

October 22, 2013

French intellectual, Pascal Bruckner, writes in City Journal about the apocalyptic foolishness that has taken over our culture.

As an asteroid hurtles toward Earth, terrified citizens pour into the streets of Brussels to stare at the mammoth object growing before their eyes. Soon, it will pass harmlessly by—but first, a strange old man, Professor Philippulus, dressed in a white sheet and wearing a long beard, appears, beating a gong and crying: “This is a punishment; repent, for the world is ending!”

We smile at the silliness of this scene from the Tintin comic strip L'Étoile Mystérieuse, published in Belgium in 1941. Yet it is also familiar, since so many people in both Europe and the United States have recently convinced themselves that the End is nigh. This depressing conviction may seem surprising, given that the West continues to enjoy an unparalleled standard of living. But Professor Philippulus has nevertheless managed to achieve power in governments, the media, and high places generally. Constantly, he spreads fear: of progress, of science, of demographics, of global warming, of technology, of food. In five years or in ten years, temperatures will rise, Earth will be uninhabitable, natural disasters will multiply, the climate will bring us to war, and nuclear plants will explode. Man has committed the sin of pride; he has destroyed his habitat and ravaged the planet; he must atone.

My point is not to minimize the dangers that we face. Rather, it is to understand why apocalyptic fear has gripped so many of our leaders, scientists, and intellectuals, who insist on reasoning and arguing as though they were following the scripts of mediocre Hollywood disaster movies. ...

... Over the last half-century, leftist intellectuals have identified two great scapegoats for the world's woes. First, Marxism designated capitalism as responsible for human misery. Second, “Third World” ideology, disappointed by the bourgeois indulgences of the working class, targeted the West, supposedly the inventor of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. The guilty party that environmentalism now accuses—mankind itself, in its will to dominate the planet—is essentially a composite of the previous two, a capitalism invented by a West that oppresses peoples and destroys the earth. Indeed, environmentalism sees itself as the fulfillment of all earlier critiques. “There are only two solutions,” Bolivian president Evo Morales declared in 2009. “Either capitalism dies, or Mother Earth dies.”

So the planet has become the new proletariat that must be saved from exploitation—if necessary, by reducing the number of human beings, as oceanographer Jacques Cousteau said in 1991. ...

... To wake people up requires ever more extreme rhetoric, including a striking number of analogies to the Holocaust. Noël Mamère, a French politician in the Green party, has accused another politician, Claude Allègre, of being a négationniste about global warming—a French word that refers to those who deny the Jewish and Armenian genocides. Economist Rajendra Pachauri, head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has explicitly compared the Danish statistician and eco-skeptic Bjørn Lomborg to the Führer. The American climate scientist James Hansen has accused oil companies trying to “spread doubt about global warming” of

“high crimes against humanity and nature” and called trains transporting American coal “death trains.” Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman has written that “global warming deniers are now on a par with Holocaust deniers.” ...

... What is surprising is that the mood of catastrophe prevails especially in the West, as if it were particular to privileged peoples. Despite the economic crises of the last few years, people live better in Europe and the United States than anywhere else, which is why migrants the world over want to come to those places. Yet never have we been so inclined to condemn our societies.

Perhaps the new Green puritanism is nothing but the reaction of a West deprived of its supreme competence, the last avatar of an unhappy neocolonialism that preaches to other cultures a wisdom that it has never practiced. For the last 20 years, non-European peoples have become masters of their own futures and have stopped regarding us as infallible models. They are likely to receive our professions of environmentalist faith with polite indifference. Billions of people look to economic growth, with all the pollution that accompanies it, to improve their condition. Who are we to refuse it to them?

Environmental worry is universal; the sickness of the end of the world is purely Western. To counter this pessimism, we might list the good news of the last 20 years: democracy is making slow progress; more than a billion people have escaped absolute poverty; life expectancy has increased in most countries; war is becoming rarer; many serious illnesses have been eradicated. But it would do little good. Our perception is inversely proportional to reality.

*The Christian apocalypse saw itself as a hopeful revelation of the coming of God's kingdom. Today's has nothing to offer. There is no promise of redemption; the only hope is that those human beings who repent of their errors may escape the chaos, as in Cormac McCarthy's fine novel *The Road*. How can we be surprised, then, that so many bright minds have become delirious and that so many strange predictions flourish?*

Contrast all that worry to the weather this year in the United States where we have had one of the least extreme weather years ever. Or course, we're a small part of the world. But, when AlGore is telling us the world is coming to an end, we learn God does have a sense of humor since our climate is the mildest in years. [Climate Depot](#) had the story.

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Number of wildfires: *'On pace to be the lowest it has been in the past ten years'*

Extreme Heat: *The number of 100 degree days may 'turn out to be the lowest in about 100 years of records'*

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City Journal

Apocalyptic Daze

Secular elites prophesy a doomsday without redemption.

by Pascal Bruckner

As an asteroid hurtles toward Earth, terrified citizens pour into the streets of Brussels to stare at the mammoth object growing before their eyes. Soon, it will pass harmlessly by—but first, a strange old man, Professor Philippulus, dressed in a white sheet and wearing a long beard, appears, beating a gong and crying: “This is a punishment; repent, for the world is ending!”

We smile at the silliness of this scene from the Tintin comic strip *L'Étoile Mystérieuse*, published in Belgium in 1941. Yet it is also familiar, since so many people in both Europe and the United States have recently convinced themselves that the End is nigh. This depressing conviction may seem surprising, given that the West continues to enjoy an unparalleled standard of living. But Professor Philippulus has nevertheless managed to achieve power in governments, the media, and high places generally. Constantly, he spreads fear: of progress, of science, of demographics, of global warming, of technology, of food. In five years or in ten years, temperatures will rise, Earth will be uninhabitable, natural disasters will multiply, the climate will bring us to war, and nuclear plants will explode. Man has committed the sin of pride; he has destroyed his habitat and ravaged the planet; he must atone.

My point is not to minimize the dangers that we face. Rather, it is to understand why apocalyptic fear has gripped so many of our leaders, scientists, and intellectuals, who insist on reasoning and arguing as though they were following the scripts of mediocre Hollywood disaster movies.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, a paradigm shift in our thinking took place: we decided that the era of revolutions was over and that the era of catastrophes had begun. The former had involved expectation, the hope that the human race would proceed toward some goal. But once the end of history was announced, the Communist enemy vanquished, and, more recently, the War on Terror all but won, the idea of progress lay moribund. What replaced the world's human future was the future of the world as a material entity. The long list of emblematic victims—Jews, blacks, slaves, proletarians, colonized peoples—was likewise replaced, little by little, with the Planet, the new paragon of all misery. No longer were we summoned to participate in a particular community; rather, we were invited to identify ourselves with the spatial vessel that carried us, groaning.

How did this change happen? Over the last half-century, leftist intellectuals have identified two great scapegoats for the world's woes. First, Marxism designated capitalism as responsible for human misery. Second, “Third World” ideology, disappointed by the bourgeois indulgences of the working class, targeted the West, supposedly the inventor of slavery, colonialism, and

imperialism. The guilty party that environmentalism now accuses—mankind itself, in its will to dominate the planet—is essentially a composite of the previous two, a capitalism invented by a West that oppresses peoples and destroys the earth. Indeed, environmentalism sees itself as the fulfillment of all earlier critiques. “There are only two solutions,” Bolivian president Evo Morales declared in 2009. “Either capitalism dies, or Mother Earth dies.”

So the planet has become the new proletariat that must be saved from exploitation—if necessary, by reducing the number of human beings, as oceanographer Jacques Cousteau said in 1991. The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, a group of people who have decided not to reproduce, has announced: “Each time another one of us decides to not add another one of us to the burgeoning billions already squatting on this ravaged planet, another ray of hope shines through the gloom. When every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth’s biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory.” The British environmentalist James Lovelock, a chemist by training, regards Earth as a living organism and human beings as an infection within it, proliferating at the expense of the whole, which tries to reject and expel them. Journalist Alan Weisman’s 2007 book *The World Without Us* envisions in detail a planet from which humanity has disappeared. In France, a Green politician, Yves Cochet, has proposed a “womb strike,” which would be reinforced by penalties against couples who conceive a third child, since each child means, in terms of pollution, the equivalent of 620 round trips between Paris and New York.

“Our house is burning, but we are not paying attention,” said Jacques Chirac at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. “Nature, mutilated, overexploited, cannot recover, and we refuse to admit it.” Sir Martin Rees, a British astrophysicist and former president of the Royal Society, gives humanity a 50 percent chance of surviving beyond the twenty-first century. Oncologists and toxicologists predict that the end of mankind should arrive even earlier than foreseen, around 2060, thanks to a general sterilization of sperm. In view of the overall acceleration of natural disorders, droughts, and pandemics, “we all know now that we are going down,” says the scholar Serge Latouche. Peter Barrett, director of the Antarctica Research Centre at New Zealand’s Victoria University of Wellington, is more specific: “If we continue our present growth path we are facing the end of civilization as we know it—not in millions of years, or even millennia, but by the end of this century.”

One could go on citing such quotations forever, given the spread of the cliché-ridden apocalyptic literature. Environmentalism has become a global ideology that covers all of existence—not merely modes of production but ways of life as well. We rediscover in it the whole range of Marxist rhetoric, now applied to the environment: ubiquitous scientism, horrifying visions of reality, even admonitions to the guilty parties who misunderstand those who wish them well. Authors, journalists, politicians, and scientists compete in the portrayal of abomination and claim for themselves a hyper-lucidity: they alone see clearly while others vegetate in the darkness.

The fear that these intellectuals spread is like a gluttonous enzyme that swallows up an anxiety, feeds on it, and then leaves it behind for new ones. When the Fukushima nuclear plant melted down after the enormous earthquake in Japan in March 2011, it only confirmed a feeling of anxiety that was already there, looking for some content. In six months, some new concern will grip us: a pandemic, bird flu, the food supply, melting ice caps, cell-phone radiation.

The fear also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the press reporting, as though it were a surprising finding, that young people are haunted by the very concerns about global warming that the press continually instills in them. As in an echo chamber, opinion polls reflect the views

promulgated by the media. We are inoculated against anxiety by the repetition of the same themes, which become a narcotic we can't do without.

To wake people up requires ever more extreme rhetoric, including a striking number of analogies to the Holocaust. Noël Mamère, a French politician in the Green party, has accused another politician, Claude Allègre, of being a *néga­tionniste* about global warming—a French word that refers to those who deny the Jewish and Armenian genocides. Economist Rajendra Pachauri, head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has explicitly compared the Danish statistician and eco-skeptic Bjørn Lomborg to the Führer. The American climate scientist James Hansen has accused oil companies trying to “spread doubt about global warming” of “high crimes against humanity and nature” and called trains transporting American coal “death trains.” *Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman has written that “global warming deniers are now on a par with Holocaust deniers.”

A time-honored strategy of cataclysmic discourse, whether performed by preachers or by propagandists, is the retroactive correction. This technique consists of accumulating a staggering amount of horrifying news and then—at the end—tempering it with a slim ray of hope. First you break down all resistance; then you offer an escape route to your stunned audience. And so the advertising copy for the Al Gore–starring documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* reads: “Humanity is sitting on a time bomb. If the vast majority of the world’s scientists are right, we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet’s climate system into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, floods, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced—a catastrophe of our own making.”

Now here are the means that the former vice president, like most environmentalists, proposes to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions: using low-energy lightbulbs; driving less; checking your tire pressure; recycling; rejecting unnecessary packaging; adjusting your thermostat; planting a tree; and turning off electrical appliances. Since we find ourselves at a loss before planetary threats, we will convert our powerlessness into propitiatory gestures, which will give us the illusion of action. First the ideology of catastrophe terrorizes us; then it appeases us by proposing the little rituals of a post-technological animism. But let’s be clear: a cosmic calamity is not averted by checking tire pressure or sorting garbage.

Similarly, we are told that “our power exceeds our knowledge,” as the German philosopher Hans Jonas once put it—yet we are also told, with a certainty puzzling from such skeptics, that we must change our diets, cut back on air travel, consume fewer material goods, and stop driving gas guzzlers. This is the central aporia of green neo-asceticism: it attributes a wildly exaggerated importance to ordinary human behavior, thus weakening its appeal to the very humility that it tries to instill.

Another contradiction inherent in apocalyptic discourse is that, though it tries desperately to awaken us, to convince us of planetary chaos, it eventually deadens us, making our eventual disappearance part of our everyday routine. At first, yes, the kinds of doom that we hear about—the acidification of the oceans, the pollution of our air—charge our calm existence with a strange excitement. The enemy is among us, and he waits for our slightest lapses, all the more insidious because he is invisible. If the function of ancient rites was to purge a community’s violence on a sacrificial victim, the function of our contemporary rites is—at first—to dramatize the status quo and to exalt us through proximity to cataclysm.

But the certainty of the prophecies makes this effect short-lived. The language of fear does not include the word “maybe.” It tells us, rather, that the horror is inevitable. Resistant to all doubt, it is satisfied to mark the stages of degradation. This is another paradox of fear: it is ultimately reassuring. At least we know where we are heading—toward the worst.

One consequence of this certainty is that we begin to suspect that the numberless Cassandras who prophesy all around us do not intend to warn us so much as to condemn us. In classical Judaism, the prophet sought to give new life to God’s cause against kings and the powerful. In Christianity, millenarian movements embodied a hope for justice against a Church wallowing in luxury and vice. But in a secular society, a prophet has no function other than indignation. So it happens that he becomes intoxicated with his own words and claims a legitimacy with no basis, calling down the destruction that he pretends to warn against. You’ll get what you’ve got coming!—that is the death wish that our misanthropes address to us. These are not great souls who alert us to troubles but tiny minds who wish us suffering if we have the presumption to refuse to listen to them. Catastrophe is not their fear but their joy. It is a short distance from lucidity to bitterness, from prediction to anathema.

Another result of the doomsayers’ certainty is that their preaching, by inoculating us against the poison of terror, brings about petrification. The trembling that they want to inculcate falls flat. Anxiety has the last word. We were supposed to be alerted; instead, we are disarmed. This may even be the goal of the noisy panic: to dazzle us in order to make us docile. Instead of encouraging resistance, it propagates discouragement and despair. The ideology of catastrophe becomes an instrument of political and philosophical resignation.

What is surprising is that the mood of catastrophe prevails especially in the West, as if it were particular to privileged peoples. Despite the economic crises of the last few years, people live better in Europe and the United States than anywhere else, which is why migrants the world over want to come to those places. Yet never have we been so inclined to condemn our societies.

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Pascal Bruckner is a French writer and philosopher whose latest book is The Paradox of Love. His article was translated by Alexis Cornel.

Climate Depot

New Study: '2013 ranks as one of the least extreme U.S. weather years ever'– Many bad weather events at 'historically low levels'

'Whether you're talking about tornadoes, wildfires, extreme heat or hurricanes, the good news is that weather-related disasters in the US are all way down this year compared to recent years and, in some cases, down to historically low levels.'

by Marc Morano

Tornadoes: 'lowest total in several decades'

Number of wildfires: 'On pace to be the lowest it has been in the past ten years'

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Hurricanes: 'We are currently in the longest period since the Civil War Era without a major hurricane strike in the US (i.e., category 3, 4 or 5)'

To begin with, the number of tornadoes in the US this year is on pace to be the lowest total since 2000 and it may turn out to be the lowest total in several decades. The table below lists the number of tornadoes in the US for this year (through 10/17) and also for each year going back to 2000.

(Source: NOAA, <http://www.spc.noaa.gov/climo/online/monthly/newm.html>)

Year	# of Tornadoes
2013	771
2012	1119
2011	1894
2010	1543
2009	1305
2008	1685
2007	1102
2006	1117
2005	1262
2004	1820
2003	1374
2002	938
2001	1219
2000	1072

Second, the number of wildfires across the US so far this year is on pace to be the lowest it has been in the past ten years and the acreage involved is at the second lowest level in that same

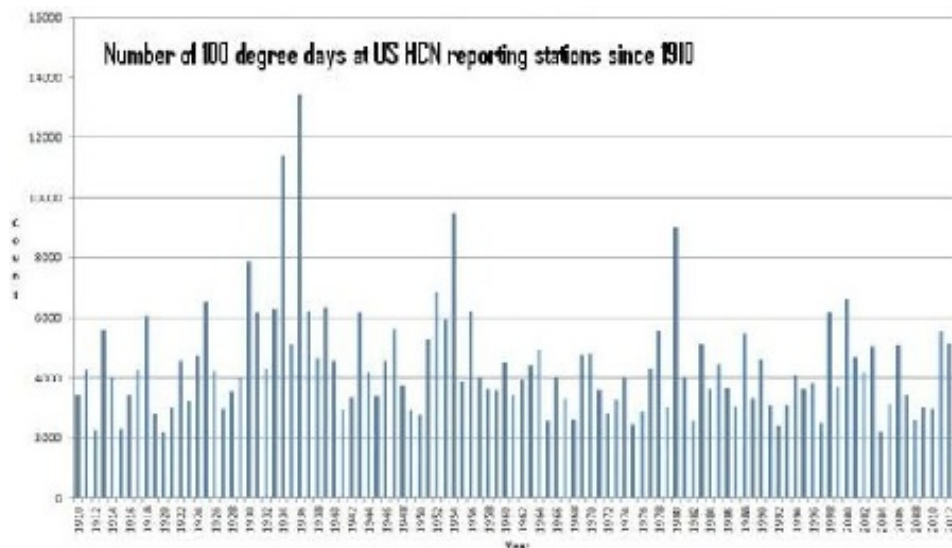
time period (table below).

(Source: National Interagency Fire Center; <http://www.nifc.gov/>)

2013	Fires: 40,306	Acres: 4,152,390
2012	Fires: 67,774	Acres: 9,326,238
2011	Fires: 74,126	Acres: 8,711,367
2010	Fires: 62,471	Acres: 3,233,461
2009	Fires: 78,792	Acres: 5,921,786
2008	Fires: 80,094	Acres: 5,254,109
2007	Fires: 85,822	Acres: 9,321,326
2006	Fires: 96,358	Acres: 9,871,939
2005	Fires: 66,552	Acres: 8,686,753
2004	Fires: 63,608	Acres: 8,097,880

*2013 data through 10/16

In addition to wildfires, extreme heat is also way down across the US this year. In fact, the number of 100 degree days across the country during 2013 is not only down for this year, but it is perhaps going to turn out to be the lowest in about 100 years of records.



(Source: NOAA, USHCN reporting stations; through August)

The five summers with the highest number of 100 degree days across the US are as follows: 1936, 1934, 1954, 1980 and 1930. In addition to the vast reduction in 100 degree days across the US this year, the number of high temperature records (ie hi max and hi min records) is way down compared to a year ago with 22,965 records this year as compared with 56,885 at this same time last year.

(Source: NOAA, <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/extremes/records/>; through 10/17).

Finally, as far as hurricanes are concerned, there have been only two hurricanes so far this season in the Atlantic Basin (Humberto and Ingrid) and they were both short-lived and weak category 1 storms. Also, the first forming hurricane this year occurred at the second latest date going back to the mid 1940's when hurricane hunters began to fly. Overall, the tropical season in the Atlantic Basin has been generally characterized by short-lived and weak systems.

In addition, this suppressed tropical activity has not been confined to just the Atlantic Ocean. The eastern Pacific Ocean has had no major hurricanes this season meaning there has been no major hurricane in either the Atlantic or eastern Pacific which only occurred one other year in recorded history – 1968. This is actually quite extraordinary since the two basins are generally out of phase with each other i.e. when one is inactive the other is active.

One of the best ways to measure “total seasonal activity” in the tropics is through an index called the Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) which is a metric that accounts for both intensity and duration of named tropical storms. Indeed, the ACE for this tropical season so far in the Atlantic Basin is only 29% percent of normal (through 10/17) when compared to the climatological average from 1981-2010 and it is the 7th lowest since 1950. Elsewhere, the ACE across the northern hemisphere is only 58% of normal and global ACE is 62% of normal. (Source: Dr. Ryan Maue at Weather Bell Analytics; <http://models.weatherbell.com/tropical.php>)

Finally, another interesting stat with respect to hurricanes has to do with the fact that we are currently in the longest period since the Civil War Era without a major hurricane strike in the US (i.e., category 3, 4 or 5). The last major hurricane to strike the US was Hurricane Wilma during late October of that record-breaking year of 2005 – let's hope this historic stretch continues. By the way, just as a point of comparison, in 1954 the US was hit by 3 major hurricanes in less than 10 weeks.



