Global Warming Culture versus the Natural Future for Humanity, and the Real Denialism

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Are we the last generation of humans, as claimed by speaker and writer Guy McPherson?

So-called balance is exercised by the some corporate news media, catering mainly to science skeptics, to allow denial of human-generated global-warming. But there is a true balance to be met: while the progressive, science-minded alternative press does not reflect total gloom and doom, critics see this as denial of our near-term extinction. Balance in coverage must be between predicting near-term extinction from multiple climate forcings versus science-based consideration of separate, known factors in global warming that even together do not indicate runaway greenhouse effects beyond the IPCC's worst case.

This reporter does not subscribe to either view with confidence, due to uncertainties laymen should have, and due to a glimmer of hope that the Earth's complexity may leave more wiggle room than we perhaps deserve. It turns out that a hopeful stance may deserve more weight, according to a solution offered in this report. It is based on application of biology, soil science and collective potential for society. In contrast, the rapidly spreading doom & gloom position appears to be devoid of these considerations, and may be less scientific than many assume. However, this does not detract from the fact that there is no time to lose.

How bad it is

The White House released on May 6 the National Climate Assessment. The scientist team advised,

- If greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane continue to escalate at a rapid pace, the warming could conceivably exceed 10 degrees by the end of this century. [This spells no human life - ed.]

- “Climate change, once considered an issue for a distant future, has moved firmly into the present.”

Despite the increasingly obvious climate reality, the White House supports continued fossil fuels dependency for economic growth-at-any-cost.

With much more global-warming climate forcing "in the pipeline," double meaning intended, hopes for a long-term future for humanity have been fading noticeably in the last couple of years. The almost 1c-degree increase since the Industrial Revolution has been measured based on emissions up to 40 years ago only. No greenhouse gas emissions have yet kicked in temperature-wise from post-1974 emissions. Few people are aware of, or they forget about, climate-change lag.[1]

A safety valve has served to postpone terrestrial temperatures, largely accounting for the above-mentioned decades' delay: ocean sequestration, whose limit has perhaps been now maximized. Besides temperature readings, evidence is manifested in rapid, recent CO2-caused acidification of the oceans that prevents organisms' calcium growth at the base of the food chain. Yet, "Ocean acidification leads to release of less dimethyl sulphide (DMS) by plankton. DMS shields Earth from radiation."[2] That the living world is more complex than anyone can grasp should be consensus. Yet much is known that indicates the need for urgent action.

An ice-free Arctic Ocean can be a major tipping point for the global climate, and is expected to hit in perhaps a few short years. Methane spewing out of Arctic regions is just beginning, but the process and meaning are not entirely clear for climate model certainty. Other climate forcings include feedback loops such as sea-level rise on land vegetation and loss of the abledo effect[3] from reflective ice. All considering, we would appear to have more than a bleak outlook for a benign natural world for humans. If we also consider also the effect from eventual collapse of the fossil-fueled corporate economy now providing ongoing global dimming[4] which when it ceases will up global temperature average suddenly by another 1c, the result would be -- considering the other forcings -- an unimaginable and much less inhabitable Earth. It already is so, for innumerable species, as this period of the planet's history is seeing the sixth major mass extinction.

Humans have never lived during an ice-free Arctic, let alone a 3.5c-degree increase on the way before the end of the century if a turnaround is not somehow brought about. With climate and weather disruption interfering much more in crop production, unprecedented famine is the outlook among those who accept the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Yet, many believe the IPCC puts forth misleading optimism for very limited global temperature rise in a longer-than-reasonable time frame. A two-degree centigrade average increase in several decades as a top-out goal is believed by more and more students of climate change to be too optimistic, derided as part of conservative climate modeling. For it excludes some climate wild-cards disturbing to many scientists.

If climate forcings are in play as much as many fear, it may be eventually be widely acknowledged that our failure to end most industrial emissions in the late 1960s, with its back-to-the-land & consciousness revolution, was our undoing -- when we consider the subsequent added emissions that dwarfed all the previous industrial emissions and deforestation. The Population Bomb went off unheeded and is still exploding -- seldom mentioned in any press.

However -- yes, there's a "however" of quantifiable optimism -- one man's proposal based on calculations offers hope. Albert Bates is an author, Permaculture teacher and veteran of the 1970s appropriate technology movement. In his 2010 book The Biochar Solution he calculated that if everyone in the world planted one tree per day, in a matter of months the excess CO2 from the atmosphere would be removed and put back into the ground.[5] Bates told Culture Change on May 1, 2014, "If there is a glimmer of hope, it lies in soil and what we can do to assist accelerated photosynthesis."

Before delving further into hopeful and positive solutions for putting the brakes on global warming, featuring alternatives to lethal industrialism, let us consider that reports of our demise by mid century may be subject to bias or confusion. Examples from the climate science community include "The latest IPCC and NAS (National Academies of Science) assessment reports, in fact, deemed such a [methane bubble] release 'very unlikely' this century. One reason for that is that the Arctic has been this warm or warmer a couple times in the last 200,000 years, yet that methane stayed in the ground." [6] And, according to Michael Tobis, who holds a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin - Madison in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, and whose blog makes clear he is no friend of runaway industrialism nor an apologist of deforestation, "the biosphere as a whole is still a carbon sink, not a source." [6 again]

Climate scientists are collectively accused of both alarming the public and holding back on the nitty gritty of near-term gloom. The prospects of predictable, slower warming with devastating consequences, without human extinction, versus out-of-control warming, mass starvation and complete collapse along with our extinction within a few decades, are worth exploring for oneself. One can seize upon one sudden extreme aberration in weather patterns, confirmed by old timers' memories, as enough evidence to push one over to resignation and the most dire expectations. But however valid any piece of input or collection of news headlines is for our emotions and fearful imagination, personal confirmation about climate change should not blind us to remaining open to a systems approach to anticipating the actual potential global warming in store. Nor should gut assessments or a series of scary climate-related headlines set in stone an idea of a terminal predicament that would preclude consideration of ameliorating successfully the known climate trends.

Some dedicated, dug-in environmentalists specializing in peak oil and "Transition" don't buy into extinction of the human

species. In the Postcarbon Institute's latest newsletter, Senior Fellow and Board officer Richard Heinberg writes in his column The Anthropocene: It's Not All About Us,

"[F}uture geologists will be able to spot a fundamental discontinuity in the rock strata that document our little slice of time in Earth's multi-billion year pageant. This discontinuity will be traceable to the results of human presence. Think climate change, ocean acidification, and mass extinction... the deepest insight of the Anthropocene will probably be a very simple one: we live in a world of millions of interdependent species with which we have co-evolved. We sunder this web of life at our peril."[7]

It's as if we have a future of thousands more years!

The only denialism

The essential denial today is not about anthropogenic climate change, but rather that life is sacred. For the fossil-fueled death sentence to be carried out requires denial that the Earth is sacred. No amount of information or logic can sway a person or a society in such denial. Addressing mass psychosis driving Western Civilization appears to be the impossible challenge, so that sad events and changes to the Earth, along with a positive alternative vision, will have to be what brings about a culture change. Then we will no longer be fighting ourselves nor fighting nature, and restoration will prevail at least in terms of effort. To help get there, many believe, we make changes because we see something potentially better for ourselves, not because we are driven from fear.

The hope for geo-engineering our way out of becoming toast is related to the industrial mindset of accepting more global warming without altering course, because adaptation is attractive. The hope there is for continued material wealth generation and the joys of consuming. This is not to say adaptation is wrong; it will be essential, for example as sea levels rise and species try to migrate to the poles. Letting geo-engineering and adaptation be subjects for future columns and debates is this reporter's policy, because immediate approaches to minimize future warming give more bang for the buck and are the more ethical course.

Past years' Culture Change columns have highlighted tools for sustainability and models of sustainability. Even though we 1990s road-fighters and depavers didn't see our campaigns catch on like wildfire, nor saw our wider network's efforts make great strides with their urban gardening and eco-villages, we were happy to embrace these and other approaches. Why? Doing them made us feel good, but mainly they were essential to establish blueprints or historical examples for post-collapse society. We could not quite generate society-wide discussion, planning or support for sensible survival strategies that, if applied en masse, would save people money, improve local economic self-reliance, provide solidarity and conviviality, and spread practical skills for living closer to nature, without car-dependence, plastics profusion in the home or reliance on long-distance, corporate food. Yet, some features of a sustainable society still rose to the surface and are spreading today, such as farmers markets. And there is palpable excitement for sail transport to expand almost infinitely.

Dead end of both technological manipulation and reign of cheap petroleum

The Age of Information has astounded and overwhelmed almost everyone who saw the rapid transition to digital technology and telecom networks. The less attractive byproducts -- that may principally stem from competing for diminishing job security -- have hit almost everyone pretty hard: stress, loss of leisure time and electronic screen-addiction. A related consequence of unquestioned technology proliferation has been more social control: people with cell phones are in a fashion in a cell, paralleling the rising imprisonment trend in the U.S. Mass surveillance is another consequence. The more technological manipulation there is, especially when centralized and combined with billions of dollars of capital, undomesticated human freedom is endangered. We have run from Mother Nature, so, as Neil Young sang four and a half decades ago, we have "Mother Nature on the run." The biggest issue with the Age of Information is that no Age of Wisdom can get onto the horizon. We are distracted by clutter, speed and glitz made desirable by advertising for the herd.

The pervasive, complex systems happen to rely on petroleum today, just as the steel and brick industrial monolith of decades ago was built thanks to cheap oil. The growing subsidy to petroleum and unaccounted "externalities" from energy extraction cannot continue for long. Complex systems and corporate hierarchies are not only vulnerable to disruption and chaos from financial meltdown, social unrest or oil-supply crisis; they are inherently suspect and unnatural. If you don't believe it, why are they enforced, often brutally, and claimed to be the only way to live and work? It is established that mutual cooperation is more efficient than competition, and rested, healthy people work better than sick, stressed people. But the industrial system of technological control over humans and nature, for short-term gain, is sacred to the status quo's business-as-usual "ethic." There cannot be very rich people without very poor masses of people. Relatedly, there can be no isolated manipulation-of-nature adaptation to global warming and climate change for the long haul, without giving up on nature and human potential. We have to all work together, with nature.

This is why a natural future is inevitable, assuming a few key changes that are as simple as they are challenging. Our preferences for, or alternatively fears of, overdue changes may be consistent with a natural future featuring humanity. Simplicity and decentralization are countertrends strengthening today, and can appear most attractive and easiest to succeed with. At the rate U.S. society and others failing to thrive are struggling, the anti-nature control-mentality is letting everyone down and appears to be spinning society out of control.

An article in Culture Change in 2011 offered a list of strategies and skills for proactively changing lifestyle and politics at the grassroots: Getting There (Part 2): Bringing to Life a Transformative Culture. Seventeen points are described that are consistent with the 10 steps in our Pledge for Climate Protection circa 2000 [see Further Reading]. Unsurprisingly, these points and steps don't help the GDP. For people to live well without being consumers and contributing to their own demise, instead being in touch with nature through lasting community, is not the corporate agenda. And precious little is offered by central governments. We can, however, reorganize ourselves if we make the effort to get together and let go of isolation. Walls do not exist in nature, or they did not prior to civilization. We need to tear down the walls before they crumble down on top of us when we are ill prepared.

The only denialism all along, since Western Civilization achieved the ability to annihilate everything, has been the refusal or inability to see life as sacred. To see the sacredness of nature is our only way forward.

Global warming culture versus nature's benign potential

Until I can no longer find the strength to lift my hand, I'll fight global warming culture. I'll do it by presenting alternatives and living them as much as possible.
Hardly any people caught in the modern artificial environment call it global warming culture, but by now everyone knows they're surrounded by it to some degree. Global warming culture can only be destroyed by its own operation. The trouble is how much it is taking down with it. As people face it, whether they be urbanites unaware of nature's totality, or people enjoying pristine nature, they cannot countenance destruction of the whole world. So they are primed for rejecting the increasingly discredited, vile global warming culture. Is it a time of action, resignation, or celebration? Is nature's benign potential something desirable over the allure of going shopping? It's up to us.

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Notes

1. Climate lag: skepticalscience.com

2. Nature Climate Change, 25 August 2013: nature.com

3. "The albedo effect": skepticalscience.com
"Papers on the albedo of the Earth": agwobserver.wordpress.com

4. Global dimming: realclimate.org

5. From The Biochar Solution, Chapter 27:

"If everyone in the world planted one tree each day, by the end of the 2nd year, the sequestered CO2 would exceed the global emissions. Meanwhile, the trees you rst planted are now older and bigger. So by year 3, the sequestered CO2 is more than three times emissions. By year 4, it is ve times emissions. By year 5, we sequester seven times the emissions. By the end of year 6, we are annually sequestering more than ten times the 2009 CO2 world emissions...

"The principal obstacle is not lack of manpower, however; it's the availability of land. Twenty-three million planters could plant enough trees to offset global CO2 emissions in two months, but they would use up all the fallow arable land in the world. Where do we send the tree planters after all the unused arable land is planted? Deserts cover a third of the Earth's surface. Climate change is causing deserts to expand at an accelerating pace. Expanding deserts disrupt evaporation and rainfall patterns, desiccate forests, and grow steadily larger, changing regional climate. And yet, what is true about deserti cation affecting climate is also true about de-deserti cation. By greening barren lands, the hydrological cycle is restored, ecosystems are re-invigorated, and carbon is steadily removed from the atmosphere..."

6. "How Guy McPherson gets it wrong": Fractal Planet and "McPherson's Evidence That Doom Doom Doom": Planet3.org "McPherson totally ignores any ameliorating feedbacks... (Mcpherson) demoralizes people who might otherwise have been active, so he's not doing us any favors. He may have more cultural affinity with environmentalists than with oil oligarchs, but he's doing them a lot more good than he's doing us."

7. The Anthropocene: It's Not All About Us
Museletter 264, May 2014

Further reading

Take the
Pledge for Climate Protection

National Climate Assessment coverage: The New York Times felt compelled to put it in its ENVIRONMENT category:

U.S. Climate Has Already Changed, Study Finds, Citing Heat and Floods,
by Justin Gillis, May 6, 2014

West Antarctic Ice Sheet's Collapse Triggers Sea Level Warning

"Devastating" Impacts of Climate Change Increasing, a comprehensive report by Dahr Jamail, Truthout.org

Guy McPherson's April 30, 2014 radio interview on projected
human extinction,:, Santa Cruz, California "Tangerine Dream" show

Living free and off the grid: What Choosing Poverty Looks Like - NBC News

Peak Moment Television is a long-running video documentary series on sustainable living: peakmoment.tv

The Sail Transport Network offers hope for post-oil, post-global-warming-culture connectivity between bioregional economies.

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"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest -- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." - Albert Einstein