

THE MONKEY TRAP

Place a large, attractive nut inside a glass container with an opening just large enough for a monkey to insert a paw. The paw goes in easily and the monkey grasps the nut, but cannot withdraw the paw while grasping the nut. The monkey is trapped while grasping the nut, but could easily escape by letting go of the nut. However, the monkey wants the nut and refuses to let go; consequently, he remains trapped. The original metaphor uses a box and bananas, but I have chosen to depict the metaphor by using a glass jar and a nut because the monkey could see the problem and still would not let go.

The “monkey trap” is a superb metaphor for humanity’s present addiction to fossil fuel and consumption of material goods far beyond the basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Humans know that finite amounts of fossil fuel exist on a finite planet and that all the easy sources have been tapped. The remaining sources of fossil fuel are hard to obtain and involve ever increasing risk and danger. However, humanity refuses to transition to non-carbon energy alternatives (e.g., solar, wind, geothermal). Much opposition and much support are voiced for the Keystone XL pipeline from the tar sand deposits in Canada to refineries in Texas, USA. Tar sands are a dangerous source of energy and the long pipeline would damage both ecological and societal areas. Some considerations follow.

- (1) *Homo sapiens* is facing the most serious crises it has ever faced. Although these crises were identified decades ago, humankind has failed to respond — when will *Homo sapiens* let go of the nut?
- (2) No politically acceptable solutions have been found for any of the interactive global crises, so the crises continue to worsen — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (3) The fossil fuel era is ending because the supply is finite — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (4) Robust evidence confirms that carbon, sequestered by natural laws for millions of years, cannot be extracted and burned at present rates without altering Earth’s climate — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (5) Since the 1880s, carbon dioxide has been identified as a greenhouse gas that changes the climate — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (6) The human population cannot expand exponentially without creating a food crisis — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (7) No resource on Earth is infinite, but perpetual economic growth supporters act as if resources upon which economic growth depends are infinite — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (8) The universal laws of biology, chemistry, and physics are preeminent and nonnegotiable, but humanity either ignores them or believes technology can transcend them — when will humanity let go of the nut?
- (9) The assaults on scientists who provide evidence on the functioning of universal laws will not change the functioning of these laws — when will humanity let go of the nut?

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