

# ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

## *What's Real and What's Nonsense?*

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# **Environmental Issues: What's real and what's nonsense?**

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Thank you for inviting me.

The story of environmentalism is generally portrayed as one of citizens triumphing over evil corporate polluters, of public awareness, science, and affluence working together to solve pressing problems. There is no problem so huge or so abstract that we cannot solve it if we put our minds to it. And solving these problems yields all sorts of positive side-effects and no drawbacks.

While that may be the perception, it is far from the fact. Public awareness is easily swayed by media campaigns that are little more than propaganda and supported by a press that would rather take sides than present balanced reports. Science is largely bought and paid for by politicians who control the agenda and the outcome. And our affluence, or what is left of it, is viewed as an inexhaustible source of revenue for whatever fantastic ideas the political class can dream up. Negative consequences of such folly are viewed as so impossible as to be unworthy of discussion.

Consider the plight of the Orangutan, a creature in such dire peril that biologists place its chance of survival beyond a few years to be near zero in the wild. Do we hear much about Orangutans? No, we are constantly treated to pictures of a lone polar bear floating away on a shrinking piece of sea ice. But polar bear populations are rising so much that they are becoming an increasing threat to arctic villages as these huge white grisly bears roam ever further in search of food. When I lived in Fort Churchill, Manitoba on Hudson Bay, we had to be on the lookout for bears that would come into town after raiding the city garbage dump. Their preferred meals in town were sled dogs tied up outside the barracks buildings. We made sure that we did not also become part of their diet.

There was an amusing story a couple of years ago about an Irishman who was determined to be the first to sail across an ice-free arctic ocean. When he got stuck in the supposedly non-existent pack ice, he was last reported pleading with the Russians to come to his rescue with one of their icebreakers. Part of his pleading involved a description of polar bears closing in on him! I do not know how the story turned out, but the Russians were themselves preoccupied ferrying tourists across the Arctic Ocean and having to deal with one of their icebreakers trapped in the pack ice!

Bears as a species are very adaptable, just as we are. That is why they have survived for many

thousands of years, with many natural changes of climate and of diet. I remember one black bear just ahead of me in the Olympic National Park eating huckleberries. I remember another in Sequoia National Park trying to get into my backpack. And I remember one in my yard in Corbett contemplating a battle with my bees for some honey. Bears of whatever color are a huge success story.

Orangutans, in contrast, are more like many other animals and plants, heavily dependent on a tropical rainforest habitat. They have not needed to be greatly adaptable to a changing climate because tropical regions change much less dramatically over time than polar regions. That is *until man appeared on the scene*. Initially, man lived in the forest as just another creature making a home there. But now he seeks to heavily exploit the forest for valuable hardwoods like teak. Then he goes a step further by completely leveling what remains of the forest and burning the residue. That allows him to plant cash crops like palm trees for palm oil.

Why the interest in palm oil? Although it is considered an inferior cooking oil, it is the #1 choice in the manufacture of bio-diesel because it is relatively cheap compared with other vegetable oils. The former colonial rulers of Indonesia, the Dutch, got the bright idea that they could produce electricity back home from bio-diesel and found it easy to entice poor people to produce more palm oil. The only way to do that was to clear the last remaining tropical rainforest.

Orangutans, “people of the forest” in Malay, are large powerful apes, very closely related to man. Because they are gentle creatures, humans once considered them to be people hiding in the forest to avoid work. But with the destruction of their forest homes, Orangutans will resist. The net result is horrible: the natives shoot the adults and take their children as pets. Since they have no way of caring for the cute baby Orangutans, the babies quickly perish like their parents.

It is an enormously sad story that few hear, because it is politically incorrect to think ill of bio-diesel. We are assured that the large bio-diesel refinery built recently on Puget Sound will not use tropical oils. But then why was it built where it will have easy access to cheap tropical oils delivered by tanker from Indonesia?

Now let's step back for a moment to consider the concept of risk. We are perpetually told that we are poisoning the planet with everything from pesticides to carbon dioxide such that our world is rapidly becoming unlivable. This feeds our enormous egos that tell us we are far more important to this planet than we really are. This is not to say that we have done no damage to our host, mother earth, but that we are more of an irritant than a serious threat. Perhaps we are to the earth what fleas are to a dog, irritating for sure, but not threatening the planet as a whole.

And if anything the overall trend in the affluent developed world is toward greatly reduced environmental risks. Take for instance, the beautiful country between Hood River and Mt. Hood. If you buy a piece of property there, your real estate agent will quietly inform you that the soils are “leaded.” That is a euphemism for the prevalent insecticide used on apples in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; acutely toxic lead arsenate. If you had a liking for strawberries in that same time frame, it was a good idea to wash them thoroughly because they were treated with Paris Green, a popular name for the extremely poisonous copper acetoarsenite. It gained its name from its use in the sewers of Paris to kill rats. For killing pests on cotton, workers used to fill burlap bags with a mixture of arsenic compounds and shake them over their crops. During 1944 and 1945, vast amounts of Paris Green were sprayed by airplane in Italy and Sicily to control malaria.

But then a scientific miracle came along in the form of synthetic pesticides that were far less toxic to

people but highly effective against insects. Among the best were malathion and DDT. Malathion was developed in Nazi Germany as a part of their research into organophosphate nerve gasses that inhibit a particular neurotransmitter. It is probably the most common insecticide used in the United States today. DDT was developed much earlier, but its value as an insecticide was not discovered until 1939. It proved vastly beneficial against the mosquito that carries malaria.

With the end of World War Two another environmental scare became a topic of endless concern: *nuclear radiation*. Prior to the dropping of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, few people were aware of the dangers of such radiation. Madame Currie had been badly burned by the glowing bottle of radium that she kept on her laboratory table and eventually died of cancer likely the result of radiation poisoning. After the atomic bombs were dropped, people who were nearby started dying of mysterious causes clearly attributable to the radiation. But as time went along, the predicted excess of deaths from leukemia did not materialize.

In other words, nuclear radiation in small doses is not to be feared. Because of cosmic radiation and naturally occurring radio-isotopes, we get a certain background dose of radiation anyway, whether we like it or not. As long as the excess dose we receive from man-made sources does not add appreciably to the background dose, it cannot have a significant impact on us.

This is the fundamental logic underlying the concept of *acceptable risk* for virtually all hazards. We never argue that risks can be reduced to zero, only that they can be greatly minimized to naturally occurring levels.

When I lived in Chicago during the 1950's, 60's and 70's, environmental problems abounded. Cars belched large amounts of hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, and lead. Steel mills in Gary, Indiana spewed vast clouds of smoke over South Chicago that left metal flecks on everyone's cars overnight. Oil refineries were big polluters. Coal-fired power plants spread fly-ash and sulfur dioxide across the city. The city's trash incinerator on the South Side was a large polluter situated next to the Sherwin-Williams paint factory that exuded such a foul odor that it was difficult to drive by without gagging. Radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear testing was easy to detect on your car in the morning. And cancer rates were clearly a function of where you got your drinking water. The more sewage systems and factories upstream from you, the worse off you were.

Today those problems have largely been addressed in a triumph of sensible environmentalism that utilized best available mitigation technologies.

But as these triumphs were occurring, a new and dangerous form of environmentalism began to take hold, involving theoretical problems, far less rigorous science, and a political component that suppressed dissenting views.

It began with Rachael Carson and her famous book 'Silent Spring' published in 1962 that railed against the evils of DDT and caused it to be banned in the United States and much of the rest of the world. This resulted in the recovery of predatory bird species said to be especially sensitive to DDT but badly damaged vector control programs around the world for malaria. Malaria subsequently surged back to epidemic proportions. The number of excess death attributed to this fiasco total today about forty million people. That is comparable to the number of deaths in Russia or in Germany during the Second World War. With malaria substantially confined to Black Africa, the devastating impact is largely ignored in the developed world.

The success of Rachel Carson's brand of environmentalism was not lost on the political class, who saw great possibilities for the techniques she pioneered for stampeding public policy changes past skeptical citizens. Ironically, Carson is said to have never advocated the complete banning of DDT, perhaps realizing that such a ban could cause great harm. Scaring people into irrational action had dangerous consequences, not only for the resurgence of malaria but for the environmental issues that were to arise later.

Little noticed in the 1960's was the commencement of measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide on a volcano in Hawaii. Twenty years later the steadily increasing levels were to spark concern, not only amongst scientists, but amongst politicians who saw great possibilities for advancing their own agendas. The first politician to raise the alarm was not Al Gore but someone at the opposite end of the political spectrum: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She was in a desperate battle with British coal unions and wanted an excuse to move Great Britain toward nuclear power. Unfortunately, her advisers suggested the theory of Anthropogenic Global Warming. A short while later with the fall of the Soviet Union, the far left was cast adrift and began searching for a new cause. Then Vice-President Gore suggested that they join his environmental crusade to save the world from Global Warming, and they accepted.

In the 1970's, another theoretical environmental scare was attracting attention: ozone depletion. It was to become a dry run for action on Global Warming. Based on the calculations of three chemists who received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their efforts, it appeared that we were headed for catastrophic consequences from our use of the chlorofluorocarbons commonly known by their DuPont trade name, Freon. Following a now familiar pattern, the National Academy of Sciences supported the credibility of the ozone theory, leading to a ban on CFC's in aerosol cans, a "Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer," and in 1987 the Montreal Protocol phasing out Freon.

*But what was the bottom line that is never discussed in official circles?* Other researchers later discovered that those who had done the original work had made a big mistake with one chemical reaction rate such that the problem that had been touted as "critical" was really minor. The ozone hole was likely a natural phenomenon, devoid of human contributions.

What about "Acid Rain" that was allegedly turning lakes in the NE United States to a dangerously acidic state? Power plants burning high sulfur coal were said to be responsible. Indeed some lakes were becoming more acidic, but only those close to and downwind from power plants could be gaining acidity from the power plants. Lakes in other areas far removed from power plants were also substantially acidic. The obvious conclusion: *natural causes*.

What about "Ocean Acidification," the latest scare intended to succeed Global Warming hysteria when it becomes less of a research funding vehicle. The 2005 report from the British Royal Society paints a scary scenario and argues that massive new research funding is necessary to head off yet another disaster. But at the very end of that report, far beyond the Executive Summary intended for politicians, they point out the essential truth. Our oceans are so heavily buffered with calcium carbonate that they can NEVER become acidic. The slight variations in pH about the nominal alkaline value of 8.0 are caused by natural variations such as temperature. Colder water more readily dissolves atmospheric carbon dioxide and is therefore a little less alkaline. Corals said to be at imminent risk if we do not take action have survived on earth for hundreds of millions of years, through many natural climate and carbon dioxide variations.

That brings us to the greatest environmental and scientific scam of our time: Global Warming.

President Obama makes the political case for Global Warming:

“Few challenges facing America and the world are more urgent than combating climate change. The science is beyond dispute and the facts are clear.”

That is a pretty outrageous statement. Do you think HE believes it? I doubt it. But he certainly wants **you** to believe it. And if you believe it, he has a carbon tax he would like to sell you.

Let's consider what more than a hundred scientists said in letter of reply last year.

“With all due respect Mr. President, that is not true.”

This letter was signed by some of the most respected scientists in the world today:

- 1) **Dr. Gerhard Gerlich** who is a Professor of Mathematical and Theoretical Physics in Germany
- 2) **Professor Ivar Giaever** who received the Nobel Prize in Physics and is a Democrat who campaigned for Obama
- 3) **Dr. Martin Hertzberg** who is a meteorologist and a lifelong Democrat
- 4) **Professor Richard Lindzen** of MIT who is widely recognized as the greatest meteorologist alive today
- 5) **Professor of Advanced Physics Antonio Zichichi**, who is President of the World Federation of Scientists
- 6) and of course, I signed it!

The letter was published last year as a full page ad in many newspapers by the CATO Institute. It disproves the universal agreement that Alarmists claim.

The selling of Global Warming, Obama style, depends fundamentally on a vast scientific illiteracy in the general population. It also depends on people not recognizing that a much different logic applies in politics than in science. In politics, people typically decide where they want to go and back-fill the reasoning as a series of 'talking points.'

The logic of science is a rigorous process requiring honest evidence from independent sources. Scientists believe that there exists an objective reality that is completely independent of politics.

The most fundamental attribute of a scientist isn't brilliance or superior knowledge but an “utter honesty” that goes beyond what an average citizen might consider honesty. We certainly know from Climategate that many climate scientists did not come anywhere close to 'utter honesty' and in fact are closer to the concept of 'political talking points.' If the talking points have been tested on the population and work, some will use them. Honesty is never part of the equation!

Many of you know that the Climategate e-mails revealed the existence of a climate cartel intent on dominating the scientific process so that challenges to the dominant dialectic involving carbon dioxide could not be effectively mounted. Conspirators maintained a tight grip on the scientific societies and their publication processes. Scientists at the very top of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had become racketeers.

More important, Climategate revealed that some scientists have been cheating in many different ways, usually mixing a little truth with a whole lot of rubbish.

Because a detailed analysis is beyond what we have the time for today let me just say: Virtually EVERYTHING Global Warming Alarmists say is wrong, and NO 'climate crisis' exists.

Attempts to save the planet with bio-fuels, wind power, and solar cells are themselves substantial scams. But those are topics for another day.

Let me conclude with two quotes from Michael Crichton:

***“The greatest challenge facing mankind is the challenge of distinguishing reality from fantasy, truth from propaganda.***

***Perceiving the truth has always been a challenge to mankind, but in the information age (or as I think of it, the disinformation age) it takes on a special urgency and importance”***

We are at another cross-roads with several modern day scientific scams that threaten our way of life and that will surely fall hardest on the poor in black Africa. My plea is an echo of Michael Crichton:

***“If we really have trillions of dollars to spend, let us spend it on our fellow human beings.”***

Thank you for listening.

I will be happy to answer any easy questions you might have.

Cover photo of orangutan as posted to [realscience.org](http://realscience.org).



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