

Fallibility

by Bill Herbst

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I've read a number of articles on very thoughtful and highly intellectual climate science web sites that argue against "climate-change doomers" (a category with which I identify) as being people who are deluded and dangerous. Here's a link to one such article that is, I think, worth considering:

<https://www.scientistswarning.org/2020/06/04/dimming-dilemma/>

Basically, the doomer position is that it's too late to save ourselves (and the current life-system on planet earth). Where climate change and a warming earth are concerned, as well as possible mitigation measures, doomers have concluded that we're damned if we do, but also damned if we don't.

My own position is that all the talk of "Green Energy" — electric cars, wind farms, millions of new jobs in the clean energy sector, and the mainstream hope that the "American Way of Life" can continue basically unchanged — is just pissing into the wind. The problem I see goes a lot deeper than just burning fossil fuels for energy. It's about economics, finance, consumerism, and our whole wacky obsession with endless and infinite growth. It's about misunderstanding joy and what contributes to happiness in a world where suffering is inevitable. Our hysterical desperation in pursuing that the wrong way (through the acquisition of wealth and accumulation of material goods) is now literally killing the life-force of the planet. Basically, it's a spiritual misconception at the very core of our understanding about how to live in the material world.

Sure, our civilization's continuing denial about the dangers of a warming earth, along with our dogged persistence on releasing ever-more greenhouse gases through burning fossil fuels does indeed suck. It's goddamned stupid. But, to my way of thinking, that has to do with human nature — especially our habitual neural programming — more than with alternative solutions. We already know what to do. We just don't want to change.

But what if I'm seriously deluded, as these articles I've read suggest? Perhaps I am indeed suffering from *Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Maybe I *am* guilty of catastrophic thinking that's fallacious and dogmatic certainty that's wrong-headed. Put simply, what if I'm wrong?

All I can say to that is, well, maybe, but I don't think so. That's hardly a cogent defense, but it's about all I can offer. I can't "prove" that I'm sane and that my

head is screwed on straight and my heart is healthy. Hell, if those latter conditions were 100% true, I wouldn't be as upset as I am.

Sadly, though, everything I see in the world (and I do mean *everything*) leads me to reject the arguments of these articles. The most damning elements of what I perceive come not from the realm of climate science and the urgent need to cool down a warming earth, but instead from a thousand different facets of ordinary human experience. Yes, global dimming from the aerosol masking effect worries me, but not nearly as much as the cumulative evidence from the built-in degradation of "human nature" that operates everywhere in our day-to-day lives, in every facet of our activities and all the various dimensions of our experience — sex, romance, family, health, illness, food, recreation, entertainment, work, ambition, status, social acceptance, etc. You name it, and whatever it is looks increasingly screwy to me.

Basically, I think we're fucked because we've been that way from the get-go. Living as humans did for almost 200,000 years — in small, nomadic kinship bands of hunter-gatherers, where the total global population of human beings remained relatively small — worked fairly well, all things considered. No, we were never in perfect harmony with nature, but no species of life ever is, and our cumulative footprint on the environment was relatively slight and, if not totally benign, at least minimally toxic. Yes, all the many terrible facets of human nature were present and in evidence, throughout our behavior and interactions (human and otherwise), but their impact was limited mostly to localized suffering. The damage we did was mainly to ourselves and whatever was in the immediate environment around us. So yes, we could and did routinely fuck up by doing stupid, crazy shit that was terrible, but it didn't matter much in the long run or the Big Picture. The harm we did was limited in its scope.

Now, however, that's changed. With 7.8 billion human beings currently drawing breath on the planet and the juggernaut of modern industrial/technological civilization dramatically and exponentially amplifying the negative effects and poisonous impact of our worst impulses, the damage is no longer limited just to human or local suffering. Now our foolishness is disrupting the life-giving ecosystem and literally destroying the natural world. The earth can no longer suck up our collective insanity and detoxify it. We have whomped up Death Culture into a Black Hole that sucks everything into its maw.

Look, friends, I'm perfectly willing to admit that I'm all fucked up. Not only am I not Enlightened, I'm barely functional, and even less so now in my old age than earlier in my life. Yeah, I think I've matured considerably over my seven decades, but that's countered by my increasing decrepitude and dysfunction. Any additional wisdom I've earned is, I fear, offset by my diminishing ability to do almost anything kinetic in the real world. Thank God I can have groceries delivered now. In other words, I'm very aware of my fallibility. So, the idea that I could be wrong is ever-present in my consciousness. And it would be terrific if it turns out that I am indeed wrong about the future prospects for our species.

That said, I worry deeply that humanity may be screwed. The wonderful qualities that human beings express don't seem to me sufficient to neutralize, balance out, or overcome our worst impulses. Please understand, though, I'm not arguing that I'm right about this, nor trying to convince you to believe what I believe.

I'm just saying that the first two decades of this 21st century have been really disappointing to me. For all my personal liabilities, I've done pretty well over that time. My work as an astrologer is arguably the best it's ever been, I got to live in a beautiful place on the Oregon coast for nine years, I have more money than ever before thanks to a small family inheritance, and I'm still here in spite of everything. I've also let go of a lot of stupid shit that I used to be compulsive about. So, for me personally, I can't really complain.

But the Big World around me? Jesus, it's gone to hell in a hand basket. By "the Big World," I mean mainly America, since that's the country I'm from and the culture I know. I'm not and never have been a world traveler, so I'm not as savvy about what's going on in other countries. Here, though, it looks to me like every major decision we've made in America over my lifetime has been either wrong from the start or tainted despite whatever good intentions we may have held. And I'm not just talking about certain arenas or a particular segment of the American population. Nope, the entire project of the American Experiment has succumbed to corruption. I am hard-pressed to name anything that I think has improved. Everything I might identify as better turns out on closer examination to be a cover for something diabolical and venal.

The insanity is just downright tragic. Worst of all, I don't see any of the craziness as new. From where I sit, this madness was present in Americans for as far back as we care to look, but masked and covered by a better-looking veneer. We dressed for success and got away with it. Now that veneer has worn thin and peeled off. The mask is gone, and all the previously hidden, stored-up and rotting underbelly is being vomited up.

Could this be a sign of healing, like a purge of toxins, that might foreshadow an improved health prognosis down the road? Maybe, but I have my doubts.

Once again, I come back to the possibility of being wrong. I don't want my negativity to leave a bad taste in anyone's mouth. On the other hand, I don't wish to hide my true feelings or pretend that I think humanity will be fine.

One hypothesis that seems likely to me is that the collective zeitgeist may be infected, as if something poisonous but invisible were in the air or water. That's a metaphor, of course — I don't mean to imply a literal conspiracy, but rather a kind of collective pressure that's built up over time and is toxic. Whether or not that's the case, do whatever you can not to get swept away by the insanity tsunami. If possible, move to higher ground and take shelter. Continue the inner work of Right Being and Right Action as well as you know how.

At this point, that may be about the best any of us can do.