

Feasible Planet
Ken Kroes

Feasible planet is one of those odd and delightful products of the self-publishing age

This is a book so broad ranging that a librarian would be at a loss to find an appropriate shelf. It addresses climate change, cooking and child raising all at once. It is a compendium of advice from a man who has lived life his own way and accumulated wisdom along the path.

One of the delights is in its unpredictable positions. Though I find myself disagreeing with Kroes on several points, it is not in any systematic way. I am to the left of him on some issues, to the right on others. He presents his case for each position in a way that is not dogmatic at all, but rather invites the reader to consider his opinion and form his own.

This is perhaps the area in which Kroes and I agree most strongly. It is up to each of us citizens to form our own opinions on the major issues of the day. How do we know what we know? I include a couple of essays on the topic as the first two comments below.

Kroes' overarching argument is that we should learn to be content with what we have. People consume too much. Our excessive appetites are spoiling the planet. We need to slow down. His most often repeated areas of concern are:

- Global warming
- The culture of consumption/obsolescence
- Soil deterioration
- Water resources
- Food inefficiencies: what we eat, what we throw away, and how it comes to us in the first place

Although I generally agree with Kroes, our disagreements are more interesting. Odd for a man of his generation, Kroes is not diametrically opposed to GMO's. He points out that they have their uses. Most insulin that our diabetics use is grown on genetically modified organisms. GMOs can give better crop yields, support no-till farming, resist droughts and provide greater nutrition. I will make a point to Kroes does not make. It makes no difference to our bodies whether the proteins and carbohydrates we ingest were produced by GMO plants or not. Just like maple and oak are all fuel to a bonfire, raw food materials, GMO or not, are all the same to the human gut. They will not poison us.

To me, the danger with GMO's is that pesticide resistant crops allow the widespread use of products such as Monsanto's glyphosate. These pesticides are probably dangerous in large quantities, and controlling GMO's seems to be the most effective way of controlling the pesticide use. My disagreement with Kroes is a matter of degree.

We have the same kind of difference of opinion about global warming. Kroes lives close to the Alberta tar sands, which we both deplore but for different reasons. He is most concerned about the carbon dioxide they emit. I am convinced that the carbon dioxide will be tolerable over the timeframe in which our whole transportation paradigm will shift and the developed world's population shrink. Therefore, the environmental damage is what concerns me most about the tar sands.

One touching part of Kroes' thesis is that we all need to be more tolerant of one another. Tolerance is a word associated with old-fashioned liberalism. He offers several definitions, one of which is "Tolerance:

the ability or willingness to allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of something that one dislikes or disagrees with, without interference."

This is the beautiful sentiment that prevailed a half-century ago. It is the sentiment that allowed Europe to grow so phenomenally successful. Venetian and Hanseatic traders dealt with people and every port in Europe and Asia. The major cities, such as Bruges, Venice and Lubeck tolerated the presence of all kinds of foreigners with different religious beliefs. It was good for business.

Tolerance, however, is a virtue that works only when those who practice it are in a comfortable majority. The word the best applies to a tolerant minority is "victim." Just observe what is happening to the anti-apartheid whites who remain in South Africa and the Jews and Christians who remain in most of the Middle East.

Moreover, people are now advocating "diversity" and "multiculturalism" rather than "tolerance". Diversity and multiculturalism as applied in the United States and Canada are expressly nonjudgmental. Perhaps not even that – they do judge white people who fall short of the traditional standard of tolerance, while refusing to judge people who have no tradition of tolerance and are open in their hostility toward the dwindling white majority.

Kroes wants to appeal to reason to resolve these issues. People are simply not that reasonable. Many do not have the required intellectual capacity. The average IQ of the world is 86. At the top are Japan, China and Korea, followed by the North American and northern European democracies. A little arithmetic shows that there just isn't enough brainpower left in much of the world for their citizens to reason their way through problems. That's exactly what history and contemporary politics show.

The virtue of tolerance has best been practiced by Northern Europeans. They have shared the example with the rest of the world, which studiously refuses to accept it. Observing the way people of European bloodlines are treated in countries where they are a minority, such as Africa, the Andean countries and the Middle East, one must conclude that tolerance is a virtue almost peculiar to Northern Europeans, a luxury that can be practiced only in places where those people are a comfortable majority. Europeans cannot expect tolerance from others in places in which they give up their majority status and/or their power.

Tolerance is not even doing well in its former citadels within the homeland. Have you tried to listen to a conservative speaker on a college campus lately? Kroes makes a lovely sentimental appeal, but reason points one the other way.

I conclude with the observation that this is a five-star effort all around. Kroes poses all of the right issues and asks absolutely the right questions. Intelligent people will disagree; the most important thing is the discussion. Far too few people are willing to submit to open discussion.