We Want to Live, So That We May Die

Benjamin Procopio

Department of Political Science, Diablo Valley College

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Adjunct Professor John Kropf

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Abstract

Humans are constantly driven by the natural intent for survival and with their unique intelligence, humanity was capable of developing cultures and advancements through the creation of tools, unlocking the ability to adapt without their bodies needing to physically change to accommodate their lifestyle. With increasing advancements in innovation through the goal to expand our chances of survival, we involuntarily created multiple issues that have followed us into the modern day as a result of our inability to foresee the long-term consequences of our actions. The creation of long ranged weaponry to increase hunting and warfare efficiency lead to further advancements in distanced combat which also resulted in a progressively worsening desensitization with killing others from the increasing distance between people when in combat. The industrial revolution and the advancements that came with it had numerous significant impacts on humankind, but they too came at a cost. A significant dependency on fossil fuels and the production of plastics created an ever growing threat which was once again caused by humankind assessing short term benefits over long term consequences. Should humanity continue repeating the act of ignoring or failing to see long term consequences, it could spell death for humanity, but recent behavior and humankind's drive to survive could also save them.

We Want to Live, So That We May Die

Humans possess the capacity to be good, but on the other end of the scale, humans also possess the capacity to be bad. Humanity is driven to survive just as any other species is, this is an undeniable fact that has been proven an innumerable number of times throughout our existence and is likely to remain that way, but what has humanity done to survive? 99.9% of all species to have lived on earth are now extinct, and as Leon C. Megginson states "it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself." I disagree with this as humans have clearly shown that their intelligence and the technologies we have created gives us the ability to seemingly transcend adaptation due to no longer needing to alter our bodies through adaptation so that they are better suited for the environment that they reside in. The issue with humanity's innovative nature is their progressive disconnection from each other and their acts of making a significant leap in technology without fully realizing the consequences of it. (Megginson, 1963)

Things like warfare have been a constant throughout human history, but as our technology has advanced, we have begun to distance ourselves from our enemies with the intent of keeping ourselves safer and give us a much more effective way to combat enemies, but this comes at the cost of losing our own humanity. The closeness of combat was a key aspect in our nature that prevented us from wiping each other out until only one of us remained and as we further removed ourselves from it, we brought ourselves closer to our own destruction.

Our disassociation in warfare is not the only place where our innovation puts us at risk of extinction, but things like climate change and our manipulation of nature share the same quality

in how they are both a direct result of us creating something without grasping the full extent of what that action may result in.

Humans want to survive, they want to live out their lives to the fullest and have it come to a close, not at the hands of another but at the hands of nature. Why do people in the middle of a scenario where their lives are put at risk try everything they can to stay alive, but their lives would come to an end no matter what so why are they so desperately trying to prolong the inevitable? The concept of dying at the hands of another is not just terrifying because it is death and is something that we instinctively try to avoid, but the fact that that death is premature to us, one where we do not feel as though we had any control over it. Every single person that has ever lived and will ever live, will eventually die, death is what gives life purpose and the desire to live is the desire to shape your story so that it may conclude in a way that was meaningful to you.

Evolution

2.6 million years ago humans created the first stone tools and while yes, they were simple, they also had a revolutionary impact. From that point onwards, humanity fundamentally altered what adaptation was. No longer did a species need to physically adapt to be more well suited for survival in an environment and instead, with tools, we no longer had to depend on biological adaptation exclusively but on our intelligence which opened the door to alternatives through cognitive innovation. Stone tools skyrocketed humanity's chances of survival, providing them with the ability to both hunt more efficiently, and defend themselves more effectively. A direct consequence of this was an increase in human population through access to new food sources, but it did not stop there, the creation of tools facilitated an increase in cognitive function and with time, tools progressively advanced in complexity and versatility (Stout, 2011).

With the creation of tools, humans also began to develop an evolving culture with them.

This was through the passing down of knowledge and devices of previous generations to newer ones. Just the act of holding on to tools that they used, viewing them as permanent devices to be used in their daily lives demonstrated clear cognitive development (Overmann, Wynn, 2019). This process set early humanity apart from other species as they began to develop based on the collective knowledge of those before them, which was a vital step in their ability to advance further not only in the creation of tools, but the structures of their groups and how they cooperate together which lead to the development of more complex societies.

Around 70,000 years ago, the first known evidence of bow and arrow technology was created. The bow and arrow were a revolutionary form of technology as it extensively advanced humanity past the need for close quarters combat, especially when it came to hunting for food and defending themselves and their groups by allowing them to have a large distance between them and their target and still be able to deliver a lethal blow. The bow and arrow was also a widespread form of weaponry across a multitude of cultures, showing that its creation was an inevitability and with its creation marked the first ever major distancing between the wielder and their target and was the beginning of a chain reaction within our innovation, something that humanity had not yet understood the full extent of (Sabretooth Nomad, 2022).

When a person attempts to kill another through the process of strangulation with their bare hands, it involves an extremely close, even intimate form of contact. The physical distance between you and the person creates a psychological response to resist killing them, the process of being able to see the emotions in the individuals face, the sounds they make as they try desperately to hold on to life, the act of resistance from them are all factors that play a role in how difficult it really is to kill another person. Dave Grossman in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society,* spoke of how the closer you are to

your target, the harder it is psychologically to kill them which is further instilled by the ability to make eye contact with the individual. The creation of the bow and arrow took away the closeness of combat, seemingly dehumanizing their target and therefore the natural resistance to kill and this natural resistance decreased as the distance between individuals in combat increased. This laid the foundation for it to move from the intimate, close quarters combat that demanded for them to be able to see the life that you would be taking, to a distant and more disconnected form of violence and it would only move further away as time progressed such as with the creation of gunpowder weapons (Grossman, 1995).

In 1280 CE, the Heilongjiang hand cannon was one of the first ever confirmed surviving guns to have been created and alongside it was explosive weaponry. When these weapons were created, the intent was to improve the safety and efficiency of killing in combat but it also came with the cost of taking the human contact out of it almost entirely, no longer did we have to feel the full weight of somebodies death at the cost of our own hands especially because of the swiftness that it would put an end to somebody and the distance at which it could be used. This was a clear instance of how humanity's innovations were beginning to produce technology that had been extending past our ability to fully understand the extent of our creations (Andrade, 2016).

World War I introduced new, very significant weapons far beyond what guns would do. Chemical warfare was brought into the fight, things like tear gas and chlorine gas were used to wipe out concentrated groups of enemy soldiers. Chlorine gas, when inhaled, would begin to cause extreme pain while filling the victims' lungs with fluid, often resulting in the soldier drowning in their own lungs. With the use of chemical warfare, the forms and faces of their victims were shrouded in the gas, obscuring the extreme anguish that their enemies were

experiencing from those who had unleashed it upon them and removed from those soldiers the ability to fully comprehend the reality of what they had just done leaving the death of another faceless and virtually invisible. This inability to see just how tormenting chemical warfare was, made it far easier to utilize as in the end, all they truly saw was an enemy, orders, and the bodies that remained.

World War II made one of the most well-known and significant leaps in technology when it came to warfare, so far beyond the scale at which humanity could fully understand at the time that it now sits in the back of the minds of millions as a constant fear. The atomic bomb, a weapon forged out of fear, desperation, and the want for power. This weapon was like no other in all of history before it. Weapons that came before the atomic bomb could kill hundreds of people; the atomic bomb could erase entire cities off the map along with every single person that resides within them. The power of the bomb was so extensive that even those a kilometer away from the initial blast were instantaneously vaporized and killed with the only remaining evidence that some of those who lived even existed was no more than a shadow on the ground and those who were unfortunate enough to be outside of the range where they would have been instantly killed were forced to suffer burns that covered their entire bodies, and if the burns did not kill them, the radiation would (ICRC, 2013).

The father of the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer expressed a concern for it stating, “We thought of the legend of Prometheus, that deep sense of guilt in man’s new powers that reflects his recognition of evil, and his long knowledge of it.” This refers to how Oppenheimer believed that through science, humanity was given a power that they were never intended to wield which like how Prometheus was punished for his actions, Oppenheimer and the scientists who helped create the bomb developed a feeling of guilt within themselves which served as their

own form of punishment as once the bomb had been made, it could never be unmade, now permanently remaining in the hands of man, who could not fully understand its absolute capabilities. Unfortunately, that feeling of concern was not strong enough to stop his progress in creating it. The atomic bomb is a prime example of how humanity's intensifying advances in science and technology had reached a tipping point where they had seemingly begun to outpace our understanding of the broad, long-term consequences of our creations (Hart, 2008).

Now in the modern era, technology such as drone strikes has become increasingly utilized in warfare now as one of the most efficient and least dangerous forms of combat since it completely removes the operators from what they are controlling. These drone strikes almost completely sever the connection between those controlling it, and those on the receiving end. The only thing connecting them to the people who they would inevitably be killing was surveillance (Coeckelbergh, 2013). With the drone operators likely being located thousands of miles away within a secure shelter, having full access to high tech weapon systems and controlling them through a screen, there is no immediate danger or concern for their own lives, their actions are not driven out of instinct or a concern with their survival, instead they are driven by the orders that were given to them. In a study regarding the well-being of military personnel in remote combat, 354 US Air Force personnel were assessed and the results showed that only a quarter of the personnel in the study were found to be experiencing distress while pointing to the distress in some as a result of factors unrelated to the action of remote combat (Bufford et al., 2023).

Drone operators and their targets do not make eye contact, there is no physical closeness between the two, the person on the other end of the screen may as well just be a lifeless, thoughtless figure to them due to how detached from reality the mind truly is and the process of

killing that individual being connected to the simplicity of pressing a button. Death to the drone operator becomes reduced to pixels on a screen, they do not hear the screams of those as they brace for death, they do not see the fear in the eyes of those as they witness their life flash before their eyes, they do not see the blood that remains, a show that the person who was just killed virtually does not exist anymore, their very presence on this earth stripped away leaving only the memories within the minds of others, and their biological remains, scattered across the land where they once stood. The sensory cues that would have normally evoked an immediate psychological response not being present dilutes the death of those people.

As technology continues to advance further, concerns regarding what warfare will evolve with it. Artificial intelligence has become a significant talking point recently and the idea of bringing artificial intelligence into the battlefield is not a new idea, but what are the costs of doing so? Completely removing all humanity from warfare, instead sending thoughtless, emotionless beings to complete tasks, to kill others in combat without ever having to worry about losing men in the battlefield any longer sounds like a dream to some. No longer would we have soldiers return to the normal world with things like PTSD, or missing limbs, or brain damage, but then you must consider the other side of the battlefield. No longer does human emotion come into play, instead the people in control of these thoughtless beings would view combat like a game of Stratego, they would just be subjecting the other side to their unfeeling wrath until they accomplish their mission. In the end, the connection that humans would have with each other should they follow this route, would be completely severed, the only thing remaining within their minds being the intent to complete their assignment.

From stone tools to drones and the atomic bomb, every one of these major leaps in warfare has pulled humanity further from the emotional realities involved with killing. Each of

these new creations made the act of killing easier, faster and increasingly abstract. This turned killing from a human action that held significant weight to something resembling a mechanical task. Should this path continue, we could face such a strong disassociation that the killing of another almost, if not completely loses its meaning, putting us at risk of completely wiping ourselves out.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial revolution held an unprecedented rate of technological advancement that at the time was able to effectively handle a multitude of problems that humanity had such as transportation and the ability to not only develop roads faster and more efficiently, but fuel-powered vehicles like the steam engine as well. People would also come to the cities in search of employment and better pay which the industrial revolution could provide, giving many people more job opportunities through factory work, significantly contributing to economic growth. The industrial revolution clearly was a major step in the right direction for us, but with all the positives that came as a result of it, it also had its own consequences. The industrial revolution unleashed a slow, lethal poison into the world, some of which are nigh irreversible. This stands as a showing of how our creations had once again outpaced our intelligence and ability to assess long term risk (Alvarez-Palau, 2020).

Fossil fuels, one of the best energy sources when first discovered, were a major contributor to the industrial revolution. With such an efficient and abundant source of energy, it was understandably taken advantage of immediately and put to use in nearly every way that we could. But even though this form of energy opened up so many doors for humanity, it did not mean that it would not have severe repercussions over its 300 years of being used (Fernihough, 2020).

Their usage released a large quantity of CO_2 into the atmosphere and as time went on it would continue to build up. Unfortunately, we also developed a strong, virtually unbreakable reliance on fossil fuels for most everyday things as it made life significantly easier and even to this day, we struggle to utilize alternatives as they simply cannot compete with just how effective fossil fuels are. With that dependency having been created, the use of fossil fuels has stretched onwards for centuries, reaching the modern day. We still rely heavily on fossil fuels even though we have multiple alternative energy sources that are far cleaner, which has driven the quantity of CO_2 within the atmosphere to continue its exponential increase since the industrial revolution to today with no signs of slowing down.

One of the most notable impacts that fossil fuels have had on the world is ocean acidification and rising sea levels. The ocean produces 50 percent of the world's oxygen while absorbing 30 percent of all carbon and capturing 90 percent of the heat that had been generated as a result of these emissions. “The ocean is not just ‘the lungs of the planet’ but also its largest ‘carbon skink’ - a vital buffer against the impacts of climate change” (The World's Greatest Ally Against Climate Change, n.d.). The ocean is one of the core contributors to the stabilization of the climate but as emissions increase and life in the ocean is experiencing the detrimental impacts that it has to offer, reducing the ocean’s ability to maintain the climate’s stability and therefore putting life further at risk with every passing day.

Coral reefs are an extremely valuable ecosystem, being one of the most important on the planet even when they cover less than 0.1 percent of the earth's surface. This is due to their extensive biodiversity, supporting over 25 percent of all marine biodiversity. Coral reefs also happen to be one of the most sensitive ecosystems on earth with recent reports stating that 90

percent of reef building corals would be lost as a result of warming seas caused by our acceleration of climate change (Coral Reef Restoration, 2021).

The warming and acidification of the ocean is not the only concerning outcome when it comes to what humanity has produced and released into the environment. An extremely high demand for natural resources such as ivory which was used in a great number of things back in the 1800's was beginning to drive certain species populations to sharp decline, especially elephants due to being the main source of ivory. This raised concerns not only for the species put at risk due to humanities carelessness, but it also meant that we would need material to take its place. That new material that we so desperately needed at the time would come to be known as plastic. The creation of plastics is one of the greatest representations of humanity not just being extensively outpaced by their technology but manipulating nature and realizing the repercussions of it only years after they've done it (Frienkel, 2011).

Plastics are one of the most harmful things that the world has ever had, the displeasure of touching. Plastic was the result of humanity attempting to create cheap, versatile material that could be used in almost anything without needing to consume large amounts of natural resources, but they also had an unintended con that was their extremely long lifespan, though it was not viewed as a con at first. At first it was considered a great achievement, and the intended concept absolutely was, but now it sits as a curse on this world that is still continuously pumped out of factories (Frienkel, 2011)

Plastics are now in most places of the world and due to their long lifespan, they remain within the environment that they were left in and will outlast us, but that is not the only concern when it comes to plastics. Plastics are not just in the environment and around you, plastic is in

the food that you eat (Microplastics and Nano plastics in Food, 2024), even inside your organs (Dzierżyński, 2025).

As plastics continue to accumulate in the environment and landfills, instead of undergoing biodegradation like a natural resource would, they instead break down due to weathering. This breakdown causes plastic to become progressively smaller in size over time and as a result end up inside a great many places including the food we grow and raise. Microplastics and nano plastics have already been found within our drinking water with it acting as a perfect vessel for us to be constantly exposed to them caused by our need to consume it in order to survive. These plastics have ended up within our drinking water as a result of things like surface run-off, to atmospheric disposition (Microplastics and Nano plastics in Foods, 2024).

The land is not the only place that has had a significant increase in plastic pollution over the years. The ocean, covering about 70% of the earth, has accumulated a gargantuan number of plastics both above and beneath the surface. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch spans across America's west coast to Japan. While most people imagine a large island of plastic floating in the middle of the ocean, in actuality, the GPGP is instead a large amount of microplastics in circulation. The accumulation of garbage in this region of the ocean was caused by the north pacific subtropical gyre (NPSG). NPSG traps garbage including a large quantity of plastics inside of it as a direct result of the swirling current generated by the gyre and moves the bulk of debris towards the center where the water is much calmer (Great Pacific Garbage Patch, n.d.).

Every single one of these issues that we are now struggling to solve has been a result of human innovation and our lacking ability to fully learn from the mistakes we have made, instead repeating the same process just in different ways and continuously failing to realize the possible long-term risks associated with our actions. We are now dealing with extremely high levels of

pollution which is causing the planet to heat up at an unprecedented rate and destroying highly valuable ecosystems, microplastics and nano plastics are beginning to collect in both our bodies and what we consume, and a huge amount of waste is left in the environment.

Our best bet when it comes to an alternative source of energy is none other than nuclear energy. While wind and solar are both a good step in the right direction, the amount of energy they produce is inconsistent as a result of wind patterns and the day cycle. Nuclear energy on the other hand is not only one of the cleanest energy sources that we have, but it also greatly surpasses fossil fuels in terms of both energy production and the cost to run (Igini, 2023).

One of the greatest concerns regarding nuclear energy is its waste product. Indeed this waste can last up to tens of thousands of years, but around 90 percent of waste product produced by nuclear plants can be recycled and while that 10 percent of waste product is still an issue, overall it is nowhere near as problematic as fossil fuels and the impacts they have left on the world today (Igini, 2023).

The use of nuclear energy should not be considered a final and absolute source of energy that we should completely rely on for the foreseeable future as the waste product is still a concern, but nuclear energy can provide us with an opportunity to not only help fix the climate change issue that is actively ravaging the earth, but it would also give us a significantly greater amount of time to find and develop other, more viable options for energy that produce no waste product and will not cause long term consequences.

Conclusion

Through evaluating the evolution of humans and their innovative qualities, humans have consistently shown to repeatedly make decisions that hold often severe, large scale unintended

consequences, only coming to realize the weight of their actions after they had already started the chain reaction. But one thing to note is that through all of those innovations, a significant portion of them had started with good intention. Many of man's innovations such as plastic or splitting the atom were created with the goal of improving the world and opening new doors to humanity's ability to advance further, with the bitter outcome as a result of their innovations never having been an intended outcome.

Although humans have repeated this process with the intensity of each increasing significantly, we must also reflect on humanity's response to the negative outcomes whenever they have occurred and became a concern. In each instance, even when humans in their drive to improve had failed to assess short term gain against long term risk, they learned from the mistake they made and worked towards finding a solution and fixing the issue that they created.

Humanity is already showing a greater amount of care when it comes to innovation, being sure to assess anything that could result in severe, widespread consequences and trying to find a functional workaround. If humans continue on this path of acknowledging long term risk and seeking alternatives, there is no doubt that we as a species will not only survive but thrive.

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