



2 B R O 2 B?

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“To be or not to be?” These famous words by William Shakespeare pose an essential question of existence, a question that we face corporately and individually. Three hundred fifty years after Shakespeare, Kurt Vonnegut wrote the dystopian short story 2 B R O 2 B, in which society has mandated a deadly “cure” for overpopulation. More recently, the Marvel movie, Avengers: Endgame, wrestled with existence through the character Thanos’ use of the Infinity Gauntlet, vaporizing half of the world’s population in pursuit of universal balance.

These works of fiction raise the question: How serious are we about creating a future in which all life is sustained?

At no time in human history have the measurable threats to global extinction been clearer. Last week, the United Nations released a summary report on biodiversity that offers a stark warning of humanity’s impact on the environment. As the population tops 7 billion, activities such as farming, logging, fishing, and mining—combined with global warming—are altering the natural world at an unprecedented rate. A quarter of all species are threatened, and one million species risk extinction in the next decade.

Regrettably, climate is not the only existential threat we face. Atomic scientists have moved the “Doomsday Clock” ahead by 30 seconds—to 11:58 p.m. According to these experts, civilization is only two minutes away from destruction. The United States and Russia hold over 14,000 nuclear warheads—enough to destroy each other and the world many times over. The likelihood of a limited nuclear war is higher than ever as “smarter” bombs are developed to address the threat of rogue and non-state actors. Despite dire threats to life that even a small-scale nuclear strike would have, the U.S. and other nations spend millions on weaponry that have the capacity to end humankind.

Thankfully, there are many among us who—in the face of Hamlet’s question of whether to die or to dream—have chosen to dream. Last month, Rep. Alexia Ocasio-Cortez released “A Message from the Future” video (google it!) written

from an alternative future in which the U.S. implemented environmental protection measures and thereby shifted the future of our planet. It offers a beautiful vision of what could be. The Sunrise Movement and Our Children's Trust, as well as the Back from the Brink anti-nuclear campaign, are all efforts to dream and work toward an alternative future of environmental sustainability, justice, and peace.

The dystopian future Vonnegut depicts is not inevitable. We are not doomed by our current trajectory. We can change. Such change will require sacrifice, political will, and ultimately, imagination. If we are to be, we must choose to dream together.

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