

EDITORS' CHOICE

Musings on the Real Problems

I realize that *Protist* is a journal for the science of protists (unicellular eukaryotes), not for musings on the future of humanity (and of protistologists!), but please give me leave to attempt to articulate my thoughts. We too often get flustered and concerned about current problems, be they personal or international, and leave festering in the dark corners of our minds the real problems. I agree that the loss of my (and others) retirements savings invested in stocks is serious and close to a personal and even international calamity. I agree that the election of an intelligent, rational and less bellicose American President is important and serious. I agree that anti-intellectualism and the rise of religious fundamentalism has been and is a serious and distressing and recurring problem in all societies. I agree that the continued existence of thousands of horrible nuclear weapons by multiple countries is a serious and perhaps fatal problem.

But the certainty of the universal devastation which will be, and amazingly, is already starting to be being reeked by human-caused climate change throughout this world of ours is to my mind the most serious and consequential problem that *Homo sapiens* has ever faced. The various scenarios modeled by the most eminent climatologists are frightening and bode ill for civilization as we know it now. The certainty of rises in ocean levels which will inundate island nations and flood coastal cities world-wide, combined with the certainty of changes in weather patterns and sources of water have extreme consequential predictions. These changes will produce starvation, increase disease and cause massive emigration of millions upon millions of people world-wide. The eventual pressure on highly industrialized countries to decide whether to accept the massive immigration of poor starving people or to build Berlin-walls to keep them out and try to preserve their own devastated infrastructures and crumbling economic frameworks produced by the loss of major cities will be one of the most important ethical and moral decisions ever made. But the walls will be to no avail and this influx and the destruction of societies will forever change

the industrialized societies in irreversible ways. An immediate result will be the use of military power to either obtain newly fertile regions for agriculture or to fight against the movements of peoples. The resulting wars will devastate more countries and weapons that were created never to be used perhaps will finally be used. Finally the economic and social framework and the very fabric of modern societies will collapse. The further consequences cannot even be imagined by my feeble imagination.

Of course it is clear to anyone who can think rationally that the ultimate underlying cause of these horrible scenarios is overpopulation, which appears for multiple fundamental reasons to be impossible for the human species to change; but there are of course more immediate causes that actually can be remediated somewhat. A mandated world-wide severe decrease in the output of carbon dioxide from burning of fossil fuels would by all the models begin to decrease the rate of change, but this also appears to be beyond the abilities of humans (if our leaders and politicians are indeed human).

I myself will probably not experience the worst of this but our children and their children certainly will. Perhaps our species' evolutionary time span has been reached, but I truly hope not. The intelligence, ingenuity and resourcefulness of humans will perhaps reverse these trends and leave the protistologists a little more time to study our little beasties.

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