

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



The Only Thing Future Generations Care About

with Derrick Jensen

Big ideas from this session:

- A Language Older than Words, The Endgame, The Culture of Make Believe, and Earth at Risk
- The emergence and growth of Deep Green Resistance
- Finding deep inspiration and joy in prioritizing the wellbeing of future generations

Michael: Well, Derrick, thanks so much for joining in this conversation series, The Future is Calling Us to Greatness.

Derrick: Thank you for having me.

Michael: One of the things I've been doing at the start is just inviting all of my guests in this series, and so far I've had 48 abso-freaking-lutely amazing conversations. I've been looking forward to this one for quite some time. I've been inviting my guests to help us really get you.

Most people, I suspect, will probably be familiar with your work to some degree. Help us, take five, six, seven, eight minuets or whatever, but take some time, please, and help us get what you're most committed to, how you got to where you are, a little bit of your story. Whatever you're allowed to share, help us get Derrick Jensen.

Derrick: Well, the most important thing, I recently maybe a year ago had a primer come out of my work. I've got 20-some books out so my publishers decided it was time to put out sort of a greatest hits.

On one level, in terms of career satisfaction that's something I never could have dreamed of when I was first starting writing, that I'd actually have a greatest hits book. That was very satisfying. Of course, when they put out your greatest hits it's time to reflect on your career.

I have to say that in the way that really matters my career is a complete failure. What I mean by that is that the reason I write is for the salmon and for the meadowlarks and for

the frogs. They're getting hammered and the world is getting absolutely killed. The only measure by which any of us will be judged by the people who come after us is going to be the health of the land base. On that level we will all be judged complete failures.

I was doing a radio interview a while back and at one point the interviewer said, "Gosh, isn't it enough to just fight the good fight?" No, I'm actually not doing this to stave off feelings of internal insecurity or something. This is not a therapeutic effort on my part. There are tangible goals that I want to achieve.

I want for there to be more wild salmon every year than the year before. I want for the oceans not to be murdered. I want for there to be less dioxin in every mother's breast milk every year than the year before.

What am I about? I'm all about trying to stop this culture from killing the planet. If we want to go back to my own history, I guess I've talked a lot about how my father was extremely abusive. My brother has epilepsy from blows to the head and he broke my sister's arm. He raped my mother, my sister and me, beat everybody in the family but me. On that level I was introduced to the insanity and the violation imperative in this culture very early.

Even as a kid I was asking if his behavior wasn't making him happy, why is he doing it? There's one level at which that was part of my introduction to all these issues.

Another part of the introduction was in second grade they put in a subdivision right next to where I lived. All these beautiful meadows got converted to white box houses. Once again, I remember thinking even as a kid, "This can't go on forever." If you keep building houses then eventually the animals, the meadowlarks, the garter snakes, the cottonwood trees will have no place to live.

My point on that is that I didn't have sophisticated language but even as a seven year old I understood you can't have infinite growth on a finite planet. I made a choice as a child not to have children because there's too many humans. Over population, as such, has not been one of my primary issues. I prefer, actually, to talk about over consumption and also the violation imperative, the belief that there are no limits which underlies over consumption and over population. I'm more interested in talking about those.

On a personal level, once again, I felt so strongly about this even as a kid, it's like there's too many of us.

Michael: This is great, keep going.

Derrick: This is maybe more personal detail than people want but my father was very abusive and my parents got divorced. It was a very, very messy divorce, as it often is with

abusers. I kept saying, “I’m afraid to go see him.” I was sent to a number of psychiatrists to see if I actually was afraid or if I was faking it.

My point is, the whole point of me telling you that story, is one of the psychiatrists, one of her questions was, “If you could be a non-human animal, what would it be?” The first answer was I would be an endangered species so there’d be one more of them. That was when I was probably 10 or 11. The concern about non-human nature has been here my whole life.

Michael: Actually, if I can just interrupt.

Derrick: Please, please.

Michael: I’ve had several major mentors, one of them Joanna Macy, the other Dolores LaChapelle. My major mentor was Thomas Berry. He, of course, as those of us who knew and loved him, he was regularly reminding audiences that it was a formative experience that he had very young in life about a meadow, and seeing any economics, any politics, any way of doing things as humans that didn’t benefit that meadow was not a good thing. It’s interesting, hearing your story reminded me of that. Actually, I hadn’t thought of that in quite some time.

Derrick: Well, I think that that cuts down to I don’t remember Aldo Leopold’s exact line but it’s basically something is good to the degree to which it benefits biodiversity essentially.

Michael: Exactly.

Derrick: I did a talk once, 10 or 12 years ago in Ohio. After the talk this one guy came up to me who knew me because we’re both baseball fans. He knew nothing about my work. He just showed up because we happened to have contact over baseball. He came up to me afterwards and he said, “Do you know what you are? You’re an ethicist.” I think he’s right in a sense.

Really, the entire morality that I’m trying to build up through my entire series of books can all be summed up, I think, in something is good if it increases the health of the land base.

I was just reading this account by a very famous anti-imperialist who shouldn’t speak about environmental issues. One of the things he said is that one of the ways you measure biological success is through sheer numbers. I was thinking, “Wow, that’s just the Biblical go forth and multiple projected onto the natural world.” Actually, it’s the capitalist model of your success is measured by how many dollars or how many franchises you own.

It’s also just ridiculous because of course there’s going to be more worms than there are elephants, but that doesn’t mean worms are more successful. Then the real point is I

started thinking what would be a measure of biological success that I could get behind. I think a measure of biological success is a creature is biologically successful if their existence, in the numbers in which they exist improves the capacity of the land base to support life and the resilience of the land base, thereby ensuring their own future survival as well as the survival, of course, of the land base.

It's extraordinary to me. This is another thing. When I first became an honest to goodness activist I kept being hit by this line that those in power would throw out which is, "We need to balance the needs of the economic system versus the needs of the natural world."

I kept thinking that I wish that environmentalists would exploit that statement. What they're saying is that's an explicit acknowledgement that the economic system is harmful to the natural world.

You can't have an economic system that is harmful to the natural world that will last. If you have an economic system, if you have a social system, if you have a biological community, if you have anything the way to survive is by improving the health of the land, by your existence. That's what salmon do, that's what grizzly bears do, that's what bison do. That's what everybody does in their natural relationships.

Think about it this way. If you have 100% of health and the number goes to 99 and then 98 and then 97, eventually it gets to zero. What that says to me is you can't have an economic system that harms the land base at all.

Michael: Or at least not beyond the inherent repairability, the healing ability of the land base itself.

Derrick: Well, see, this could be an interesting discussion we could have except I think it would take up the whole time just for this. I think when salmon come up, if a bear eats a salmon that's not harming the land base, that's actually moving the nutrients. I know what you're saying. I think about this a lot. I just walked through the forest and I accidentally stepped on a snail. Had I not walked through the forest that snail would still be alive. Did I harm the land base?

Michael: Or cutting trees to build a house or whatever. I don't want to spend too much time on this because I think I'm actually pretty much where you are. I've seen you for quite some time now as one of the major voices in helping us move beyond anthropocentric ethics to biocentric or life centered or eco-centric ethics.

You quoted Aldo Leopold before. I think the quote is something like, "A thing is right if it tends to preserve the diversity, the stability and the beauty of the life community. A thing is wrong if it tends to do otherwise."

Derrick: Absolutely.

Michael: One of the quotes I use at the beginning of almost every sermon I've been preaching recently, I don't know if you know, Connie and I have been traveling for 12 years all over North America. This year we've been going along the route of the Great March for Climate Action. We've gone from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. We're now in Pittsburgh on our way to D.C. We've done about 80 of 100 speaking engagements.

The last four or five sermons I've begun my scripture reading from Thomas Berry. He says basically our predicament and our way into the future can be summed up in three sentences. "The glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth. The desolation of the Earth is becoming the great shame of the human. Therefore, all programs, policies, activities and institutions must henceforth be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship."

Derrick: That's beautiful.

Michael: I think it just says it. That's the essence, as I understand it, of a biocentric Earth-honoring, life-honoring perspective. The fact that we've had a political system, an economic system, a religious system, a scientific way of thinking that has fostered this not only profoundly unsustainable but to use religious language demonic.

That is if anything can be called evil it's pursuing our own wealth, our own pleasure, our own benefit knowing that it's destroying. It's the opposite of using up. It's destroying the potential for the soil and the forests and the life community to nourish future generations. If anything deserves the name evil, that's got to be it.

Derrick: I completely agree, I completely agree.

Michael: Anyway, I interrupted you. Continue, please. I just love your work and I love where you're going, so keep going.

Derrick: Thanks. I don't remember what I was saying.

Michael: You were sharing a little bit about sort of how you came to this and some of the personal issues that helped you see the violent way that we've been with the land and with future generations. The whole title of this conversation series is The Future is Calling Us to Greatness.

What I'm sort of trying to hold in a mythic way is that when we live our lives as if the past and past generations, many of whom, most of whom probably suffered or struggled or in some way sacrificed. Had they not we wouldn't be alive. We hold that in our hearts that we can forego

certain pleasures or comforts or wealth or whatever in order to be a blessing to the larger community of life and to the future.

This sense that the past is rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness is sort of a mythic mindset that I find to be really useful. Anything that you want to say related to this notion that the future is calling us to greatness and what you see, if anything, that's in the right direction? What do you see are the most important things that need to be done to be a blessing to the future? Or is that even possible?

Derrick: I don't have a lot of optimism. I am by temperament a fairly happy person and I'm happy in my own life. I'm not depressive. I've been having a really hard time getting up and doing the work the last bit because I can't bear what's happening.

I live on 40 acres of second-growth redwood here in northern California. It is wonderful and amazing and beautiful to see the land recover here since my mom and I moved here. The forest, you can tell, is so happy that we are here and I can tell you stories about that if you want.

One way that I know that the forest is really happy is there are ways that it has recovered that have been much faster than they were in the previous years. It's very clear. It feels like there are places where the forest is reproducing when it wasn't before. I feel like part of the pledge that my mom and I both made is that no trees would ever be cut. It's like, okay, we can have babies then if we know they're not going to be murdered.

One on hand there's that but on the other hand, just in the 15 years I've been here, the frog populations have collapsed and newt populations and salamander populations and daddy long legs populations. I used to see big, big clusters of them all winter. They cluster in places about the size of a dinner plate and then maybe sticking out about three or four inches. It's a big cluster of daddy long legs and that's how they hang out through the winter. I haven't seen any of those clusters for probably three or four years now. I still occasionally see a single daddy long legs somewhere in the forest.

So many beings. Bats, I used to see bats fairly often and I don't see bats anymore. Dragonflies, I used to see maybe 100 at a time over the pond right out there but I don't see them anymore. I see two or three at a time.

As you know, there was that report that recently came out about how wildlife around the world has collapsed by 52% in the last 40 years. Of course, we also have to recognize in the previous 40 years it probably collapsed another 52% and previous to that and previous to that. This is collapse upon collapse upon collapse.

I just saw an article in the paper a couple days ago about how the tule elk has recovered to 4,000 creatures and now the dairy farmers further down the coast of California are complaining because the elk are eating too much of their forage. I'm sorry, prior to the arrival of Europeans there was at least a half million tule elk in California. They're at less than 1% of their population and they're still complaining.

My point is that it's really hard. The thing that keeps me going, well there's a few things that keep me going. One of them is that, and this is true for all of my friends, too. If there is even a one-ten thousandth of 1% chance that anything we do makes a difference then we have to do it.

It's like my friend John Osborn says. He's a wonderful human being and a wonderful activist. He often says the reason he's doing this work is because we can't predict the future and he wants to make sure that some doors remain open. What he means by that is if grizzly bears are still around in ten years they may be around in 100, if they're gone in ten years they're gone forever.

Basically, and this is what I have, is to take an attitude of not on my watch. These creatures are not going down. Sometimes people call me the violence guy, which is really unfair. I do talk about fighting back but sometimes I feel like I should have written a 1,000 page book called *End Game for Pacifists* which would be 1,000 blank pages with one page in the middle that says, "Sometimes it's okay to fight back." That's the only thing they hear out of 20-some books of analysis.

I say all the time we need to use whatever means necessary and that includes, by the way, one of the things I do is there's a pond right out here. Every winter the frog populations are collapsing because of a mold called saprolegnia. It's not saprolegnia's fault because saprolegnia is ubiquitous. Saprolegnia's job is to take out the weak egg sacs. The problem is with the weakening ozone layer that's causing some amphibians to have weaker egg sacs. The saprolegnia is just doing what the saprolegnia does but unfortunately too many of the egg sacs are weak.

Just in the time I've been here it's gone from 2% mortality to 90% mortality on the eggs. One of the things I do, because of the weakened ozone layer UVB comes through and weakens the egg sacs. What I do is I get in the pond every weekend all through the winter and I bring in egg sacs and I raise them in the house. As soon as they hatch I put them back in.

Here's the thing. I hate cold water. I hate cold water more than anything. One of my first memories of my entire life is crying in the YMCA locker room because I don't want to get in the cold pool. When I talk about doing anything, any means necessary, that includes getting naked and getting in a cold pond.

The big distinction is not between those who believe in militant resistance and those who don't, the big distinction is between those who do something and those who do nothing. That's one of the things.

People all say, "Gosh, I have no time." I will admit that a single parent with three children probably has no time. I'll grant that. If you're not a single parent with three children and if you watch Dancing with the Stars, you've got time. If you watch a football game you've got time. I like sports. I'm going to go watch a baseball game at my mom's house tonight. That doesn't alter the fact that I've got time. We've all got time to do something.

That's one of the things. I do this series of radio interviews called Resistance Radio. One of the things I do at the end of every conversation is, "What can people do to help?" Basically one of the things I want to do is get people off their butts, do something. When I started, do you know the story about me and the gasoline?

Michael: No.

Derrick: This is a great story. Smartest thing I ever did. I'm in my mid-20s. I know that the problem is culture is killing the planet, I know that the problems are overwhelming, I know I'm just one person, I know I can't do everything so I don't do anything. Then I realize I'm not paying enough for gasoline. This is in my mid-20s, the mid '80s. I'm not paying enough to cover the ecological and social costs of gasoline.

What I decide to do is for every dollar I spend on gas I'm going to give a dollar to a local, not national, a local environmental organization.

Michael: That's fabulous.

Derrick: Except I didn't have any money. What I decided to do is I decided to pay myself five bucks an hour to do activism. I would get a tank of gas, which at that point would cost me about ten bucks. That means I would have to do two hours of activism this week. I started off writing letters to the editor. I was so scared when I wrote my first letters to the editor that I used a fake name. Contrast that to now where I'm calling to bring down civilization using my own name.

My point is don't let fear scare you. We're all so scared that the CIA or the NSA or the bad people or somebody's going to get us. Fine, use a fake name. I don't care, just don't let that be an excuse not to do the work at all.

I used a fake name at first, a bunch of fake names. Then after that I started doing anti-fur demos, anti-circus demos. I didn't let my ignorance stop me, either. I went to an

anti-circus demo and I'm just holding a sign that says, "Circuses are bad." Somebody comes up and says, "Why are circuses bad?" I said, "I don't know, ask this guy over here."

My point in telling that story is that we all have a million excuses not to act. Neither poverty nor fear nor ignorance were good enough excuses not to act. Hell, I walked in a gay pride march. I'm not gay but it doesn't matter because I thought it would be good to support them.

Then I started having so much fun with the activism I stopped keeping track of time. My point is it got me off my butt.

Michael: Derrick, one of the things that's sort of been a subtext to so much of what you've already been sharing, and it ties into another quote that I'll often use in my evening programs from Thomas Berry, he says, "We're talking only to ourselves. We're not talking to the rivers, we're not listening to the wind and the climate. Most of the disasters happening now are a consequence of that spiritual autism."

Your work and your writings have constantly been inviting people to listen not as a metaphor, but to really listen, listen from the heart and interpret what is the land form saying. What is the ocean, what is your creek, what are the dying frogs saying, what are the missing daddy long legs saying? How is the world through all of its myriad life forms speaking to us about what we need to do and what we need to change?

Anything that you'd like to say about how to listen to the voices of nature and how that can impact us as human beings?

Derrick: So many indigenous people have said to me that the primary difference between western and indigenous ways of being is even the most open-minded westerners perceive listening to the natural world as a metaphor. As opposed to the way the world really is.

People sometimes say, "Gosh, how do you know that you're not projecting?" You don't. We don't know.

Michael: It's a co-creative process.

Derrick: Frankly, I can't know your experience, I can't know anybody else's experience. I was thinking about this when I wrote my book *Dreams*. I'm trying to figure out what is projection and what is not. For crying out loud, I will never know what it is like to pee from a woman's perspective and I will never know what it's like to have sex from a woman's perspective. So what? That doesn't mean that I can't tell whether a woman wants to be sexual with me.

One of the things I'll do if people ask me, "How do you know a non-human's communicating?" I'll say, "First off, have you ever had a dog or a cat?" They'll say yes probably. I'll say, "Okay, how did the dog or cat let you know when the dog food dish was empty or when the food dish was empty?" The dog will look at the food dish, look at you, look at the food dish, look at you. Eventually you figure it out.

If you have a lover does the lover have to say, "Put this there?" Does the lover have to say in every moment using English, "This is what I want you to do next?" No, you read each other's bodies as well as communicating in English.

I've thought about this in terms of you and I are speaking English. I've got to tell you this story. One day I'm over at my mom's doing my laundry. I'm folding towels and my mom comes up and says, "Would you like some help with that?" Okay. We all have histories with our mothers. Many of those histories are similar. What I heard my mother say was not, "Would you like help with that?" What I heard her say was, "You're folding the towels all wrong." My mom says, "Would you like help folding the towels?" and I say, "No." My mom says, "Okay?"

My point is that in somebody I have literally known all my life we're speaking English and there's still this level of miscommunication. Now let's add to this let's say this is a situation. If someone says, "I love you," and the other person says, like, "What does that mean? Does that mean that now we're together forever? Does that mean that we just had a nice time? Does that mean that you want to see me tomorrow? Does that mean that we're like best friends?"

Even words like that can mean so many different things. Then just imagine what happens if you're trying to communicate with somebody who doesn't speak English. You can still go, somehow you can communicate I need to go to the bathroom somehow.

I was having a conversation with this Russian guy one time, 20 years ago. We both had German in junior high school so we're both conversing in German. I wanted to ask him if there were any bears where he lived. I started pantomiming. Then it was pretty funny. We both realized that the word for bear in German is bear, so we got there eventually. At first we were like, "Grr," and he was like, "Grr, does this mean NKVD, KGB, what's it mean?"

Just imagine if one person's speaking English and the other person speaks Swahili. There's going to be a lot more room for misunderstanding. Now let's move it so you don't speak human, one of you speaks dog and one of you speaks human. There's even more room for miscommunication.

Just yesterday I was in the shed at my mom's doing some work. My mom's dogs are running around outside. One of the dogs came in the shed. I thought he was tattling on his sister because I thought she had run down into the forest someplace. When I came out to check he was not

actually tattling on her but he was telling me to come out. Just like Lassie with Timmy's in the well. She had gotten stuck in the blackberries. He actually came in to say, and he didn't say. Basically all he could communicate is, "Come out, come out, come out." He still communicated.

Now what if you don't both speak mammal? What if one of you speaks human, which is mammal, and one of you speaks reptile? There's going to be even more room. It doesn't mean they're not communicating. That's one of the things that kills me about this whole human supremacism thing is that the notion.

One of the words that the human supremacists like to throw out at us all the time is we should never anthropomorphize. Oh my God, you're saying we shouldn't anthropomorphize but you are saying that all intelligences have to resemble ours.

Michael: Yes, exactly. One of the better arguments I've heard against that came I think originally from Elizabeth **Tutoris**. Oftentimes when we don't anthropomorphize we do mechanomorphize. That is we attribute mechanistic attributes.

Derrick: Yes, that is horrible, horrible. I never use the word ecosystems.

Michael: Really?

Derrick: They're not systems, they're natural communities.

Michael: Eco communities, yes, interesting.

Derrick: I don't use that mechanistic language. I do it when I have to, it's not like I'm a fascist about it. I try not to use it and I try to speak of communities. It's like people talk about ecological niches being destroyed. The creatures who, they always say that, the creatures who aren't adaptable, who don't have a lot of adaptability, will die when their niche is destroyed. That's really sort of blaming them for not being adaptable.

Instead I say what happens when you destroy the fully functioning mutual relationships upon which they depend. If you talk about destroying their relationships it puts the onus back on us. We also realize that if you destroy all the human relationship they're going to die, too.

I want to get back to the communication thing and talk about how I know that the land here has really, and this is just a great example of communication. When I moved in here I felt like and I just got the vibe that the land is welcoming me some. Not really welcoming but I was a good Nazi, do you know? It's like if you're going to have a Nazi here he's okay, but the land didn't trust me.

Then I caught this guy three days in a row cutting burls on the land, which is cutting off parts of the tree. I caught him on the land, kicked him off every day. Right after that everything changed. In the next few days first I saw the biggest pile of bear poop I'd ever seen. The next day I saw the biggest red-legged frog I'd ever seen. The next day I was walking by these bushes and a bird flew out and brushed my chest with its wing.

That's also the time that the land here started exploding. I feel like, and once again I could be projecting.

Michael: Yes, sure, whatever.

Derrick: I feel like that was when the land, I did something tangible to protect the land. It's just like a human being. What would you do, let's say evil enemy of the day from the United States conquers the United States. You meet one of these people and at first you're like, "I don't trust them." Then they do some stuff tangibly to protect you, okay, I'll trust them a little bit. Then you trust them a little more, a little more.

At this point why would they communicate with us when we have systematically pretended they don't exist? How this manifests for me on a day-to-day basis is a lot of my writing, a lot of the ideas I'll have when I'm taking a walk through the forest. At first I was thinking it was sort of a peripatetic thing, that the act of walking. Then I noticed that there's actually some parts of the forest where I get more ideas than others.

So often I can get stuck writing. I just walk out in the forest and ask the question and usually I get an answer.

Michael: I'm so glad that you're bringing this up. I've been saying now for the last couple years that I think the most important empirical discovery about religion in the last 100 years is that our brains inherently give human characteristics to what's other than human, what's more than human. That actually helps us relate to them.

Martin Buber's famous book *I and Thou* talks about the radical difference between an I-it relationship where we use someone or something or some aspect of nature or we think we are for our benefit, or we relate to it as a thou, to be honored, respected, related to, listened to. One is sustainable and one's not.

Also, James Hillman, the famous psychologist, talked about to enter myth we must personify. He was always critical of the idea that it's just merely the human brain that is personifying what's not human, that it's a real co-creative process and that we now of no culture that has survived any length of time that hasn't had an I-thou personal relationship to reality. All the Gods and Goddesses are personifications, not persons.

That's one of the reasons why I was grateful that just in the last week Julia Roberts and Harrison Ford and some of these others, these Hollywood big guns have started personifying. Harrison Ford, I don't know if you've seen it yet, but Harrison Ford speaks as the ocean.

Derrick: That's great.

Michael: It's like Poseidon speaking, although he's not using Poseidon which would be too easy to dismiss that's a mythic thing. He's the ocean speaking. Julia Roberts speaks as nature. It's kick ass. I encourage you to check these out because they're using that technique of personifying but it can also grab our hearts and move us beyond the rational stuff to really get that, oh my God, we are not more powerful than nature. We are subject to nature.

We are up against hard ecological limits and, by God, if we don't come back into a humble, harmonious relationship with nature we're causing our own extinction and condemning countless other species to extinction.

Derrick: Yes, I agree.

Michael: Anyway, I got carried away. Sorry about that.

Derrick: No, that's great. I don't really know what to say because I agree with all that. I want to say another thing about projecting just because I think that this is pretty funny. They're always talking about don't anthropomorphize. Do you know about, I'm sure you do, about plant communication and how they can communicate? If one plant is being eaten by caterpillars it can communicate with other plants and tell them to change the palatability and toxicity of their leaves.

Michael: Yes.

Derrick: There were some scientists who were getting mad at the plant scientists who were saying this. The people who were saying it wasn't communication, a couple of them were going, "Gosh, we don't actually think this is communication. Instead, we think this is plant soliloquies where the plant is communicating to itself, just basically talking to itself. If anybody else hears this and gets anything good out of it, then so much the better."

I started thinking. It was two middle-aged white guys who said this. Seriously, two middle-aged white guys who were saying that we should not anthropomorphize and were also saying that plants basically just talk to hear themselves talk and if anybody else gets a benefit out of it, so much the better. Project much?

Michael: Yes, exactly, exactly.

Derrick: I guess one more thing I want to say about the whole human supremacism thing. I'm just finishing a book on it. It just kills me. All the arguments for human supremacism are so tautological. Humans have large brains, therefore large brains are a sign of intelligent because, of course, we have to be the most intelligent.

The thing that's the most embarrassing about that is that humans don't even have the largest brains, by far. Our brain's about three pounds. Walruses are two and a half. Whales can be up to 12 or something. Elephants are much bigger.

Then they say it's not actually brain size that matters, what's important is brain size to body mass ratio. That's what's important. Okay, that's really embarrassing because humans are about a two and a half percent brain mass to body weight ratio. That's about the same as it is for mice. Songbirds are about 8%. The biggest is shrews at 10%.

Then, of course, what they say is that's not a measure either. Of course it's not because it doesn't make us number one. That's where I think a lot of this comes from. I guess where I want to go is that one of the things we're up against is the problems are not simply selfishness, it's not simply arrogance. I think part of the problem is that we have a huge void of one of the central rules of patriarchy. I'll back up.

Part of the problem is that there is a violation imperative that is at the core of this culture. If it exists it must be violated. This is crucial to supremacy and crucial to everything we're seeing around us. Violation is not an action that one does but it becomes ones identity itself. The reason is because you have to feel superior to others. What is the best way, the most convenient way to feel superior? [Inaudible 00:39:38]

What happens is it finds those who are superficially different, who are immediately identifiable as different. Such as women, such as people of other races, people of other species. Then you identify them as different. Of course, we're all different. Men and women are different. Trees and salmon are different.

The problem is not in noticing the difference, the problem is in perceiving the difference as a reason for superiority. Humans aren't superior to trees, men aren't superior to women, women aren't superior to men, whites aren't superior to blacks, to any other race, any other skin color. Those are all differences that are turned into ways to violate.

The point is you perceive yourself as superior to this other. How do you make sure that you're superior? How do you validate that superiority? You do that by violating them. If you couldn't violate them obviously they are inferior because if they weren't inferior you couldn't violate them. It ends up in this circular logic but it's self-enforcing.

Michael: One of the challenges, though, is that to some degree that in-group, out-group mentality is pretty damn instinctual.

Derrick: I don't have a problem with that. My point is that the in-group, out-group mentality does not have to lead to violation.

Michael: Yes, I agree.

Derrick: That's the problem. I completely agree. It's like so many indigenous nations, their name for themselves is the people. The problem is they didn't commit genocide against everybody else. In fact, the **Anish** and **Abit** called the Dakota their honored enemy. They might kill and individual and they might take some of their land but the existence, even of a person they considered their enemy, was still a necessary part of the universe. It would never have occurred to them to exterminate them. That would be unthinkable.

It's the same here. I'm not saying that trees are not different. I'm not saying that beavers can't eat trees. Of course beavers can eat trees. What they can't do is perceive themselves as superior to trees and therefore the trees are violatable and violating them for the sake of violation.

Once you understand the violation imperative, which I've done a terrible job of describing today, once you understand that it helps explain a lot of things. Such as no limits on scientific knowledge. We cannot be limited. Everything must be violatable. This is why they bombed the moon. This is why they have to send probes to the deepest folds of the ocean. This is why they have to blow up an asteroid. This is why.

If there's a limit it has to be violated. There's a great line by RD Laing, "How do you plug a void plugging a void?" The problem is that these violations are not actually solving the problem, the existential emptiness that they purport to fill. Because there is always someone if your identity is based on being superior to others your identity is, by definition, other oriented. Which means you can never be content. There can always be some other new person out there who could be superior to you.

The problem is perceiving this world in this hierarchy in the first place. That's just nuts. Once again, I'm sorry I've done a really terrible job of explaining the violation imperative. It's part of what we face. If I could say one thing that I think is central to all my work that I don't see a lot of other people saying, it's that the problems we face are not fundamentally rational and therefore they're not amenable to rational solution.

I'm not saying people shouldn't devise alternative economies. It's kind of like there was all this resistance to Hitler in World War II. I think sometimes of Carl Goerdeler. He was the mayor of, I think, Leipzig, who was part of the resistance. One of the main things he did,

he was tireless, but one of the things he did was he would spend a lot of time planning how the post-Hitler government would be. That's great to have something in place but you're kind of skipping a step of actually stopping the madman.

Years ago I did a talk at Bioneers. It broke my heart for a couple of reasons. The reason is the same. I was the only person that was talking either about psychopathology or power. I don't understand how you can talk about the murder of the planet without talking about psychopathology. I don't understand how you can talk about social change without talking about power in one way or another.

My point in bringing all this up is that the response by the culture to the melting of the Arctic ice caps has been lust for the increased resources available. It's not been terror. It's not been shame. The only way that I can make sense, years ago I talked to Luis Rodriguez who wrote *Gang Days in LA: La Vida Loca*. It's about getting out of a gang for the literature revolution.

One of the questions I asked him is why do all of these gang kids stand on street corners killing mirror images of themselves? He said it's because they want to die. The reason they want to die is because they're teenagers and teenagers are supposed to want to die because you have to die to your childhood to become an adult. Nobody's telling them this death can be spiritual and metaphorical.

There's a bunch of components to the death urge this culture has but one part of it is that everybody knows that this way of life is not sustainable and it's really miserable. It provides us with lots of goodies but existentially it's a complete mess. They understand this and they want it to end but they don't understand that the end can be spiritual and metaphorical. Everybody goes around killing everybody.

That's the thing, the thing I'm writing about right now on the human supremacism book is the mirror test of self-awareness. You know that test, right?

Michael: Yes.

Derrick: It's completely ridiculous on a whole ton of levels. Of course, a bat could say, "You can't hear your own echo location? You must not be self-aware." It's just absurd.

Leaving all those aside, my biggest problem with this self-awareness test is is this a big joke? You think humans are self-aware? Look in the mirror. When we look in the mirror we see God's gift to the universe. We don't see anybody is killing the planet. We don't see these horrible, horrible monsters.

One of the things I'm going to do. I'm going to say it's a weird version. It's like the mirror of Dorian Gray where we keep looking in the mirror and the mirror keeps showing us looking nice and clean and healthy and happy. It's like they call this the Anthropocene, lately they're calling it the age of man. That just pisses me off for a number of reasons, one of which is we're narcissistic enough already. Gilgamesh wanted to create a name for himself and so he cut down a forest. Now you're killing the planet, you name an age after yourself, of course.

The other reason's if we're going to do that let's call it the sociopath - I can't say it, the sociopathocene. Anthropocy, yes, we're number one and that's okay but let's tell it like it really is which is you've got to be sociopaths to kill the oceans. They're killing the oceans. This is not local. Yes, it's terrible when any species goes extinct and it's terrible when the frogs are dying in this pond. They're killing the oceans, the oceans.

Anyway, my point is that I think one of the things that's central to my work is we need to understand is that you don't just stop Ted Bundy by saying, "Hey, dude, that's a bad idea." Yes, we need to talk about it. It's wonderful that you're doing all these. It's so important, it's incredibly important. My books I think are important. I think that's really important.

That doesn't alter the fact that you can't stop a psychosis through reason. This is a culture that's completely psychotic. Do you know the story about the American Indians and the wolves and having the conference?

Michael: I don't think so.

Derrick: Soon after the Europeans arrived on this continent a bunch of the American Indians in the northeast, I don't know which nations, wanted to all get together to discuss this because they couldn't figure out why the whites were killing all the wolves. This doesn't make any sense.

They got together and had this big talk for several days. All they could come up with is they're crazy. Well, I don't think I can do better than that. My point, I think it's really, really important for us to recognize. Once again, I'm not saying we shouldn't try to point out reasonably thought errors and everything else, but I think we also need to recognize that the problems are much bigger than simply doing tweaks to an infrastructure.

Michael: Right, I 100% agree. In fact, one of the things, reading *Deep Green Resistance* recently and then also Naomi Klein's new book *This Changes Everything*, which I just think is one of the best books I've ever read in my life, certainly one of the most important. It just came out two weeks ago, I just finished reading it, listening to it, last week. Then I ordered the hard cover because there was about 50 or 60 times throughout the book, maybe 100 times, where I thought, "Oh my God, I've got to quote her or I've got to use that language," because I'm a preacher. I wrote the hard cover so I can re-read it and mark it up.

Yes, the talking, the clicking on something online to make your voice heard, to do whatever, all these are nothing. They give you the illusion that you're doing something when in most cases you're not. The changes that have to be made in the next five to ten years, it seems to me, one of the points that you've made many times is that do you really think? In fact, I'll let you say it. The way that you put it.

There are two things I want to ask you about before we conclude this. One is sort of this question that you always ask people and then the follow-up question around do you think things are going to voluntarily change.

Then the other is a passage that I've seen now in several different forms where you say, "Whatever it is that ultimately stops this, whether this, that or the other," and then you have this litany that's so kick ass where you basically say they're not going to care about this, they're not going to care about that, they're not going to care about this, they're not going to care about that. To whatever degree you have that internalized or memorized or can generate that, I'd love for you to do that.

Derrick: The people who come after are not going to care about how hard we tried. They're not going to care if we were nice people. They're not going to care if we signed petitions. They're not going to care if we voted Democrat, Republican or Green. They're not going to care if we wrote really good books. They're not going to care if we wrote really bad books. They're not going to care if we wrote really big books. They're not going to care if we did a whole series of interviews. They're not going to care if we did a whole bunch of preaching, no matter how wonderful the sermons are. They're not going to care how brilliant Thomas Berry was.

What they're going to care about is whether they can breathe the air and drink the water. They're going to care about whether the land can give them food that they can eat. That's the bottom line, always.

That's the thing. I am a firm opponent of human supremacism and I'm a firm opponent of anthropocentrism. Long-term anthropocentrism is actually biocentrism, too.

Michael: Yes.

Derrick: No bio, no anthro. This is one of the things that kills me about all of the so-called solutions to global warming. They all take industrial capitalism as a given. The natural rule is that which, not who, must conform to industrial capitalism. That's completely nuts because without a world you don't have any social system whatsoever.

Michael: Naomi Klein's saying the same thing. You'll love this book, I guarantee it.

Derrick: The bottom line of everything is the health of the land. I am embarrassed that I even have to say this because it's just so obvious. Without the planet to support you you don't have life. That's the second question. The first question, what was your first question?

Michael: The first question's related to when you ask audiences, "Do you think that things will voluntarily shift."

Derrick: That's a question I've asked for years, is do you believe we'll undergo a voluntary transformation to a sane, sustainable way of living. I've asked literally 10,000 or 20,000 people by now. Nobody ever says yes. One of my talks this one guy raised his hand and then he looked around and he said, "Oh, voluntary. No, of course not."

Yes, we will be living in a sane and sustainable way of living at some point or we won't be living at all, by definition. The only question what will be left of the world when we get there. Will it be a voluntary transformation? I don't see it.

One of the ways I know we won't see it is because of off-road vehicles. If we have to fight about off-road vehicles that's not even food, clothing or shelter. That's just go-carts for adults. We still have to fight to keep them out of endangered species areas. That's just nuts. You can come up with your favorite example of that. Some of the battles we have to fight are so crazy. No, I don't think there's going to be a voluntary transformation.

The next question becomes if you don't believe there's going to be a voluntary transformation to a sane and sustainable way of living, what does that mean for your strategy and for your tactics? The answer is we don't know. The reason we don't know is because we spend so much time pretending that we have hope that the system's going to miraculously change.

I'm sorry, but I don't want to leave the fate of the world up to a completely false hope. I think that what we desperately need to do, and this is what I tried to do with *End Game* and tried to do with *DGR* and try to do with all my work is we need to start by having a conversation about what it means for our strategy and for our tactics and then we have to move from there.

I just read this thing the other day where, once again, this anti-imperialist was saying there's no evidence that agriculture's inherently destructive. I guess 6,000 years doesn't count. He also said if agriculture's inherently destructive then we should all kiss ourselves goodbye. No, if agriculture's inherently destructive we need to have that conversation. We need to start talking about that now.

We are headed down a tunnel. We're driving a car down a tunnel at 100 miles an hour and there's a brick wall right in front of us. Do we say, "Oh, there's a brick wall in front of

us. I guess we should all kiss ourselves goodbye.” No, what you do is you hit the brake. I would rather hit the wall at 90 than 100 and 80 than 90 and 70 than 80 and 60 than 70.

What you do is you try to slow it as much as possible or bring it down in place. You try to do whatever you can to save as much life as possible.

Michael: When you look at just in the last 80 years, the developments that have unfolded around biointensive gardening, permaculture and a whole host of ways to relate to the soil that aren't rapacious, that aren't destructive, that aren't violent, that are in fact building soil and working with the land and attending to it and paying attention to what the land and what the soil and what the trees and vegetation is telling us.

I think there are ways of feeding not seven billion people, but I think there are ways of feeding humans on a much smaller scale that are still in alignment with **useufrucht**. That is relating to the land, relating to the soil in ways that allow future generations to thrive.

We're so far from there now that, yes, anything now seems so radical. I agree with you, we need to put on the brakes and stop or slow down.

Derrick: Yes, but the first thing we need to do is recognize that, yes there is indeed a brick wall, yes indeed we are traveling 100 miles an hour. It's like a doctor friend of mine always says, the first step towards cure is proper diagnosis.

We need to be honest. We need to be ruthlessly honest and eliminate false hopes but then examine our situation. Also, another thing I think we need to do is to start being more clear about what it is we want. As environmentalists this is incredibly important because environmentalism has been hijacked almost completely on an institutional level over the past 30 years and is no longer about trying to save wild places and wild beings and become about sustainability, become about sustaining this destructive culture, which is the worst thing possible.

One of my problems with a lot of the climate change movement, not all of it by any means but a lot of it is that there's an environmentalist friend of mine who says that a lot of environmental activists begin by wanting to protect a specific piece of ground. Then they question the foundations of western civilization. Once the questions start they don't stop.

There are so many climate activists who have not gone that direction. For years I have been wondering what is wrong with them. I don't understand why they're trying to go the direction they are. Until I suddenly realized that the truth is a lot of them aren't environmental activists. They didn't come from grassroots activism.

Before we do the wind down I just want to finish that point which is I think that we as environmentalists need to be very clear about what we want. Do we want to sustain the

society? Do we want to have jobs? I want to have more wild salmon. I want to have more migratory songbirds. I want to have more amphibians. I want to stop white nose fungus or white nose disease. This is very clear.

I think that's a really important question we need to ask, even before we talk about strategy, is we need to ask what do we want. We need to have honest questions about that.

I can work with somebody who wants to sustain this society. I can work with them in so far as we have agreements. Then when we have disagreements I'll have to not work with them. That doesn't mean I have to attack them, either. That's another big problem we could talk about. It just means I think we should be clear on where we are in alignment, where we're not in alignment, what do we want. I think every activist needs to be asking themselves, "What am I fighting for?"

Michael: Yes, I'm with you. There's one question that I've asked all my guests. It's a little off the wall but it's been getting some interesting results, which is if you could have any three people in human history alive today or at any time in the past to a dinner party where all four of you are together or in a one-on-one situation over a beer, glass of wine or hike or whatever, who would those three people be and why would you choose them?

Derrick: Gosh, sorry, I'll have to think on that one. The only answer I have right now is a very bad joke which would be Descartes before he came up with his whole philosophy so I could push him off a cliff. That's a joke and it's just going to hurt my reputation more. It's a joke. I'm telling everybody it's a joke, it's a joke, it's a joke. I don't want to kill Descartes. Although I'm sure lots of vivisected animals would be urging me on.

Michael: Yes, exactly.

Derrick: I don't know who. I think of Andrea Dworkin's one of my heroes. John Muir is great. I dedicated a book to Tecumseh.

Michael: When I interviewed Lierre Keith she wanted you as one of the three.

Derrick: That's nice, that's nice. Yes, I'll think on it. I'll think on it and get back to you. The other question was?

Michael: The other question is just anything that you'd like to say in conclusion and then where would you recommend people go to go more deeply into your work?

Derrick: Well, they can go to the library and find my books or they can go to DerrickJensen.org, D-E-R-R-I-C-K J-E-N-S-E-N dot O-R-G. So far as to what they should do, find what you love and then defend your beloved. Find out what your gifts are and ask yourself

what are the largest and most pressing problems that you can help to solve using the gifts that are unique to you and all the universe.

The world needs you no matter what your gifts are. Some people have gifts for organization. Not me. Some people have gifts for writing. Some people have gifts for speaking to people they don't know. Lots of people have lots of different gifts and we need them all.

Michael: Yes. Well, thank you, Derrick. This has been wonderful.

Derrick: Thank you so much. It's been great.

Michael: I look forward to the next time that we're out in California I'll let you know ahead of time and see if we can get together.

Derrick: Great. I look forward to that.

Michael: Great, thanks.

Derrick: Thanks.

Michael: Bye-bye.

Derrick: Bye.