

Our Species Suicide?

Barry Vacker

Associate Professor

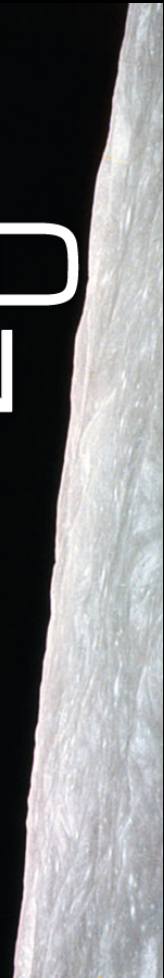
Dept. of Media Studies
and Production

THE END of the WORLD -AGAIN

Why the Apocalypse Meme Replicates
in Media, Science, and Culture



Barry Vacker



I teach a media criticism course

- “Media, Culture, and the End of the World”

I teach a media criticism course

Why?

- “Media, Culture, and the End of the World”

Extinctions and apocalypses *all over our culture*

Books, movies, TV shows



Extinctions and apocalypses *all over popular culture*

Books, movies, TV shows

- “Prophecy”
- Biological
- Nuclear
- Technological
- Ecological
- Cosmic



“It’s the end of the world!”

“It’s the end of the world!”

THE END
of the
WORLD
-AGAIN

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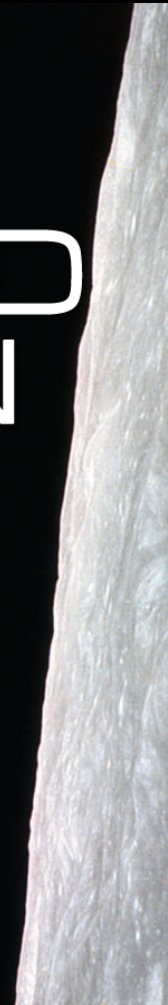
There are three possibilities

THE END
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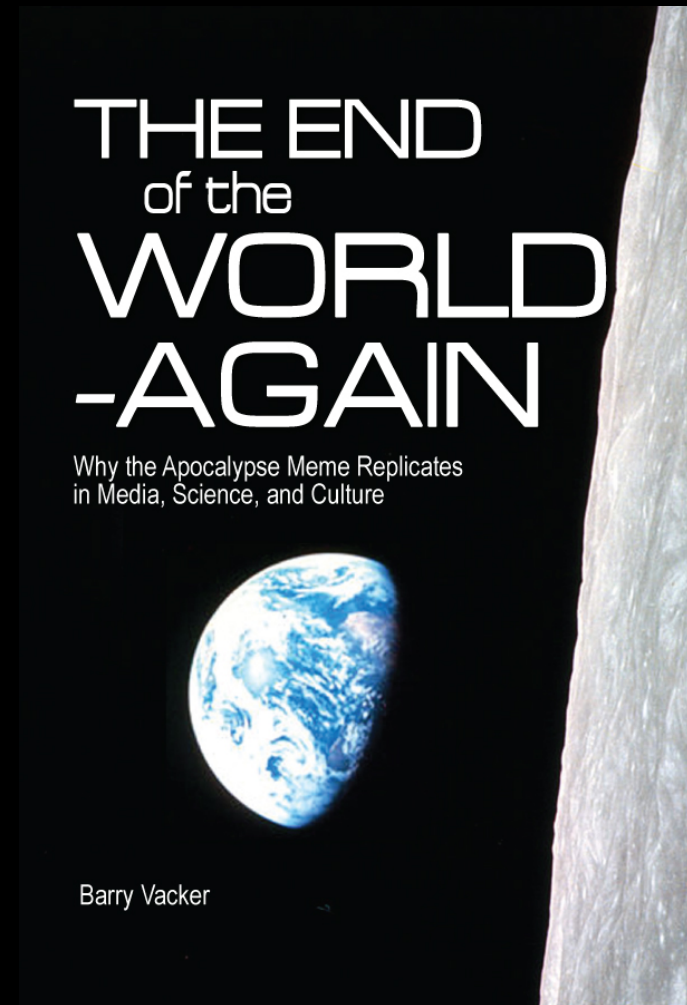


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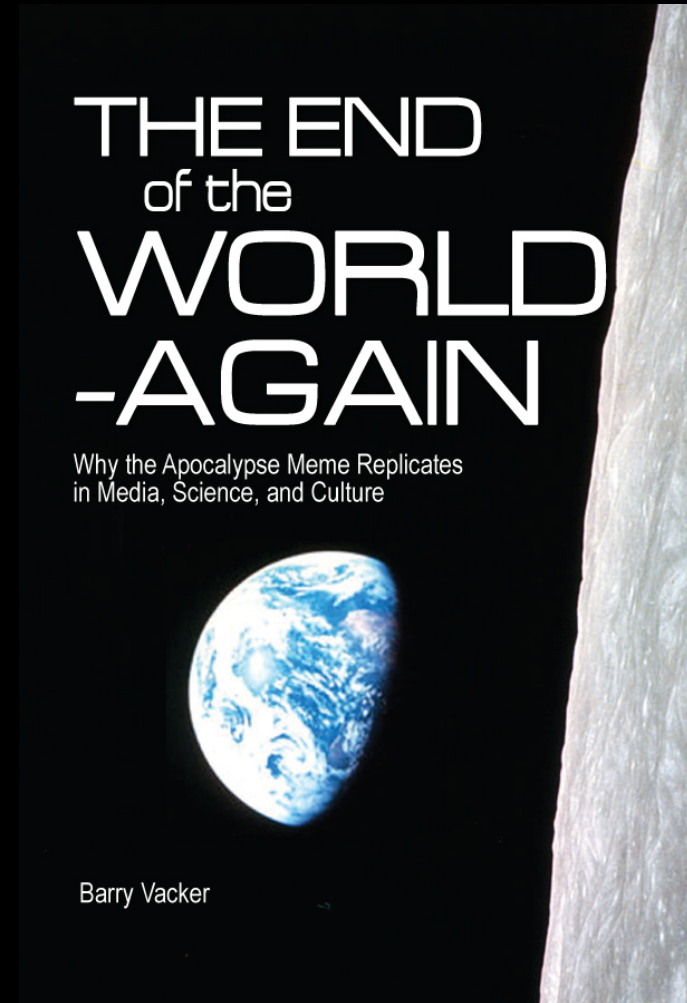
There are three possibilities

1. The end of the world **will** happen.



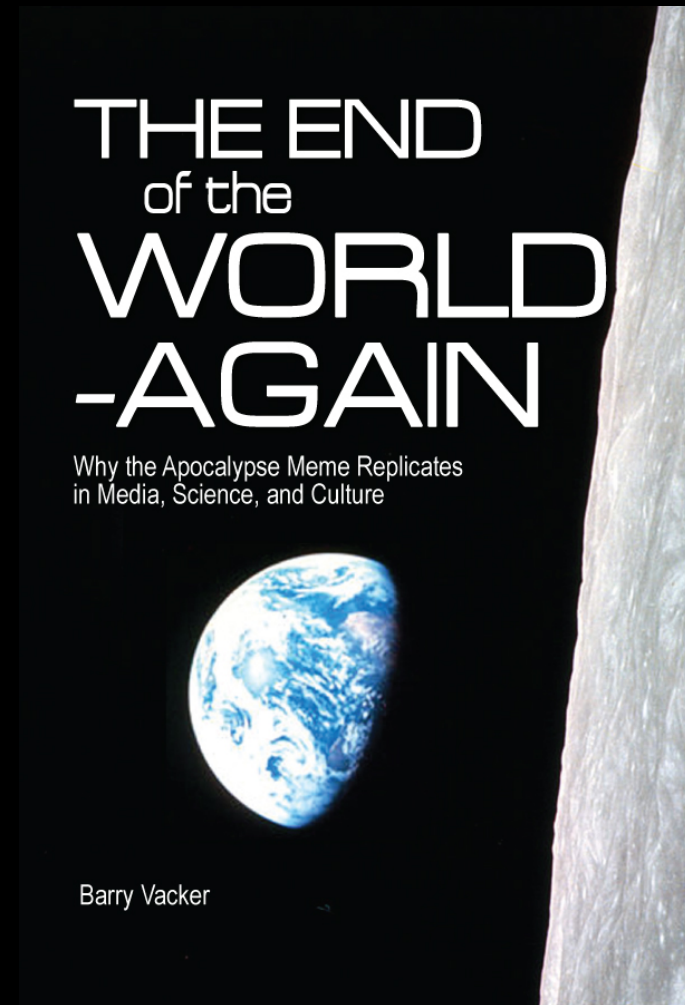
There are three possibilities

1. The end of the world will happen.
2. The end of the world will **not** happen.



There are three possibilities

1. The end of the world will happen.
2. The end of the world will not happen.
3. The end of the world has **already** happened!



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- **“Prophecy”**

Recall the Mayan “prophecy”?



World supposed to end on December 21, 2012.

“Weather” for the Mayan “prophecy”



December 21, 2012

% of humans who believed “prophecy”
would happen on December 21

- America:
- China:
- Russia:
- Canada:
- Great Britain:
- Germany:
- Global total:



Reuters-Ipsos, 2012.

% of humans who believed “prophecy” would happen on December 21

- America: 12%
- China:
- Russia:
- Canada:
- Great Britain:
- Germany:
- Global total:



Reuters-Ipsos, 2012.

% of humans who believed “prophecy” would happen on December 21

- America: 12%
- China: 20%
- Russia: 13%
- Canada: 9%
- Great Britain: 7%
- Germany: 4%
- Global total: 10%
- 700 million people total



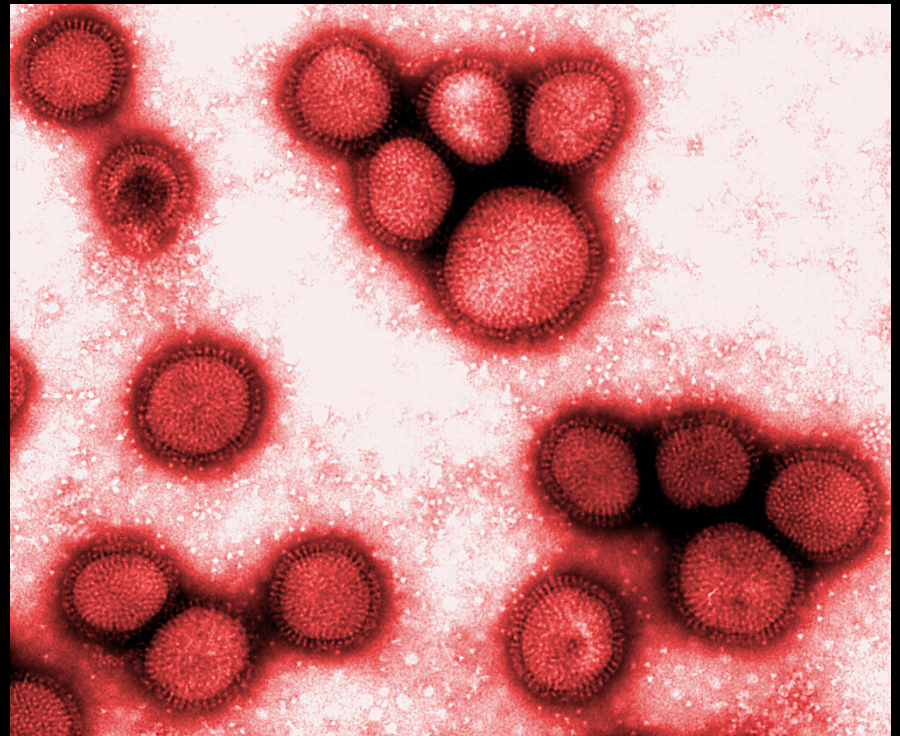
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Complete Nonsense *as are all so-called prophecies*



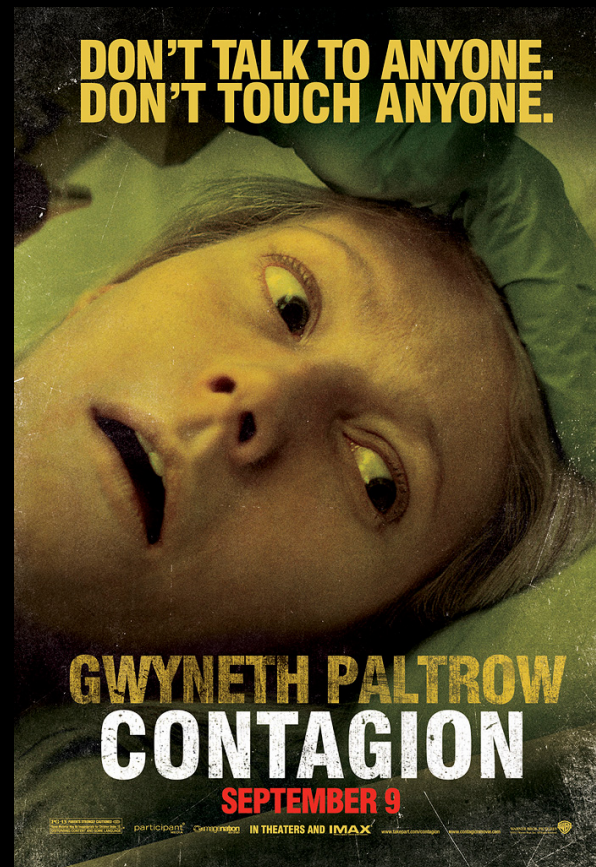
Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- “Prophecy”
- **Biological**
 - Pandemics, contagions, diseases.



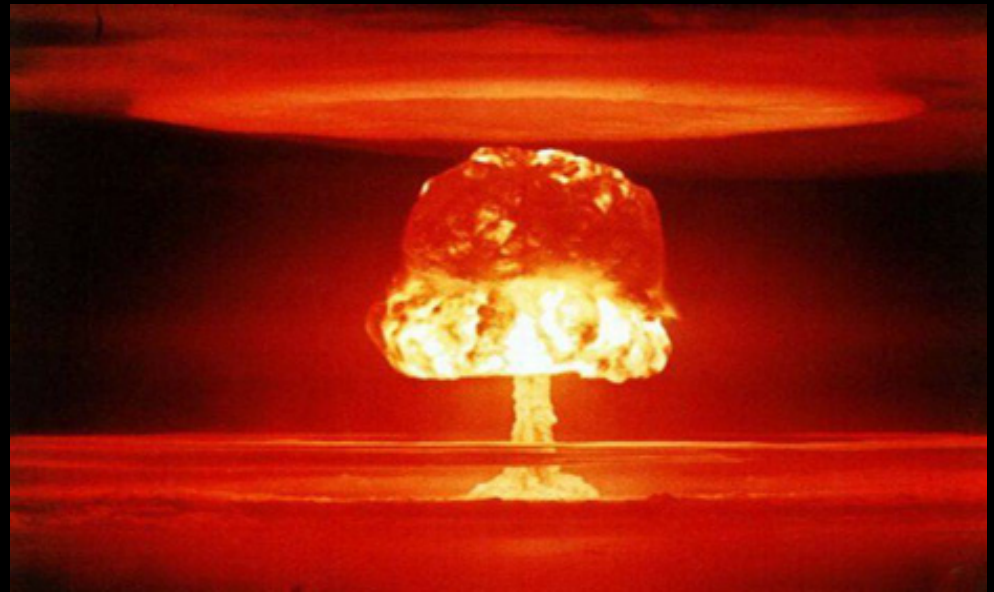
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- **Nuclear**
 - 22,600 nuclear warheads in the world’s arsenals.



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Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

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 - Our machines get out of control ... or our technoculture destroys ecosystems.



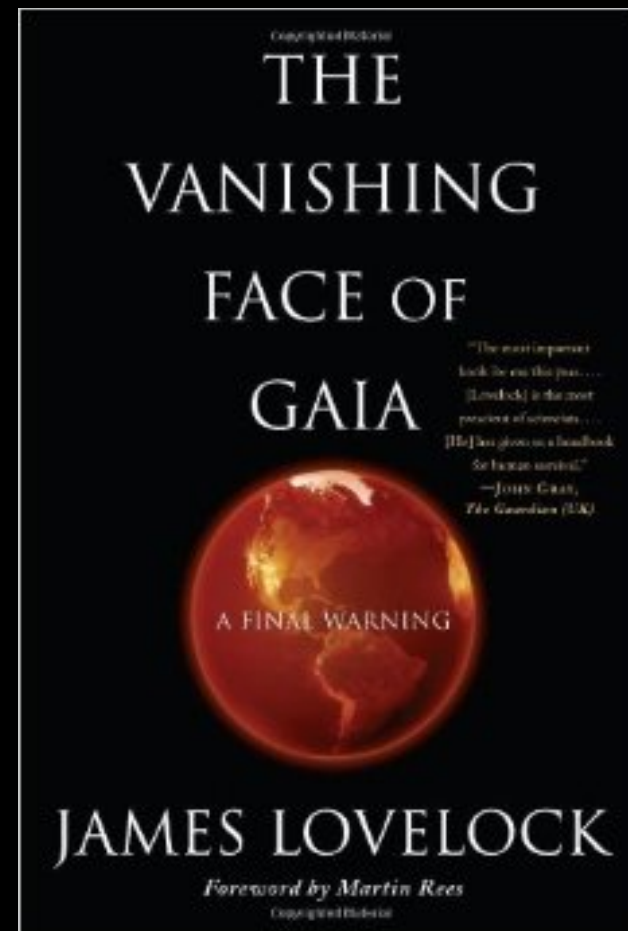
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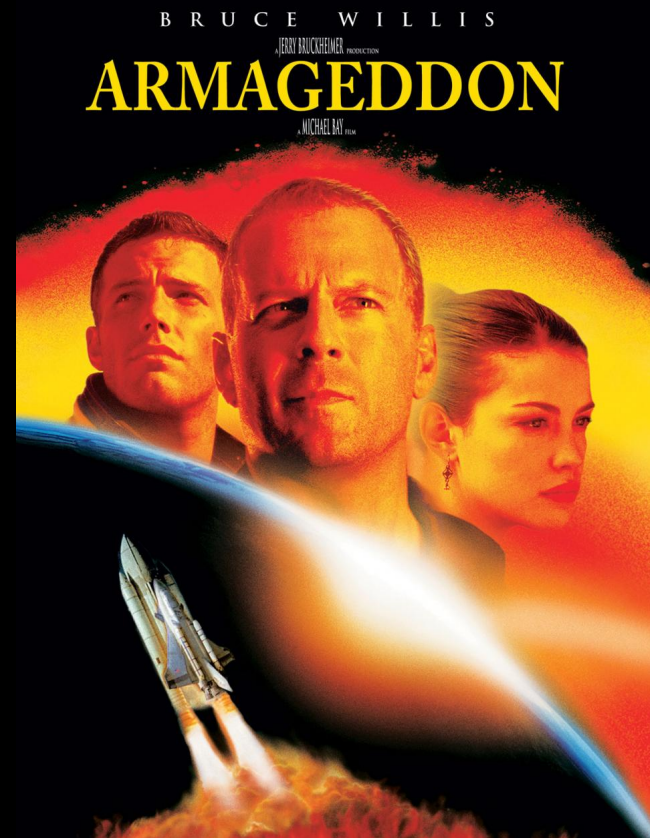
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- **Cosmic**
 - Earth struck by comet, meteor, etc.
 - Many **“warnings”**



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- Evidence suggests a **meteor** helped wipe out the dinosaurs.
- 65 million years ago.



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- First decade of the new millennium, humans spent
- **\$4 million** per year on finding comets/meteors.



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- First decade of the new millennium, humans spent
- \$4 million per year on finding comets/meteors.
- \$ per year on waging war.



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- First decade of the new millennium, humans spent
- \$4 million per year on finding comets/meteors.
- \$1.5 trillion per year on waging war.



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- First decade of the new millennium, humans spent
- Fraction of 1 cent per person finding comets...
- \$2100 per person on waging war.



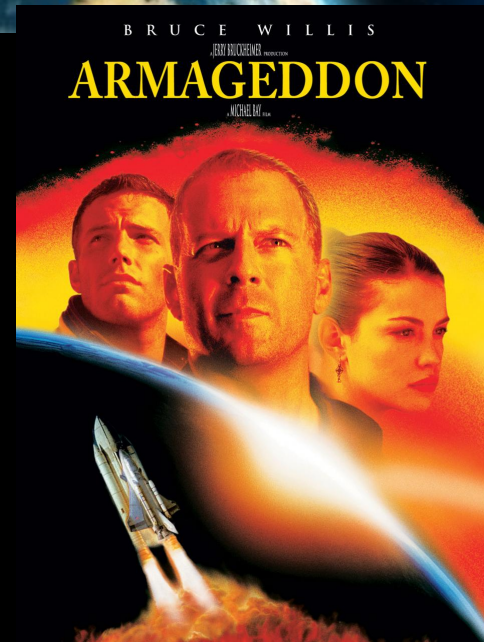
Think of it this way

- Humans spent:
- \$4 million on finding NEOs in 2009.



Think of it this way

- Humans spent:
- \$4 million on finding NEOs in 2009.
- \$550 million watching *Armageddon* in 1998.



Some Ways Our Species **Could** Die?

- ~~“Prophecy”~~
- Biological
- Nuclear
- Technological
- Ecological
- Cosmic
- Almost all of these are preventable!

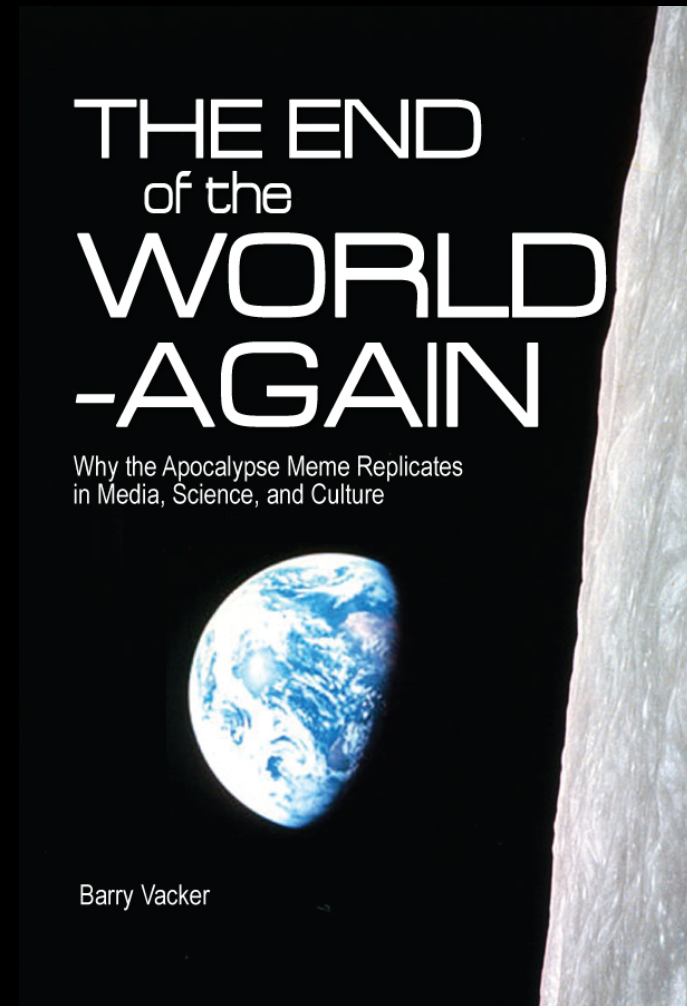
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- ~~“Prophecy”~~
- Biological
- Nuclear
- Technological
- Ecological
- Cosmic
 - Supernova, gamma ray burst



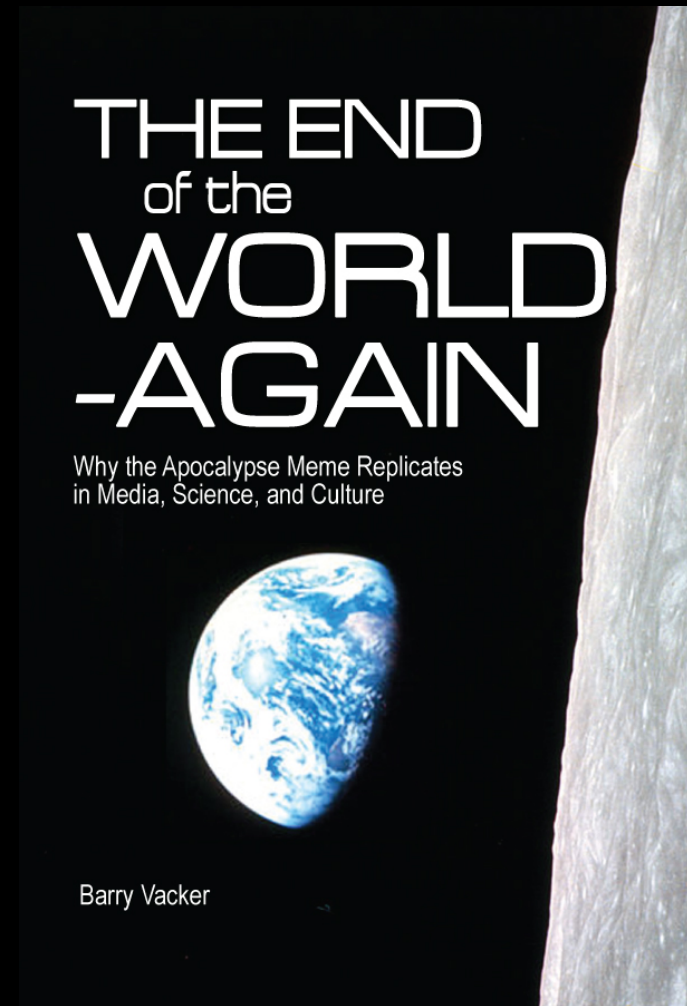
There are three possibilities

3. The end of the world
has **already** happened!



There are three possibilities

Our world is no longer
the center of the
universe





How Our Species **Will** Die?

- **Philosophical**
 - Intellectual suicide

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- Cannot survive the loss of shared meaning and destiny for our species.

How Our Species **Will Die**?

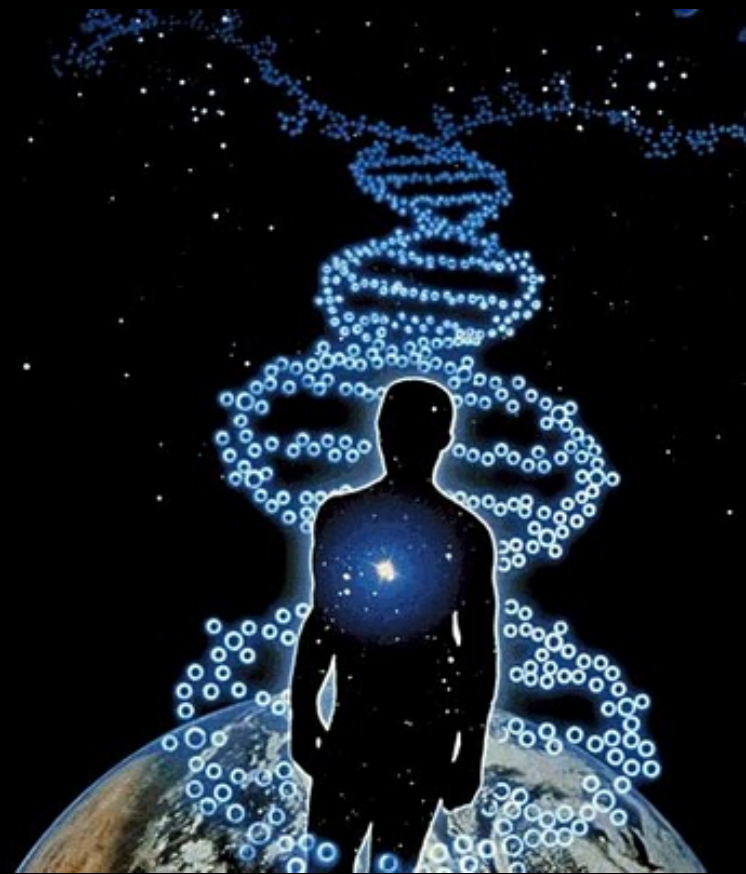
- **Philosophical**
 - Intellectual suicide
- Cannot survive the loss of shared meaning and destiny for our species.
- Caused by discovery of our cosmic non-centrality

How Our Species **Will Die?**

- **Philosophical**
 - Intellectual suicide
- **Failure to embrace:**
 - We are not the center of the cosmos ... not the center of life.
 - We are the center of nothing.

How Our Species Could Survive?

- Philosophical
 - New starting points
- Humans share:
 - 99% of the same DNA



- Philosophical
 - New starting points
- Humans share:
 - 99% of the same DNA
 - Our bodies are made of the most common elements of the cosmos.

Human Body Ingredients

The four ingredients below are essential parts of the body's protein, carbohydrate and fat architecture.



O

OXYGEN

65.0%

Critical to the conversion of food into energy.

C

CARBON

18.5%

The so-called backbone of the building blocks of the body and a key part of other important compounds, such as testosterone and estrogen.

H

HYDROGEN

9.5%

Helps transport nutrients, remove wastes and regulate body temperature. Also plays an important role in energy production.

N

NITROGEN

3.3%

Found in amino acids, the building blocks of proteins; an essential part of the nucleic acids that constitute DNA.

Other Key Elements

Calcium 1.5%
Lends rigidity and strength to bones and teeth; also important for the functioning of nerves and muscles, and for blood clotting.

Phosphorus 1.0%
Needed for building and maintaining bones and teeth; also found in the molecule ATP (adenosine triphosphate), which provides energy that drives chemical reactions in cells.

Potassium 0.4%
Important for electrical signaling in nerves and maintaining the balance of water in the body.

Sulfur 0.3%
Found in cartilage, insulin (the hormone that enables the body to use sugar), breast milk, proteins that play a role in the immune system, and keratin, a substance in skin, hair and nails.

Chlorine 0.2%
Needed by nerves to function properly; also helps produce gastric juices.

Sodium 0.2%
Plays a critical role in nerves' electrical signaling; also helps regulate the amount of water in the body.

Magnesium 0.1%
Plays an important role in the structure of the skeleton and muscles; also found in molecules that help enzymes use ATP to supply energy for chemical reactions in cells.

Iodine (trace amount)
Part of an essential hormone produced by the thyroid gland; regulates metabolism.

Iron (trace amount)
Part of hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in red blood cells.

Zinc (trace amount)
Forms part of some enzymes involved in digestion.

(Percentage of body weight. Source: *Biology*, Campbell and Reece, eighth edition.)