

A Visitor's View Of Earth

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This piece by the regular CACOR Newsletter columnist Buzz Nixon, was written several years ago but, as far as we can tell, never appeared in the CACOR Proceedings.. Buzz refers to it in his column in the September Newsletter. Ed.

That beautiful space photograph of our planet, with its swirls of white, blue and green is often used as the introduction and the context for many conferences and gatherings where the subject of discussion is the frightful state of the world and what can be done about it. But does that photograph show the real earth, or was it taken from so far away that only the captivating features of the broadest outline have been caught by the photographer?

Let your mind go and imagine that you are the photographer, but you are not an earthling. You are an extra-terrestrial being and that, while you have all of the human thinking and conceptualizing capability, you do not have the hang-ups, the biases and the values that are common place in our westernized industrial societies. After you have taken that photograph and have marvelled at the beauty of the planet earth, you decide to move in closer for a better view of the details of this planet that is foreign and unknown to you. What would you see? More importantly, what would be your rational reaction to what you did see?

If you don't want to be an extra-terrestrial being, then just imagine yourself as some earthly organism that, while not being human, does have the same thinking and conceptualizing capacity as do humans. When you look around at your planet earth, what would be a rational and reasonable reaction to what you see?

Either as an extra-terrestrial being or as a non-human earth organism, the reaction after taking a close look at planet earth would probably be one of shock and bewilderment, and your might exclaim: "It's unbelievable!"

Earth has been hit by the worst plague that one can imagine. The pestilence has spread from north to south, from east to west, from the deserts to the frigid regions, from under the seas to the tops of the mountains. There simply is no place on earth which these pests have not usurped for their own purposes. The pests are multiplying without any self control. They have no predators nor seemingly diseases that they have not brought under their control. With their spreading and multiplying, the pests seem to display a strong propensity for self destruction. They are gradually exterminating many of the other species of flora and fauna that contribute to the ecological stability and the ability to sustain life on the planet earth. In so doing they are also destroying some of their main sources of food and of renewable materials. They are destroying (by erosion, over cultivation, poisoning and alternative use) the land that they need for the production of their food and for the habitat of all species which are so important to a sustainable environment. They are polluting the air and water that they need for their own survival by using these resources for waste disposal. They are consuming the non-renewable resources of the planet without thought for future generations. In total, these pests are taking more (and in increasing amounts) out of the resources of the earth and are putting back into the land, air and water more (also in increasing amounts) wastes than these basic resources and the earth's flora and fauna can absorb. These pests seem to display great intellectual capabilities, able not only to think and conceptualize on all sorts of subjects but able to express these in structures, books, music, art, theatre, and in reconfiguring the earth to their desires. The perplexing and completely baffling question is WHY, with all of this intellectual capability do the pests act in such a manner which is so counter to their own long term survival, to say nothing about the survival of the other species on earth?

After those reflections, as an extra-terrestrial you would likely decide that the pests are so irrational that earth is not a suitable place for any

sensible being. You would conclude that with the momentum of the trends that you see, the pests either would be destroyed or drastically reduced by their own self destructive habits, or by some disease or other pestilence that they have not mastered. The only hope that you would see for the planet earth is that in the nick of time the intellectual capability of these pests would come to the fore and overcome their instinct for short term gratification. Until that happens you, and all other extra-terrestrial beings would steer clear of planet earth. As an earth-bound, but non-human you would likely conclude that the plague is destroying the planet and that all efforts must be made to eradicate these pests. Their numbers must first be brought under control. Their rate of increase must then be halted and be reversed. Their numbers must decrease to the sustainable carrying capacity of the planet while also leaving space for the natural continuity and evolution all of the other species in the planet's ecology. From the perspective of an extra-terrestrial being, or of a non-human earthling, are these reflections not reasonable and rational? If so, how do you feel about being a perpetrator of the worst plague that has ever hit this planet?

Harrison Brown in 1953 concluded the preface to "The Challenge Of Man's Future (Viking Press) with the following three paragraphs.

If machine civilization, which thus far has created more problems than it has solved, disintegrates, humanity as a whole will revert to a way of life not unlike that which existed in Europe in the seventeenth century or that which exists in China today. If, on the other hand, machine civilization is able to survive, the possibilities for human comfort, security, and achievement in the centuries ahead are virtually limitless.

Whether or not it survives depends upon whether or not man is able to recognize the problems that have been created, anticipate the problems that will confront him in the future, and devise solutions that can be embraced by society as a whole. The problems that can be recognised at present are enormous, and great intelligence, vision, and courage are required for their solution. In the light of what we know of the nature of man, it would appear that the possibilities of solution are remote. However, I do not believe that solution is by any means impossible – if I thought so, a book such as this would serve little purpose other than to depress people further at a time when events are depressing enough.

I believe that man has the power, the intelligence, and the imagination to extricate himself from the serious predicament that now confronts him. The necessary first step toward wise action in the future is to obtain an understanding of the problems that exist. This in turn necessitates an understanding of the relationships between man, his natural environment, and his technology....

Harrison Brown made our choice quite clear more than forty years ago. In the interim, the predicament of the world has only intensified. Will we humans live up to his expectations as to the use of our "power, intelligence and imagination to extricate ourselves from the serious predicament that now confronts us" (to paraphrase his words), or will we prove his worst fears by demonstrating that rather than "the possibilities of solution (being) remote", they are beyond human accomplishment, in which cases history will record humanity as the worst plague that ever hit the earth?