How Climate Change Makes Cultural/Bio-Conservatism the Most
Ecologically Sustainable Guiding Ideology

The parallels between the computer models of climate scientists and what
is happening in everyday experience around the world—droughts, changes
in seasons that affect crops, Biblical rains and floods, extreme weather
patterns, melting of polar ice as well as glaciers, record high
temperatures— point to fundamental changes occurring in the earth's
ecosystems. The consensus among climate scientists is that human activity
is releasing more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which in turn is
accelerating the changes in the acidic levels in the world's ocean that are
killing coral reefs that are home to 25 percent of marine life, and creating
water scarcity in many regions of the world that threaten both human life
and animal species. What the West has assumed to be the pathway to
progress is turning out to be the pathway to ecological and social
catastrophe.

 The accelerating ecological crisis poses a special challenge for Americans
who appear irreversibly divided between liberals and what should be more
accurately be called the faux conservatives. If we get beyond these abstract
labels by considering the core beliefs and deep cultural assumptions of
both liberals and the faux conservatives we find a shared bedrock of beliefs.
That is, both assume that this is a human-centered world (that the
environment is a human resource to be exploited), that the individual is
autonomous, that science and technology are the engines of progress, and
that the West provides the model the rest of the world should follow. They
differ on social justice issues, which includes the role of government in
providing safety nets and in limiting the abuses within certain sectors of
society. While the social justice concerns of liberals have led to criticisms of
the consumer dependent culture promoted by capitalism, it has only been
in the last few decades that liberals began to take environmental issues
seriously. The core beliefs and assumptions continue to go unquestioned by
both the faux conservatives and most liberals even though they underlie

the industrial/consumer culture that is contributing to the release of the greenhouse gases accelerating climate change.

It is important to note that the origins of these core beliefs and assumptions were derived from the abstract and ethnocentric theories of western philosophers and social theorists who were unaware of environmental limits. They were also unaware of the indigenous cultures that had a long history of learning how to live within the limits and possibilities of their bioregions. Given the threats we now face in a world of seven and half billion people, with billions now struggling just to survive, the important questions not being addressed by either the faux conservatives (who are really libertarian and market liberals) and the social justice liberals have to do with knowing what to conserve as the industrial revolution transforms itself into the digital revolution that is introducing new security threats as well as promoting even higher levels of consumerism that are exacerbating climate change. The education of both the faux conservatives and social justice liberals promoted the Enlightenment idea that represented traditions as obstacles to social and economic progress. Thus their vocabularies are heavily oriented toward promoting more changes that supposedly lead to more progress, with the faux conservatives more oriented toward perpetuating traditions of gender, racial, and ethnic inequality—as well as narrowly conceived and double bind social injustice traditions derived from different fundamentalist Christian mythopoetic narratives.

The most important question today is: What do we need conserve as we enter the ecological and digital tipping point where scarcity in food, work, security, and other necessities becomes the new normal—including the loss of wisdom traditions that are being replaced by data?   The ideological framework best suited to guiding the cultural transformations in everyday lifestyle and belief systems is cultural/bio-conservatism, which has guided most indigenous cultures before the abstract thinking philosophers, social, and religious theorists promoted ways of thinking that did not take into account the impact on natural systems. This Enlightenment inspired

detour from the mainstream of human history also involved replacing the oral traditions that carried forward the intergenerational knowledge of the cultural commons and of cultural practices that were informed by learning from the behavior of natural systems. As the new Enlightenment class of elites relegated oral traditions to low status, the two modes of cultural reproduction they elevated to high status were print and data. Both are less well suited to providing knowledge of the changes occurring in ecological and cultural contexts, and for accountability in how the new technologies are being used.

Bio-conservatism is the easiest to understand as it refers to conserving species and habitats, which challenges both the idea that this is a human-centered world and the right of the individual to exploit the environment. But it cannot be treated as a separate form of conservatism; rather it highlights that the wisdom of cultural conservatism is derived from the awareness that the health of natural systems is essential to the health of the human community. A cultural/bio-conservative does not promote the idea of settling the planet Mars. If we are to have a future, it is here on Earth.

So what do we need to conserve as the ecological crisis deepens and as social chaos results from population stresses occurring in different regions of the world. The combination of a long history of social injustices, the transformation into a total surveillance culture that is well down the pathway to a techno-fascist future, and the potential of the digital revolution to lead to cyber warfare, means we need to conserve what remains of our traditions of civil liberties that extend back to Magna Carta in 1215. We also need to resist the loss of craft knowledge, the creative arts, and other human skills now being threatened by the ever wider use of algorithms and robots—as well as the Social Darwinian thinking of computer scientists who are promoting the idea that humanity is entering its post-biological phase of existence. It is their Enlightenment view of progress that leads them to ignore the traditions that will be essential to surviving the social chaos that lies ahead as the industrial infrastructures come under cyber attacks and as the impact of climate change reduces

regions of the world to what is now being experienced in oil-rich Venezuela.

Conserving the culturally diverse cultural commons that still exist in nearly every community, including urban communities, will be especially important as individuals and communities recognize the wisdom of intergenerationally renewing the knowledge, skills, and mentoring relationships essential to self-reliant and mutually supportive communities. This means the restoration of face to face communities where local decision making and intergenerational accountability replace the data driven decision making of elites focused on amassing material wealth regardless of its destructive ecological impacts. What is common to the diversity of cultural commons (which should not be romanticized) is that the knowledge and skills ranging across a broad range of cultural activities— from the growing, preparation, and sharing of food, healing practices, ceremonies, uses of technologies, craft knowledge, artistic performances, games, use of language, knowledge of the behavior of the local ecosystems, and so forth— is that they are less monetized. When understood within the context of the cultural commons, wealth is acquired by developing personal skills and talents valued by the community—in knowing traditional recipes, in carrying forward the narratives of past mistakes and of models of behavior that strengthen community, in knowing a craft, mentoring in one of the creative arts, in modeling how to exercise ecological intelligence, and so forth.   To reiterate, the cultural commons are passed forward in face to face intergenerational relationships where the local cultural context becomes a rich source of information—and not from the abstract accounts in books and printed texts appearing on a computer screen. The cultural commons also become sites of resistance to the hackers and market-oriented data collectors who are now creating the Internet of Everything and introducing the digital technologies that will further reduce the opportunity to earn a living.

The community and environmentally-centered focus of cultural/bio-conservatism takes account of the mainstream of human history, which was

sustained by a healthy cultural commons, as well as awareness of what both the faux conservatives and social justice liberals continue to ignore: namely, how to survive as seven and a half billion people face the coming deprivations that accompany climate change.

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