

Kill the Messenger!



No one loves the messenger who brings bad news – Sophocles

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Humans are an optimistic lot. It would seem logical, historically, having to fight for your life daily, facing miserable conditions, dangerous beasts, unpleasant elements, and yet still, beating this all back - “taming” it, taking over and declaring ourselves, ‘top of the food chain’, replete now with creature comforts and leisure time. To fight this long battle, we had to believe “winning” was possible.

Much was done to the planet in the name of progress that we now must reverse. With climate science data in hand and once, bi-partisan and global consensus dating back to the late 70’s, how is it that *today*, some otherwise reasonable, smart and sane people aren’t entirely convinced that climate change is real?

Daniel Kahneman wrote of the human thought process in “Thinking Fast and Thinking Slow”. Fast (intuitive, emotional) requires heuristics, quick rules of thumb on what to do. A Mountain Lion is poised to strike us - run! Thinking Slow is the deliberate part, though potentially biased or flawed. With the luxury of rumination, comes the potential of biases and other human foibles messing with out logic.

Hope, it would seem, shows up with the time to ‘think slow’. Hope may not be a foible, or produce faulty logic, but it may change rational assessment of the probability of outcomes. If humans are predisposed to hope, does *hopelessness* (even if more emotional than rational) lend to denial, to a willingness to believe the lies we want to hear? A new hope, even if just a charade?

Probabilities always add up to 100%, but it's conceivable that a combination of 1) feeling plausibly culpable for the world's environmental damage, 2) yet lacking a sense of control and 3) too much wealth, perceived purpose and accomplishment tied up in ways that damage people and planet, make it harder to accept the conclusions that science and math might suggest.

But don't we also love the underdog? Absolutely, though that's not who we are in this horse race. We are War Admiral, not Sea Biscuit. We've won everything, crushed all, and now, NOW, we have to start again, as if we aren't the champions? As if we'd not tamed the planet and shaped it to our will?



The underdog and lost causes generally, capture our imagination. People like to root for the underdog, and feel good when hearing stories of someone "beating the odds". The big difference is that Sea Biscuit, Rudy, The Bad News Bears all overcame obstacles placed before them, not of their doing or choosing. Humans damaged the planet in the name of progress, we did this to

ourselves, that makes us more like Amy Winehouse, than Stevie Wonder. We are not the mariner in Winslow Homer's *The Gulfstream*, vessel sinking in the distance, storm coming and rough shark-filled waters seeking to swallow the battered lifeboat up.

No, we are Thurston Howell III on Gilligan's Island. We can just make another martini rather than take action. Enough pop culture analogies. You get the point.

It may be easier for some, to think of climate change as, at best, speculation, at worst, in the distance. In neither instance are the risks and damages imminent nor particularly catastrophic *for us*. All the other probable outcomes, well, better not to dwell on it. They're too awful to consider.

Lost causes have their advocates - like Saint Jude - they just aren't particularly popular, or headline-making news. Who wants to read about a problem of our own creation that may not be easily remedied?

Finally, assuming it's hard for some to accept the logical conclusions regarding climate change, particularly given the developed world's culpability and singular historical benefit, it's most likely that this *kill the messenger(!)* perspective is (or will be) decidedly a developed markets phenomena.

The ramifications of this are a denial of the science by nationalistic politicians who don't want to foot the bill or change the economic engine. The failure of say, the US to do its fair share, to stay in the Paris Accord, and instead, to be a carbon free-rider, means surely, it would be simple for China, India and the Eurozone to follow suit. Just as we need a global community to attack these issues, the worst carbon scofflaws are splintering into inwardly-focus, jingoistic sovereigns

caring less about the rest of the world. Couldn't be at a worse time, but perhaps the "it's them, it's not you" mantra lets the West off the hook.

There is a ray of light. Younger generations shall inherit a planet abused by unknowing and then, indifferent generations. They also inherit \$50 Trillion over the next 30 years in the largest inter-generational transfer of wealth. Millennials are not wed, generationally, to some sense of self-worth attached to accomplishment tied up in ways that damage people and planet that pre-dates them.

Like the heroic underdog, climate change is the obstacle placed before them, not of their doing or choosing. If we give them the time and capital to fight the good fight, they just might beat the odds, and help heal the planet. If some simply cannot accept where we are and aren't capable of being hopeful given our culpability, let's equip our younger people with the knowledge, opportunity and capital necessary to have the chance to win. Then we can root for the underdog.

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This article is a precursor to a more exhaustive study on this topic (as well as others) by student-Fellows of Lupoff Impact Scholars Institute, a non-profit providing stipends to students accepting no/low pay internships and jobs for the benefit of people and planet. www.lupoffimpactscholars.org