Julian Langer
Thoughts On Political Misanthropy
23/01/2020

Retrieved on 2020-04-06 from www.radicalartreview.org

theanarchistlibrary.org

Thoughts On Political Misanthropy

Julian Langer

23/01/2020

> "Fifty years ago, I concluded that the best thing for the planet would be a peaceful phase-out of human existence."

With these words, Les Knight justifies the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement in an article for The Guardian. Rather than write out the whole piece, I'd invite anyone reading this to read Les's article before going on (it is quite short).

If you cannot be bothered to read it, my brief summary would be this: the earth would be better off without humanity, which has caused all these problems, so we should work towards the extinction of humanity.

In a singular term, the ideology being pushed here is what I'd call political misanthropy. It is political in the sense that it relates to decisions being collectively made regarding the affairs of the city. It is misanthropy in the sense that the perspective views humans as at the very least "bad", though probably more like "evil".

Now, while I am an eco-anarchist writer writing within anti-civilisation discourse, despite what you might assume, I am not

a misanthrope. I'll give you a moment to let that sink in … yes, I desire the ending of this 10,000-year-old failed cultural experiment and a total rewilding of earth. But I do not feel hatred for humanity and I do not share in the misanthropic perspective that there is something evil about humanity.

What I call myself is an anti-humanist. Yeah, sounds like it is the same thing, doesn't it! But anti-humanism has an extremely different perspective and reasoning to misanthropy.

As an anti-humanist, my perspective has two threads to it, which twist around each other to form a single strand.

The first of these draws from post-structuralist psychological and sociological studies; the second comes from my experience of the world as an egoist who rejects species-being.

Basically, I do not believe in the existence of humanity. Or rather, I believe in humanity in the same way that I believe in juggalos, hipsters, cybergoths, steampunks and hippies – it is a stereotype.

Yes, there is a biological basis for this stereotype of habitual similarities, but really every "human" is uniquely them, in the sense that everything is different. Not believing in humanity can be a weird thing to tell someone – especially if they identify as a human! It can become an even stranger conversation when you compare people who are proud to be human (humanists) are using the same type of identity thought as that of people who are proud to be white, and point out how similar speciesism is to racism.

Returning to Les, if he means the extinction of a stereotype, which I call dehumanisation/becoming-animal (and he almost certainly is not), then I can embrace this call for extinction. However, if Les means attempting to remove unique living animals that are included within this stereotype (which he no doubt does mean), then I feel rejectful of this attempt. Les, as a misanthrope, is a humanist, who seemingly privileges humans in the great chain of being, in the same way that Satanists are Christians, who raise God up to be an almighty evil.

If we move past the question of "what the fuck is a human?" and just work with the stereotype, then what is the cause of all this?

I assume that we are including uncontacted tribes, such as the Sentinelese, the Batek or the Yuqui and indigenous communities who were colonised by European settlers in the last few centuries, as humans (if not, we're surely being racist)! Are they the cause of all this? If not, are they evil, or is guilt by association enough to condemn these peoples to their end? My intuition and instinct is that you (even if that you is Les himself) will also find the idea of their extinction being necessary ridiculous at best and vile at worst.

Like many others who have similar to perspectives to mine, I am of the opinion that our present situation is mostly due to technological development – advanced technologies, industrial technologies and (yes) agricultural-architectural technologies. And like the horses who pulled ploughs for centuries (and still do in many places), humans seem more like the fuel this now global totalitarian culture/machine uses to sustain itself with. The response this often gets is that technology serves human needs and ends, but I believe that closer inspection reveals that technological development and humans serve technological needs and ends.

If there is one thing that "voluntary human extinction" is, or is intended to be, it is a solution.

There is (apparently) a problem (humanity), so there is a solution – this is what we were all taught in math class as kids. The ideology of solutionism (people who believe in the existence of solutions) stems from political optimism.

As a pessimist, I am extremely mistrusting and rejecting of optimism. Pessimism doesn't mean sad, miserable, or defeated – which tends to be the experience of optimists who didn't get what they thought they would do from their solutions. Pessimism is the assertion that the "human" will ultimately collapse into the inhuman/unhuman, rendering all the solutions

of humanity futile (including humanity's extinction as a solution) – we all die eventually and always will, and every "improvement" has not been worth the cost, when the payment is due and it is mass extinction, mass poverty across the world, lives typified by mass boredom and everything else that makes up normal everyday Reality of this culture.

Arriving at one of the solutions that Les suggests – martyrdom through vasectomy – I have a disgust reaction. On a personally embodied level, I do not want to abuse my body out of self-sacrifice. As an egoist, my motivations are desire based, rather than moral based, and the only reasons conceivable to me for my having a vasectomy seem like moral ones.

Basing arguments in moral logic seem to me to have been one of the greatest continual weaknesses of environmental thought, as it stinks of self-sacrifice and is highly off putting. I favour the approach that one of my literary loves, Daniel Quinn, suggests, in encouraging people to seek what they want/desire, what they really want/desire. Really, people don't want mass extinction and most people (misanthropes are people too) don't want the extinction of the living animals who make up the stereotype of "human". The extinction solution is so off-putting, it seems to only succeed in making environmental discourse appear more like bullshit self-sacrifice, than something that is actually desirable.

Relating to people on desire-based levels is terrible, because we aren't discussing what is right or wrong and we are not forming solutions to problems. We're entering into a space that is dark, animal, confusing, conflictual and so inhuman that churches have put in centuries upon centuries of effort to ensure that people weren't relating on desire based levels.

In the last mass extinction event, were the survivors the individuals who did not breed? What about the one before? What about the one before that? Any of them?

Surely a mass extinction event is more of a reason to have children?! Not to raise them to be horrible little conformist consumers, who make this Reality more revolting. If "human" is a stereotype, as an environmentalist, I encourage you to dehumanise yourself and your life and to raise little inhuman/unhuman/abhuman children, who will grow up in the nightmare that this Reality has built, but are capable of surviving it and supporting those other non-human living beings (including biologically stereotypical humans who are not humans) out of an egoist desire for their presence.

Extinction might hold a (comfortable and disgusting) promise, but promises rarely amount to much. Dehumanising the world by raising unhuman/inhuman/posthuman children, in a landscape full of ruins, in the midst of ecological collapse, to face whatever world comes after this – it is awful to imagine and far less certain a route. However terrible it might be though, I am thoroughly in favour of life!