# Metaphysical reflections on Climate change and environmental crisis [By Peter Murigwa (MA)]

The call for a collective human action to curb the effects of climate change and environmental degradation has become more and more rampant in our times than ever before. The universe is currently ravaged by calamities like wildfires, droughts, storms, heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and many more, at levels that humanity has never witnessed before. The human activities like power plants, agriculture, vehicles and transport, cutting down of trees, fishing and many more have been cited as the main causes of such calamities. To contents the effects of such phenomena a good number of safer alternatives to such human activities have been suggested. But nobody knows what other effects such safer alternatives will cause in turn. This article explores into some metaphysical insights on being, climate change and environmental crisis.

In Heidegger’s view, “Nature was created or exists for the purpose of the human Dasein.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This means that the interplay between humanity and the universe was preordained at the outset of creation. Human existence depends on and is predetermined to depend on the world. Consequently, a being without the world is inconceivable. It is from this perspective that human beings have timelessly sought the fulfilment of their existential needs within the world. These existential needs include but not limited to energy, food and transport. Without these existential needs human life would be impossible.

However, when human beings engage themselves in such life-enhancing activities the resultant is climate change and environmental degradation. Heidegger notes that, “the basic constitution of the *Dasein* is being-in-the-world”, meaning that “in its existence, the *Dasein* is occupied with, about, being-able-to-be-in-the-world.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This is tantamount to an appreciation of the rapport between the universe and humanity. Needless to say, such a rapport has brought and will always bring unforeseeable consequences now and in the future and it is not within the prerogative of humanity to determine what will or will not happen. In Heidegger’s view;

“The world, is not the sum of all extant beings, not the universe of natural things – the world is not at all anything extant or handy. The concept of world is not a determination of the intra-worldly being as a being which is extant in itself. World is a determination of the Dasein’s being.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Hence, to the extent that the human existential situation is dynamic, the world too is dynamic. It continuously fluctuates with the development of human initiatives. On the other hand, it goes without saying that, human beings are compelled by their conatus to work in order to preserve their being. Hence, a complete understanding of the world, cannot and should not be detached or separated from the human activities. With the ever growing world population and the continuous rise in demand for technology, some outcomes are unavoidable, or as Hegel says, “A given outcome is only necessary, that is inevitable, given certain conditions.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The human condition here, is a sufficient condition to account for climate change and environmental degradation, for it is in his engagement with the world that his existence emanates.

However, this is not synonymous to the advocation of human idleness to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Human beings exist to think and to take charge of their existential situations. Climate change and environmental degradation are some such existential situations that human beings ought to grapple with. This is what distinguishes human beings as rational beings from the brutes. A human being is by nature a rational being, and in so far as his rationality enables him to realize his identity and his existential needs, it also brings destruction to his being in the name of self-preservation.

In Spinoza’s view, “the ultimate explanation of the world lies within the world; the world is fully explicable as a self-contained system.”[[5]](#footnote-5) In this sense, to the extent that human activity in the world is inevitable, climate change and environmental degradation are inevitable too and their explanation subsists within their own nature. “Nothing can be the cause of its own destruction”; argues Spinoza. “The destruction of a thing is always through an external cause."[[6]](#footnote-6) This means that, it is never a human intention to cause his or her own destruction either through Climate change and environmental degradation or through any other means. Such phenomena are just byproducts of life-oriented human activities and they become of concern for the human species in so far as they threaten its survival. But Spinoza further remarks that, “We are free in so far as the explanation of what we do derives from our conative disposition to behave in certain ways, as our essential natures meet each situation.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The world was given to man from the outset of his existence to satisfy all his existential needs. This means that the consequences of human actions in the world like climate change and environmental degradation follows with absolute necessity from such a rapport, since the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of a cause."[[8]](#footnote-8). Suffice to say, the human condition is a sufficient reason to guarantee the occurrence of climate change and environmental degradation.

Spinoza calls us to see “the strict logical necessity of all that happens; all follows from God’s immutable nature by logical necessity. - - - - we understand the necessity of what happens through reason”[[9]](#footnote-9), and there may seem to be nothing we can do about climate change and environmental degradation, but this metaphysical reflection invites us to have a certain attitude towards the world. An attitude that is guided by philosophy in its metaphysical sense. Our minds will be alleviated of the troubles of this world when we view the world from a sub *spicie aeternitatis* that is, a view of the world that is outside time. Viewed from this perspective, the world is whole and complete and all that happens, happens for a good reason and this include climate change and environmental degradation.

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5. John Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers, An Introduction to Western Philosophy,* UCL Press, London, 1993, 97 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers, An Introduction to Western Philosophy,* 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers, An Introduction to Western Philosophy,* 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Baruch Spinoza, (1632 – 1677) – *Modern philosophy,* opentextbc.ca, axioms, 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. John Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers, An Introduction to Western Philosophy,* 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)