

Miscellany9: A Prayer for Ishmael; Eschew Obfuscation

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Commentary on the past month's news and reading.

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A Prayer for Ishmael

Global Warming Exposes Arctic to Oil, Gas Drilling

On November 8, 2004, Tom Doggett of Reuters wrote the following article (carried by Yahoo), entitled, "Global Warming Exposes Arctic to Oil, Gas Drilling."

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Rising global temperatures will melt areas of the Arctic this century, making them more accessible for oil and natural gas drilling, a report prepared by the United States and seven other nations said on Monday.

It predicts that over the next 100 years, global warming could increase Arctic annual average temperatures 5 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit over land and by up to 13 degrees over water. Warmer temperatures could raise global sea levels by as much as 3 feet.

Such a change would threaten coastal cities, change growing patterns for vegetation and destroy habitats for some wildlife, but an energy-starved world would have new areas for oil and gas exploration, according to the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment report.

The Arctic region, particularly offshore, has huge oil and gas reserves, mostly in Russia, Canada, Alaska, Greenland and Norway.

Warmer temperatures would make it easier to drill and ship oil from the Arctic, the report said. It did not attempt to quantify the costs of drilling and shipping Arctic oil and gas, or estimate how high energy prices would have to be to justify drilling in the region.

"Offshore oil exploration and production are likely to benefit from less extensive and thinner sea ice, although equipment will have to be designed to withstand increased wave forces and ice movement," the report said.

However, land access to energy reserves would likely be restricted due to a shorter season during which the ground is frozen hard enough to support heavy drilling equipment.

"The thawing of permafrost, on which buildings, pipelines, airfields and coastal installations supporting oil and gas development are located, is very likely to adversely affect these structures and increase the cost of maintaining them," the report said.

Energy companies would find it easier to transport oil and gas because the warmer temperatures would open sea routes.

"By the end of this century, the length of the navigation season...along the Northern Sea route is projected to increase to about 120 days from the current 20-30 days," the report said.

However, a longer shipping season will increase the risk of oil spills, the report warned.

The report was commissioned by the United States, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland. It concluded that global warming is heating the Arctic almost

twice as quickly as the rest of the planet in a thaw that threatens millions of livelihoods. [End of article.]

Now, the newsworthy aspect of this article is not that global warming is melting Arctic polar ice at an incredible rate – that has been reported for quite some time. It is now generally accepted that global warming is being caused by massive consumption of fossil fuel (oil, coal and natural gas), resulting in the release of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere. These greenhouse gases are produced either as a direct result of burning of fossil fuels (mainly carbon dioxide, but many other gases in lesser quantities), or the planetary deforestation that is being caused by global industrialization (enabled by the energy from fossil fuels, which supports large human numbers and industrial activity), or the release of various other gases, such as methane (from massive numbers of cattle) and halide and other gases used in industry (e.g., Freon). The burning of forests results in a “double-whammy”: The burning of the trees releases carbon dioxide, but it also kills one of the main natural entities that converts carbon dioxide back in to oxygen (the other main oxygen-producer being algae, in the seas, which are also being polluted).

What is at work here is a feedback loop – the burning of oil (and other fossil fuels) is warming the planet and melting the polar ice, which in turn is enabling access to more oil, which will contribute further to global warming.

The incredible aspect of the article is that, although massive use of fossil fuel is destroying the biosphere, and the rational response would be to *reduce* this use, the planet’s leaders are eagerly and enthusiastically looking forward to acquiring and using *even more* fossil fuel, as the polar oil becomes accessible.

I wrote an article some time ago, entitled, *The World Does Not Need More Fossil Fuel, or Alternative Energy Sources to Replace It*. It is amazing to see that, although it is the massive use of energy that is destroying the biosphere, mankind wants not only to continue this use, but to expand it. Dramatically reducing the use of commercial energy is the only way that the world’s environmental problem will be solved, but *none* of the world’s leaders is proposing this – they are all proposing just the opposite!

For a long time, I have been writing about the fact that the world’s leaders are all bent on increased energy use and increased industrial production, and my belief that the global industrial system will collapse catastrophically as the petroleum age draws to an end and global oil production starts to decline. The preceding article, which underscores the suicidal intention of present world leaders to continue to press for increased energy production and consumption no matter what the cost in terms of the destruction of the biosphere, is a forceful reminder of the certainty of this end.

Since global oil reserves are finite, there is no question that they will someday exhaust, as long as consumption continues at any positive rate. How soon this exhaustion occurs depends simply on how fast we discover and use the remaining reserves. Demand for oil is increasing, both because of human population growth and the insatiable demand of world leaders for more industrial and agricultural production (to feed the increasing population and increase their material standard of living). Global oil reserves are about half-exhausted, and very soon, the annual rate of production will start to fall (“Hubbert’s Peak”). That is the time when the global industrial system will start to fall apart.

There is a particularly distressing aspect to Doggett's article, namely, that because of the melting of the polar ice, mankind may have access to a little more oil than it would have otherwise had. What this means is that global industrial activity will continue at high levels for a little while longer than would otherwise have been the case. But each additional year that global industrial society continues means the extinction of another 30,000 species. Hence, the access to more oil caused by the melting of the polar ice will enable mankind to ravage the planet for a little while longer than otherwise, and there will be even less biological diversity in the biosphere when industrial society finally collapses. Furthermore, since the risk of biospheric collapse increases with an increase in global warming, the risk that mankind will be made extinct also increases.

Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*

Over ten years ago, Daniel Quinn wrote the novel, *Ishmael*. Over the years, I had noticed a number of references to the book, and, at one point, I became curious about it, and I ordered a copy from Amazon.com. I never got around to reading it. About a year ago, at a used-book store in Lusaka, Zambia, I came across a copy of another book by Quinn, entitled, *My Ishmael: A Sequel*. I purchased it, but once again, I never got around to reading this one, either. This is not all that surprising – I buy a lot of books, and have many that I have not gotten around to reading.

I didn't know anything about either book, except that they were often referenced in New-Age contexts. On the cover of *My Ishmael* was a picture of a large gorilla. At some point, I glanced through both books, and saw that they were about a telepathic conversation with a gorilla. Well, that sort of conversation wasn't high on my list of items of interest, so I simply placed both books back on the shelf, and would probably have never gotten around to reading either one, ever.

Until a few weeks ago, that is, when I received an e-mail from a lady whose e-mail address contained the phrase, "FriendsOfIshmael." Now this lady was particularly complimentary about the articles on my website, and so my curiosity was piqued. First, was this the same "Ishmael" that Quinn had written about? Evidently, it was – on one page of the book, set off quite noticeably, was a reference to "Friends of Ishmael." So, I read the book. This did not take long, since it is novel, and reads fast.

I found the book to be very interesting, and recommend it highly (despite its format of telepathic communication with a gorilla, which, because of the gorilla's views on nature, actually turned out to be a very useful literary device). It makes a number of points similar to those in my novella, *The Story of Civilization*, such as the fact that, with the advent of agriculture, the vast majority of mankind are now complete prisoners, and have no possible means of escaping a "culture riddled with greed, cruelty, mental illness, crime, and drug addiction." The book also refers, as I have, to the symbolism of mankind's taking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and leaving the Garden of Eden. It also takes a jab at relative morality (à la Neale Donald Walsch) – "Whatever I can justify doing is good and whatever I cannot justify doing is evil." It notes some of the history of the development of civilization, as detailed by Jared Diamond in his book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

About the only point on which I would take strong exception to Quinn's arguments is the following passage:

“One thing I know people will say to me is ‘Are you suggesting we go back to being hunter-gatherers?’”

“That of course is an insane idea,” Ishmael said. “The Leaver life-style isn’t about hunting and gathering, it’s about letting the rest of the community live – and agriculturalists can do that as well as hunter-gatherers.”

As I have written before, I see no place for large-scale (commercial) agriculture in the future of the planet, under a rational (and humane) planetary management system). It is a noxious system that enslaves people and promotes misery and poverty. (My view of a long-term sustainable human society is a “minimal-regret” population consisting of a single-nation high-technology society of five million people and a globally distributed primitive society of five million hunter-gatherers. The purpose of the high-tech society is planetary management. The purpose of the low-tech society is to decrease the likelihood of human extinction from a localized catastrophe.) After all of the discussion that Quinn included about the story of Cain and Abel (and leaving the Garden of Eden after partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and of the Tree of Life), and the destruction of hunter-gatherer societies by agricultural societies, I am surprised that he evidently still clings to agriculture-based society as a viable long-term system.

Offers of Help

Fairly often now I receive e-mails about my writing. Several times recently, readers have offered me help, and asked how they might do so. I generally respond by asking for more information about what their interests are, and what they might suggest. In one instance, to a lady with a background in education, I suggested that it would be useful to set up an Internet open university on planetary management, along the lines of Britain’s The Open University (<http://www.ac.uk>), or the African Virtual University (<http://www.avu.org>), or MysticWeb (<http://www.mysticweb.org>). I often suggest about a dozen books to read, such as Herman E Daly’s *Beyond Growth*; Herman E Daly & John B Cobb’s *For the Common Good*; Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen’s *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*; Richard Heinberg’s *The Party’s Over*; Thom Hartman’s *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunshine*; Barbara Marx Hubbard’s, *Conscious Evolution*; William R. Catton, Jr.’s *Overshoot*; Garrett Hardin’s *Living Within Limits*; Joseph A. Tainter’s *The Collapse of Complex Societies*; Michael T. Klare’s *Resource Wars*; Thomas F. Homer-Dixon’s *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*; Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin’s *The Sixth Extinction*; David and Marcia Pimentel’s *Food, Energy, and Society*; Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs and Steel*; John Robbins’ *The Food Revolution*; Kenneth S. Deffeyes’ *Hubbert’s Peak*; Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael*; and articles posted on Jay Hanson’s *Dieoff* website, <http://www.dieoff.com>. (The preceding books are mainly ones that I happen to have with me here in Zambia – they should not be taken to be a “best” reading list.) And at that point, the correspondence generally ends. It appears that my suggestions are either far too ambitious, or do not match the correspondent’s interests.

It has occurred to me that the people who offer to help are not interested in more reading, consideration and discussion – God knows enough people have done enough of that – but in taking direct action of some sort, such as participating in a demonstration, radio program, political campaign, environmental or conservation movement, or some other sort of direct-action project. Unfortunately, being somewhat isolated in Zambia at the moment, I am not currently in a position to become involved in those kinds of efforts, other than my Internet activity of maintaining the *Foundation* website. The thought of running an Internet discussion group has occurred to me, but I simply don’t have the time to do that.

Having given the matter some further thought, a somewhat different approach about what people can do to help has occurred to me. As I have written before, I consider that spirituality (including spiritual aspects of both the New Age Movement and traditional religions) will have a significant role to play in the future of Earth's planetary management. Many people, seeing the destruction that Earth's current global industrial system is wreaking, are anticipating major change, not just in the economic / industrial system that is destroying the biosphere, but in mankind's collective view of nature and mankind's relationship to it – the so-called Great Awakening.

It is my view that the current system will collapse catastrophically, and that the next system of planetary management will replace it under those circumstances. The change will be revolutionary and abrupt, not evolutionary. Because of the stranglehold that global industrialization has on society at the present time, it seems pointless to attempt to change the current system by force, or even by persuasion. Any such attempt would be quickly, easily, contemptuously, ruthlessly, and totally suppressed. That is why current environmental movements are doomed – the current system does not agree with their goals, and they cannot achieve their objectives by force. You cannot bargain with the devil and win – hoping to save the world's last forests by promising material wealth to nearby residents and the country's owners is doomed to failure (although I freely admit that doing something is better than doing nothing, and I agree that a few species may be saved by these movements – it's just that these movements will not "turn things around," as long as global industrialization persists).

So what to do? What can be done that will make any difference?

No matter what your spiritual inclination, all of us believe that we have some control over our lives and destiny, and that where there is life there is hope. If you are a believer in traditional religion, you believe that God is in control of all things, that he can help, and that prayer is the means of communion with him. If you are a New Ager, you believe that you can change your life and the world by meditative practices.

I believe that life rewards action. It also rewards desire and knowledge and planning. If you have read my piece, *The Good Life*, you will know that I believe from personal experience that it rewards thinking, meditation and visualization. It rewards imagination and faith. I also believe in the power of the Master Mind – the ability of groups of people to accomplish vastly more than any single individual can.

When I receive future offers of help, I will tell them this: Pray. Meditate. Imagine. Desire. Visualize. Plan. Decide, act and work. Keep faith / persist. Think about the terrible problem facing mankind, and know that it can be solved. Do not put it out of your mind and try to ignore it, as many others have done. Face the challenge. Each night, as you lie in bed prior to sleep, relax, and contemplate the situation. Imagine how you would want things better here on Earth, for you, your loved ones, your society, your species, and your planet. Employ the power of your subconscious mind to help identify a solution, implement it, and achieve the goal.

Do this without fail, every night. If your friends ask you what to do to change things for the better, ask them to do the same. If, every day, millions of people are thinking about this problem and are determined to solve it, it will be solved.

Continue with your regular work and life – you live in an industrialized world, and you must earn a living and support yourself and your family in the social context in which you find yourself. But each night, meditate / pray for change. For survival. For freedom.

Think about the fact that, since the advent of agriculture and the dawn of civilization, most of mankind has lived in poverty, squalor, disease, servitude and slavery. Billions of animals are now raised in battery production under the cruelest of conditions, and then slaughtered for human food. With the tremendous intensification of food production for human beings via agriculture, much of the planet has been converted to cropland and rendered void of other large life forms. Where once there was seemingly limitless food, land and natural splendor for all humanity, there is now no free land for any man, and no natural means of support. Realize, as Daniel Quinn discussed in *Ishmael*, that mankind, because of its bloated numbers, is now a prisoner of (large-scale) agriculture, and that the only way that he can regain his freedom is to banish this enslaving, nature-destroying scourge from the face of the planet.

Mankind has been seduced, as Eve seduced Adam and Delilah seduced Samson, into believing that agriculture would be his salvation. Instead, it has choked the world with people, so that most of humanity is enslaved in a crowded prison, in utter despair, and all of nature is being destroyed. Recall the curse of agriculture in Genesis: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil will you eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will remain." Mankind has traded its Garden-of-Eden existence as free hunter-gatherers for a life of bitter toil as slaves on civilization's fields. Now in its final phase (global industrialization), the age of agriculture is in the process of destroying the very biosphere on which mankind depends for its survival and pleasure. Know that you have been blinded to the truth by the lies of the greedy. Open your eyes and see that Gaia is dying, and that each additional year of global industrialization brings her closer to death. Realize what is happening, and what must be done to change things for the better.

Agricultural civilization has made you a prisoner, and blinded you to the truth. Large-scale agriculture has taken away your freedom, and global industrialization is now destroying the biosphere in which you exist. World leaders and economists have told you that increased agricultural and industrial production will save the planet, when in fact that is what is destroying it. The labor surplus enabled by agriculture has always been used to promote wealth and power for those in control. Your salvation is not in increased industrialization – that will simply destroy more of nature. The past half-century has revealed the truth of this beyond the question of a doubt – despite all of the so-called "economic development," and despite the "green revolution," there are more poor, hungry and ill people on the planet than ever before, and more of nature has been destroyed. Open your eyes and see this!

We are all different, and we commune with the Universal Consciousness, the Universal Spirit, the Universal Mind, in different ways. If you meditate, then meditate, imagine, and visualize, and see what to do. If you pray, then recall the prayer of Samson as he prayed for release from the Philistines after they took him prisoner and put out his eyes, just as agricultural civilization has imprisoned you and blinded you to the truth:

"While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me

just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than when he lived.”

Pray for an early end to the industrial age. If the industrial age runs its course, the biosphere may be destroyed and mankind made extinct. Each day that global industrialization continues, another 80 species are exterminated by large human numbers and industrialization. If this continues for much longer, there will be little or nothing left to save, and mankind will itself be made extinct. The time for action is *now!* Do not let another day go by without acting to save the planet. By your action – your meditation, your prayer – you can make a difference. The future of the world depends on you – on what you decide, and on what you do. If we all work together, there is little that we cannot accomplish. Seek the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Eschew Obfuscation

Unlike the United States, Zambia, which is one of the poorest nations in the world, asserts rather firm control over its borders (as best it can, given its limitations). If the government believes that a “local” (black) Zambian can do the work of a white foreigner, it deports the foreigner and gives the job to a local. The foreigner is declared a “prohibited immigrant,” his residency (work) permit is revoked, and he is deported. His position is said to have been “localized.” He is said to have been “P.I. -ed.”

My wife plays in a local bridge club. One of the members of the group is an Italian, who runs a tile business. Last week, the government decided to deport him, along with several others. The November 9 issue of the *Times of Zambia* newspaper carried an article, entitled, “Chilanga Cement MD [managing director] work permit revoked.” The article described the positions that were being localized and identified the people who were being declared prohibited immigrants. The article included an excerpt from the public notice that was published to effect the deportation. It reads as follows: “Now therefore this notice is published in accordance with the provisions of Section 34 of the Act as service on the above mentioned persons of the declaration which the effect of declaring of the above mentioned as prohibited immigrants in relation to Zambia.”

Huh? What’d they say?

This is an excellent example of “legalese” – text that is deliberately obfuscated in a foolish attempt to make the legal profession look arcane. Thank goodness, a movement started in the United States several decades ago to simplify legal announcements and documents, and render them in plain, understandable language. Those who stood for deliberate obfuscation will be pleased to hear that it is still alive and well in Zambia. Those who do not should know that their work is far from done.