

## The Fanaticism of the Apocalypse

Pascal Bruckner

We want our hair shirts! Bruckner analyzes why we want to believe we are egregiously wounding Gaia

Bruckner offers a philosopher's take on the family of issues related to ecology that have come up over the past half century. In his introduction, entitled "The Return of Original Sin," he writes "Ecologism, the sole truly original force of the past half-century, has challenged the goals of progress and raised the question of its limits." And "The environment is the new secular religion that is rising, in Europe at least, from the ruins of a disbelieving world. We have to subject it to critical evaluation in turn and unmask the infantile disease that is eroding and discrediting it: catastrophism."

Bruckner's critical evaluation comes from a philosopher's perspective. Not so much about the factual arguments surrounding each issue, but what human needs are satisfied in raising the issues and whether it is even reasonable to find a solution.

Mankind defines itself by its enemies. Convenient enemies of the past have been other religions and then religion itself after the enlightenment. Communism and capitalism have been useful enemies. Over the past several decades it has been intolerance. Good people are militantly intolerant of intolerance in all its forms, real and invented: patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, racism, and denial of sacred texts relating to the Holocaust and Global Warming. Several countries have made it a criminal act to deny the latter two in speech or writing.

Ecologism involves a suite of belief structures. The Global Warming meme is most dominant. It is the threefold belief that temperatures worldwide are rising rapidly, that the major reason for temperature change is anthropogenic greenhouse gases, and that this rise in temperatures threatens life on earth. Bruckner does not much address the science, but many other authors do. Google "graham seibert global warming" for my 15 minute PowerPoint analysis of the scientific argument, concluding with a fairly extensive bibliography.

Another related belief is that animal and plant species are going extinct at breakneck speed and that the survival of the earth depends on the diversity of species. Yet another is the moral conviction that animals have rights in the same way that humans do. A third is the conviction that the present generation is stripping the earth of natural resources at such a rate that there will be nothing left for subsequent generations. A related notion is the belief that the earth has exceeded its carrying capacity of human beings and that we have a moral obligation to curb our fertility. Bruckner weights these issues as I have, global warming getting the most attention.

Each of these arguments is cast as an impending catastrophe. Bruckner writes:

"All catastrophist discourses suffer from a twofold contradiction: if the situation is as serious as they claim, why fight against it? Why not sit back and await the deluge? But the proposed solutions are ludicrous in view of the perils. As a rule, information has value only if it leads to concrete action: telling us, for example, that 'the oceans are on the brink of a biological crisis unprecedented in 55 million years', or that marine ecosystems will all collapse between now and 2050, is simply bewildering. This news prohibits any reaction other than distress and passivity. To then offer 'recommendations' is to contradict the gravity of the message.

"Consider the ways of reducing our CO2 emissions that the ex-vice president, like most ecologists, proposes: replacing our light bulbs by low-consumption models, checking our tyre pressure, recycling waste, rejecting excessive packaging, turning down thermostats, planting a tree, turning off electrical devices (DVD readers, stereos, computers). All this for that! The enormity of the diagnosis, the absurd inadequacy of the remedies."

Bruckner delves into other contradictions. With regard to extinctions, it is easy to name dozens: giant anteaters, Irish elk, mastadons, mammoths, moas, passenger pigeons, ivory billed woodpeckers and dodos come off the top of one's head. The trouble is, those are ancient news. What has gone extinct in the last few decades? The Costa Rican golden toad, last seen in 1989, which had a habitat of 1¼ square mile of rain forest. There is not much to back up the claim of "one extinction per hour." With regard to the tremendous value of biodiversity, advocates struggle to identify new medicines that have emerged from the somewhere in the wild kingdom, but they are generally at a loss to name any, much less any that came from threatened species.

Philosophers starting with Rousseau have advocated returning to a state of nature. What is that? Native Americans and other aboriginals made major changes to the ecology of their habitats long before civilization. They killed off most of the above-named extinct species and introduced useful species where they could use them. Bruckner has a long paragraph on the ecologically unimpeachable Kayapo Indians of Brazil. I lived for a while with them in the Amazon. Between a population that is burgeoning in the absence of war and disease, and the introduction of shotguns, they are running short of game food in the form of tapirs and peccaries.

That is the question that Bruckner raises over and over. Can the Kayapo be denied hunting on their own land? Must India and China remain forever backward in order not to overload the planet with CO2? Isn't it presumptuous of prosperous western do-gooders to (1) presume they have the answers and (2) force them on the rest of humanity?

Doomsayers have been consistently disappointed over the course of history. In my lifetime they included the Nuclear Winter that never happened; Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" pesticide catastrophe. In hindsight the catastrophe appears to be more malaria deaths for want of DDT. Global cooling in the 1970s was a bust, as was Paul Ehrlich's Population Bomb and Amory Lovins' exhaustion of natural resources, Hubbert's Peak (running out of oil). As of this writing, 2017, global warming seems to have been at a standstill for two decades, forcing its advocates to do unnatural and unsavory things to their data to attempt to goose it up.

In the final analysis, it is a question as much for philosophers as scientists. Not, what is going wrong, but why do we want so fervently to believe that something is going wrong.

## Table of Contents

### Part I: The Seductive Attraction of Disaster

- .... 1 Give Me Back My Enemy
  - .....Farewell to insouciance
  - .....The candidates for a successor
  - .....The offence against Gaia
- .... 2 Have the Courage to be Afraid
  - .....Maximal indictment
  - .....Trained to panic
  - .....The return of the grim reaper
  - .....The limits of the horror show
- .... 3 Blackmailing Future Generations
  - .....The voluptuous pleasure of the state of emergency
  - .....The art of distracting attention
  - .....The breast-beaters

### Part II: Progressives Against Progress

- .... 4 The Last Avatar of Prometheus?
  - .....The inevitability of forward movement
  - .....Intermittent lights
  - .....Do we control the weather?
  - .....The living, a subject with rights?
- .... 5 Nature, a Cruel Stepmother or a Victim?
  - .....On the bucolic as reconstruction
  - .....Zoophilia, theoretical and practical
  - .....Nature is not our guide
- .... 6 Science in the Age of Suspicion
  - .....The universe of evil spells
  - .....The imaginary doctor
  - .....The panic of reason
  - .....Scientists tell us that...
  - .....The fourth Copernican revolution
  - .....Saving the spirit of exploration

### Part III: The Great Ascetic Regression

- .... 7 Humanity on a Strict Diet
  - .....An ethics of renunciation

.....Impoverish yourself!  
.....The preachers of austerity  
.... 8 The Poverty of Maceration  
.....The sacredness of manure  
.....For a politics of lightness  
.....The commissars of carbon  
.... 9 The Noble Savage in the Lucerne  
.....The golden age rediscovered  
.....We have to cultivate our gardens  
.....Humankind diminished or humankind expanded  
.....A fear of movement  
Epilogue: The Remedy is Found in the Disease