

***“Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t know”***

Benjamin Franklin

John Cairns, Jr.

Department of Biological Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, USA

*Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.*

Dr. Seuss, “The Lorax”

Exponential population growth, increasing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, markedly decreasing biodiversity, ecological overshoot, and harm to the biosphere are rapidly changing the environment in which *Homo sapiens* evolved and flourished. In the last 200 years, “more” has been the motto of a growing population. This delusion is the “devil” that humankind knows and expected to last forever. However, perpetual growth cannot continue indefinitely on a finite planet. At present, the “devil you know” is undergoing irreversible change. In short, the “devil you know” (e.g., cheap, abundant fossil fuel) is rapidly becoming the “devil you knew.” Even with approximately half the world’s population not living the “good life,” plus most of the financial “rewards” going to 1-2% of the population, reluctance to change is still strong. Of course, the corporations of “the devil you know” era are fighting change. “Clean coal” is not yet a reality and not likely to become one soon. Alternative carbon-free energy sources (e.g., wind, solar) are not just ignored – in some areas, they are actively shunned.

### **Risk Adverse Societies**

The approach to risk in the United States is irrational. Americans spend huge amounts of money to thwart a few terrorists, but are ambivalent about global climate change, which is by far one of the most formidable challenges that *Homo sapiens* has ever faced. Continuing present, unsustainable practices will almost certainly result in effects on the biosphere that will be catastrophic (Simms and Johnson 2010). Yet, politicians express no sense of urgency, although scientists are verging on barely controlled panic.

### **Addiction to Economic Growth**

The very notion of growth includes some concept of maturity or sufficiency beyond which physical accumulation gives way to physical maintenance (Daly 1991). Development continues but growth gives way to a state of dynamic equilibrium. A notable exception is cancerous growth. Perpetual economic growth requires either more consumers or more consumption per capita. Neither is good for human society or the biosphere. The perpetual growth “devil” known at present is a dangerous companion – humankind must find a new companion!

### **Failure to Change Not due to Lack of Information**

The climate in which humans developed and flourished is changing rapidly, and the changes are irreversible. The preponderance of scientific evidence indicates that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are a significant part of the problem. Publications on global warming first appeared in the 1800s. In the last two decades, a vast amount of peer-reviewed literature has appeared – much of it has been summarized by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which won the Nobel Prize for its research. In 2009, several papers appearing in the US National Academy of Sciences Proceedings pronounced climate changes irreversible. In short, no excuses can be given for not knowing about global warming and other types of climate change. The message is simple – the devil we know is changing into the devil we don’t know and we are responsible.

### **The Basics of Determining Information Quality**

The preponderance of peer-reviewed, scientific information provides verified evidence that global climate change, including global warming, is real and that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are a significant component of the problem. A well financed, substantial disinformation campaign (e.g., Hoggan and Livermore 2009) has created an impression that scientists are divided on the issue. This impression is reinforced by the common practice in the news media of treating the issue as if the numbers of scientists on each side were equal, which the news media calls “balanced coverage.” Disinformation is delaying environmental action.

### **How Much Time is Left?**

The exact location of the tipping point for runaway, irreversible climate change will not be known until it is passed. Decisive action is needed now. Even if some of the precautionary measures are not necessary, a healthier biosphere will result. The biosphere presently known is preferable to a vastly different, replacement biosphere.

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