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Why is Humankind Eliminating Its Future?

John Cairns, Jr.
Department of Biological Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, USA

Let us see how high we can fly before the sun melts the wax in our wings.

Astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar
Paying tribute to his mentor Sir Arthur Eddington[1]

My sense is that the "perfect storm" or the "ultimate recession" could come at any time. It will likely be triggered by an unprecedented harvest shortfall, one caused by a combination of crop-withering heat waves and emerging water shortages as aquifers are depleted.

Lester R. Brown
World on the Edge, p. *x*

Why is humankind destroying the planet that has nurtured its species (*Homo sapiens sapiens* — wise man or knowing man) for approximately 200,000 years? Humankind is the only extant species of the family Hominidae, so the selective advantage it enjoys may not continue far into the future. When will the tipping points be reached of one or more of eight interactive global crises (human economy, climate change, exponential human population growth, ecological overshoot, biotic impoverishment and the reduction of biodiversity, renewable resource depletion, energy allocation, environmental refugees [Cairns 2010])? Why do politicians and citizens avoid discussing these crises?

Even though no catastrophes have occurred in a particular area of the world does not mean that the universal laws of physics, chemistry, and biology are not working there. Effects are regional — each area's time will come. For example, the temperature in Moscow in July of 2010 was 14°Fahrenheit above the norm (Brown 2011, p. 3). In Western Russia during the same time, 300-400 new fires occurred daily, which produced smoke that had deleterious effects upon respiration.

In addition to the lack of discussion of interactive global crises, many politicians and citizens in the United States are rejecting and/or attacking scientists and science, which made the country a powerful, wealthy nation in the 20th century. Scientists are not engaged in a conspiracy or perpetuating a hoax. Their evidence is still published in peer-reviewed journals, and the evidence on climate change, including global warming, is more abundant than ever. Science is reality based on a preponderance of evidence, and reality is often hard to accept.

At present, most nations are obsessed with security. However, the biggest threat to human security is not nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists, horrifying as this idea might be, but the conviction that the human economy can grow while ignoring the Biosphere (i.e., the environment). The resources on which the human economy is based are produced by the Biosphere. In addition, even if the Biosphere were not badly damaged, ecological overshoot (using resources more rapidly than the Biosphere can regenerate them) was already becoming a problem.

Glaciers are melting rapidly, which reduces the stability of the agricultural water supply from glaciers. Changes in rainfall patterns are already causing severe drought in many areas of the world. The addiction to cheap, readily available petroleum to fuel the global economy has many implications for humankind's future. For example:

> *. . . China has overtaken the United States to become the world's number one energy consumer . . . by becoming the world's leading energy consumer, China will also*

[1] I am indebted to Peter Leigh for calling this quote to my attention.

> *become an ever more dominant international actor and so set the pace in shaping our global future. . . . As the leading player in the global energy market, China will significantly determine not only the prices we will be paying for critical fuels but also the types of energy systems we will come to rely on. More importantly, China's decision on energy preferences will largely determine whether China and the United States can avoid becoming embroiled in a global struggle over imported oil and whether the world will escape catastrophic climate change* (Klare 2010).

No global problem can be solved by any "sovereign" nation or ideology. Such problems can only be solved by conforming to the universal laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. Scientists have been the best profession in determining how these laws work. The future of *Homo sapiens* will be in serious doubt if the entire species does not develop a global sense of community — it might as well kiss the future goodbye! Humankind simply cannot live in the past on choices of fuel or attitudes of sovereign nations.

Scientists in climate science and related fields have a professional and civic responsibility to communicate their views on the effects of "business as usual" on climate change. "Doing nothing, however, will result in suffering . . ." (Hunt 2010).

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