

Title: The Earth and It's Passengers - The Doctor's Ear

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Our lives are not critical to the earth's health. Yet the earth's health is critical to ours.

Although I believe that a very large portion of the current climate changes stem from human activity, some natural changes are occurring because that are beyond the jurisdiction of human activity. But it doesn't matter. The earth's climate is changing. The earth will survive a major change in its geological make-up. We however, may not. Our complex society is based on the current geological make-up, but we need to seriously think about the "how and if" of our own survival as the geography changes.

**This project is about those who get on Noah's' Ark and those who do not.**

Whether climate change is a natural or human-induced phenomenon is in many ways moot. We must, however, be incredibly far-sighted to reduce the human burden adding to those changes. After all, why make a worsening situation even worse.

There is a common but dangerous inclination that because we, as people, are so tiny compared to the size of the planet, that the 'earth-to-me' size ratio makes it hard to conceive that the few Styrofoam cups I use will frankly make a negative difference. This image may not even change by looking at the refuse after a nearby national league football game or the daily bulk of garbage collected by the New York City Sanitation trucks. The quantity is incredible, but the psychological response of the earth-to-me size ratio is a powerful attitude generator. Yet others may look at this burden of garbage as the an unavoidable cost of living. The quantity of garbage is fixed, but our reactions to it are not.

Nature has usually found ways to correct our activities. But nature never planned for plastic. Nature never planned for the massive burning of oil at the same time that countless acres of forest were being reduced. If the trees were our protectors, then we are taking out the buffers at the same time we are increasing the toxins that the buffers removed. We have grown into an addictive cycle that destroys our own futures. It has the stench of profligacy and hedonism.

Plant trees. Plant them everywhere. Use the land in the middle of the superhighways. Plant trees in all the highway interchanges where huge

circles of land would be the home of countless thousands of trees. Everyone with a open area in their backyards - plant a tree or two. We think nothing of replacing an air conditioner filter to improve the air. Let's use trees to give us back the air and remove the carbon dioxide.

The problem has other aspects which are chilling. The southern third of Florida may be under water in less than one hundred years. Where will all the Floridians move? How do we suitably and wisely move very large communities? And what will happen to all the homes and buildings that have been built? As the water rises, and people look to move, who will buy their homes? No one. It raises the question of why a city should invest in a new school or roads if it will be under water in the next couple decades. Who would invest in property or businesses that will be washed away?

The political issues are equally enormous. If everyone in the United States used less gasoline, how can our efforts be seen as being helpful if the Chinese are putting 14,000 new cars on the streets every day and are rapidly using enormous amounts of coal to energize that growth, but that coal use is also causing massive pollution problems .<sup>1</sup> Climate change challenges are global, so our own sacrifices are mocked and in vain if our neighbors undo our efforts. Will our political systems survive as people demand that governments immediately enroll others to join in the changes?

We are inclined to want to sell our life styles to other cultures. Doing such can make a lot of money for those who sell the accoutrements of our culture. But a major accoutrement of our society is energy consumption. How do we forewarn the Chinese and other countries not to copy us as much as they seem to want to? How do we prevail on investors to do the same? How should we control our emotions when we see a population so large as China's undoing our conservations? How do we work together? What if our environmentally corrective efforts fail because our global neighbors refuse to cooperate?

USA Today reported that in 2005, "American drivers spend 3.7 billion hours a year stuck in traffic."<sup>2</sup> Those billions of hours burn billions of gallons of gasoline. The quantity of wasted fuel from all the traffic jams throughout the world is incomprehensible. The only solution is to massively improve mass transit, transform driving habits, or shift the time we travel. Consider the real emissions impact that a traffic jam has on our environment. I must confess as well that when I'm stuck in a traffic jam because of an accident caused by a reckless driver, I wished that the courts would impose a penalty equal to the cost of all the wasted gasoline in the hundreds of cars who sat idling. (The money from the fine would be given to an environmental fund.) That penalty might give some extra thought about not driving recklessly.

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<sup>1</sup> Economy EC: The Great Leap Backwards. The Crisis of China's Environmental Crisis. *Foreign Affairs*. Vol 86 (5); September/October 2007, 38-59

<sup>2</sup> USA Today, September 12, 2007, Page 5A

My concerns are these. We are too easily led to feel comfortable in our little neighborhoods. Part of it is also due to the 'planet-to-me' size ratio experience that so often deflects our awareness away from the fact that our personal worlds exist in the larger world. These perceptions mislead and are dangerous.

We gladly bring the world into our homes via television or computer, but these visits from the world come with great cost. Approximately 10% of all the energy used in the US is related to computer operations. Of course some computers cannot be turned off at night. But many can.

We do not appreciate how much we are part of the larger world. Think for a moment about food. I read that the average food item travels many hundreds, if not thousands, of miles before it reaches our tables. That consumes gasoline. The tomatoes in your salad arrived because of fossil fuel, which added to climate change. Certainly some fuel is needed to transport the food, but if the tomato came from a local farm, the fuel costs would be less.

The Boston Globe<sup>3</sup> reported that investors are looking at the land under the ice caps as areas to develop. They are also looking at drilling for oil once the ice is gone. This is the ultimate example of deeply misguided notions. Will the oil be used to operate air conditioners that will be needed to offset the temperature rises secondary to oil combustion? Will the oil merely serve to continue a lifestyle of frenzied denial of long term problems. It's similar to the self-destruction of a depressed drug addict who is going to defy and deny to the point of his own death. We should leave the ice caps alone and currently pretend any oil under them doesn't exist. Someday we may need it, but for the moment, it is more important to learn to do with less, not try to figure out how to maintain life. It reeks of gluttony. These investors need climate change to make money.

Millions of us use phone chargers. Often they are left in the wall socket, but what we fail to realize is that the charger, which is actually a transformer, continues to draw power even when it is not charging our phone. It is quite an active electricity consumer all the time. Merely unplugging it when it is not being use will save fuel. It's a little item in a big house, but the concept is that we have to consciously reduce every unnecessary use of power. It's not enough to say that "I can afford the little extra on my electric bill for the convenience of having it there all the time..." because the real payers of the extra electric used is the earth and all who want to continue to live on it.

An argument against this could be that the power came from a non-carbon source, such as wind or hydroelectric generators. There is some truth to this, but the tiny, tiny amount of heat generated by the transformer still adds to the

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<sup>3</sup> The Boston Globe, Race for the Artic, September 2, 2007, page E3

warming as well. Some may see this example as silly because it is so small. But this not silly for two reasons - the consumptions of electricity and the production of waste heat is for non-productive reasons, and two, it captures the style of thinking that needs to be changed. 'Little' is not the issue and cannot be used as a rationalization.

We must introduce the concepts of change. Designing a change should not trigger a panic which screams alarms that any use of energy will result in long-term problems. Energy should be thoughtfully used to enjoy and function in life.

How do we maintain the sense of social and emotional security as the geography changes? What elements are necessary to our feelings of community and societal safety? Is there a desire to be duped as long as we are kept presently comfortable?

We can't inundate the populace with daily reminders of dangers that will be coming - the warnings loose their impact and may ultimately convert to an over dramatization. The endless warnings may also have the opposite effect of causing apathetic or nihilistic thinking. There is an emotional paradox that must be overcome - that *what* we want to believe about our world, and what we *must* believe, are indeed contrarians. Our survival will require the blending of these end points. A major concern, however, is the intensity of the social reactions when people face the results of their ignorance, misguidance, or prior denials.

There is a story of an old woman who said that "It is I who have created all! I am the source of everything in creation." After hearing these thrilled assertions, a mob of fanatic Baluchi soldiers buried the old woman alive. A decade ten years later, some of these same soldiers, who happened to be in Poona, saw the same old woman, Hazrat Babajan blessing a group of devotees. Aware of their terrible mistake, they begged Babajan for her forgiveness, placing their heads at her feet in reverence.

We must not overlook people are used to being manipulated. Truth is commonly modified to fit an advertisement or news report. As such, climate change fears might be seen by some as a type of frightening scheme designed to sell a fear or be used by manipulators for their own self justifying actions. A quality of skepticism exists. Yet there is a paradox at the door as people study climate change. The higher up one goes up on the scale of understanding, the fewer and fewer things of this world can be brought with along. The response is a denunciation of the 'logic' and the ending of any blind acceptance of the wisdom peddled by many who are in political or financial control.

We as human beings share some core values, like empathy for others, a need for social and family bonds and security, and so forth. But we as human beings also

have a nasty propensity for war. Societies arrange their peaceful and warring elements in individual ways, but there are only so many configurations that are secure. Part of the desired security is that even under pressure, the society will not fall into disarray. Climate change will add considerably to that pressure. Societies may see the need to go to war in order get land and resources, or there will be massive population shifts, such as when as people move inland away from rising waters. Borders may be closed to migrating neighbors. Unfortunately, similar shifts have historically not gone smoothly. The social effects of integrating massive numbers of migrating people are colossal. This would be further complicated when the emigrants are people who expect a life style equal to what they left. We see such problems often, such as after Hurricane Katrina. But this was, numerically speaking, a relatively small group that could return to their home land (albeit they may not have had a home on that land). Imagine permanently moving all of south Florida.

It's interesting to ponder how humans adapted to the past ice ages. One explanation is that their societies were more mobile - both physically and spiritually, and the populations were much smaller. There was also plenty of free land to move to. The climate changes were also much slower, so the impetus for a southern migration to avoid the encroaching glaciers was relatively easy.

We need to prepare to make our transitions more smoothly. A seamless transition would be nice, but is probably impracticable. Society will require a set of political, moral and other criteria to filter who, and how, and where, to let people move. Food and water supplies will become critical and may not be as available as they are now. Likewise, when geographic changes start to force the shifts, who will insure for the business losses or give jobs and homes to the millions and millions of people as they relocate. Unlike the history of how societies evolved into communities, once the climate change based need for security reaches a crisis mode, the process could certainly become a matter of Darwinian-like political reassignments. I worry it will become a very large and weighty equivalent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This project has the same level of importance and urgency as the concerns about the use of nuclear weapons. Such weapons would be as destructive to the climate any temperature rise. The difference, however, is that a limited or localized nuclear exchange may not produce a global climate change. At some point of widespread nuclear weapon use, the damage to the earth is equal to global warming or pollution. There can be no sluggishness or self-deception about these dangers.

We must work to dramatically reduce the human inducers of climate change. We must do this vigorously in a manner that we also allow the earth time to heal. It may be too late to stop some of the changes, but it may not be too late to prevent the catastrophic changes. We also acknowledge that some of the

change may be a natural phenomenon. In either case, our planet is rapidly changing, and those changes will cause many community changes. That is the goal and job of this project - to reduce by planning, hard education and implementation - the likelihood of social turmoil and disarray. This is our job. Our destiny rests in our new vocation.

Here are some questions that need answers:

1. Many excellent websites already exist with countless good ideas on how to reduce global warming and climate change. How do we energize the population to embrace them?
2. How do we persuade other countries, especially developing ones, to join in with our concerns? What is the environmental psychology of developing nations?
3. What is the psychology of the committed environmentalist as opposed to the lip-service, fad-driven or politically motivated environmentalist?
4. How do we get the majority of people to say “how can I do this using less energy?” What psychosocial learning devices will do this? How do we convince people to accept critically important inconveniences, yet not think they have to be teetotalers who can never again enjoy life? Energy should be intelligently used. We can use it more craftily. Can we get people to say “my accepting this inconvenience is my investing in the future”? We need to re-define personal success away from displays of consumerism and into displays of smart conversations that still allow joy in life. How do we humble people with climate change challenges? Should schools ask students to prepare plans for when the climate changes reach critical levels? Does any government have contingency plans for the demands these challenges will force upon them?
5. What will happen to people’s emotional state as they realize that some of the interventions are coming too late and their lives are about to experience involuntarily enormous changes towards what may be a much harder life? Will it numb the psyches into Friedrich Nietzsche existential nihilism? <sup>4</sup> Will it produce a passive world view of futility, angst, social disrespect, rebellion, religious despair, entitlements, over-simplifications, detachment and hopelessness? How can we produce masses of stronger people, working together, who funnel their fears and

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<sup>4</sup> Nihilism is from the Latin root *nihil*, meaning nothing or that which does not exist. The same root is in the verb “annihilate”. Nihilism labels all values as worthless, therefore, nothing can be known or communicated, and it speaks to extreme pessimism, skepticism, and no loyalties. It has been described as the result of a faulty value-system turning back on itself and its human creators.

anger into productive work to deal with these changes? Will people see the world as Macbeth did: “*Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more*” Or perhaps it will follow Albert Camus’ “The Rebel”<sup>5</sup> “*how metaphysical collapse often ends in total negation and the victory of nihilism, characterized by profound hatred, pathological destruction, and incalculable death.*” How can our behavioral sciences help prevent these social breakdowns? What role will the religions play in this entire process?

6. Assuming we do achieve a worldwide massive reduction in global warming inducers, will it be enough to offset the changes that are already underway? If in 5-10 years we are able to stop global warming from increasing, how much more will have to be done to bring the temperature back down to a level where the earth heals? How long will that take, and what will happen to our societies as we wait for the healing to occur? Will the healing allow us to return to the pre-climate change geography, and how do we accommodate if it does not? This requires much thought and planning, and is one of our core questions.

Here are some starting ideas.

We must insist that governments be robustly pro-active in changing life styles. If they don't, then we have to do it ourselves.

Intrinsic to any government action must be the absence of political diversions, panic or exploitations using grandstanding fears or denials. The call is for adult-like alarm, not shock. Government must lead the way by showing that tough decisions about the costs of environmentally corrective or protective projects cannot be swayed. Just as if a foreign army was at our door, so too must we devote equal resources at the climate changes at our door. If the military budget was spent on environmental repairs, our future would become immeasurably more secure. The issues cannot be decided by opinion. There is no opinion any more. The issue is factual.

Governments might need to take uncomfortable stances. For example, we should immediately limit trade with any country whose policies on global climate change are not good enough. These is no longer an issue of economic growths. If a country wants to sell us their goods, it has to come from a country that respects the earth. It's really quite simple.

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<sup>5</sup> Camus, Albert, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Random House, Inc., New York, 1991.

We must introduce to the populace, without hysterics, that their own futures lie in what they already personally touch in life. Solutions cannot be bought from others. The solutions exist now, in our own homes. We already know how to fix a lot of it. When new technology can reduce the energy load, such might be with a more efficient air conditioner, then that and things like it will help. In the meantime, though, we need to optimize the current systems. Sometimes this is as simple as using them less. Let there be a Federal income tax credit for any repair or improvement of any home energy using system.

This fall in line with the recommendations to follow the 10% saving notion and parent savings accounts posted on [The Doctor's Ear](#) home page.

We have to work with an anxiety that is currently known but psychologically hard to comprehend because of its cause and dimensions. We are forced to trust both a hard working but still imperfect science and the guidance of an often flawed political system. We need a trusted leader. That leader can be ourselves.

I would like to see very specific thought papers on how to prepare our society for these changes. Then I would also like to see projections - as best as possible - for the time periods when the comforts of our current society change. In those papers should come a reasonable plan of action.

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