

## *From the Kitchen*

15 August 2012



Having finished my last post with a quote from Douglas Adams, I shall start this one with another:

*We don't have to save the world. The world is big enough to look after itself. What we have to be concerned about is whether or not the world we live in will be capable of sustaining us in it.*

This is perhaps the most important idea for us to ponder. We need to educate politicians and business leaders to ponder this also because, without this as the basis for all important deliberations leading to action, the answer to Adams' question is probably that the earth will not be capable of sustaining us in it.

We carry on as if there is plenty of time to work it all out and as if in that time things will be discovered or invented that will make it all alright. It is like Adams' puddle:

*... [I]magine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, 'This is an interesting world I find myself in – an interesting hole I find myself in – fits me rather neatly, doesn't it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!' This is such a powerful idea that as the sun rises in the sky and the air heats up and as, gradually, the puddle gets smaller and smaller, frantically hanging on to the notion that everything's going to be alright, because this world was meant to have him in it, was built to have him in it; so the moment he disappears catches him rather by surprise.<sup>1</sup>*

Humanity is behaving like that puddle. We have less excuse than the puddle because we have the capability of seeing the wider world outside the hole; we can see that the puddle is shrinking and may disappear. Yet we still behave like the mindless puddle, which means we will probably eventually 'evaporate' with the notion that we are surprised.

So many wise people have for a long time been pointing to our folly and to the nonsense of perpetual growth and to the disasters that will beset us and other species if we continue to create rubbish at the rate we do and keep telling ourselves that we can keep doing so. The only thing that is true in all this is that we continue to tell ourselves that it is true and that we fail to listen to those who expose that as a lie.

We are not in the dangerous situation we find ourselves in through lack of data – we are drowning in it. Nor is there dearth of wisdom. The wisdom resides with the wrong people. Actually, no, that's not true either. It is that those who could do something useful with the wisdom fail or refuse to use it. They ask the question, 'What is good for me?' or, 'What is good for those whose patronage I need to ensure?' These are questions about the short-term, the immediate future. A more important question would be, 'What is good for my children and my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren and *their* great-grandchildren?' Now, there's a question to ponder.

Asking such a question would result in different answers, leading to different actions and different outcomes. The relevant people will have to continue to ask such questions for generations, because the results are to be seen in the long term, perhaps only by their children's great-grandchildren. Those who govern our various communities need to

understand that they now govern on behalf every other community, without mistaking this for the hegemony of *actually* governing all those communities.

Those who would govern mistake the idea that they can at some level dictate what happens on the land over which they claim sovereignty and extend that to sovereignty over the air and the oceans. They conveniently forget that the water and air over which they claim sovereignty will soon be someone else's water and air. This should be clear to them, because whatever other governments allow to be discharged into the air and water will eventually come around. There is a twisted justice about this – twisted because it affects all seven billion of us, not just the individual communities and their respective governments.

There are many people who are telling all this to the rest of us, as well as many who are merely bleating and are to be ignored, along with those who tell us that to change anything will itself be disastrous. It's our call.

1. Speech at [Digital Biota 2](#), Cambridge UK, September 1998. The transcript of the entire speech is on-line.