

A Cato Institute Book

# ECO-SCAM

THE FALSE  
PROPHETS OF  
ECOLOGICAL  
APOCALYPSE

---

RONALD BAILEY



ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  
NEW YORK

- “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now.”<sup>1</sup>
- “The limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime in the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.”<sup>2</sup>
- “In the case of recombinant DNA, it is an all or none situation—only one accident is needed to endanger the future of mankind.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Global warming, ozone depletion, deforestation and overpopulation are the four horsemen of a looming 21st century apocalypse.”<sup>4</sup>
- “The threat of a new ice age must now stand alongside nuclear war as a likely source of wholesale death and misery for mankind.”<sup>5</sup>

Prophets proclaiming imminent catastrophe are nothing new in the history of Western culture. However, at no time in the past have predictions of global disaster achieved such wide currency and been given so much respectful attention by policymakers and the general public. The approach of inevitable doom has become the conventional wisdom of the late twentieth century.

In contrast to our gloomy century, nineteenth-century Europe and America celebrated a robust faith in human progress. And why not? The nineteenth century saw great strides being made in human knowledge and the advance of political liberalism. This faith in progress was shattered by the slaughter of World War I. Subsequently, a sense of cultural disarray and cynicism provided fertile soil for the growth of the twin totalitarian political faiths—fascism and Marxist communism. The worldwide Great Depression accelerated the loss of faith in progress in the United States. The horrors of total war during the Second World War—forty-five million dead, the saturation bombing of cities, and

the Holocaust in the concentration camps, ending with the flash of the atomic bomb—further eroded confidence in a better future.

Consequently, nostalgia for a simpler time, when humanity purportedly was not confronted with complex and apparently intractable political, economic, and social problems, powerfully attracted some segments of the West’s intellectual castes. Rousseau’s romantic notion of the innate goodness of primitive, “natural” man distorted by the temptations of civilization gained favor. Some radical environmentalists, inspired by Rousseau, now literally urged modern mankind to return to a hunter-gatherer existence. The ostensibly more “natural” lives of the earth’s remaining tribespeople are used to reproach a corrupt modern society, as in Margaret Mead’s biased and misleading accounts of sexual practices and morality in Polynesia.<sup>6</sup>

“The apocalyptic myths of the last several decades have been cast on a global scale: world depression, world war, nuclear holocaust, overpopulation, ecological disaster . . . the imagination of disaster has become fixated on worldwide catastrophe,”<sup>7</sup> Michael Barkun observed in *Disaster and the Millennium*.

Modern ecological millenarians, impatient with waiting for the flash of a thermonuclear doom, now claim there is a “global environmental crisis” threatening not just humanity, but all life on earth. A cadre of professional “apocalypse abusers” frightens the public with lurid scenarios of a devastated earth, overrun by starving hordes of humanity, raped of its precious nonrenewable resources, poisoned by pesticides, pollution, and genetically engineered plagues, and baked by greenhouse warming. The new millenarians no longer expect a wrathful God to end the world in a rain of fire or overwhelming deluge. Instead humanity will die by its own hand.

In Christian eschatology, the “Millennium” denotes specifically the thousand-year kingdom to be established after Christ’s Second Coming as prophesied in the New Testament’s Book of Revelation (20:4–6). Following Christ’s

thousand-year reign comes the Last Judgment, and the creation of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

The expectation that the end of the world was imminent has spawned numerous Christian millenarian sects, such as the Anabaptists and Hussites in Central Europe, the Rappites and the Millerites in nineteenth-century America, and more recently the Jehovah's Witnesses. Millenarian movements tend to arise in periods of great social and political turmoil, and this is especially true where modernity begins to undermine traditional institutions and established ways of life.

The Millerites of upstate New York were one fairly typical millenarian sect. In 1818, William Miller, the group's founder, calculated that Christ's Second Coming would take place during the next twenty-five years. Spectacular meteor showers and a huge comet were taken as unmistakable portents of impending disaster. After several missed dates, Miller finally predicted that the end would definitely come on October 22, 1844. On the appointed day many believers, dressed in white robes, climbed nearby hilltops to await the apocalypse. "The Great Disappointment" is how the Seventh-Day Adventists, the modern successors of the Millerites, characterize Miller's prophetic failure.

Millenarian aspiration is not confined to Christianity and Western societies. Traditional societies stressed by contact with modern Western culture are particularly prone to outbreaks of millennialist enthusiasm. For instance, in the late 1880s, Native American tribespeople on the Great Plains and in the West joined the Ghost Dance cult. Ghost Dance ceremonies were supposed to resurrect ancestral warriors who would destroy the expanding white settlements.

Similarly, "cargo cult" rituals in Polynesia sought to lure ships and airplanes filled with Western goods to poor islanders. In one case, natives actually constructed a dummy runway and mock air-control tower to welcome the long-anticipated cargo plane. They even made an aircraft out of sticks and leaves in an effort to woo its mate to the ground.<sup>8</sup> With the advent of apocalyptic environmentalism and the

rejection of science and technology, it now seems Western civilization may join the Ghost Dance.

The great medieval millenarian Joachim di Fiore propounded the doctrine that history is divided into stages. For him history was a march from a previous golden age to the present corrupt society whose evil would imminently be swept away by a major cataclysm and replaced by a purified society. Joachim exhorted the faithful to smash their decadent society and thus help bring history to fulfillment. In Joachim's new age, all hierarchies would be eliminated, harmony established, and poverty abolished.<sup>9</sup> This notion that history proceeds in discrete stages toward final perfection profoundly influenced many later thinkers including Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx.

In the nineteenth century, millenarian aspirations, originally spiritual and religious in character, became secularized and were incorporated into the doctrines of radical and utopian politics. The greatest millenarian political faith is Marxism and its more temperate social democratic sects.

"Marx, with his highly detailed and imaginative presentation of the eschatology of capitalism, can be described as the last of the Judeo-Christian prophets, or the first of the secular ones," wrote British social critic Paul Johnson.<sup>10</sup> Like the religious millenarians who preceded him, Marx believed that a corrupt society—in his case, capitalism—would collapse in a massive crisis ushering in a golden age of egalitarian harmony.

According to orthodox Marxist eschatology, the internal class contradictions of capitalist production doom that hateful form of society to inevitable destruction. The proletariat led by the Marxist avant-garde will overthrow the exploiters and topple capitalism into well-deserved oblivion. Now, with Marxist class warfare relegated to the dustbin of history, capitalism can no longer be counted on to self-destruct. Marxist communism's recent disintegration leaves contemporary radicals with an "agency problem."

"Ecological alarmism . . . incorporates many aspects of Marxist theology, especially the idea that capitalist soci-

ety . . . is ultimately self-destructive," writes Johnson.<sup>11</sup> For many modern leftists the "global environmental crisis" is the new "agent" of history which will eventually destroy capitalism. In the reinterpreted radical vision, capitalism, instead of strangling itself to death on its class contradictions, will choke to death on its own wastes. Radical environmentalists are now the earth's vanguard class who will lead the struggle to bury capitalism and Western materialism.

Self-described "revolutionary leftist" and founder of the Institute of Social Ecology Murray Bookchin flatly declares that "the immediate source of the ecological crisis is capitalism," which he pointedly calls "a cancer in the biosphere."<sup>12</sup> He adds, "I believe that the color of radicalism today is not red, but green."<sup>13</sup>

According to Michael Barkun, the social visions of modern secular millenarians embrace "the disappearance of want and hierarchy, the leveling of distinctions, the elevation of the downtrodden."<sup>14</sup> Like the followers of earlier millenarian movements, both spiritual and political, radical environmentalists stress egalitarianism, the special insight of adherents, the imminence of the apocalypse, and the salvation of the faithful after the cataclysm.

The modern environmental movement strongly attracts "radical egalitarians," says University of California at Berkeley political scientist Aaron Wildavsky. "Radical egalitarians view environmentalism as the best thing that they've got going to attack corporate capitalism."<sup>15</sup> He adds, "Egalitarians believe that the environment is threatened by man-made things, just as man is. Humanity's institutions, in the egalitarian view, are no less the source of inequalities among humans than they are the source of destruction for the environment. To defend the environment is therefore to erode inequalities."<sup>16</sup>

For example, social ecologist Bookchin argues that we must change our repressive industrial capitalist society into "an ecological society based on non-hierarchical relationships, decentralized democratic communities, and eco-technologies like solar power, organic gardening, and

humanly scaled industries."<sup>17</sup> In 1976 arch-environmentalist Barry Commoner concluded in *The Poverty of Power* that "it may be time to view the faults of the U.S. capitalist economic system from the vantage point of a socialist alternative," while the "deep ecologist" Arne Naess calls on humanity to adopt a much lower material standard of living.<sup>18</sup>

Ecological mystic and founder of the radical group Earth First! David Foreman asserts that Western society is "rotten to the core" and says he plans to help build "an egalitarian, decentralized, ecologically sound" society that will "emerge out of the ashes of the old industrialized empire" after the ecological apocalypse.<sup>19</sup>

Environmental millenarians, like their medieval forebears, declare that humanity can only avert total ruin if society repents and quickly adopts their sweeping proposals for radical social restructuring and economic redistribution.

Richard Hofstadter tagged this type of apocalyptic demagoguery the "paranoid style" of politics. Political paranoids believe that all of humanity's ills can be traced "to a single center and hence can be eliminated by some kind of final act of victory over the evil source. . . . the world confronts an apocalypse of a sort prefigured in the Book of Revelation."<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, the contemporary focus of evil is the "global ecological crisis."

The political paranoid, like the modern radical environmentalist, "traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values."<sup>21</sup> Environmental doomsters believe themselves uniquely capable of seeing the impending catastrophe while the rest of humanity remains stubbornly blind to the danger. "Ecologists are the saved" who believe that they "are better able to plan man, space, and the environment than existing institutions," concludes historian Anna Bramwell.<sup>22</sup>

Predictions of doom have become more numerous in recent years for a more mundane reason as well—they work. Fears of ecological collapse motivate voters and political institutions to adopt environmentalist policies. Environmental

scientist Fred Singer notes that the first Earth Day in 1970 “showed that frightening the public gets results. We have been hit by one doomsday prediction after another ever since.”<sup>23</sup>

Bill McKibben, an environmental writer, lets the cat out of the bag in his overwrought rendering of the alleged global crisis, *The End of Nature*: “The ecological movement has always had its greatest success in convincing people that we are threatened by some looming problem. . . .”<sup>24</sup> Essentially apocalyptic threats, “If you don’t do what I tell you to do, the world will come to an end.”

Wildavsky calls the use of doomsday predictions a form of political pressure, the “Armageddon complex.” He notes that apocalyptic “bring all the dangers of the future into the present, hold them over people, and say the most terrible things will happen unless [their] views are accepted. If we are not freezing to death from nuclear winter, for instance, then the greenhouse effect is going to fry us to a crisp. The solution, of course, will be local, state, national, international, and intergalactic regulation to prevent these awful things from happening.”<sup>25</sup>

A sizable portion of the contemporary environmental movement has goals far beyond merely preserving wilderness, protecting endangered species, recycling garbage, or even trying to prevent global climate change. American “Green” political activists are building “support for a political outlook that merges ecological and social activism, with a strong emphasis on participatory democracy and political and economic decentralization. The Greens have helped sustain a hopeful alternative voice in a period characterized by a distinct shortage of idealism on the left.”<sup>26</sup>

In fact, “social justice” has long been on the agenda of environmental egalitarians. Paul Ehrlich wrote more than twenty years ago: “Many of the suppressed people of our nation consider ecology to be just one more ‘racist shuck.’ . . . Slums, cockroaches, and rats are ecological problems, too. The correction of ghetto conditions in Detroit is neither

more nor less important than saving the Great Lakes—both are imperative.”<sup>27</sup>

As recently as 1991, Ehrlich reaffirmed that the “environmental crisis” can only be resolved through the “creation of a new civilization” which will deal with “the inequitable distribution of wealth and resources, racism, sexism, religious prejudice, and xenophobia.”<sup>28</sup> In 1970, Denis Hayes, chief organizer of the first Earth Day, forthrightly declared, “We demand a lower productivity and a wider distribution.” He argued that the growing environmental movement shared “a single unified value structure” which stood against “exploitation, imperialism, and the war-based economy.”<sup>29</sup>

The editors of the influential leftist magazine *The Progressive* warned in their special 1970 Earth Day issue that the “new Four Horsemen—Overpopulation, Pollution, the Famine of Resources, and Nuclear War—are riding relentlessly on their mission of destruction.”<sup>30</sup> *The Progressive’s* editors added, “The true ecological crusaders and the peace crusaders have a common objective—a world to save from war, poverty, racism—and pollution.”<sup>31</sup> Twenty years later, the peace movement and the environmental movement are now virtually indistinguishable.

The environmental movement’s widening social justice agenda includes not only preventing the construction of incinerators and nuclear power plants, fighting over landfill sites and recycling campaigns, but also opposing the Persian Gulf War, supporting native treaty rights, and organizing the inner city poor to demand more public housing.<sup>32</sup>

The largest student-run political organization on America’s campuses, the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), calls for a “broader definition of environmentalism,” and issues of social justice, recast as “environmental equity,” dominated the group’s 1991 national conference in Boulder, Colorado. Randolph Viscio, SEAC’s national coordinator, declared: “Poor housing is an environmental issue. Fighting for equality in an impoverished community where a company wants to put a toxic waste dump. Building coalitions with labor and minority groups.

It's not that these are very new issues. They just haven't been given the attention they deserve."<sup>33</sup>

In response to these social justice concerns, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun to broaden the scope of its regulatory activities by focusing on "environmental equity." For example, the EPA plans to analyze how the siting of environmental nuisances like landfills and incinerators specifically affects poor people and minorities.<sup>34</sup>

An increasingly influential wing of the modern environmental movement consists of the adherents of the religious-mystical worldview known as "deep ecology." Deep ecologists are even more radically egalitarian than those environmentalists whose roots are in a social justice tradition. They urge us to shun a narrow ethical focus on humanity and adopt a "biocentric" view which treats humans and all other species as morally identical. "Man is no more important than any other species," concludes Earth First! founder Dave Foreman.<sup>35</sup>

Calling for "greater environmental humility," many deep ecologists are frankly antihuman. Foreman says, "We are a cancer on nature."<sup>36</sup> And the highly regarded "ecoth theologian" Reverend Thomas Berry doesn't mince words either: "We are an affliction of the world, its demonic presence. We are the violation of Earth's most sacred aspects."<sup>37</sup> Some deep ecologists welcome the AIDS epidemic as a means of population control,<sup>38</sup> while others, like Christopher Manes, shout the slogan "Back to the Pleistocene," and urge us to tear down modern civilization and become tribal hunter-gatherers as our ancestors were ten thousand years ago.<sup>39</sup> This strong antihuman and anticivilization inclination has caused some friction between "deep ecologists" and environmentalists who stem from the more human-centered social justice tradition.

Unlike secular millenarians who express their utopian hopes in political rhetoric, deep ecologists do not shrink from using frankly religious and salvationist language. "If we seek only personal redemption we could become solitary ecological saints among the masses of those we might

classify as 'sinners' who continue to pollute," writes Bill Devall.<sup>40</sup> Devall, a professor at Humboldt State University in California, wants to organize society along explicitly egalitarian and communitarian lines.

The environmental problems of "technocratic-industrial societies" are "coming to be understood as a crisis of character and of culture," he writes.<sup>41</sup> What is needed is a "new ecological sensibility."<sup>42</sup> There is a chilling similarity between the old Marxist aspiration of molding a "New Soviet Man" and the deep ecologist's desire to create a "New Ecological Person."

Devall adds that "deep ecology goes beyond the so-called factual scientific level to the level of self and Earth wisdom."<sup>43</sup> Less generously, one critic fumes that environmentalism has become "like a new religion, a new paganism, that worships trees and sacrifices people."<sup>44</sup>

Millenarians, both secular and religious, look forward to a transformed humanity, and radical environmentalists also wish to remake a flawed human race. In his seminal article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," historian Lynn White, Jr., blamed environmental degradation on Judeo-Christian teleology, which he decried as having instilled in Western culture a "faith in perpetual progress." In 1967, White asserted, "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."<sup>45</sup> And this call to "rethink and refeel our nature and destiny"<sup>46</sup> has not gone unheeded. Environmentalist Victor Scheffer believes that "if religion can be defined simply as a binding philosophy, the start of environmentalism was a religious reformation."<sup>47</sup> Another advocate declared that "environmentalists are the lay priests of a different gospel that can help save us."<sup>48</sup> We are bombarded by demands that we must convert to the new environmental gospel.

In this vein, Paul Ehrlich writes that we must undergo a "revolution in attitudes" leading to a "transformation in human thinking comparable to the one that accompanied the agricultural revolution and in a much, much shorter

time.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, eco-doomster Lester Brown is calling for an “Environmental Revolution” in the 1990s. He adds, “The Agricultural Revolution began 10,000 years ago and the Industrial Revolution has been under way for two centuries. But if the Environmental Revolution is to succeed, it must be compressed into a few decades.”<sup>50</sup> “Our world,” he warns, “faces potentially convulsive change.”

The environmental movement also offers a congenial home to many neo-Luddites, that is, modern antitechnology zealots. The term *Luddite* is derived from the name of the apocryphal leader of nineteenth-century England’s machine-breakers, Ned Ludd. Gangs of traditional weavers outcompeted by modern looms smashed thousands of the offending machines in the English Midlands in the early nineteenth century. Today many environmental radicals, like the Luddites of old, yearn to smash industrial capitalism. Neo-Luddites like Jeremy Rifkin and Dave Foreman oppose nuclear power, private automobiles, pesticides, automated manufacturing, and biotechnology. Some neo-Luddites literally engage in machine-breaking. The radical group Earth First! uses “ecotage” or what it calls “monkeywrenching” to destroy developers’ bulldozers by putting sugar in their fuel tanks or spiking trees with nails so that they shatter saw blades at lumber mills. Flying debris from the shattered blades have maimed several lumberyard workers.

Less militant neo-Luddites have adopted E. F. Schumacher’s slogan that “small is beautiful” and urge humanity to adopt “appropriate technologies.” Deep ecologists seek technologies which they deem to be “simple in means, rich in ends.” These neoutopian platitudes beg the question of just what constitutes “appropriate technology.” As Witold Rybczynski points out, “appropriate technology” usually boils down to labor-intensive low technology or at best some vaguely defined form of “intermediate” technology.<sup>51</sup> Recently the clamor for “appropriate technology” has been repackaged as a generalized demand that we reduce the “scale of human activity.”<sup>52</sup>

What makes a technology “appropriate” or “inappro-

priate”? Deep ecologists Devall and Sessions suggest that in order to determine whether a machine is “appropriate” or not people ask: “Does this technological device or system foster greater autonomy of local communities or greater dependency on some centralized ‘authority’?”<sup>53</sup> (Fostering greater autonomy is, of course, “appropriate.”)

Just how nonsensical this question is becomes immediately apparent when one considers the case of computers. Early in their history computers were expensive behemoths which social critics almost unanimously predicted would foster highly centralized and regimented organizations. The critics (along with everyone else) completely failed to foresee how personal computers and dispersed networks would eventually emancipate people from central control and put ever greater computing power in the hands of millions of individuals.

It probably would have been impossible to develop liberating personal computers without first building mainframes. And how about automobiles? Certainly cars foster “autonomy,” but few environmentalists would deem them “appropriate.” It is simply unwarranted, but completely characteristic, hubris for radical environmentalists to think that they can determine with any degree of certainty the future benefits and costs of a new technology.

Modern environmentalism shares the belief—typical of earlier millenarian cults—that we live in the time immediately before the end, that our age is special, and that the final battle between good and evil will culminate during our lifetimes. “We just happen to be living at the moment when the carbon dioxide has increased to an intolerable level. We just happen to be alive at the moment when if nothing is done before we die the world’s tropical rain forests will become a brown girdle that will last for millennia,” writes Bill McKibben.<sup>54</sup>

“Never in the course of history has humankind been faced with so many threats and dangers,” declared the Club of Rome in 1991.<sup>55</sup> Others warn that “we are the last generation on Earth that can save the planet.”<sup>56</sup>

Like earlier millenarians who saw signs and portents of the end in comets, meteors, plagues, floods, and droughts, contemporary enviro-prophets see confirming proof of their worst fears wherever they turn. "The signs are there for those who can read them," declares Paul Ehrlich.<sup>57</sup> He points to hurricanes, heat waves, unseasonal cold snaps, depleted oil wells, and local famines, along with the traditional floods, droughts, and epidemics, as portents of the coming global catastrophe—literally anything bad indiscriminately counts as evidence of impending doom.

Millenarians like Ehrlich do not accept the culturally transmitted notions of reality. They selectively fix their attention on information that confirms their strongly held beliefs. They ignore information that does not fit or twist it so that it confirms their views. Even apparently good news is artfully reinterpreted as a bad omen. For example, the fact that worldwide farmers grow far more food per acre now than two decades ago is bad news in the exegesis of the doomsters. They claim that more intensive agriculture means greater soil erosion and groundwater depletion; consequently, more people who are temporarily sustained by the extra agricultural bounty will later die in misery when the earth's fertility is exhausted and the long-predicted global famine finally strikes.

Sad to say, many prominent modern millenarians misuse their scientific credentials to lend authority to their policy pronouncements. They claim certain factual states of affairs necessarily call for specific ethical and policy responses. Thus, they try to make the philosophically illegitimate leap from an "is" to an "ought," from the domain of facts to the realm of values.

Modern doomsayers typically furnish some very qualified scientific data as evidence for the imminence of the crisis and then strike out boldly to reorganize society completely to meet the alleged challenge. In addition, apocalyp-tics claim our predicament is so perilous that we do not have time for further study of the situation. Despite enormous uncertainties about the seriousness of the alleged

problems, they insist that we must act immediately to radically transform our society, economy, and values. Or else.

These "apocalypse abusers" typically extrapolate only the most horrendous trends, while systematically ignoring any ameliorating or optimistic ones, offering worst-case scenarios in the guise of balanced presentations. Ehrlich recently dropped all pretense to scientific objectivity and endorsed the "quasi-religious" deep ecology movement. He commended deep ecologists for eschewing "scientific nonsense."<sup>58</sup>

"Normally scientific research leads to scientific conclusions, not to metaphysical manifestos, prophetic outbursts, utopian reorganizations of society, and political positions, let alone to a set of internationalist positions on the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor nations, which are clearly identifiable as positions taken by the far left portion of the political spectrum," observed Edith Efron in her groundbreaking *The Apocalyp-tics*.<sup>59</sup> Physicist Edward Teller declared, "Highly speculative theories of worldwide destruction—even of the end of life on Earth—used as a call for a particular kind of political action serve neither the good reputation of science nor dispassionate political thought."<sup>60</sup>

However, radical environmentalists have become very skilled at portraying scientific findings as part of a "global ecological crisis." Consequently, politicians and other policymakers are often forced to respond to the illegitimate fears fostered by apocalyptic environmentalists. Political leaders must make decisions—often far-reaching ones—based on very uncertain, and sometimes deliberately distorted, scientific findings. Some environmentalists are not above lying in what they believe is a good cause.

What about John and Betty Smith who earnestly recycle their soda cans and newspapers, eat fast-food hamburgers served in cardboard—not Styrofoam—cartons, and carpool to work? Surely the Smiths are not apocalyptic egalitarian environmentalists? They are just trying to do their little bit to "save the earth."

The Smiths' modest "light green" environmentalism is

an echo of the radical agenda set by millenarians in the "dark green" environmentalist movement. The Smiths and their neighbors are motivated by the relentless drumbeat of fears and millenarian environmental predictions tapped out by apocalypse abusers.

There are more than 450 national organizations, and countless ones at the local level, promoting environmentalism.<sup>61</sup> While certainly not all of these organizations are radical, they all share an institutional imperative to find and publicize an endless series of crises and disasters, since without calamities to combat, they have no reason to exist. Consequently, many of these groups have become quite skilled at mass-marketing doom.

Leading environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, pulled in more than \$400 million from a contributor base of nearly four million in 1990.<sup>62</sup> Four hundred million dollars is ten times the amount of money that Republican and Democratic parties together raised in 1990. "Ecology is now a political category, like socialism or conservatism," says historian Anna Bramwell.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in 1970 Marion Edey, a founder of the League of Conservation Voters, argued that environmentalists "must stop acting like a small pressure group and become more like an unofficial political party. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

And the "unofficial" environmental party has been very effective in disseminating its message. When 74 percent of respondents to a *New York Times* poll agree with the statement, "Protecting the environment is so important that the requirements and standards cannot be too high, and continuing environmental improvements must be made regardless of cost,"<sup>65</sup> radical ideas have surely taken hold among average Americans.

Four hundred million dollars also buys a lot of influence in the halls of the United States Capitol. George Mitchell, U.S. Senate Majority Leader, warns in unmistakably apocalyptic tones in his book *World on Fire: Saving an Endangered Earth* of an impending "ecological holocaust" in

which "we risk turning our world into a lifeless desert in the coming century, and bringing to pass the grim final judgment of a world on fire."<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, Vice-president Albert Gore, who, for more than a decade and a half, was the leading Congressional backer of environmental causes, is now calling on his fellow citizens to "become partners in a bold effort to change the very foundation of our civilization."<sup>67</sup> He urges us "to make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization,"<sup>68</sup> offering "a global Marshall Plan" to drastically reorganize the American and world economies along environmentalist lines.<sup>69</sup>

Since the 1960s the United States has adopted scores of new environmental laws and thousands of environmental regulations. Some have been beneficial and necessary. But environmental regulation has been expensive, costing the economy \$123 billion in 1991, with the price tag rising to \$171 billion annually by the year 2000.<sup>70</sup> The Environmental Protection Agency's budget has jumped 31 percent since 1989, while its staff swelled by 23 percent.<sup>71</sup>

In June 1992, the global environment rose to the top of the world's agenda when the United Nations convoked its 172 members at Rio de Janeiro for the much-heralded "Earth Summit." Organizers grandiloquently billed Rio '92 as "the most important meeting in the history of humanity."<sup>72</sup>

More than 100 presidents, prime ministers, and princes gathered for the world's greatest-ever photo opportunity. The Earth Summit also attracted diplomats from 172 countries, 9,000 journalists, and 17,000 environmentalists representing more than 1,400 nongovernmental organizations.

The U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, as the Earth Summit was officially called, was not known for understatement. Maurice Strong, the Canadian oilman who served as its Secretary-General warned in his opening remarks that humanity's current path "could lead to the end of civilization" and that "this planet could soon become uninhabitable for people." He concluded that the only

hopes for saving humanity are sweeping changes in "global culture and value systems." As we have seen, this utopian call for changes in "values" is a staple of millenarian movements including modern apocalyptic environmentalism.

The most significant agreements reached at Earth Summit were the Convention of Global Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and Agenda 21. Even before Rio, the nations of the world had signed some 170 international treaties dealing with environmental concerns.<sup>73</sup>

The more interesting event—from a psycho-social-cultural point of view—was the parallel "Global Forum." The Forum, held in a park near downtown Rio, was advertised as the "world's fair of environmentalism." At the Forum, radical environmentalists and their allies in the New Age Spirituality movement hawked their solutions to the global ecological crisis they believe is looming. These non-governmental organizations hammered out a series of "treaties" among themselves designed to monitor and pressure their countries' governments to comply with the official treaties signed at the Summit.

The most surprising thing about the Earth Summit was how little the natural world and the environment were actually mentioned. Usually, the alleged environmental crises were simply stipulated and the conversation and speeches turned quickly to outlining schemes for drastically redistributing the world's wealth in order to achieve "global equity."

The U.S. and many other nations signed Agenda 21, the ambitious 800-page blueprint for global environmental regulation and economic planning for the twenty-first century. To implement Agenda 21 programs, the developed countries are expected to give the Third World \$125 billion annually. At the Summit, one got the impression that many poor countries anticipate the arrival of Western aid much the same way that Polynesian "cargo cults" wait for goods-laden ships to dock.

Agenda 21 is the Mother of all Five Year Plans! A U.N. Sustainable Development Commission will be established by the General Assembly under the authority of the

Secretary-General to oversee Agenda 21. The spectacular failure of Soviet economic central planning has not dimmed the enthusiasm of environmentalists for global ecological central planning.

To ameliorate or prevent impending doom, apocalyptics simultaneously recommend the creation of a huge coercive international bureaucracy while promoting decentralized "participatory democracy" at the local level. They wish to turn the whole world into one gigantic "commons." The notion of a "global commons" is akin to the old-fashioned Marxist demand for the abolition of private property.

Historian Anna Bramwell notes the contradiction between the radical environmentalists' "small is beautiful" values and their belief in global planning. "Their method of returning to the natural world involves mass planning and coercion," she notes.<sup>74</sup>

As the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development showed, the doomsters reflexively turn to the international control of whatever they deem the problem to be—population, food, climate, or carbon dioxide. Not incidentally, international regulation of the problem would also enhance the doomsters' own power and prestige.

Another disturbing and disheartening aspect of the rise of radical environmentalism is the growing pressure on scientists to manipulate research findings in order to attract funding. "It is well known that Congress has a short attention span—so short that it often appears capable of dealing only with crises. Because everyone else is crying 'crisis,' responsible scientists are forced to join the chorus or risk losing their research programs," avers Harvard University researcher Peter Rogers.<sup>75</sup> He adds that the phony crisis atmosphere engendered by this dismal process causes environmentalists, politicians, and citizen's groups to demand immediate action, which is not what most scientists had in mind at all.

The father of the atom bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, appalled by the devastating power of nuclear weapons, once declared that scientists had now "known sin." Scientists have indeed "known sin" in the last fifty years, but not the

sin of eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as implied by Oppenheimer. Instead their besetting sin is far more mundane—greed.

After three years and two billion dollars, Manhattan Project scientists succeeded in making three atomic bombs. The project's two billion dollar budget would add up to more than \$16 billion today.<sup>76</sup>

At the dawn of the atomic age, the physicists were the first scientists to enjoy vast government largesse. The great national laboratories like the Argonne National Laboratory outside Chicago and Lawrence Livermore near San Francisco were built and funded as technical citadels devoted to the struggle against Soviet communism. "Government was evidently to be a far more benign and generous patron than most scientists had believed possible," concluded Alice Kimball Smith, in her history of the Federation of American Scientists.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, federal research spending has now ballooned to more than \$76 billion annually,<sup>78</sup> and scientists at government and university laboratories have become a powerful political lobby. The ideal of the dispassionate and objective analysis of the natural world has sometimes been thrown aside in favor of naked interest-group politics and the scramble for funds.

Climatologists are fairly recent entrants to the government science funding frays. In the 1970s, the \$50 million Climatic Impact Assessment Program (CIAP) was the first intensive scientific study of humanity's impacts on climate. In the 1980s, some climatologists began warning against an eroding ozone layer and catastrophic increases in the earth's average temperature. Subsequently, they have been rewarded with new grants of federal monies; the climate change research budget, for example, climbed to \$1.1 billion in 1992 and will increase by 24 percent in 1993.<sup>79</sup>

Of the scores of scientists interviewed in the course of researching this book, nearly every one of them mentioned, unprompted, how scarce research funds are and how they need more money for their work. Most of them believe in

good faith that their work is important and possibly even vital for the future well-being of mankind. Therefore it is not surprising that some are tempted to try to attract more money by linking their efforts to whatever the latest crisis is. Thus the politicization of science has led inexorably to interest-group lobbying and to the erosion of the standards of objectivity, threatening the very foundations of the scientific enterprise.

This intense competition for funding has also led to a steep increase in "science by press release." Scientists working on environmental problems have been particularly prone to issuing their results without the normal benefit of having their work reviewed by their scientific peers. For example, Ehrlich popularized *The Population Bomb* by making several appearances on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show." The publication of the classic eco-doom study *The Limits to Growth* was orchestrated by a public relations firm. "Nuclear winter" first came to the public's attention in an article by astrophysicist Carl Sagan in the popular newspaper Sunday supplement *Parade*, and was also handled by a public relations firm.

Science by press release has also been used to publicize lesser "crises" such as the carefully choreographed Alar scare in which the Natural Resources Defense Council used a public relations firm to promote the bogus "story" of poisoned apples to CBS's "60 Minutes." In each case, the public was alarmed and new enduring environmental myths were added to the accumulating conventional wisdom of doom, but later scientific analysis severely weakened the original catastrophic claims. The problem of science by press release has become so bad that the National Academy of Sciences issued a report in 1992 calling on scientists to stop the "questionable research practices" of misrepresenting speculations as fact, and releasing research results, especially to the popular press, that have not been evaluated by fellow scientists and judged valid.<sup>80</sup>

Unfortunately, not only do scientists have an incentive to cry "crisis," so too do the environmental advocacy groups

need crises. Without them, how could advocacy groups justify their pleas for donations? Nearly every American gets bulk quantities of junk mail warning of ozone depletion, topsoil erosion, resource depletion, diminishing biodiversity, and global warming. The money the advocacy groups collect is spent on lawyers, lobbying, propaganda, and the salaries and perquisites of the headquarters staffs. The media also have a strong incentive to report "crises"—they must sell newspapers and airtime after all. So there it is—an iron triangle of scientists pleading for research funds, interest groups who need crises to justify their existence, and a press that needs to sell papers. It's no wonder people are frightened.

It is, however, far easier to raise fears than to allay them. The apocalyptic factoids manufactured by radical environmentalists develop a life of their own once they are fixed in the popular imagination. Who does not still hear the "facts" of overpopulation, impending global famine, and resource depletion discussed at cocktail parties and congressional hearings?

The hallmark of a truly scientific statement is that it must be made in a way that permits experiments to reveal that it is false. It is also logically impossible to prove a negative. For example, just as it is impossible to prove that there are no unicorns, so too it is impossible to prove that the world will not come to an end imminently.

On the other hand, pseudoscientific claims can never be proved wrong. For instance, we will see in a later chapter that it is difficult to imagine what evidence would ever convince population alarmist Paul Ehrlich that global famine will not occur in the next three decades. Ehrlich and Lester Brown have time and again predicted that world food prices will soon skyrocket and hundreds of millions starve in massive famines. Like earlier millenarians they insist the catastrophe is imminent, predicting global famine beginning in 1975, 1980, etc. Yet world food prices continue to fall and global famine recedes ever further into the hazy future. Unfazed, the gloom peddlers simply postpone doomsday,

claiming that humanity has somehow gotten a temporary reprieve. How many times can doomsday be delayed before the soothsayers of doom admit that perhaps their prophecies are wrong?

Half a century's woeful experience indicates, however, that crying wolf never erodes the popularity of the frightful predictions. "One clearly wrong prophecy, or even a whole string of them, rarely discredits the prophet in the eyes of those who believe in prophecy," notes Daniel Cohen in *Waiting for the Apocalypse*.<sup>81</sup> And this is especially true for contemporary environmental predictions of doom.

Nevertheless, the conventional wisdom of doom is simply wrong. Humanity is not running short of food or minerals, and in fact life for most human beings has dramatically improved over the past half century.

So why do so many people in the developed world believe in apocalyptic environmentalism? The attraction of apocalyptic thinking is strong. One survivor of millenarian environmentalism, Eric Zencey, recalled, "There is seduction in apocalyptic thinking. If one lives in the Last Days, one's actions, one's very life, take on historical meaning and no small measure of poignance. . . . Apocalypticism fulfills a desire to escape the flow of real and ordinary time, to fix the flow of history into a single moment of overwhelming importance."<sup>82</sup>

Daniel Cohen believes that every generation grows up convinced that it is the last generation in history. However, the method by which the end is to be brought about changes. For Cohen's generation nuclear war was the agent of the apocalypse. "We believed passionately that there would be such a war, and like the early Christians we were sure that this Judgment Day would come within our own lifetimes," he writes.<sup>83</sup>

The glare of the atomic explosions at Trinity and Hiroshima still illuminates all the subsequent prophesied dooms that have so beset the last melancholy half century. So, let us turn now to the beginning of doomsday—July 16, 1945.

being handled by public relations firms, for example, *The Limits to Growth*, nuclear winter, and the Alar scare.

- 7 Scientific findings and conclusions are generally highly caveated and nuanced—rarely flat-out one way or the other. Beware of absolute certainty.
- 8 Find out who funded the work being reported—what agency or foundation, and what is its agenda? Remember that advocacy organizations' personnel need to justify their jobs and perquisites.
- 9 Beware of moral fervor and high levels of righteous indignation. Just because people are willing to put their lives on the line for their beliefs, à la Greenpeace, doesn't mean that they are right. After all there were hundreds of thousands of convinced Nazis and communists who died for their causes.
- 10 Talk with scientists—other than those who are pushing the alleged crisis. Be aware, however, that scientists are often reluctant to criticize their fellow scientists and may even fear that their criticisms might endanger the funding for their own work if they speak up in opposition. No one wants to sound like they favor nuclear war or destroying the ozone layer.

A. A. Hodge once wrote: "It is easier to find a score of men wise enough to discover the truth, than to find one intrepid enough, in the face of opposition, to stand up for it."

It's a reporter's job to find that one.

## NOTES

### Notes to Chapter One

- 1 Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Sierra Club-Ballantine, 1968), i.
- 2 Donella Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: New American Library, 1972), 29.
- 3 Liebe Cavalieri, "New Strains of Life—or Death," *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 22, 1976), 67.
- 4 Michael Oppenheimer, "From Red Menace to Green Threat," *The New York Times* (Mar. 27, 1990), A27. Oppenheimer holds the Barbra Streisand research chair at the Environmental Defense Fund.
- 5 Nigel Calder, "In the Grip of a New Ice Age?" *International Wildlife* (June 1975), 33–35.
- 6 Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge,

- Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983). See especially 95–109, 282–293.
- 7 Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 205.
  - 8 Witold Rybczynski, *Taming the Tiger: The Struggle to Control Technology* (New York: Viking, 1983), 77.
  - 9 Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 97.
  - 10 Paul Johnson, *The Enemies of Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 88.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, 89.
  - 12 Steve Chase, ed., *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 57–59.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 58.
  - 14 Barkun, *Disaster*, 185.
  - 15 Aaron Wildavsky, interview, Oct. 30, 1991.
  - 16 Aaron Wildavsky, *The Rise of Radical Egalitarianism* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1991), 74.
  - 17 Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 155.
  - 18 Barry Commoner, *The Poverty of Power: Energy and the Economic Crisis* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 262.
  - 19 David Foreman, cited in Chase, *Defending the Earth*, 73–75.
  - 20 Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965), xii.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, 29.
  - 22 Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 16.

- 23 S. Fred Singer, "Lowering the Gloom," *Time* (Sept. 14, 1987), 12.
- 24 Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), 174.
- 25 Wildavsky, *Radical Egalitarianism*, 238–239.
- 26 Brian Tokar, "The Greens: To Party or Not?" *Z Magazine* (Oct. 1991), 42.
- 27 Paul Ehrlich and John P. Holdren, "Impact of Population Growth," *Science* 171:1212–1217 (Mar. 26, 1971): 1215.
- 28 Paul Ehrlich and Anne Ehrlich, *Healing the Planet: Strategies for Resolving the Environmental Crisis* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 242.
- 29 Denis Hayes, "Earth Day: A Beginning," *The Progressive* (Apr. 1970), 7.
- 30 "Action for Survival: A Prologue by the Editors," *The Progressive* (Apr. 1970), 3.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 32 Tokar, "The Greens," 42.
- 33 Randolph Viscio, cited in Keith Schneider, "Student Group Seeks Broader Agenda for Environmental Movement," *The New York Times* (Oct. 7, 1991), A12.
- 34 John Cushman, "Environmental Hazards to Poor Gain New Focus at E.P.A.," *The New York Times* (Jan. 21, 1992), C4.
- 35 Dave Foreman, cited in John Fayhee, "Earth First! And Foremost," *Backpacker* (Sept. 1988), 23.
- 36 Dave Foreman, "Only Man's Presence Can Save Nature," *Harper's* (Apr. 1990), 48.
- 37 Thomas Berry, quoted in Murray Bookchin, "Will Ecology Become 'the Dismal Science'?", *The Progressive* (Dec. 1991), 20.

- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 237.
- 40 Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1987), 14.
- 41 Ibid., ix.
- 42 Chase, *Defending the Earth*, 3.
- 43 Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 65.
- 44 Charles Cushman, director of the National Inholders Association, cited in *The New York Times* (Dec. 23, 1991), A12.
- 45 Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* (Mar. 10, 1967), 1206.
- 46 Ibid., 1207.
- 47 Victor Scheffer, *The Shaping of Environmentalism in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 7.
- 48 Archie Ruprecht, "Ask Not for Whom the Owl Hoots," letter to the editor, *The New York Times* (Mar. 14, 1992), 24.
- 49 Ehrlich and Ehrlich, *Healing the Planet*, 251.
- 50 Lester Brown, et al., *State of the World 1992* (New York: Norton, 1992), 175.
- 51 Witold Rybczynski, *Paper Heroes: A Review of Appropriate Technology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1980), 182.
- 52 Ehrlich and Ehrlich, *Healing the Planet*, 238.
- 53 Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 35.

- 54 McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 194.
- 55 Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider, *The First Global Revolution: A Report by the Council of the Club of Rome* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 127.
- 56 Anita Gordon and David Suzuki, *It's A Matter of Survival*, cited by Daniel Kevles in "Some Like It Hot," *The New York Review of Books* (Mar. 26, 1992), 32.
- 57 Ehrlich and Ehrlich, *Healing the Planet*, xiii.
- 58 Ibid., 258.
- 59 Edith Efron, *The Apocalyptic: How Environmental Politics Controls What We Know About Cancer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 44.
- 60 Edward Teller, cited by Starley Thompson and Stephen Schneider, "Nuclear Winter Reappraised," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1986), 983.
- 61 Scheffer, *The Shaping*, 180.
- 62 Terry Anderson and Donald Leal, *Free Market Environmentalism* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991), 94.
- 63 Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, 39.
- 64 Marion Edey, cited in Scheffer, *The Shaping*, 139.
- 65 Riley Dunlap, "Public Opinion in the 1980s: Clear Consensus, Ambiguous Commitment," *Environment* (Oct. 1991), 32.
- 66 George Mitchell, *World on Fire: Saving an Endangered Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 225.
- 67 Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 14.
- 68 Ibid., 269.
- 69 Ibid., 295-360.
- 70 John Cushman, "Federal Regulation Growing as Quayle

- Panel Fights It," *The New York Times* (Dec. 24, 1991), A1.
- 71 *Ibid.*, A14.
- 72 Christina Lamb, "Summit in danger of crashing to earth," *Financial Times* (Nov. 7, 1991), 21.
- 73 Hillary French, Worldwatch Institute Press Conference, Jan. 15, 1992.
- 74 Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, 31.
- 75 Peter Rogers, "Climate Change and Global Warming," *Environmental Science and Technology* 24:4 (1990), 429.
- 76 Robert Norris, et al. "History of the Nuclear Stockpile," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Aug. 1985), 108.
- 77 Alice Kimball Smith, *A Peril and a Hope: The Scientists' Movement in America 1945-47* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 522.
- 78 Colin Norman, "Science Budget: Selective Growth," *Science* (Feb. 7, 1992), 672; William Broad, "Swords Have Been Sheathed But Plowshares Lack Design," *The New York Times* (Feb. 5, 1992), A12.
- 79 Norman, "Science Budget," 673; Edward Rubin, et al., "Keeping Climate Research Relevant," *Issues in Science and Technology* (Winter 1991-92), 50.
- 80 Boyce Rensberger, "Science Panel Cites Research Fraud Problem," *The Washington Post* (Apr. 23, 1992), A11.
- 81 Daniel Cohen, *Waiting for the Apocalypse* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1973), 248.
- 82 Eric Zencey, "Apocalypse and Ecology," *North American Review* (June 1988), 55, 57.
- 83 Cohen, *Waiting for the Apocalypse*, 166.

## Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 Alice Kimball Smith, *A Peril and a Hope: The Scientists' Movement in America 1945-47* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), ii.
- 2 Edward Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1956), 71.
- 3 J. Robert Oppenheimer, cited in Peter Beckman, et al., *The Nuclear Dilemma: Nuclear Weapons in the Cold War and Beyond* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1992), 10.
- 4 Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 188.
- 5 Bertrand Russell, cited in William Poundstone, *Prisoner's Dilemma* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 72.
- 6 Smith, *A Peril and a Hope*, 475.
- 7 C. P. Snow, "The Moral Un-neutrality of Science," *Science* (Jan. 27, 1961), cited in Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (New York: Avon, 1966), 27.
- 8 Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*, 183-84.
- 9 Bernard Feld, "Forty Years of Muddling Through," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Aug. 1985), 30.
- 10 Winston Churchill, cited in Schell, *The Fate*, 197.
- 11 Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable*, 30.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 13 Dexter Master and Katherine Way, *One World, or None* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946).
- 14 Milton Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, 1957-1985* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2-3.