

## Searching for Truth Where You Live

*If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?*

Dogen<sup>1</sup>

When I mention the massive British Petroleum oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and the probably irreversible damage that has resulted, an all too common response is: “That’s far away; it has nothing to do with me.”

When I mention the heat wave in Russia, which has killed 50,000 people, the common response is: “That’s far away; it has nothing to do with me.”

When I mention the alien planet that humans are creating for future generations by continued ecological disasters, the common response is: “That’s far in the future; it has nothing to do with me.”

How can the eight interactive global crises, which could doom civilization and even eliminate *Homo sapiens*, be eliminated if action is delayed until everyone experiences a catastrophe personally? How has humankind lapsed into an ethical/spiritual/moral stupor and become obsessed with economic growth? A few relevant factors follow.

- (1) Substantive discussions/debates on life’s important values are nonexistent.
- (2) Literacy is essential to any informed discussion/debate.
- (3) The US Supreme Court has concluded that corporations, which are artifacts of the financial system, have many of the same rights as individuals.
- (4) Many people do not live in natural systems or have easy access to them. Even fewer people have the opportunity to experience a single system for many years. With nearly 7 billion people on the planet, such opportunities become rarer daily.
- (5) Despite massive scientific evidence that climate change is markedly affected by human activities (and more rapid than originally expected), significant remedial action has been blocked and has been delayed by public uncertainty, doubt, and denial of climate change. The small group of deniers, mostly untrained in science, has been extremely vocal and is well funded. Not surprisingly, the United States is poorly prepared to cope with the profound challenges that climate change will bring. Funds for prevention of further climate change are scarce and unlikely to increase in the present financial crisis.
- (6) All areas on the planet will suffer from climate change, although some will have greater problems than others. Only science can estimate the physical, chemical, and biological changes, and only empathy can help humankind develop compassion for other life forms and other distant members of its own species in space or time. Ethics and compassion should have a higher priority than economic growth.

However, the eight interactive global crises that are threats to the biospheric life support system cannot be addressed by information that is inadequate. For example, determining the global mean temperature requires planet-wide input. In addition, the same systems of measurement (e.g., the metric system) must be used. To make effective global policy, a global systems-level perspective is essential. An unseasonable snowfall in Washington, DC, does not mean that global warming is a hoax.

Global problems require an opportunity-cost perspective. Funds must be spent where they will get the “biggest bang for the buck.” This approach will probably be strongly resisted by special interest groups and their lobbyists. Local and regional interests are certainly important, but the Biosphere is a global system and all regional problems and opportunities must be considered in a global context.

For practically all of its existence on Earth, *Homo sapiens* has been a tribal species spread thinly over the planet. In many ways, humankind still thinks and acts like a small-group species — such as distrusting and fearing other tribes (i.e., cultures). Language differences make communication difficult and sometimes lead to dangerous misunderstandings. Many people have a tendency to dwell upon and emphasize differences between cultures rather than commonalities. Finally, climate change events are moving much more rapidly than anyone expected. Social changes are slow and major adjustments must be made in decades rather than centuries.

The climate changes that humankind is almost certain to face (e.g., rising sea levels) require rapid, congruent, social evolution at a global level. As an essential beginning, humankind must co-evolve in ways that

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Karen Cairns for calling this Zen quote to my attention.

nurture the biospheric life support system, which means dramatic alteration of the present perpetual economic growth system with excessive use of natural resources that damages the Biosphere. Human society will have to live sustainably, not just talk about doing so.

Should humankind not choose to live sustainably, the universal laws of biology, chemistry, and physics will cull the human population. "Cull" is just a way of stating that some members of the human population will be incapable of adapting and will perish. Culling will occur not only by the universal laws mentioned but by humankind's (especially Western and affluent humans) refusal to change and its denial of responsibility. Humans are already responsible for the culling of poorer populations that are dying from the effects of climate change and who are becoming environmental refugees in increasing numbers. By this level of denial, humankind is now (although this situation is unacknowledged) deciding that other humans are "not worth saving" (Karen Cairns, draft manuscript). The worst case scenario is that too few individuals will adapt and the human gene pool will be so reduced that *Homo sapiens* will join the huge number of extinct species.

Much of humankind is in denial that extinction could happen, but seven species once existed in the genus *Homo* and only one remains. The "Black Death" caused population declines of 30% or more, depending on the area. The result was more renewable resources (e.g., fruit from trees) per capita. After a significant lapse of time, the result was the Renaissance — a period when the arts and sciences flourished. However, exponential population growth made the "Black Death" a minor, downward blip in the upward population growth curve. Renewable resources are again becoming scarce, and, as petroleum supplies for mega-agriculture decline, the production of food will suffer. The pressures to ignore and even become hostile to exponential population growth were simply too great to stabilize the human population and more misery was the result.

Truth can be found where one is: (1) if sufficient imagination can determine how the changes based on predications derived from evidence produced by credentialed scientists and published in peer-reviewed, scientific journals will affect the area right where one is and (2) if trust is placed in evidence produced by the scientific process and human society acts accordingly.

"The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) has projected that the United States will lead the world into catastrophic global warming over the next twenty five years. In its 2011 Annual Energy Outlook, EIA predicts that energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will 'grow 16 percent from 2009 to 2035,' reaching 6.3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent" (Johnson 2010). All but approximately 10% of the carbon dioxide will come from fossil fuel combustion.

The climate changes that have already occurred due to global warming have made conditions less favorable to humankind than they were. Evidence provided by climate scientists indicates future climate changes will be catastrophic. Human society must become more literate about the scientific process in order to put the attacks on it by special interest groups in perspective. The deniers of global warming have not published any robust scientific evidence that negates the preponderance of present scientific evidence.

Informed individuals can still do quite a bit in their local or regional areas and keep it congruent with global crises. However, everyone must be vigilant to identify misinformation and/or statements that attempt to discredit credentialed scientists without evidence from a peer-reviewed, scientific journal. Humankind got into these global crises because it forgot that all species, without exception, are affected by the universal laws of biology, chemistry, and physics. Actions not within the context of these laws are usually fatal. Humans must live with integrity, keeping in mind both local and global perspectives if *Homo sapiens* is to survive.

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#### LITERATURE CITED

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