

A Global Anthropocene Earth Science Take on Avoidable Deaths

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Purpose of this Article

The purpose of this article, written specifically for the Avoidable Deaths Network is to: (1) present a discourse founded in some of the greatest contributions of Earth Science to human thinking; (2) fuse these Earth Science contributions with aspects of demography, consumption, inequality, and planetary environmental limits theory; and, (3) offer rationales and solutions for global level challenges with respect to the Avoidable Deaths Network paradigm (defined here as deaths, injuries, and damage caused, in part, through systems failure and discriminatory practices resulting from inequality, and divergent social values, with a disaster focus), that offer future scenarios which can increase or decrease Avoidable Deaths at all scales.

The article will propose that the impact of ~ 8 billion humans, together with their cumulative consumption, and gross levels of inequality, is the main cause of Avoidable Deaths, alongside an inability to share resources equitably. The article will also demonstrate that Earth and life (as a whole system) has nothing to fear from human activities, including Climate Change. Geological Time teaches us that Earth and life are resilient, powerful, and sustainable, and have weathered eons of extreme Earth environments.

The conclusions and interpretations are my own, rooted in evidence and solid science, rather than meaning too for into self-indulgent speculation.

Avoidable Deaths and Amartya Sen

One of the inspirations of the Avoidable Deaths Network is the work and philosophy of Amartya Sen, a polymath, who mastered Economics and Philosophy, amongst other subjects, and a Nobel prize winner. Professor Kay Bennett quotes from Sen in her book 'Avoidable Deaths: A Systems Failure Approach to Disaster Risk Management' articulating a key principle that 'most deaths that occur during natural disasters are avoidable' based in part on Sen's work relating to 'social justice' and 'social choice theory'. These theories state that avoidable deaths are a matter of justice and occur because of systems failures which impact disproportionately on the poorest and least empowered. Some of Sen's most famous quotes include: (1) 'Deaths are rarely due to a lack of food and do not occur in well-run democracies'; and (2) 'being poor does not mean being below a theoretical imaginary poverty level, but does an income level that does not allow individuals to cover the basic necessities... within the requirements of the environment (in which they live)'. We either live or don't have social justice, freedom, and 'well-being', Sen argues, depending on our 'well-being levels' or our ability to economically transact and exchange through our inheritance, labour, goods, services, and other options. Sen's 'Value of Exchange' (well-being) theory predicts that it is the poor, less connected, and less powerful who are the most adversely affected by famine, poverty, and disasters. (For further reading please see Sen's books 'Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation' (1982); 'Development as Freedom' (1999); 'The Idea of Justice' (2009)