

Why we will not save the rainforests?

An attempt to answer the title question about the future of rainforests and surrounding nature through the angle of media manipulation, system, perception of the world, instincts, culture and religions.

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PREFACE

A few years ago, I talked to some naturalists who were familiar with the topic of rainforests and who knew the subject from both the theoretical and empirical sides. They told me that these ancient forests are doomed to extinction, no matter what we do. Their pessimism and defeatism aroused both my surprise and indignation at such an approach to the topic. Today, with the perspective of time, I agree with them, and I will try to present examples and reasons on the basis of which I came to the same conclusions.

I emphasise that this is only my private opinion based on the knowledge and observations I have acquired. I want to share my experiences and thoughts from various fields of life and apply them in response to the question of why, in my opinion, rainforests are doomed to extinction. In the text, I give examples of human behaviour, and I do not mean any specific people, but only refer to the phenomena that occur. I would also like to keep the childish hope that I am wrong in my analysis, but my conclusions do not give much illusion for the salvation of these wonders of nature.

In addition, I realise that some readers may not be familiar with the topic of tropical forests or natural processes. Therefore, I will try to briefly and simply present the topics that may be obvious to some. And finally, please note that some situations I describe here are from the point of view of a Polish person.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Preface

The uniqueness of rainforests

First contact

System, corporations and politicians

Perception

Parks and reserves

Our approach

Who else?

History, culture, religion, society

Herd

Threat

Before the COVID-19 pandemic

The onset of the pandemic

The end

THE UNIQUENESS OF RAINFORESTS

I remember how, in 2010, for the first time, I immersed myself in the dense foliage and trees of the Malaysian jungle along the Kinabatang River. This river flows, meandering through the northeastern part of the island called enigmatically Borneo, which is the third largest in the world. In the past, the uniqueness of this island was described by famous travellers and scientists, such as naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who, with his discoveries and insight, matched Charles Darwin. All these researchers and explorers agreed that Borneo is one of the most diverse natural places on earth, with many endemic organisms — that is, those that do not occur anywhere else in the world and are limited only to one island and even to one isolated valley. You can meet, among others, human-like monkeys — orangutans and their cousins, proboscis monkeys with long noses and even longer tails, carnivorous plants, glowing mushrooms, insects, and countless microorganisms.

The isolation of islands at an appropriate distance and time from other land masses favours the adaptation of newly arrived organisms to the new conditions. As a result, this isolation and adaptation can gradually lead to transformation into different subspecies or even completely separate species. All this happens to a greater or lesser extent depending on the local geographical or climatic factors as well as the appropriate time scale. For example, species diversity is one of the criteria used by scientists to estimate the age of the island.

One can argue which of the islands is the most diverse in these organisms that are not found anywhere else, but one thing is certain: a trip to such a primary ecosystem is for the imagination of a traveller like a journey to another world, to another planet, or even a journey in time.

Rainforests have been developing continuously since the emergence of the first forms of life on solid land, and their current form has been teeming with life for about 130 million years. For comparison, the geographical latitude where I live, central Europe, began its current process of assembling the ecosystem after the retreat of the ice age, that is, about 11–12 thousand years ago. These are time scales that are unimaginable and incomprehensible to most of us. To present them on some graphical scale, allowing us to imagine such a time interval, let's agree that one year is represented by a section of 10 cm. We get on a bike, and the period of 11 thousand years will give us a distance of 1.1 kilometres to travel. Then, to go on our time scale to the peak of the dinosaur era and the flourishing of the tropics, we would have to ride our bike a distance of 13 thousand kilometres — it's like setting off from Lisbon in Portugal to Vladivostok on the eastern coast of Russia. These two sections on the time scale seem incomparable and illustrate the extraordinary history of these unique forests.

Due to the fact that they were not destroyed by the Ice Age, this continuity of existence, in combination with geological changes and a constant year-round supply of solar energy (12 hours for 365 days a year), allowed to evolve countless genes, organic compounds, organisms, and coexisting ecosystems. As a result, it led to the emergence of the prehistoric cradle of humanity (biblical paradise) with a whole bunch of other species, which to this day treat the equatorial forest as their home, including seasonally migrating species from south to north, such as "our Polish" cuckoos or skylarks. Currently, most of us no longer live there, but our existence as humans is almost completely dependent on them.

The functions they perform are only being discovered by scientists, such as regulating the earth's climate or the chemical composition of

the atmosphere. This countless diversity of molecular substances contained in various plants or fungi contains equivalents of medical substances for all known and unknown diseases that will appear in the unforeseen future. It is worth noting that less than one percent of the discovered plants have been tested for pharmacological properties. Many of the newly discovered species are still waiting to be named, and even more are waiting to be discovered.

For example, there are approximately 150,000 discovered species of fungi known to us, most of which occur in the tropics, but according to biologists-mycologists, the true number ranges from 2.2 to 3.8 million. Another example may be trees, of which we have catalogued 53,000 species from all latitudes, of which 50,000 grow in the torrid zone. A similar situation applies to other groups of organisms that are less visible to the naked eye, which live mainly in the inaccessible canopies of trees in the equatorial forest or in the layers of the earth, and I do not even mention the depths of the ocean or the dying reefs. We literally live on the so-called — Terra Incognita — an unknown and unexplored planet. How else to call it when the number of all discovered species up to date is 2 million and the actual number according to scientific consensus is about 20 million, and some bolder estimates suggest even 100 million. I think that would be quite possible before cutting down all the primary forests.

Rainforests are part of a complex planetary network of interdependencies; they are a very important element of the machine that creates this delicate balance, thanks to which life on our planet is possible. Our own species, especially over the last centuries, along with population growth, develops proportionally both geophysical and technological ability to disrupt this balance, which in turn leads to deterioration of the quality of life and ultimately, in the perspective of time, to its partial annihilation. No one who has common sense and lives with his family on a high branch of a tree will take a saw in his hand and start cutting it? And yet, as a species,

against reason, we do exactly the same, cutting the branch on which we live.

FIRST CONTACT

When I first arrived in the aforementioned Bornean jungle on the Kinabatang River in 2010, apart from excitement, I also experienced surprise and disappointment. The village described in the tourist guide (an edition from a few years ago) was supposed to be set in a lush, green jungle. Unfortunately, the only green was the oil palm plantation, which started 350 km earlier, when I left by bus from Kota Kinabalu. Indeed, behind the village, 100 metres away, the forest began, but as it turned out later from my suspicions and satellite images, it was only a narrow strip of riparian forest, which covered the area along the river bank. It is usually left as a buffer zone, protecting the plantation from the meandering river. This is especially important during the rainy season, when the rivers overflow, destroying the banks and changing the course of the river bed. Since then, I have been to Borneo twice more, and during each trip, I had to find these few-kilometre patches of forest among the ocean of monoculture of the African oil palm.

I encountered a similar situation in the whole of Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, although the plantations look green, from the point of view of the biosphere, they are biological deserts and have little in common with real forests. Although some institutions, depending on the definition of forest, classify oil palm plantations as forest areas, Ultimately, everyone sees that there are trees growing there, which may be a helpful way to obtain subsidies under CO₂ capture programmes from the atmosphere.

A comparable situation, though not as tragic, I found in Central America, which, like most of South America, cuts down these ancient forests mainly for cattle pastures. The exception is Costa Rica, which in the 1970s and 1980s was a leader in cutting down its forests and now tries to restore the biological balance that it destroyed, learning from its own past mistakes.

Whether it's palm plantations for oil production, soybeans for high-protein feed for farmed animals, or pastures for cattle, most of these crops are owned by large American or Singaporean (read: Chinese) corporations. A small farmer who borders a large plantation has no chance of survival. Sooner or later, he will be swallowed up by the corporate juggernaut.

SYSTEM, CORPORATIONS AND POLITICIANS

Almost all corporations follow one universal principle: maximising profits in the shortest possible time, according to the best business plan. There is no room for sentiment; what matters is here and now.

Many corporations have above them other units called holdings, which often own several or dozens of corporations and can have a real influence on the actions and decisions of these companies. Rapid enrichment provides them with sufficient resources to realistically influence politicians and shape the law that serves and protects these corporations. Going up the network of corporate boards, holding groups, and shareholders, the circle of super-wealthy people narrows down to a small group, just as it happens in the financial pyramid. They are often people who not infrequently consider themselves gods, usurping the status of owners of this planet, who can do anything according to their own whim. With

billions or trillions of profits beyond the limits of my reasoning, I can say with certainty that they have a real influence not only on politicians and law but also on the education system, media, and even religions. By influencing these areas of life, they strive to have as many citizens and consumers as possible who think in line with their interests. I would like to point out here that, as in any field, there are also exceptions to this rule, and I do not claim that such corruption occurs in all cases.

At this point, we gradually come to the first conclusions regarding the title of my essay. If corporations have a real, even short-term profit from destroying tropical forests, they will certainly do so. History and the present confirm this. There is no point in deluding ourselves that it can be otherwise. For corporations, it does not matter that, in the long term, intact forests and all nature can bring more profit and benefits. Nature is a good that can be converted into real capital and human well-being in one way or another, taking into account most of the organisms coexisting with us.

“Big money rules the world, and everything revolves around it.” I've heard this sentence since I was a little boy, and the longer I go through life, the more everything I see confirms this long-heard sentence. I remember how the prefix "ECO" was overused in the 90s, just to make a given product sell better. Sometimes I wondered if this ecology was not some kind of gimmick. A good example is the size of coal stone, which is called eco-pea coal. It is the same hard coal, with the difference that the combustion is controlled by an appropriate type of furnace. Furnaces for burning this coal received funding as an ecological product. After years of sales, it turned out that eco-pea coal is no longer ecological, and these stoves will have to be replaced in the future. In the meantime, gas boilers were promoted and subsidised as environmentally friendly and ecological,

but as it turned out over time, gas boilers are also not ecological, and from 2024 on, they will not be able to be installed in new homes within the EU. Currently, heat pumps are promoted, but they are very expensive and not everyone can afford them. What the future will bring, time will tell, and who will want to earn money.

Another example are companies that make millions by destroying the environment, but all they have to do is plant a few trees to get the ECO-Friendly label, a company that cares about the environment. Another absurdity that exposes the hypocrisy of European Union officials is the ban on the use of plastic straws, which have been replaced by paper ones. But wherever I look, I see paper straws wrapped in plastic. Besides, the debate on straws, which lasted for over a decade, only blurred people's eyes, and I got the impression that the problem of plastic pollution in the world concerns only plastic straws for drinks and plastic bags. I understand that the enthusiasts of these solutions want to change habits in this way, but I have lived long enough to say that this way does not work. Such absurdities could be multiplied in every area of our lives. But the biggest absurdity concerning rainforests is the production of eco-fuel, also called biofuel, obtained from palm oil. To obtain palm oil, a rainforest had to be removed or burned down to grow the oil palms, which are used to produce the oil that constitutes the ingredient in biofuel. I leave this without comment.

My educational project, started in 2018, aimed at raising awareness about rainforests and a holistic approach to nature, along with promoting ecological values, met with misunderstandings on the part of local authorities. My strenuous efforts to obtain funding for the project, which I financed entirely from my own savings, met with a negative response. Visits and conversations with various representatives of institutions at different levels of authority, not only related to ecology, opened my eyes to the detachment of some people from current problems. During our conversations, one of my

questions was, "Have you heard of the Sixth Mass Extinction?". In all these institutions, including the Provincial Office for Environmental Protection in Katowice, Poland, the answer was always negative, even though this problem is not new and has been publicised by scientists specialising in this field since at least the 1960s. Also, for the last two decades, it has even timidly penetrated the popular media. Perhaps an official from the environmental protection department working in a small village could never have heard of it, which seems strange to me considering his function, but that the employees of the provincial office knew nothing about it is a scandal for me.

After these experiences, I got the impression that all these bureaucrats occupying cushy jobs live completely detached from reality. They worry about the upcoming elections, statistics, numbers, and satisfying those who hold offices over them. There is an analogy here to great politics and the money flow associated with it. It is a complex system of dependencies and connections that sometimes resembles a living, functioning ecosystem. Based on my own experiences and observations (which does not mean that it was the case in every situation), it seems to me that even the intentions of various institutions, such as schools or libraries, whose key role is education, wanted to use my exhibitions and lectures more as another asset in building their prestige and position in the mentioned system than in actually conveying knowledge to the young generations.

My private involvement in my own project and promoting the mentioned values usually took place on the basis of selflessness for a higher idea and, in a few cases, for a symbolic compensation of travel costs and related minor expenses. But this is me, an ordinary John, in this case, Krzysztof Filla. Other groups working for the

environment are non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which, according to their assumptions, are supported only by "private donors". It is worth adding that, according to the law, even a "private donor" can have expectations in return for their donation. Everything is fine, as long as the support and expectations do not come from a private person representing one of the corporations responsible for environmental degradation. I would like to hope that most non-governmental organisations check and do not accept funds from outsiders acting in the interest of these companies. The next groups are the previously mentioned government organisations, which unfortunately are part of the system, and related networks of dependencies.

I write this with regret but also with understanding, but most people who are aware of the importance of environmental protection will never engage in pro-environmental activities for two main reasons: firstly, they simply do not want to, and secondly, they do not have much time for them (work, family, home, recreation, rest). From this group of people, some will prefer to financially support one of these organisations, which will hopefully act on their behalf. Of course, supporting these organisations is also a way of cleansing one's conscience and making up for one's passivity. Meanwhile, I have the impression that companies and corporations spontaneously use these pro-environmental organisations to create a false sense of protection, to show people concerned about the well-being of animals and the environment that there are whole groups of activists fighting for the environment. At this point, I would like to emphasise that I do not diminish the good intentions of people working for a better tomorrow. On the contrary, they are often people who are underestimated by most of society and, in many cases, stigmatised, which I will refer to later. It has long been known that this fight is a battle between David and Goliath. However, my observations and events of recent years have made me realize that this Old Testament metaphor does not accurately reflect the current situation, in which

two opposing worlds collide. I have the impression that sometimes these elite units deliberately allow a battle to be won as part of the so-called war tactics, in which the final outcome of the war is already determined.

In the above sentences, I mentioned people who know about environmental changes due to human activity and feel more or less responsible. Apart from them, there are followers of other mentalities, philosophical concepts, or those characterised by different moral responsibilities. I will quote in a few sentences a handful of such concepts, which I personally had the opportunity to encounter in conversations with people for whom caring for nature is a waste of time. One young man, with whom I talked on a train, learned at school that (in theory) in 5 billion years the Earth will be absorbed by the expanding Sun, which will destroy everything on our planet, so he does not see any reasons why he should care about it when everything will be destroyed anyway.

Others refer to the holy scriptures, in which it is written that the earth will be destroyed by God on the day of the final judgement, and then a new earth, a new Jerusalem, will be created. Similar concept to the one with the sun, except that the biblical prophecy will happen soon. Some believe that nature is doing quite well despite our impact on it, and there is no need to worry about its fate. They claim that nature has always coped and therefore will cope now too, because physically we are not able to destroy it. Some are not interested at all and do not intend to bother with it. Still others argue that people are part of the process of evolution, and if something is to be destroyed in this process, then it should be, and we should not interfere. Although such thinking is absurd, a large group of people share this belief. One of the most common arguments I have heard is the often repeated and hackneyed cliché "people are more important than frogs". I do not deny this, but such thinking often shows a lack of respect and arrogance of these people, that in this world there is no

place for anything that stands in the way of man achieving his goals. Still others believe in the genius and intellect of man — of course not their own, but super scientists and technology. They believe that if we screw something up, they will surely come up with something, so there is no reason to worry, and you can sleep peacefully. I see a certain analogy in this thinking to the approach many people take to their own health. They lead an unhealthy lifestyle, and when something breaks down, the doctor will prescribe a pill. A good example in the context of global nature may be the problem of disappearing insects, also known as "the clean windscreen phenomenon". These people believe that if they are gone, they will be replaced by flying insect-robots, which, by the way, are already being tested. However, with current technology, this is impossible, and history teaches us something else. In many cases, attempts to fix what we once broke in nature ended up breaking it even more.

PERCEPTION

In nature, the processes and changes that take place usually last for a long period, usually little or almost imperceptible in human life. Bearing in mind the natural environment that surrounds us, the problem of human nature is that every person who is new to the world finds it in the state it currently is and automatically considers this situation to be the natural status quo, which is the starting point for further assessment of changing conditions. No one can move physically in time and empirically experience what it was like 200 years ago, not to mention thousands of years ago. The comparisons we make based on descriptions of the past are only a murky, imprecise image, resulting from the perception and cognitive techniques of people then and now. I do not claim that such historical data are irrelevant in assessing the degrading conditions, but I think

they are far from accurate. This leads to the erroneous thinking, which I mentioned earlier, that everything is fine.

PARKS AND RESERVES

The biosphere is not a small fragment or fragments of a working machine; it is a mighty mechanism that enables life on our planet in more or less comfort. It is a self-regulating mechanism that does not need maintenance, but dismantling and destroying its individual parts leads to disturbances in its functioning. In a situation where the individual elements are functional, it is enough to leave them and provide them with adequate protection, and the destroyed or damaged ones should be restored to a state that allows them to perform their functions (e.g., wetlands).

In the long run, measured in decades or centuries, a few percent of national parks and other areas currently protected will not prevent changes in the proper functioning of this already failing machine. Sadly, the process of creating new reserves is going slowly, it's a real uphill struggle. To make matters worse, protected areas are not always protected, and those who care about quick profit (e.g. corporations) will engage in plundering natural resources, they will do everything to maintain the existing order.

Even the local people often take part in this practice, especially in poorer regions of the world, for example by poaching or gradually extending small crops to the territories of national parks or protected areas. Here, I only mention such a fact, and at the same time, I try to understand people who endeavour to sustain their families or improve their status. Although I know that in some places common poaching is more a result of tradition or hobby than a matter of survival or making extra money, regardless of the place and country.

Some areas lose their protected status as a result of corporate pressure, which is interested in expanding its activities, e.g., extracting valuable minerals or building access roads to other areas of its activity. Many parks have poorly paid forest rangers, who have no chance in confrontation with corporate power or are susceptible to bribery and turning a blind eye.

Edward O. Wilson, an eminent and distinguished scientist specialising in tropical forests, in the face of the ongoing and currently advanced Mass Extinction of Species around the world, initiated a compromise project called "Half-Earth" in collaboration with other scientists. In the book of the same title, he writes: To save 80% of the species that now exist on earth, we should divide the world in half — fifty-fifty, that is, half for us and half for the rest of the non-human co-inhabitants. In theory, this seems fair and reasonable. It is certainly a goal that we should strive for, but achieving it is a serious challenge due to human selfishness and pretentiousness, which assume that everything belongs to us. Time is ticking inexorably to our disadvantage, and in societies at the moment there is no such will, let alone among politicians. I will return to this issue in my further writing.

OUR APPROACH

The inhabitants of cities and villages living in the tropical forest zone are fed by global media with similar values as people around the world. The main message of these media is consumerism and hedonism, which translate into the lifestyle and pursuit of set standards.

My observations show that, for the vast majority of people in the world, contact with nature has a similar character. Regardless of whether they live in the north or south, they most often choose relaxation by the sea, a lake, or a picnic by a popular waterfall. This may result from evolutionary, innate preferences that calm us down. Or it may be the effect of the media promoting such forms of relaxation and recreation. I can't answer that unequivocally.

From the same observations and experiences, it looks like most people who visit national parks in the tropics are tourists from distant, most often western countries, for whom a visit to the jungle is one of the exotic points on their itinerary. Being in Costa Rica on the Osa Peninsula, I spent a week in a private forest where the owner created a small, simple tourist base. On the last day of my stay, I asked him why the only visitors to his forest were folks from western countries. In response, he admitted that Latinos prefer to spend time with nature on beaches or rivers.

When visiting different national parks in tropical countries, I sometimes ask local or western tourists why they came to this particular park and what their expectations are. The answer in most cases is similar; they usually expect to see monkeys, or depending on the place, other charismatic animals, such as elephants, or, with a bit of luck, tigers. One Slovak, whom I met on a Bornean forest trail, summed it up most bluntly. He was returning from the direction I was

heading. He suggested that I should go back because, according to him, there was nothing interesting there and he didn't see any monkeys. I asked him calmly and curiously if he only wanted to see monkeys. He answered me with surprise and irony: "What do you want to see!? Trees!?".

Please don't misunderstand me; every visitor has their own goals and priorities, which may result from preferences, interests, or even time constraints. But I get the general impression that for a large group of incoming guests, if it weren't for those eye-catching animals, the rainforest itself, with all its richness of organisms, would not have much significance. On the other hand, it may be that, thanks to these special animals acting like magnets, a piece of forest or other terrain remained intact. For example, orangutans attract the attention of viewers, and it is they who play the role of a protective umbrella, which works beneficially on the existing ecosystem around them.

Unfortunately, if we look at it from above, these are only small dots on the map, patches of forest, which are, in my opinion, too small to sustain more orangutans. If we take into account the size of the area where they are often found and the fact that one orangutan needs about 2-3 km² of forest for sustenance, it seems that many of them are supplemented with food. Orangutans generate profits from tourism, which flow into the budget of the region and feeding organisations, but is this the only reason why these or other animals should exist? Such an approach is also harmful to the population of these orangutans, as it changes their behavioural habits in the way they search for food and disrupts the natural process of seed distribution. Focusing only on profitable animals can create further problems, for example, during a crisis or limited tourist influx, as happened during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The aforementioned arboreal celebrities may cease to be this protective umbrella, which in turn may negatively affect the entire surrounding environment.

Based on the above arguments, I conclude that, like in other countries, most of the inhabitants of tropical countries have no special interest in or understanding of the uniqueness of their nature and strive for the fastest possible economic growth while satisfying their created, imposed needs from outside.

The common approach to wild nature in Europe and the whole western world is very similar. Many people perceive nature as something that can be arranged according to their own taste, plan, or prevailing fashion. Most people want synthetic, tamed, selective nature. To illustrate what I mean, I will use a few examples. So, butterflies can exist in this space because they are a symbol of delicacy and beauty, but paradoxically, caterpillars cannot because they are considered by most to be disgusting and associated with ugliness and pests, even though they are the same creatures. Bees sting and buzz above their heads, which for some can be too irritating, but they have more support in society than other buzzing insects because they produce sweet honey, which we can take away from them. They pollinate our crops, and beekeeping has been strongly promoted in the media in recent years. As part of this campaign, I have often encountered a meme or information that if bees die out, humanity will have 4 years of life left, which has little to do with reality. However, when we talk about wasps, for example, I usually hear that the best solution is to poison or burn them. Few people know that their beneficial functions in the biosystem bring as many benefits as bees (if not more), for example by pollinating flowers and especially by their predatory and parasitic nature, which contributes to the natural regulation of the populations of other insects that may threaten our crops. But that's not all — the wasps themselves become the object of animals that parasitize on them, such as hoverflies (Pellucid fly), which parasitize only and exclusively in their nests, and these in turn are pollinators of other flowers ignored by bees. The flowers of these plants live in symbiosis with other organisms, and thus the whole network of

dependencies extends. Writing about wasps, I would like to mention, based on my own experience as a beekeeper's son, that wasps are decidedly less aggressive towards humans than their flying cousins bees, and yet wasps are more stigmatised than bees. Personally, I don't even think that their sting is much more painful for a healthy person than bees.

In the above example, I wanted to emphasise that every living organism, from a nematode to a mosquito to the mycelium of a fly agaric to a shrew, performs specific, important, and often irreplaceable roles in the ecosystem. Removing even one of them can have serious consequences for the intricate and complex dependencies, which, like a domino effect, can drag many other species towards the ultimate doom and disturb the balance of dependencies. In many cases, it is only a matter of time, which can be stretched over years, decades, or hundreds of years. In the case of tropical forests, these dependencies are even more intricate and narrow, which is often referred to as a specialisation of species and is the result of high biodiversity.

Summarising the above considerations, in my opinion, neither the inhabitants of the south nor the north see the need to understand nature and leave it to be itself, that is, nature.

WHO ELSE?

The basic education system and the business model of the world, in which nature is usually secondary and often identified with resources, are to blame for this. Unless society sincerely and deeply

understands how important natural ecosystems are for our survival and well-being, it will continue to harm and demolish them. Unfortunately, the corporate world does not want us to understand and tries hard to prevent us from doing so.

Many years ago, I read a sentence saying that you can know the wealth and prosperity of a country and its society by the number of trimmed lawns. From the perspective of time and my travel observations in different countries, this statement is absolutely true. I was born and have lived most of my life in the countryside. I remember how in the past, grass was mowed with hand scythes, cows were grazing on meadows, and sheep trimmed the grass in the nearby ditches and pastures, fertilising the soil with their droppings. The sight of uncut grass and what some call "weeds and thick bushes" did not bother anyone. Few had gasoline scythes, and mowing critical spots was conducted by a handful of specialised companies. Strolling through a pasture, every few metres, frogs scurried off in a hurry in different directions, right behind the grasshoppers and a whole horde of insects. Today, such a sight in my village is rather a mere and distant memory. Cuckoos and skylarks have disappeared, and meeting a hedgehog is a rare event, although I admit that I most often meet them as remnants in the form of a skin pancake on the asphalt roads. Since then, most of the small farmers have disappeared, and their roles have been taken over by large-scale farms, where mechanisation and business plans leave no room for the free grazing of animals.

Over the last decades, many shops have been created and huge supermarket chains have been built, specialising in selling everything that is needed to transform grass into a fairy-tale, dreamy lawn, exactly like the ones seen for a long time on American TV series, most TV commercials, billboards, or pages of colourful

magazines. With the help of machines, tools, and all kinds of chemicals, we create a sterile, artificial, almost synthetic landscape around us. All this drives a huge business, but it goes against the natural laws of biological processes. Unfortunately, decades of media indoctrination about what our environment should look like and what we should admire have taken their toll. Trying to explain to the average lawnmower user the harmful effects of modifying the nature around us, such as the decline in biodiversity, the lack or reduction of water retention, or soil depletion and erosion, I usually meet with the same suspicious look and a question like, "What have you been smoking and why so much?".

On the one hand, such a mocking attitude is unfair and hurtful, but on the other hand, it does not surprise me at all because the same media around the world present people who are interested in and care about the environment as lunatics and crazy ecologists who chain themselves to trees. Hence the pejorative term "a tree hugger".

Going further in my reflections towards the forest, I often hear complaints that the forest is neglected and overgrown, there is a smell of decay, branches and limbs are scattered everywhere, and even here and there overturned trees.... what a waste! They could have been planks! I heard similar statements not only from the mouth of the average John but also from some qualified foresters. Although in the latter case I have full understanding of their way of thinking, after all, they were trained to work in a company-corporation (i.e., Polish State Forests), whose main goal is to maintain the forest in such a way that it provides the largest amount and best quality of wood (read: raw material). A healthy forest with biodiversity is a forest with decay, scattered branches, and overturned trees. I will not write any more about other ecosystems, such as floodplains or swamps, which we do not even modify but effectively remove.

In all of this, how to convince uninterested citizens to change their attitude and, in consequence, their behaviour, by a whole or about 180 degrees? If this is so difficult in relation to their immediate surroundings, how can you expect someone to care and act accordingly for the environment, somewhere far away (in this case, rainforests), on the other side of the globe, with which they probably never had and will never have anything directly to do? Most people do not know what real nature is, and what they surround themselves with is mostly a manufactured product. It is worth reminding here that we use the same word to refer to "forest" both a tree plantation, seeded and cultivated by humans, also called forest farms, and a natural, primeval forest created without human aid, such as the Białowieża Forest located in Poland, which makes up only 0.6% of all Polish forest areas.

HISTORY, CULTURE, RELIGION, SOCIETY

The blame for all this lies not only with the media sponsored by the system but also with historical, cultural, social, and religious factors. Since the dawn of time, man had to fight this nature to ensure a stable and more comfortable life, literally with his own hands or with a club (or some simple tool). He felt a constant fear before it or its elements, for example, not to be attacked by a tiger or a bear in the thicket, to experience a fatal bite by a snake, or to have shelter and food after the passage of some element. He had to wrestle his way through life against nature with great difficulty. In some way, nature was his enemy. The situation changed when man began to gain an advantage over nature. First of all, by the ability to control fire, then by his gradual, expansive population growth and, over time, more

and more advanced technology. Our history is the path of transition from being a victim to being an occupant.

The emergence of religion to a greater or lesser extent (depending on the origin of the religion) contributed to instilling in people a belief in the uniqueness of our species in relation to the rest of creation. Religion in the minds and beliefs gave man legitimate power and dominance over all creation, especially in the religions of Abrahamic origin (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). This has resulted in the separation of man from the rest of the biological world and the building of a wall separating him from other beings. Here we are humans, and there they are — the rest of creation. This division into "we and they", "we and you" is clearly visible to this day in many aspects of our lives in the form of neighbourhood feuds, one village mocking the neighbouring one, Protestants in opposition to Catholics, and one state hostile to another state. I think this is also the result of our own "ego", which commands us to feel better than others. Abrahamic religions have their roots among desert-nomadic peoples, surrounded more by sand and stones than by green oases. They are distinct from animistic religions such as Hinduism, whose people have been associated with the monsoon forest and the cycles of nature for thousands of years. In these religions, such a clear division between "we" and the rest of creation is less visible.

The culture in which we are born, raised, and live is often closely related to religion, or rather, religion is related to culture (depending on the point of view), although culture is guided by its own principles formed separately from religion. Growing up in a certain culture, we are often unable to go beyond the patterns that we have been imbued with since our youth. Going through life, we confront facts that collide with the image of the world that we have built. When

facts begin to threaten the destruction of the image, we often prefer to ignore them to maintain our safety zone and mental comfort.

HERD

I also suspect that the construction of such divisions among humans is the result of an innate, evolutionary characteristic that characterises many social (herd) species on Earth, representing affiliation to a herd, a community, or a tribal group.

The characteristic feature of these tribal groups is a certain behaviour or lifestyle that distinguishes them. Loyalty to the group is rewarded, and any deviation from these rules can result in a lack of acceptance or complete rejection by the group. Such rejection could translate into expulsion from the clan, which in consequence determined the survival of such an isolated exile.

These are the foundations of our societies and interpersonal relations. I remember how in my village, anyone who was not a Catholic but a member of another denomination automatically gained a pejorative term that was mainly used to address members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was even worse to be an atheist or a follower of another religion. Such deviants usually received the label of someone worse, an object of mocking. Today the situation has changed a bit, which does not mean that it is perfect, but I imagine that being a Muslim does not necessarily have to be a reason for pride.

One of the examples of a sense of belonging is eating meat, which historically in societies was an indicator of social status. The tables

of the kings and princes were bending from the abundance of venison, and the poor and common people ate the popular peas with cabbage, a dish that in Poland is still a symbol of poverty and simplicity. The situation gradually began to change with the fall of feudalism and the advent of capitalism, in which society became richer and meat became cheaper, becoming available to almost everyone on a daily basis. Communism in Poland again shifted the border of meat availability between the privileged and the rest. However, the mentality in the consciousness of people remained unchanged to this day, where the act of possessing and consuming meat gives a subconscious sense of belonging to a higher social class (caste), and those who do not consume it are subconsciously treated as citizens outside this caste of the privileged.

Anyone who is a vegetarian or, worse, a vegan, has a high probability of encountering rejection, ridicule, or a lack of acceptance from the majority of society. I once read statistics that say that for every 4 people who turned to veganism and returned to eating meat again, 3 people return because of emotional difficulties associated with the problem of rejection by family, peers, and society. I, as a person who has not been eating meat since 1989, know and understand very well what I write and what these people feel.

Another characteristic behaviour that distinguishes herd groups is the self-preservation instinct. Imagine that you are walking in a group of a dozen or more people, and suddenly everyone around you starts running for unknown reasons. Regardless of what caused this burst, your instinct in the first instant also tells you to run, but only in a few seconds while running you analyse and evaluate what caused others to run. From an evolutionary point of view, those who did not bolt in time to escape with the rest of the group were eliminated from it at some point in their lives. Their genes were not passed on to future generations.

The above example also illustrates the so-called emotional synchronisation, which characterises groups and subconsciously influences our decisions, attitudes, and behaviours, which may be consistent or inconsistent with our individual preferences and values. People experiencing emotional synchronisation experience similar emotions and physiological reactions in the same situation and time. It strengthens the sense of community, involvement, and identification with the group and affects many aspects of our lives.

To better illustrate what emotional synchronisation is, I will describe another example. Imagine that you are sitting in a theatre, watching a play in a hall full of people, filled to the last seat. At the end of the show, the whole hall stands up and applauds enthusiastically. You think that you did not like the performance, and you sit still with your arms folded and an unhappy expression on your face. How do you feel, then? Reason tells you that the actors do not deserve such applause or even ordinary cheers, but the longer you sit, the more awkward you feel, seeing the standing and cheering people around you. From the beginning of the ovation, you count on a quick end of the applause, but the longer it lasts, the more uncomfortable you feel. Finally, you try to squeeze out a few unenthusiastic claps. It probably sounds familiar to anyone who has ever been in a similar situation. The given examples show the mechanism that facilitates understanding the reaction of society to any deviations from the established norms, which do not necessarily have to be logical or justified.

As we have already established, these patterns of behaviour can be subconsciously imposed on us by the world of marketing through the media, which uses basic human mechanisms and instincts.

Politicians and advertisers use the knowledge of psychologists and experts in the field of social engineering. They know very well the techniques of conveying information to influence the reception of selected content.

Now let's go back to the example of mowing the lawn and apply the same social norms that I mentioned earlier. Let's imagine a situation where the whole street or all the neighbours mow their lawns, and one neighbour breaks out, allowing the grass to grow naturally throughout the year, promoting his area as an incentive for various birds, mammals, and many other less visible and useful creatures. He spreads bricks, leaves piles of cut branches, and does not use chemicals. For most neighbours, this will mean sloppiness and mess, and at best, he will be infamously called "a weirdo". Any attempt at contestation by this neighbour will be met with hostility, and he will become someone who tries to undermine the established order. Most people, guided by the previously mentioned instincts, may feel ashamed and outraged by the unjust remarks addressed to them for their - in the opinion of others - "mess". Ultimately, both sides are right in the matter of their lawns and gardens; they only differ in the knowledge derived from different sources. For some, it will be books and textbooks; for others, colourful magazines and morning TV programs. In such a situation, one can be tempted to say that "the point of view depends on the point of sitting".

I also heard that in Poland there are places where a priest from the pulpit stigmatises or stigmatised such deviants. In Catholic Poland, such a message is a strong humiliation in the context of social ties, community, and, as I wrote earlier, belonging to the herd, where religion plays a role as a very strong binder. Another example is the situation in some states of the USA, where mowing and spraying the property with "poisons" is defined by law. For a lack of subordination, one can be punished financially and, in extreme cases, even thrown into prison. Welcome to the system and its reality!

THREAT

With the expansion of *Homo sapiens* on all continents, a certain alarming phenomenon accompanied him. The appearance of the first people on different continents and islands took place at different periods of our history. At the same time, this fact correlated with the disappearance of large, sometimes monumental animals called megafauna, as well as those quite small, and even the disappearance of entire ecosystems. A well-known and classic example is the dodo bird from Mauritius, or mammoths living in the northern part of the world. Often, animals that did not evolve together with a certain species may not perceive it as a threat. This is what happened with the migration of people whose appetite for hunting and "barbecuing" exceeded the reproductive abilities of local, less fearful, and inquisitive animals or were anatomically unsuited to quick escape. Archaeological evidence indicates that the first Aborigines settled in Australia about 60 thousand years ago. At that time, many different animals lived on this continent, such as *Diprotodon* (the largest marsupial in the world), *Genyornis newtoni* (a large bird 2 metres high), land turtles the size of a small car, rhinos, or marsupial lions.

A similar situation occurred in Europe and both the Americas. An interesting example, and a relatively recent one, may be New Zealand, where the first Maori arrived at the end of the first millennium of our era. Within a few centuries, they exterminated all 11 species of land birds called Moa, from the largest of them, over 3.5 m tall (11.5 ft) (*Dinornis novaezealandiae*), to the smallest, the size of a turkey (*Anomalopteryx didiformis*). After the slaughter of the Maori, 800 years later, the island was colonised by the British, who

contributed to the extinction of further species by continuing settlements, destroying habitats, hunting, and introducing new invasive species, such as cats or rodents. New Zealand is about 1600 km (994 mi) away from Australia, and for this reason, not many mammals have reached there. The birds took advantage of this, finding their place and a niche suitable for themselves. According to the data of biologist Edward O. Wilson presented in the book "The Future of Life", of the 89 unique birds occurring only in New Zealand before the arrival of the Maori, only 53 remain to this day. Similar situations occurred on all islands colonised by humans. However, the worst massacre caused by our arrival occurred in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on the archipelago of the Hawaiian Islands. Of about 145 endemic birds, only 35 species have remained alive today, of which 24 are threatened with extinction. Worldwide, as a result of human activity such as hunting, degradation and destruction of habitats, the introduction of invasive species, and pollution, we have lost forever about 2000 species of birds. The current list of those remaining alive is within the range of 10,000. This apocalyptic extinction also affected other species in the kingdom of plants or fungi. The vegetation that the first Polynesians found, reaching the shores of Hawaii, is no longer the same vegetation. Another example of Hawaiian fauna are unique land snails, of which 800 species have been identified there. Unfortunately, 90% of them are considered extinct today. The main causes of their disappearance are the introduction of several invasive species and shell collectors.

Most people think that a clear-cut forest will grow back on its own. This is possible in the temperate zone, where Poland is located, but it is not entirely true. Unfortunately, the forest will not grow back to its original state, and many species will not return. In the case of tropical forests, despite their vibrant lushness, the situation is incomparable and even dramatic, and in many cases, such a forest will not grow back (at least in our lifetime). This results from certain conditions, which I will not elaborate on, but I will mention two of the

most important ones. Many equatorial forests lose their humus (one of the components of soil formed from the decomposition of dead organic matter), which is washed away by heavy rain almost every day. After felling the rainforest, an open space is created. There is no soil there that would provide germinating plants with moisture, minerals, and nutritional values, as it happens in the temperate zone. Most equatorial forests grow on very nutritionally poor soil, which often resembles hard-packed clay of a yellow-red colour.

As a rule, the seeds of tropical plants are adapted to developing in the shady, humid climate of the tropics. When the tree canopy that creates dense shade and adequate humidity is missing, the seeds are exposed to strong direct equatorial sun rays, which kill the germinating seeds or young seedlings that somehow managed to form their first leaves.

The common practice of burning forests leaves ashes after the burnt jungle, which are rich in minerals such as phosphorus, calcium, potassium, magnesium, etc. The layer of ashes feeds the growing grasses, undergoing further erosion by blowing of wind or washing away by rain. The productivity of such a pasture usually lasts 2-3 years, and after 5-7 years, the farmer moves the cattle to a newly created field after the recently burned jungle, and the same cycle is repeated until the next expansion. Abandoned pastures are left as wastelands, often gradually turning into savannas or deserts. This is an extremely predatory economy, which turns millions of years of evolution into a momentary excitement on the palates of many consumers. The Amazon, which disappears mainly under pastures for grazing cows and soy cultivation for animal feed, is threatened with annihilation and irreversible destruction, mainly because of human appetite for grilled hamburger.

It so happens that all tropical regions (Asia, Africa, and South America) are located in the so-called global south, which is much poorer than the north. A stronger disaster, conflict, war, and people who are increasing in number (especially in these regions) turn to the forest to survive. They need not only food but also wood for fuel, cooking and heating, building materials, etc. In Africa, in the Congo, the population of mountain gorillas increased to about 1000 individuals after decades of protection and millions spent on their conservation. It only takes one several-year armed conflict in the region to erase the entire population. Animals in such situations end their lives not only in the bellies of war refugees and guerrillas but also from land mines or a lack of sufficient food when they are forced to migrate or their main source of food disappears, e.g., for anthropogenic reasons.

The list of threats to small animal populations is much longer than the dangers mentioned above. Among the more important threats, it is worth mentioning, for example: a serious infectious disease, genetic depression, which leads to the weakening of the population by interbreeding of related individuals, or industrial poaching using the latest, advanced technologies. Examples of species in a similar situation could number in the hundreds or thousands. On the example of Sumatra that I mentioned before, it was this loss and degradation of natural habitats along with high poaching that contributed to the alarming decline in the number of many endemic species, e.g., the population of the unique species of Sumatran rhino dropped in just the last 20 years from 300 to 80 individuals, despite huge investments in the protection of this species. At the same time, about 40–50% of the forests on Sumatra were cut down. Bearing in mind that this is happening so fast and in so many places on our globe, the changes that are taking place are unprecedented in the history of our species, and perhaps in the history of all life on Earth. The situations described above are only selected cases of species from the pool of thousands of others in a similar situation.

Those first colonisers who settled in different parts of the globe presumably did not realise their invasive way of life or the impact it

would have on the future of the places they reached. We, unlike those people who lived 60, 40, or 10 thousand years ago, know. And so what, when we continue or allow the process of dismantling the biosphere in a much worse way than our ancestors did.

BEFORE THE COVID PANDEMIC

Despite all the behaviours I described, I believed that developing environmental awareness through any form of education and intellectual discussion would lead to a change in thinking and perception of nature in relation to the world around us. An open discussion on superstitions and repeated myths based on science and ethics (one cannot exist without the other) combining logic, rationality, and openness of mind will bring desired, positive changes. Unfortunately, the time of the so-called coronavirus pandemic made me realise the futility of all these efforts, where science, ethics, open intellectual discussion, rationality, logic, and common sense have been swept under the carpet.

That faintly flickering light in the tunnel, which was supposed to be its end, completely disappeared with the onset of the pandemic political uproar and the subsequent events. Some people said earlier that this light in the tunnel might not be the end of the tunnel, but an approaching, speeding locomotive. I think time will tell.

Of course, I was aware of the irrationality and moral degeneration of our society on various levels and social groups, but what happened in 2020 left me with no illusions.

However, before I move on to describing social behaviours and my conclusions during the so-called "pandemic" and how it relates to the

future of rainforests, I would like to present a brief analysis of my observations based on the experience of a person who eats meatless, who from time to time tries to raise a discussion on the treatment of other living beings.

As a vegetarian and vegan for over three decades, I try to answer notoriously asked questions such as: Where do I get proteins from? Fish are not animals! (supposedly they are fruits), and chickens are not birds! These are some of the many questions or claims that should be obvious to anyone with a basic education, but as my experience shows, not for everyone. Although I think there is also a positive change with the cessation of biting comments from the 80s and 90s like, If you eat nothing but grass, you will get anaemia and tuberculosis and even die! These seemingly simple issues face an impassable wall when we touch on the spheres of animal feelings, basic life needs, intelligence, emotions, or nervous system. And what if we add philosophical questions from the field of law and justice to the list of purely biological-psychological questions, Then it starts to get messy and confusing. Also in this case, the media, history, culture, religion, school, society, or family play an important and decisive role in our view of what goes beyond our perception.

The next group are people whose answers to the questions asked earlier are similar or identical to mine. However, unlike me, their ethical choices are different from mine. Why is that? It would seem that they and I are guided by certain logic and principles, such as being polite, not harming others, not polluting the environment, etc. Moreover, these are the same people who declare concern for a better world, a better "tomorrow" and harmony, saying that animal abuse is a condemnable act.

One of such ethical choices is the choice between a meat or a plant-based cutlet. They most often reach for the one that is responsible for harming animals, along with the entire chain of subsequent destructive processes. At this point, I would like to emphasise that the production of plant-based cutlets can also (but not necessarily) entail a whole series of destructive actions, from toxic crops to unfair exploitation of people and animals. However, for someone living in our geographical zone and guided by the moral principle of choosing the least evil and fully aware of the destructive processes that lead to the creation of the final products, the final choice leaves little room for doubt. Probably no one needs to prove that a meat cutlet is always associated with suffering and taking away the life of an animal, which has its own interest in continuing it and for which that life has inherent meaning and value. This example is as obvious as a simple equation, where behind the meat cutlet there is always an equal sign (=), after which follows the death and suffering of some living being, often from the moment of birth. Someone may say that lab-grown meat is already available on the market, but at this stage of production, it has no meaning other than an obvious novelty and experiment.

The situation gets complicated when the equation is less obvious but has the same logical result. In the Catholic tradition, a number of symbols appear during Easter. One of them is the pre-Christian symbol of an egg and a hatched chick, present in many religions. It usually symbolises new life or the birth of a deity. It is a symbol with a strong message. It appears in the mass culture of the West and is a common motif on Easter cards. The sight of a chicken toddler (a baby chick) touches many, and the specific question, whether you would be able to throw it alive into a mincing machine, arouses suspicious looks and comparisons to degenerates and psychopaths among the respondents. I have not yet met anyone who would admit with a clear conscience that they do not see a problem with suffocating, drowning, or grinding small, living baby chicks. What's more, I have not even met a single person who would commission the killing of these small creatures for another person. Everyone

unanimously agreed that such a thing is unethical and morally wrong.

Up to this point, the reasoning of most respondents is understandable and consistent with mine, but what follows next is not necessarily so. It's safe to say that all eggs on the market are linked to the merciless killing of male chicks, even those that are popularly and euphemistically called "from happy hens", coming from a small farmer. Usually, such a farmer buys mature females from another breeder specialising in the breeding of so-called laying hens. During this process, tiny roosters, which are completely unnecessary in this business, are removed as a "by-product" for one simple reason: they do not lay eggs. As a useless commodity or waste, they end up in the trash (containers), where some of them, before they go to the grinding machine or the landfill, suffocate under the pressure of other roosters. Sometimes they are deliberately thrown into a plastic bag to suffocate them all.

At this point, one should ask another question: is it not the case that by paying for eggs or food products containing eggs, I indirectly pay someone for grinding small chicks, such as those from the Easter postcard? Everyone I talked to who were not vegans categorically denied this and claimed that they did not see any connection, for example, with a cake containing eggs and grinding hatched roosters. In summary, most people condemn cruelty to chicks but inconsistently tolerate it in situations that are convenient for them. What's more, they do not want to be aware of the suffering that the chicks experience in connection with egg production.

I think that denying this is a certain defensive mechanism for maintaining a comfortable safety zone for oneself. When the level of comfort achieved in life becomes threatened, ethics and moral choices often take a back seat.

At this stage, I think I can say that the logic crumbles to ruins, and the very concept of excluding the above dissonance can be subsumed under the concept of moral schizophrenia. A similar thing happens when comparing animals commonly called pets with farm animals — those we choose to love and cuddle and those we choose to kill and eat.

Summarising my above examples and comparisons, a famous quote comes to mind: "95% of people believe that unnecessarily harming and killing defenceless animals is wrong, and yet 95% of people still unnecessarily harm and kill defenceless animals — just to eat them." It wouldn't be fair if I didn't mention that several people have admitted to me that they are, quote, "hypocrites," but they simply don't have enough willpower and can't give up their favourite taste of meat. Of course, I realise that there are many different reasons and excuses, some of which can be a real dilemma and some of which may even be justified depending on the situation. I do not intend to judge individual cases, and my words apply to society in general and the way it perceives reality.

However, from what I see, people do not want to be aware of many aspects of our lives for their own convenience. For most consumers, ignorance is an alibi that protects them from the uncomfortable transition out of their comfort zone and seeing the world outside their bubble.

We have a fear of the unknown written in our genes. Sticking out beyond this zone can be temporarily interesting and exciting for some, but the awareness of no return causes paralysing fear. For most consumers, every product comes from the supermarket shelf and ends its life in the trash or sink. What happens to it before and after does not matter much. Our possession of the product, whether

it is food or a durable thing, lasts only a few seconds in its entire life. An apt saying that perfectly illustrates such a state of affairs is the well-known "Ignorance is bliss."

THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation announced the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, I arrived on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Two days later, Indonesia and 90% of all countries in the world closed their borders (according to UN data). The evacuation of tourists and their return to their countries of origin began.

I was one of the few who decided to stay and continue my project, which included exploring and photographing tropical forests. During the trip and searching for forest depths, I did not regularly follow all the events related to the development of the pandemic situation but only limited myself to obtaining information on local restrictions. Apart from a few inconveniences, life on the streets went on as usual.

From my Sumatran backyard, the only oddity was the ban on entering forests, which, as it later turned out, applied to many countries in the world, including Poland. However, like the local poachers and lumberjacks, it didn't particularly prevent me from exploring and photographing them.

In fact, no one was able to give me a reason for closing them. Even the workers of an NGO dealing with the rescue and rehabilitation of wild animals could not explain these restrictions. Meanwhile, the messages and images that slowly reached me from my home

country began to remind me of the world I knew from George Orwell's books. Nothing like this happened where I stayed. After about 5 months, the first lockdowns were lifted, borders were opened, and the possibility of extending visas on favourable terms ended.

A similar situation could be observed in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, as well as from reports from other travellers in other African and South American countries. From media reports, it seemed as if the virus was only attacking economically developed countries, such as Japan, Australia, the US, Canada, and European Union countries. During my stay in Indonesia, with limited access to mainstream information, I watched the development of pandemic events, partly by obtaining news from the Internet and partly by asking local people. Most people asked themselves the same question: why is the media massively alarming about daily mass deaths or increased morbidity due to this particular virus when no one knows anyone who knows anyone who has suffered from this virus, let alone died. It is worth emphasising once again that the restrictions in Sumatra were much less severe than those I heard about and found in Poland after my return. At this point, I would like to emphasise that I have no knowledge or intention to question the existence of the virus or the fact that people somewhere got sick and died because of it.

Analysing official data from 2020 and subsequent years, it can be noticed that the media presented the morbidity and mortality rate of SARS-CoV-2 with greatly exaggerated data. It turned out that these exaggerated data were due to various reasons, such as the hypersensitivity of the PCR tests used, which in some cases showed false-positive results of up to 90%. Additionally, financial incentives in the form of COVID allowances for doctors generated increased death statistics due to COVID-19, while the actual cause of death resulted from completely different diseases, accidents, and similar

causes. Despite exaggerated official statistics, the number of COVID-19 deaths did not exceed the number of influenza deaths in previous years. This data was publicly available and could be found on the official governmental websites and at the statistical offices. Moreover, the mortality rate associated with COVID-19 was negligible compared to other diseases in the world, such as heart disease, cancer, those caused by HIV - AIDS or the plasmodium parasite that causes malaria. However, for some reason, it was SARS-CoV-2 that brought almost the entire world to a standstill.

Indonesia did not struggle with the virus, Indonesia, like many other countries, struggled with the economic effects of lockdowns, which contributed to the even greater degradation of rainforests.

As a result of the slowdown in the economy, many people lost their jobs. In a country where earnings are much lower than in developed countries, not everyone can afford to save money for difficult times or a rainy day. Many residents turned to the already common poaching, which I witnessed almost every day. Illegal logging has also increased throughout the tropical regions, as reported by specialist portals and environmental organizations. The Indonesian island of Komodo, which is a national park for the world's largest lizards - Komodo dragons, closed itself completely to the already severely limited tourist traffic, explaining it by the protection of the lizards and the fact that tourists pose a threat to their population. However, the authorities allowed the entry of construction companies, which were to build new exclusive resorts for tourists, as reported by the local press.

I talked to local rubber producers, who before the pandemic sold it for 10,000 rupiah per kilogramme, which in euros was about 0.6 €. During the pandemic lockdowns, the purchase price dropped to 5,000 rupiah. At the same time, the prices of rubber products increased. It is easy to guess who profited from this. As a result,

these small rubber farmers told me that they would not be able to survive at such a low price and would have to increase the area of rubber tree cultivation. Where do you get more area for cultivation? The answer is: by cutting down the adjacent forest. I suspect that in the long run, they will be bought out by corporate giants. The practice used by large corporations, commonly called "land grabbing", especially in poorer regions of the world, has been known for a long time. It is difficult to assess how much damage the closed borders have done. Not only rubber producers suffered from this, but also other farmers and food producers (e.g., tomatoes), who could not sell their crops. They rotted, waiting for the borders to be cleared. Lockdowns around the world have led to the bankruptcy of millions of small businesses, shops, restaurants, and hotels. Large corporations and networks have partially eliminated small competition and partially filled the gap.

In my opinion, the previously planned restrictions under the guise of a pandemic and subsequent medical preparations served, among other things, as a tool to rob the poorer part of the population. I don't mean only destroying their life's work but also fueling high inflation, for which all people around the world are paying, especially those for whom everyday life is a struggle to survive another day.

I'm only talking about economic aspects that have a direct impact on environmental degradation and human life. However, the devastation caused by lockdowns and medical preparations created for the pandemic has a much broader dimension that cannot be measured or converted into money. I think that the amount of suffering is immeasurable in any currency or gold. The actions of political elites have contributed to a huge increase in excess deaths, suicides, miscarriages, stress, family breakdown, polarisation of society, restrictions on many human rights, persecution, and much more.

Government actions related to the pandemic may have only deepened many existing problems, for example, by fueling local conflicts and antagonisms.

Some institutions have suspended subsidies for environmental organisations operating in endangered areas. For example, during the pandemic season, some zoos, deprived of ticket revenues, had to stop financing rehabilitation and educational centres operating in tropical regions in order to keep the animals they kept alive. Some of these zoos struggled with this problem to such an extent that they were forced to kill some of the animals they kept.

While people in the West were locked up at home, the media stated that the amount of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere through transportation had decreased. According to "experts", pandemic restrictions had a beneficial effect on the Earth's climate, suggesting that transport was the only source of greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, the results of the lockdowns were different from those reported by media experts. Due to lockdowns forced by politicians, people in developed countries limited their consumption of intangible services such as restaurants, hotels, gyms, cinemas, etc. Instead, locked at home, they focused on consumption and buying material goods. People frustrated by being confined to four walls, which had become a prison for them, sought solace by ordering things online that they might not normally buy. Some did it to feel better, others to invest money against rising inflation. The prices of many products skyrocketed several hundred percent, and as I showed with the example of rubber, the prices of some raw materials in purchases fell by half.

The production of all goods requires raw materials, and one of them is undoubtedly wood. Just as the logging of tropical forests has increased, the Polish State Forests, in response to the increase in demand, have increased logging by 300%, which has resulted in an increase in the prices of lumber for some tree species. Due to the high demand for products from China, the export price of one sea container has increased from \$600 to \$3,600 due to the insufficient number of ships and containers around the world. Anyone interested

in the well-being of the planet knows that nothing destroys the natural environment more than excessive consumption. I am reminded of a famous quote by Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian activist for justice and peace, which was said in the first half of the 20th century, when the world population was 2 billion, and not over 8 billion today: "The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not enough to satisfy his greed."

Many companies have benefited during the pandemic, but the biggest profits have been achieved by global banks and some corporations, especially those in the technology and information industries ("Big Tech") and, above all, pharmaceutical companies ("Big Pharma").

This is no revelation that these companies already had gigantic revenues before the pandemic and turned over money several dozen times larger than the budgets of many developed countries. These huge funds allowed them to organise probably the largest marketing campaign in the history of the world, called the "Covid-19 Pandemic". The revenues obtained from the sale of everything from vitamins, masks, etc. to C-19 preparations gave them even more power to manage the world and prepare further "marketing campaigns".

Politicians, on the other hand, like puppets who are at the service of these global elites, have gained new experience. The pandemic has shown them how easy and how far they can go in managing and controlling citizens, and how easily they can manipulate masses of people.

These past couple of years have changed our behaviours and habits and paved the way for most people to accept new behaviours that open the door to new technologies that otherwise they might never

have accepted. For example, before the pandemic, most people would not accept the form of contact between a patient and a doctor in so-called teleconsultation, except in a few cases. Today, for most people, it has become a real alternative or even a new norm. These are just my guesses, but I wonder whether, in the coming years, the general practitioner (GP) may be replaced by a new technological product, popularly called artificial intelligence ("AI"), and teleconsultation will become the basic form of contact.

The pandemic was a test that, in my opinion, humanity failed. The people responsible for this test have certainly been reassured that, through media manipulation and systemic corruption, they can afford more and more, much more than before. They used to do it in small steps, and now they have been given the chance to take a real leap forward. And those wayward ones who opposed them could be easily humiliated. They were shown in the mainstream media as ignorant "flat earthers", dangerous to the rest of the citizens, passive murderers with blood on their hands, and even as enemies of the nation paid by Moscow. This is clearly dividing and turning individual people against each other. I really don't understand why so many citizens have been repeating the same illogical slogans in their rhetoric for almost 3 years. The belief in the message coming from blue screens and radios had little to do with medical knowledge that had been known for a long time or with new data that appeared as the declared pandemic unfolded.

Because most people believed in such inflated propaganda, it led to divisions and discrimination against those who dared to ask questions about the absurdity of what was happening around them. What's more, people of science, authorities in the field of epidemiology, and innovations in mRNA technology, who over the last decades have gained knowledge and practically cut their teeth in their fields (e.g., Zbigniew Hałat, Luc Montagnier, Robert Malogne), were denigrated and dishonoured using the same methods. They

were not allowed in the mainstream media, and those who dared to speak critically about the pandemic and subsequent preparations were vilified in all globalist-controlled media, and some of them died in suspicious circumstances during the pandemic. Even the inventor of PCR tests, Kary Mullis, enigmatically left this world a few months before the pandemic was announced and mass testing began. Maybe it was a time coincidence, or maybe he was an obstacle to organising the pandemic.

Few governments have escaped from under the jackboot of the WHO "dictatorship" - which is 20% financed by contributions from 194 member countries, i.e., almost all countries in the world. The remaining funds come from various institutions, foundations, private donors, etc.

One of the few countries that did not comply and did not introduce pandemic restrictions was Tanzania, whose government paid the highest price for collecting EUR 27 million for their introduction.

Before my eyes, inconvenient Wikipedia entries were changed or deleted that could undermine the credibility of the pandemic, and real experts were marked as spreaders of misinformation and propagators of conspiracy theories.

Instead of real experts and authorities, the so-called "media experts" appeared overnight on radio and television; paediatricians became experts in virology; and the Polish Health Minister was an expert in economics. For a period of 3 years, there were no public debates in the mainstream media, including both supporters and opponents of actions taken in connection with the pandemic.

Journalists who dared to ask questions on air had their programmes removed and pulled from the TV schedule. One such example was the Polish journalist Jan Pospieszalski, who, in his programme entitled "It's Worth Talking," invited both sides to discuss. However, it

turned out that it was NOT worth talking about, and the programme was immediately withdrawn from the TVP schedule on the initiative of the management.

I suspect that for the purposes of the "pandemic", so-called independent truth checkers or "fact checkers" were launched, who scrutinised the Internet for inconvenient facts. They were wrong many times on issues related to the pandemic, and their independence was dependent on sponsors financing them. Thanks to them, comments, recordings, and even entire profiles on social media and various channels were blocked, suspended, or deleted.

Ordinary listeners who called public radio stations were not allowed to express their view or were disconnected when they had a different opinion than the propagated narrative.

Based on my own experience, I can say that there was rarely a substantive discussion among friends, both in real and virtual life, e.g., on social media. One of the changes that I have been observing for a long time is the gradual disappearance of the ability to conduct discussions, listen to or read what others say, and even be willing to respond. With a few exceptions, these are usually short text messages that do not always answer questions and often lead to misunderstandings. Perhaps it is the result of laziness, lack of respect, or it may also result from new habits of communicating via text messages. Of course, these are my subjective observations.

While reading the comments of other Internet users, I had the impression that the discussion did not exist in the same way as it did over a decade ago. The essence of discussions usually comes down to calling your opponents imbeciles and flat-earthers who will believe any nonsense. The situation was no different on the streets, where the illegal order to wear masks prevailed, which were mostly ineffective and harmful to health (according to research and common

sense, if used for many hours). Every time I walked down the road with my face uncovered, crowds of passersby would keep throwing evil glances at me, as if I had done them some harm. Then I thought of an old Polish band called Kult and its song with a very eloquent title, "I live in Poland", the words of which echoed in my head, quoting: "I'm looking at what's going on in front of the store; the crowd is putting fists to someone's face, demanding the death penalty for him."

I would like to remind you that I came back from Indonesia, a country where masks were not obligatory and walking without a face covering was something natural. However, in Poland, when entering public buildings or supermarkets, I was threatened dozens of times that if I did not put a mask on my face, the police would be called. I have been kicked off public transportation or denied entry to many facilities. Finally, 4 days before the order to wear masks outdoors was lifted, while riding a bicycle on an empty side street, I was stopped by the police, who wanted to fine me for not covering my nose and mouth. For refusing to accept the fine, they took the case to court. Thousands, if not millions, of other Poles found themselves in a similar situation.

All these traumatic memories have nothing to do with citizens whom the police clubbed, poured water under pressure, or sprayed with tear gas in their eyes during lockdowns, just because they did not wear a mask, did not keep a distance, or walked in a group of more than 5 people (as much as the order allowed). In other countries, such as Australia, Austria, or Canada, people were even thrown into prison; their bank accounts were blocked, leaving them destitute, for example, just for giving food or hot tea to striking truck drivers who did not agree with the strict government restrictions. It's hard to believe, but these good-hearted people who wanted to help truckers standing day and night in 30-degree frost were accused of supporting terrorism.

All these spectacular incidents took place for show, served the function of intimidation and training, and had nothing to do with public health. The police funded by citizens' taxes, which should protect them, stood against these people, becoming an instrument of terror for pharmaceutical companies. These companies, together with state governments, have introduced subscriptions to civil rights in the form of the EU Digital COVID Certificate, in Poland called the green passport, that confirms obedience to pharmaceutical companies, e.g., whether someone has accepted the drugs imposed on healthy people or not.

Finally, on May 15, 2021, the order to wear masks in open public spaces was lifted, and the next day, in my opinion — 90% of people did not wear masks on the streets of nearby towns and villages. The remaining 10% were people, of whom about half didn't wear masks at all and half didn't stop wearing them even after the order was lifted. This made me wonder whether these 90% of people suddenly found that the virus had disappeared overnight and the risk of infection had reduced to a minimum, or whether they were simply extremely afraid of being punished for not wearing a mask. Or perhaps some people simply followed the blind orders of the modern dictatorship being tested on its citizens without thinking about the sense of what they were doing. Some people around me expressed doubts about the point of wearing masks in open spaces and also wondered about their potential harmfulness due to the lack of regular replacement (bacterial growth and restricted access to air), yet they continued to wear them.

Probably all of these answers are true, and that's why I have come to some conclusions.

Many people have often had their dignity, freedom, and health taken away. They could not even be examined by a doctor, and for this reason alone, many of them died or developed chronic diseases.

People died of fear and isolation. For many months, they were prevented from practicing sports (gyms and sports facilities were closed), but also from contact with nature and their loved ones.

For me, this information was almost immediately a premise and a warning signal that these bans were not about health but about something completely different. Perhaps the idea was to make as many people as possible sick or even die. It was probably intended to create even more paralysing fear, which blocks logical thinking, weakens the immune system, and then leads to even more illness and fuels the fear spiral.

Contact with nature has a very positive impact on our physical and mental health. Studies have shown that patients in hospitals who are treated for the same ailments recover faster when they have a view of a green park from the window, as opposed to patients who look at a concrete street. Even in prisons, inmates with a window onto greenery have statistically better results in social rehabilitation. These facts have been known for a long time, and yet, for some reason, those who reminded us of them were called misinformation super-spreaders. "Trust in Science" is a slogan repeated like a mantra in the mainstream media, and yet during the "pandemic" actions were taken that were contrary to previously known knowledge. It was evident that there was some coordinated, perfidious plan in all this, which remained completely imperceptible to a certain group. Only a certain part of the citizens was able to see through and managed to wake up from this torpor. There are also those who pretend to sleep, and it is probably impossible to wake them up.

Over the last decades, we have had several attempts at causing epidemics and fear campaigns such as foot and mouth disease, bird

flu, and swine flu, which turned out to be grossly exaggerated and aimed at achieving material or political benefits. In my opinion, these were also preparations for and attempts to button up the last buttons before what we experienced during the COVID pandemic. One thing is certain: not all buttons were fully buttoned, which was a lesson for the organisers, from which they will certainly draw conclusions before the next "Pandemic".

What particularly worries me, is the indifference of conscious people to the ongoing humiliation and the lack of firm will to change it. It seems as if they accepted the evil that was done to them and became hostages of companies, mainly pharmaceutical ones, and politicians associated with them. Perhaps part of society accepts whatever fate awaits them, and some have fallen into the so-called Stockholm syndrome, in which victims show solidarity and help their oppressors instead of those who are trying to help them, which was clearly visible during the "pandemic".

The topic of fabricating the pandemic is very extensive, and many books can be written on this topic that were written during the pandemic. I'm sure new books on this topic will appear as new evidence comes into the spotlight.

THE END

We are witnessing a total collapse or degeneration of the journalistic profession related to the mainstream media and the reliability of the provided information. The fact that the information is the first casualty of armed conflict is well known, but it seems that not by all. However, the topic of man's war on nature, as well as with rainforests, is beyond the interest of these media. All these issues that I have described in a nutshell, from our basic instincts and cultural and religious conditions to the way we perceive the world

around us, do not bode well in my eyes. I have only shown the tip of the iceberg, and many of the issues discussed or only mentioned can be broken down into small parts. Due to the length of this text, there are some things I don't mention, but I think I focused on the most important ones that I hope answer the title question.

The world needs changes for the better. Change in people can happen gradually or by shock, by pouring a cold bucket over their heads. It is not pleasant and it may be too late, because it is impossible to resurrect what is irretrievably lost. It is impossible to recreate what nature took millions of years to create. Already in 200 BC in Greece, Aristarchus of Samos suggested that the Earth is not the centre of the universe. Nicolaus Copernicus provided evidence for this, but in the minds of people, the geocentric vision of the universe still lingers. Historically and culturally linked to it is the vision of anthropocentrism (the belief that man is the most important and everything exists for him), that in the 21st century is in full swing. Nowadays, deviation from such thinking is still perceived as heresy, for which one could be burned at the stake during the Inquisition. Questioning such a vision leads to accusations that it is an attempt to equate man with animals and deprive him of his dignity. This is an erroneous and negative assumption, because the purpose of moving away from anthropocentrism is not to lower the status of humans, but to increase the status of animals and nature, which will be good for all of us and our health.

The purpose of the COVID example was to highlight the susceptibility of wide social circles to propaganda of unprecedented proportions, which directly affected almost every inhabitant of the world, especially in developed countries. The saddest message from this pandemic example is that if people, as individuals and as nations, do not try to change something that directly affects their

health and safety, how likely are they to be prepared to change something that does not directly affect them, something that is an abstraction for most people? For the majority of the population, the issue of disappearing equatorial forests and the surrounding nature is an abstraction. Most people will not take any steps to change this situation. I do not mean nodding, shaking heads from side to side, or liking posts on social media, but rather confronting the problem and taking any action. Both in theory and practice, in order to make any change, it is necessary to act simultaneously on two levels: political and social. However, from what I see, there is no such will on either side.

With small steps, the method of getting used to it, and putting one's boot in a closing door, the world is heading towards totalitarianism and control of citizens, which was clearly visible during the pandemic of despotism. Dictators of the past could only dream of the technological tools for managing citizens that are practically at their fingertips today. Politicians, banks, and corporations implement them, telling us that it is for our own good and that they must limit some of our basic freedom. Regardless of whether at the local, European Union, or global level, it is clear that there is some sort of enforced agenda (terrorism, migrants, the elimination of cash, etc.).

The pandemic was another example of an attempt to violate the sovereignty of citizens and the remnants of democracy that we have left. Freedom of speech has been seriously threatened. Asking uncomfortable questions that are inconsistent with the main narrative is immediately accused of spreading hate speech, acting in favour of the enemy, or being treated as anti-social activities. Similarly to the pandemic, new concepts and phenomena were introduced, such as "asymptomatic disease", and with the start of new wars, I heard about a phenomenon called "instigating peace." Old definitions and

meanings of words are changed, for example, what the word pandemic, experiment, or "ECO" means. I have the impression that everything is heading in a very bad direction, and the order I know is being turned upside down. The relative normality, common sense, and clear thinking I know are becoming obsolete. Maybe they never existed, and these values are a product of my delusions and naive belief that this is or was the case. My observations and experiences during the pandemic and the events after its end, which I briefly described above, were the last straw, and I lost faith in humanity, believing that it is able to make decisions and unite in the name of justice and higher goals.

From a human perspective, justice, human rights, and nature are closely linked. Without justice, there is no respect for human rights, and without human rights, there is no protection of nature. Without nature, there are no conditions for human life and development, and without humans, there are no justice or human rights. Unless there is a world without a man. Therefore, it is important to maintain and nurture the harmony between these values and strive to implement them in our everyday lives.

Krzysztof Filla

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Link to the coffee www.buymeacoffee.com/filla

Thank you

TABLE OF CONTENT

Preface

The uniqueness of rainforests

First contact

System, corporations and politicians

Perception

Parks and reserves

Our approach

Who else?

History, culture, religion, society

Herd

Threat

Before the COVID-19 pandemic

The onset of the pandemic

The end