dwelling. There's an image of an emaciated polar bear, its ribs visible, walking wobbly on land because there are no more ice caps it can scramble on to catch fish in its habitat.

There's a picture of a Sumatran rhinoceros, beautiful with its reddish-brown hair, that is near extinction because of dwindling rain forests. There are numerous pictures of turtles, whales and other sea animals that either perish or suffer debilitating injuries because of plastic rubbish or fishnets strewn in the open sea. There are pictures of dead seabirds coated in a thick smudge of oil spill.

According to satellite data, forests are being destroyed at a shocking rate of about 8 million hectares per year. That's the staggering equivalent of 27 soccer fields every minute, says the World Wildlife Fund.

With this rate of deforestation, it's no wonder that the number of species getting extinct every single day is nothing but dreadful. Imagine the number of ecosystems — many of them providing food and shelter to unique and irreplaceable living things—that is forever erased from the face of our planet because of the destruction of our forests.

An ecosystem refers to all living things that interact with one another in a given landscape, including the land, water and atmosphere on which they flourish. These include the ground microorganisms, insects, plants and animals, whose variety and numbers are being decimated at alarming rates.

At a time when our addiction to fossil fuel calls for intensified efforts to increase our forest cover, we are accelerating instead their obliteration. Side by side with efforts to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel, the massive planting of trees is touted as the single most effective and pragmatic way to counteract the ominous warming of our planet. But efforts in this regard are still being done largely for cosmetic purposes and mainly in a leisurely way. Mankind should see how Mother Earth is in bad need of critical care, and the massive planting of trees is the manner by which we can contribute to its effective treatment.

The ancient Greeks believed that the Earth was flat, and its farthest end was an infernal abyss called the Hell of Tartarus. The abyss was a pit of suffering where those who committed terrible crimes were punished by the gods of the underworld. With the way we are destroying our world, we may yet prove that our planet is indeed flat, and we are fated to fall into the abyss of Tartarus to pay for our grave sins against Mother Earth.

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