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## **The Root Causes of Social & Ecological Crisis?**

Essay by Randy Hayes  
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My influences come from my rubbing shoulders mostly in the southwest deserts near the Grand Canyon and northern California. This was with many Hopi elders and other fine people such as the nature poet Gary Snyder, David Brower, Hazel Henderson, Fritjof Capra, and Donella Meadows. The learning curve continued more recently with people such as Public Media Center's Herb Gunther and Jerry Mander. Here is a little bit of what I've learned. While others in this special issue of the magazine will discuss specific gains, you might look at those articles in light of this analysis of the root causes. I believe the house is on fire.

This and the next few decades will be tumultuous. A deeper analysis of the core problems is a key step to get from false solutions to the real deal. There are various valid ways to conceptualize the root causes of our social and ecological crisis. I adapted this list from a Foundation for Deep Ecology document, adding four or so points. Where you like the points made, that was probably someone else's idea. Where you think its off base, that might have been my thinking. The list evolves as I learn. How do you see it? My suggestion is to take what you like and agree with and add to your own list.

1. **Patriarchy/Anthropocentrism:** The assumption of human superiority over nature (other life forms), as if we were dominant over nature's laws, ecological principles, or the web of life. Natural carrying capacity is not harmonized with equitable & dignified lifestyles, sensible technologies, our overall population numbers, and the needs of other creatures. Patriarchy is a manifestation of this sense of superiority.
2. **Irresponsible Economic Growth:** The prevailing ethic of western society that unlimited economic growth, the market economy with billions committed to commodity accumulation, consumption, and waste are desirable and possible on a finite planet. This "Cheater Economics" system externalizes pollution costs and ignores carrying capacity issues. The "True Cost Economy" is the alternative.

3. **Technology Worship:** the prevailing paradigm that technological evolution (especially industrial technology) is invariably good and that problems caused by technology can be solved by more technology.
4. **Technological lock-in:** Given our reliance on fossil fuels, individuals have little choice to opt out. People have the feeling that they are unable to change their lifestyle (i.e. they have to drive to work as there is no public transport). To solve our environmental problems we are asking people to change almost all their behaviors – housing, transport, food, shopping, vacations etc – when as we know from dieting and smoking that single behavior changes are extremely hard.
5. **Modern Chemistry:** The invention of substances for which the planet does not have organic counterparts capable of biologically degrading or productively integrating in natural cycles.
6. **Mass Media:** The domination and advancement of viewpoints that serve the interests of the industrial world and suppress alternate views, keeping them from the public consciousness. What was once called the “Free Press” is now called the “Mass Media”.
7. **The Concentration of Power:** The loss of public governance due to the concentration of power within a small number of corporate executives and business owners is detrimental to nature and society’s future.
8. **The Lack of Holistic Thinking:** Insufficient education in whole-systems thinking in countries planet wide. This leads to ecological illiteracy, lack of appreciation for wild nature, and lack of ecological design. Indigenous communities, more exposed to nature’s ways, have much to offer to better understand a holistic worldview or perspective.
9. **The Lack of a Geologic or Long-term Perspective:** Actions based on the desire for short-term gratification (such as quarterly profit reports) can degrade the conditions for life and reduce the options for subsequent generations. The industrial economy seems unable to deal with complex, long-term problems. We are capable of good and evil, yet when the chips are down industrial society tends to be more motivated by fear and greed than by altruism.
10. **Insufficient leadership & institutional mandate:** At a local, national and global level there has been a failure of leadership. Despite the best efforts of many, there is no institution powerful enough to challenge business as usual and make the sweeping changes essential for survival. Current messages and techniques have failed to raise planetary concerns to the top of the list. Issues such as the economy/jobs, terrorism/defense, health, education, crime and religion dominate the political agenda in almost every country.

Remember that there is no economic development on a dead planet. There is no social equity to be found there either. Perhaps the rising number of extreme weather events and economic downturns will create the context for change at a scale commensurate with the problems we face. Use those windows of opportunity to your advantage and jam through the deeper solutions. Your work, be you in northern California or elsewhere on this special planet, can lead us to a better world.