

2022

What have we done to our mother?

Recent research into the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 highlights its global impact and significant influence on human history. At that time, records indicate a world population of approximately 1.5 billion; however, given limitations in data collection and unregistered births, it is likely that the true figure was somewhat higher. By comparison, as of 2022, the global population has reached an estimated 8 billion, potentially approaching 10 billion if one considers potential inaccuracies and undocumented individuals. This remarkable increase demonstrates that, within just over a century, the human population has expanded by a factor of five or more.

The primary catalyst for this substantial growth is, without question, the advancement of medical science in its various facets—including vaccines, antibiotics, surgical procedures, and healthcare infrastructure. Enhanced medical care has contributed to lower mortality rates and increased life expectancy, enabling individuals to survive ailments and conditions that were once considered fatal. This development introduces important considerations regarding the economic assessment of human life and the associated implications for aging populations. Within the financial sector, especially in insurance and actuarial fields, a quantifiable monetary value is attributed to human life. Underwriters employ sophisticated mathematical models to incorporate variables such as age, wealth, income, and family circumstances in determining benefits payable through life assurance policies. Reflecting on life expectancy from this financial perspective underscores both the complexity of these calculations and the substantial financial resources circulating within the medical industry.

If the average individual today lives approximately twenty years longer due to advances in modern medicine—which often extends the management of diseases rather than providing definitive cures—there are broader implications to consider. Pharmaceutical companies generate significant revenue from medications, treatments, and therapies developed to prolong life; however, the overall benefit to an individual's quality of life may sometimes be ambiguous. Notably, the aging and growing population, sustained by ongoing medical interventions, collectively contributes an estimated 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide annually through respiration. This output has measurable effects on the atmosphere and is believed to intensify the greenhouse effect, thereby creating a feedback loop that influences planetary health. As such, efforts to extend human lifespan may inadvertently increase environmental pressures.

This commentary is not intended as a personal critique. Many individuals, including myself as someone living with type one diabetes, owe their well-being to the advancements of modern medicine. My observations are a satirical reflection on society's inclination toward self-interest and capitalistic pursuits. Historically, before the industrial revolution approximately 350 years ago, societies were more reliant on sustainable agriculture and local farming practices. Communities typically produced food for their own consumption, thereby supporting environmentally balanced and socially cohesive closed-loop systems.

The development of macroeconomic models marked a transition toward prioritising large-scale production and global trade over local sustainability. This transformation has resulted in significant and wide-ranging impacts. The 99-1 theory posits that approximately 99% of the world's economy is controlled by 1% of its population. Years of financial study reveal that generating substantial income is possible for those who successfully establish and manage a business enterprise. Nonetheless, it is important to evaluate global opportunities beyond national boundaries and consider whether they are equitably distributed. For example, one may question if an average farmer in India has access to

the same prospects as a counterpart in the United Kingdom. While precise statistics are unavailable here, evidence suggests disparities exist.

When the British Empire colonised India during the Victorian era, their primary goal was to reshape India's agricultural practices to suit their own economic interests. The British observed that local farming communities were not producing enough crops by their traditional methods and thus imposed new techniques aimed at maximising yield and promoting mass production. While this approach benefited the macro economy and increased profits for the ruling powers, it was detrimental to local communities. The soil became exhausted from overuse and, over time, lost its ability to produce abundant crops. As a result, the average Indian farmer's situation deteriorated compared to pre-colonial times, with many losing their livelihoods and traditional ways of life.

Contrast this with the ancient agricultural terraces found in the Peruvian Andes. These breathtaking landscapes, carved into mountainsides with gradients reaching up to 50% and elevations surpassing 16,000 feet, have been cultivated for countless generations. The indigenous peoples who inhabit these regions possess a deep understanding of their environment, maintaining a sacred connection to both mother earth and father sun. Their agricultural practices are grounded in meteorological wisdom and soil science. By rotating their harvests and allowing land to rest for four years, they enable the soil to regenerate and accumulate organic matter, thus preserving its fertility. Much like a mother requires rest between periods of nurturing, so too does the earth need intervals to recover. This approach stands in stark contrast to the relentless exploitation seen in industrial agriculture, demonstrating the value of respecting natural cycles.

These are, of course, my personal perceptions and ideals. I do not intend to impose them upon others, but rather to inspire reflection on our collective journey. In the four centuries since the dawn of industrialisation, we have, in many ways, damaged the planet's ability to sustain itself and jeopardised the long-term viability of humanity. The underlying cause is, quite simply, greed. I choose the term "greed" rather than "money" because bartering—an ancient means of exchanging goods—benefited all parties involved. The introduction of promissory notes in the 1500s allowed individuals to secure finance against tangible assets, facilitated by merchant banks. These financial instruments were innovative and beneficial, but over time, the relentless pursuit of profit has led to the exploitation of both people and the planet.

Reflecting on this, we must ask ourselves how we can reconcile economic advancement with the stewardship of mother earth. Is it possible to cultivate a global society that values sustainability, equity, and respect for natural resources over the accumulation of wealth? The lessons of history, from the devastation of colonial agriculture to the enduring wisdom of indigenous practices, suggest that there is much to learn—and much to change—if we are to secure a viable future for generations to come.

Where is our feminine?

When I was a child, there was a strong societal expectation that men should not exhibit a so-called feminine side. Any hint of emotional sensitivity, gentleness, or nurturing was commonly dismissed as inappropriate, or even unnatural, for boys and men. The prevailing attitude dictated that masculinity was synonymous with stoicism and strength, while anything outside of that narrow framework was viewed with suspicion or ridicule. This rigid viewpoint shaped the upbringing of many, me included, leading to a sense of suppression and a lack of authentic self-expression.

Yet, as the years have passed and I have watched my own child grow up, I have witnessed a remarkable change. Society at large has become more accepting—indeed, encouraging—of children expressing their identities and emotions in a fuller, more genuine way. The barriers that once constrained boys and girls into fixed roles are gradually being dismantled, allowing for a greater celebration of individuality and emotional intelligence. This shift is evident in schools, the media, and even in the conversations that happen at home. Children today have far greater freedom to explore who they are, unencumbered by many of the prejudices that defined earlier generations.

My own research into this topic began when I was about nineteen. At that point, I started to question the assumptions I had inherited and sought to understand where they truly originated. I discovered that the concept of the “feminine” has very little to do with being “girly” in the superficial sense. Instead, it represents a profound, almost primordial energy—an essential facet of human experience that exists within all of us, regardless of gender. This energy is fundamental to our physical, mental, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. When it is repressed or neglected, it does not simply disappear; rather, it finds other, often less healthy, ways to assert itself. Feelings of frustration, unfulfillment, or even aggression can all be linked back to the suppression of this vital element of the self.

With these realisations in mind, I have strived to raise my child with an emphasis on self-trust and authenticity. I have always told them that they are free to pursue anything that they wish to in their life, provided their actions respect the free will of the self and that of others. This approach is not about dictating a particular path or suppressing certain traits; rather, it is about nurturing his sense of agency and encouraging them to honour their instincts. Importantly, this has absolutely nothing to do with sexual orientation. The feminine and masculine energies are universal, archetypal forces within all human beings, as Carl Jung so insightfully discussed. Jung’s work on archetypes and the collective unconscious highlights how individuals who do not express their full selves often become trapped in what he called “social blueprints”—predefined roles that limit growth and self-discovery.

This raises a profound question: How much of your identity is truly your own, and how much reflects societal expectations? To explore this, I suggest finding a quiet, still space and undertaking a personal SWOT analysis—examining your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To help centre yourself, try a simple breathing exercise: inhale for a count of four, hold for four, and exhale for four. Repeat this cycle for around ninety seconds, placing your right hand over your heart. As you breathe, contemplate the question: “Who am I?” This practice can help you access a deeper, more sacred part of yourself, away from the noise of external influences.

Record your insights from the SWOT analysis, aiming for at least five entries in each category. Once you have completed this, reflect on the origins of these traits and principles. In most cases, you will find that many of your core beliefs and characteristics were shaped by individuals or pivotal experiences—moments of light, darkness, and everything in between. In essence, we are all living narratives shaped by the expectations, assumptions, and projections of others.

Consider, for example, the influence of religion. Looking at Christianity, there is a widespread perception that Jesus was keenly aware of his divinity as he walked upon the earth. Yet, one could argue that he was, above all, an individual expressing his love and ideals, just as any of us might do. In my view, he was no more a son of the divine than any other human being. Until the 4th century, the feminine aspect of divinity within Christianity was venerated on equal footing with the masculine. Bishops were permitted to marry, and the divine feminine was an integral part of spiritual life. Over time, however, a shift towards male dominance took place; the feminine was relegated to the role of Mary, the mother, while the primal feminine forces were pushed aside. This marked the beginning of

a long era in which men were considered the superior sex, both spiritually and socially. Within this life of Nicholas I have seen such a leap in attitudes with the pretexts of monolithic religions.

It is vital to remember that, within our tangible human vessels, each of us embodies both masculine and feminine energies. These forces coexist and complement each other, forming a dynamic interplay that drives creativity, compassion, resilience, and wisdom. Denying either aspect diminishes our potential to live fully and authentically. I have come to believe that it is only by embracing both sides of our nature that we can truly “shine our light”—bringing forth our unique gifts and living in harmony with ourselves and others.

Reclaiming the feminine within ourselves and in society is not a rejection of masculinity, but a necessary recalibration towards balance, inclusivity, and wholeness. It challenges us to question inherited norms, to cultivate empathy, and to honour the cycles of rest and regeneration that sustain us—much like the ancient agricultural practices referenced earlier. In doing so, we not only enrich our own lives, but also contribute to the healing and rebalancing of our wider world. The journey towards embracing our full humanity is ongoing, but it is one worth pursuing for the sake of future generations and the wellbeing of our planet.