

Climate Change Pollyannas

A review essay by David Orton

Global Warming For Dummies, by Elizabeth May and Zoë Caron,
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“Although global warming is connected to scary scenarios featuring soaring temperatures and worsening hurricanes and monsoons, it's also a link to a better future. Global warming is opening doors for the development of new types of fuels, leading the shift to reliable energy sources, and creating a vision of a greener tomorrow.” May and Caron, p. 1.

“This small band of deep ecologists seem to realize more than other green thinkers the magnitude of the change of mind needed to bring us back to peace within Gaia, the living Earth.” James Lovelock, **The Revenge Of Gaia**, p. 198.

“We must live at a level that we seriously can wish others to attain, not at a level that requires the bulk of humanity *not* to reach.” Arne Naess

INTRODUCTION

“The more you know about both climate change and energy, the less moderate you are.”
Joseph Romm, Editor, climateprogress.org

This book, **Global Warming For Dummies**, by Elizabeth May and Zoë Caron, has lots of information about climate change and its various nuances, particularly from the individual, “what you can do”, perspective. The focus is on carbon dioxide, the main contributor to climate change. It explains the Kyoto Protocol, how it is supposed to work, carbon emissions trading, the different kinds of greenhouse gases and their individual and collective significance, etc. In addition, this book gives an overall sense of the contributions of various sectors of society to greenhouse gas emissions. We are told that fossil fuels contribute three quarters of the problem regarding greenhouse gases, and that deforestation accounts for one quarter of the problem. (p. 2) Reading **Dummies** can raise the level of a person’s general knowledge about climate change, notwithstanding the various criticisms raised in this review.

May is intelligent, passionate, hard-working, and on top of a wide variety of environmental

information. But she also works within the industrial paradigm of values which she essentially accepts and lets guide her political judgements. May's career shows that she "works the system", and the society in turn rewards her with various accolades, because the system's legitimacy is not seriously threatened by her eco-politics. She and co-author Zoë Caron, have chosen to play a Pollyanna role of promoting optimism in fighting climate change, when most of the government and corporate climate change initiatives being put forth are greenwash tokenism at best, which can always be put aside if the world economy takes a dive.

Like other books written by Elizabeth May, this book does not consciously espouse any critical eco-philosophical tradition which others can support, as does James Lovelock in the above quote. May and Caron do not raise the fundamental questions, which, I believe, climate change and "peak", i.e. diminishing fossil fuels, bring to the foreground for existing industrial capitalist societies, such as:

- how do we humans *reduce* our industrial impact upon the Earth;
- what are our vital needs as societies, taking into consideration the needs and habitat requirements of all other nonhuman life forms;
- how do humans become Earth-centered in our many cultures, not just human-centered;
- how do we bring about social justice for all the human species in a worldwide context, so everyone's full potential may be liberated; and
- how do we bring about such profound cultural changes for humankind, if we never raise the questions.

May and her co-author, however, are pragmatists – they point the reader to practical engagement with this *existing* industrial capitalist society. For these writers, the existing system just needs tinkering with, not replacing. Yet it is this industrial society which is destroying this Earth and which has brought on the climate change crisis.

There is substantial acknowledged use of data from the massive Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released in 2007. I have not personally read this latest IPCC document, but I have read some of the numerous climate change books available (by authors such as Andrew Nikiforuk, Tim Flannery, James Kunstler, Brian Fagan, John Livingston [**Arctic Oil**], George Monbiot, Al Gore, Ted Trainer, James Lovelock, and others), plus William Catton's **Overshoot** and **Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth** by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel).

One should not forget that the IPCC report is a "consensus" document. Debates are influenced by the delegates which member countries appoint, like Saudi Arabia, China and the United States. The report therefore downplays, I believe, the actual gravity of the climate situation, so all will sign on. In his 2005 book **The Weather Makers: How We Are Changing The Climate And What It Means For Life On Earth**, Tim Flannery calls this "lowest common denominator science." Flannery also notes, "if the IPCC says something, you had better believe it – and then allow for the likelihood that things are far worse than it says they are." (p. 246)

Dummies points out that the latest IPCC report “recommends reducing carbon emissions by 50 to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.” (p. 55) The reality is that in a continually growing world industrial economy, these emissions increase every year. The present level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is about 385 parts per million, whereas in 1960 the level was 315 ppm. To put this in perspective, the pre-industrial revolution figure for carbon dioxide, around the mid-nineteenth century, was 280 ppm.

While the two authors refer to “climate change” as being a more appropriate term than “global warming”, the book title **Global Warming For Dummies**, presumably reflects an editorial decision of the “Dummies” book publishing/selling formula, of making information supposedly more palatable and popular to the reading public.

Elizabeth May, who would be considered the lead author by most readers (and this reviewer) in view of her past experience and listed credentials, is the current leader of the Canadian Green Party and also its shadow cabinet spokesperson for climate change. So the public could perhaps look to this book to see the kind of ideas on climate change and related topics advocated by the Green Party in Canada. May is not known to hide her credentials and social connections under a bushel. In this book, she is described three times in the comment “About the Authors”, and once on the book’s cover, as “Dr. May.” It seems that having been granted honorary doctorates in the past, now misleadingly equates to having an earned Ph.D., presumably in one of the scientific fields associated with climate change. It should be noted that May’s listed background credits include having been “a board member for nine years for the International Institute for Sustainable Development”. The conclusion of the **Dummies** text is a promotion for this Institute (see pages 340-341). Sustainable development is also pushed throughout this book.

Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology (1912-2009) made a distinction in the early 1970s between those who practice “shallow” ecology and those who follow a “deeper” ecological path. May and Caron follow the shallow path, as this review shows. Those on the deeper ecological path see the industrial system itself as unsustainable from an ecological and social justice standpoint, and climate change as one manifestation of this. To address climate change means addressing the problem of replacing industrial capitalist society.

POLLYANNA OPTIMISM

“No one likes the blame game; pointing fingers and making accusations doesn’t solve anything.” (p. 69)

“Governments all over the world at every level, are already doing leading-edge work, moving toward low-carbon technologies and ways of life.” (p. 160)

“Can humanity actually avoid getting to the point of huge, devastating, and irreversible

changes in the world's climate? Of course!" (p. 200)

"Believe it or not, letters to your elected representatives make a difference...Politicians are eager to know what the people think." (p. 318)

The Pollyanna title for this review – meaning a false optimism or attitude of looking for the good side of any situation – is misleading, given the situation we face. The basic working position permeating this book is not that we are facing a civilizational and ecocide crisis of hard to grasp proportions – which require seismic cultural and institutional changes and lifestyle change which are difficult to comprehend – with the outcome very much in doubt. But it is the promotion of the view that good things are being done around climate change and global warming, that we are moving in the right direction, and only need to accelerate our efforts. I believe this to be a false, harmful, and very misleading Pollyanna-type message. It is totally inappropriate, considering the dire climate change situation generally, and particularly in Canada, which is proud to be the main fossil fuel supplier to the United States. Very little significant work regarding reducing green house gas emissions is being done. Carbon dioxide emissions are increasing, not declining, each year. Climate feedback mechanisms, which introduce an extreme unpredictability into what is going to happen – including a potential acceleration of indicators of climate change – are already underway. There is a fair amount of talk about climate change, but this can always be pushed aside by governing political and economic elites and the bourgeois media, when there is so-called bad economic news, like declining economic growth and consumption rates.

The Pollyanna message also reflects an erroneous but common political organizing belief, characterizing not only May's (and presumably Caron's) environmental politics, but running throughout Green Party electoralism in Canada – that is, for social mobilization purposes, one has to be optimistic, non-threatening and non-radical, to gain popular or electoral support. However, the kind of institutional, economic and personal lifestyle changes that should be on the climate change table are extremely radical, when someone of the scientific stature of climate scientist James Hansen, among others, is saying that carbon dioxide emissions have to be reduced to at most 350 parts per million, from the existing about 387 ppm. (As noted before, at the time of the commencement of the industrial revolution in the mid-nineteenth century, carbon dioxide concentrations were at about 280 ppm.) Unfortunately, the Green Party is in the business of putting forward fudge and "market" or soothing eco-capitalist positions, which do not call industrial capitalism into question or bring about the needed fundamental shift in societal consciousness.

ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTIONS OF GLOBAL WARMING FOR DUMMIES

"Clearly system change is needed. The problems cannot be solved by more conservation effort on the part of individuals and firms *within* consumer-capitalist society. They are being caused by an overshoot that is far too big for that, and they are being caused by some of the

fundamental structures of this society. Consequently much of what is said under the heading of ‘sustainability’ is nonsense and much of the effort being made to ‘save the planet’ is a waste of time. Most irritating are the ‘What you can do in your own home’ campaigners. ‘Buy biodegradable wash up liquid, use a low-flow shower head, recycle your bottles, buy a smaller car, etc.’ Such efforts can make no more than a negligible difference to *household* impact, when we need something like a 90% reduction in *national* consumption. Nothing remotely like this is possible within a consumer-capitalist society committed to affluent lifestyles and limitless economic growth. It is only possible through dramatically reducing the volume of production and consumption and therefore by *changing from* such a society to one that is about frugal but adequate ‘living standards’, as little production and consumption as possible and a stable economy.” (Ted Trainer, **Renewable Energy Cannot Sustain a Consumer Society**, p. 117.)

Here are some of the erroneous assumptions found in the **Dummies** book:

1) Saying that global population trends should not be basically opposed but have to be accepted in the climate change discussion. While seemingly acknowledging that growing human populations are a consideration in increased green house gas accumulations, May and Caron adapt to a projected world population of nine billion people and do not call for societal policies to reduce human populations on Earth: “Luckily, population growth is slowing and should level off. (The bad news is that this isn’t expected to happen until the Earth’s population reaches 9 billion people) ...It all depends on reducing fertility rates, which all depends on improving the economic, educational, and political status of women and girls.” (p. 68) Thus, and with a bow to feminist orthodoxy, there is nothing we can do about population reduction. The position of May and Caron, that with increasing affluence/education/democracy, population rates will fall, presupposes more economic growth and affluence – in other words, more overall consumption of the Earth. Contrast this with James Lovelock’s views in his 2006 book, **The Revenge Of Gaia**. Lovelock, who is very pessimistic about the possibilities of turning global warming around or seriously mitigating its impact (as anyone who is informed should be), sees the crucial importance of population reduction in the climate change discussion and speaks of aiming for “a stabilized population of about half to one billion, and then we would be free to live in many different ways without harming Gaia.” (Lovelock, p. 181) Arne Naess has made it clear that the so-called developed countries’ lifestyle cannot be one of overconsumption. Rather, it must be a lifestyle satisfying only what he calls “vital needs” and such a lifestyle should be attainable for all others in the world. Crucial for deep ecology supporters is that increasing human populations also mean decreasing space for wild nature.

2) The choice of the tipping point for carbon dioxide in this book, which helps minimize a sense of climate emergency. If one chooses to align with a higher tipping point regarding global warming for carbon dioxide emissions, then *immediate* emergency action becomes downplayed. This is the situation with the **Dummies** book, which in the main promotes 450 ppm as climate tipping point: “Scientists know only that humanity has a choice to avoid it (tipping points) by holding carbon dioxide concentrations to no more than 450 ppm, to keep

the planet's average temperature increase at or below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius)." (p. 52) This number is much too high and, as noted earlier, James Hansen says that carbon dioxide has to be reduced to at most 350 parts per million to avoid substantive climate change. The book authors do mention elsewhere, as an afterthought, that "Many scientists are arguing that we must keep carbon at no more than 350 ppm." (p. 332)

3) Assuming that new energy sources are out there waiting to be utilized and can replace fossil fuels, and hence the existing industrial 'civilization' can switch over to these sources and just continue: "Fortunately, a wide array of energies is waiting to take the place of oil, coal, and gas. Some of these energy sources aren't yet ready for modern civilization to use them on a grand scale, but if businesses and governments commit to developing these energies, they soon will be." (p. 21) This book oohs and aahs over clever new energy innovations, which do not change the overall constant picture of ecosystem degradation, while climate change intensifies. Deeper Green thinkers, like Ted Trainer in his 2007 book **Renewable Energy Cannot Sustain a Consumer Society**, have shown that the line of argumentation here retains a commitment to affluent living standards and economic growth, through a belief in supposed technical advances which will rectify the problems of climate change. In addition, through a complex and erudite discussion in his book, covering wind energy, solar thermal electricity, photovoltaic solar electricity, liquid and gaseous fuels derived from biomass, the 'hydrogen economy', storing electricity and why nuclear energy is no answer, Trainer has the position, which I support, that the "very high levels of production and consumption and therefore of energy use that we have in today's consumer-capitalist society cannot be sustained by renewable sources of energy." (p. 2) There is one additional point made by Trainer which is vital to understand, namely that, in a growing economy – which is clearly being promoted in the **Dummies** book – "whether or not renewable energy can sustain consumer-capitalist society is not a matter of whether it can meet *present* demand. The crucial question is can it sustain the demand generated by growth of the economy?" (p. 115)

4) Assuming that carbon emissions trading and the use of "market" mechanisms is the way to go for reducing greenhouse gas emissions as does the Kyoto Protocol. This position was also advanced in May's 2005 revised edition of **At the Cutting Edge: The Crisis in Canada's Forests**. As she says in the forestry book "Assigning dollar values to carbon is essential in the effort to reduce greenhouse gases. We can give it value through carbon taxes, or allow the market to set carbon prices." (pp. 64-5) May and Caron explain well the intricacies of carbon emissions trading or cap and trade, but whatever their criticisms, they support this in the **Dummies** book. Coming into a new relationship with the Earth, which should be on any deeper Green agenda, means seeing the atmosphere as part of the global commons and something which cannot be privatized. From this philosophical position, emissions trading is a continuation of the ongoing enclosure movement, the attempt to assert private property rights – rife with fraud and speculation – over the atmospheric commons by governments and industries.

5) Promoting so-called sustainable development as something desirable. (See for example,

pages 150, 166, 169, 180, 338.) A section of the book is called “Choosing Sustainable Development” (p. 192), where it says, “Climate change and sustainable development are linked.” The 1987 Brundtland Report, **Our Common Future**, which birthed the widespread acceptance in some quarters of the sustainable development scam, ties environmental protection to continued economic growth, increasing consumerism, human-centeredness and an expanded human population. In his book **Rogue Primate**, John Livingstone said that the sustainable development slogan expressed “How to plunder Nature and get away with it.” (p. 60) Sustainable development is a concept which enabled the business class to reinvent itself as environmentally virtuous, while expanding or growing their firms. May has helped build her career on the promotion of sustainable development, so this **Dummies** book is in character. We need sustainable retreat, as James Lovelock has called for, not sustainable development. Quite a long time ago, I wrote a [critique of sustainable development](#), which was being promoted at a conference in Nova Scotia.

6) Assuming that making money and reducing greenhouse gases can go hand-in-hand, and that this path should be promoted, e.g. business and industry “can cut back on their greenhouse gas emissions and make money, to boot.” (p. 3) This implies industrial growth can continue, notwithstanding climate change and peak oil. This leads the authors to non-critically promote more economic growth throughout the book, and to speak positively about countries which reduce greenhouse gas emissions but increase their economic growth. The following three examples are among several in this book:

“Many European countries have benefited with continued GDP growth because they started acting on climate change decades ago.” (p. 133)

“Germany cut greenhouse gas emissions by 17.2 percent while watching its GDP rise 28.6 percent in that time frame.” (p. 133)

“Sweden has seen 44-percent economic growth while reducing its greenhouse gas emissions to 8 percent below 1990 levels.” (p. 69)

Given the existing overshoot impact of humans upon the Earth, promoting more economic growth in any form in industrialized countries, is fundamentally opposed to basic deeper green thinking.

7) Two further assumptions in the **Dummies** book, not directly or only indirectly related to climate change concerns:

a. Bird kills by wind turbines. These are minimized and the frivolous attitude, e.g. “wind turbines are far from a bird’s worst enemy” is well conveyed by the title given to this discussion “A big flap over wind power.” (p. 210). Bat kills by turbines are mentioned only in passing. The potential ecological concerns coming from the disruption of wind flows by very tall turbines are not discussed. What also comes through is that these two authors are prepared to let the countryside be despoiled, i.e. by becoming industrialized in the placement of wind turbines. Also, landscape esthetics are not a concern. We should oppose giving up the beauty of the countryside for some “green” wind turbine energy input. The placement of these turbines, usually on the highest ground around, in the name of generating alternative energy, is becoming more common in rural Nova Scotia, as where I live. The only human concern

granted some small legitimacy in their placement usually concerns the noise of wind turbines for those who live close to sites.

b. The book promotes the Forest Stewardship Council's certification stamp as both an example of "steps" taken by the forest industry, "to ensure that forests are sustainably managed" (p. 239), and as some kind of guarantee that "the forests are grown and harvested without soil damage or clear-cutting." (p. 297) This is an erroneous claim, which an internet search could verify. (See for many examples of FSC perfidy the internet postings "This-week-in-trees".) FSC certification can still mean the cutting of old growth forests, clear cutting, plantations, and the use of forest spraying – in other words, the continuation of the industrial forestry model. When major pulp and paper companies can become FSC approved, as in Nova Scotia and across Canada, then clearly this forestry standard is basically meaningless, except for promoting greenwash sales.

WHO IS A CLIMATE CHANGE LEADER?

May and Caron write about "Ten Inspiring Leaders in the Fight Against Global Warming" (pp. 321-326). The two "politicians" chosen are shameful and not worthy of additional comment: Angela Merkel of Germany, a conservative politician; and Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican from California. These two people are only revealing in showing what inspires May, and presumably Caron. One can agree with the choice of the two "scientists", James Hansen and the present chair of the IPCC, Rajendra Pachauri.

The one "business leader" chosen is Ray Anderson, who, we are told, was turned on by Paul Hawken's **The Ecology of Commerce**. Anderson serves to illustrate one of the eco-capitalist themes of this book, that saving energy by closing smokestacks or waste pipes, or taking energy from landfills also "improved the corporate bottom line." (p. 326) Hence the erroneous claim that there is no basic incompatibility between a continually expanding capitalist economy and ecological sustainability. Yet how can such an expanding economy respect the ecological limits of the natural world? The more hidden idea here, present in much of the climate change debate in this book and in the society at large, is that this is the basic way forward on responding to climate change, a path which does not call industrial capitalism as a society into question.

Using the terminology of **Dummies**, the two "wordsmiths" chosen (Tim Flannery and George Monbiot), and one of the "activists" (Al Gore), deserve further comment, to see not only if they reflect some of the basic assumptions of Elizabeth May (and presumably Zoë Carron), and where they differ from these two. Flannery, Monbiot and Gore are extremely prominent spokespersons in climate change discussions. But are these really *inspiring* leaders, as May and Caron claim? Two other "activists" mentioned by **Dummies** – Wangari Maathai and Sheila Watt-Cloutier – I can accept. They are both significant social change people in their own right. I heard Maathai speak at the 1992 Rio Global Forum on her tree-planting African work; and here in Canada, Watt-Cloutier has frequently spoken out on the impact of climate

change on indigenous people living in the Arctic. But I do not consider them climate change role models in a theoretical sense like Flannery, Monbiot or Gore.

Regarding Tim Flannery:

This person is an ecologist with well established conservation credentials, as shown in his two books, the 1994 **The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People**, and the 2001 **The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History Of North America And Its Peoples**. I personally have tried to promote these two books for Greens who seek a deeper ecological understanding, and so, generally, I am a fan of Flannery. The 2005 climate change book **The Weather Makers** makes climate change more understandable and conveys very convincingly the enormity of the problem facing us. Flannery shows how basically unjust the taken-for-granted fossil fuel practices of industrial society are towards other species. He notes “The golden toad was the first documented victim of global warming.” (p. 119) This ecologist author, unlike May and Caron, sees the population question as vital in his climate change book. Flannery has proposed that Australia, his home nation, is overpopulated, given the dire ecological situation due to both aboriginal and white settler destruction. This is well documented in **The Future Eaters**. In this book Australia has a suggested “optimum, long-term population target of 6-12 million.” (p. 369)

Yet Flannery, whatever his ecological brilliance, like May and Caron, promotes a similar view to theirs that there is “no cost” to existing lifestyles with tackling climate change: “We can all make a difference and help combat climate change at almost no cost to our life style.” (**The Weather Makers**, p. 6) And, in the same book, he says “The transition to a carbon-free economy is eminently achievable because we have all the technology we need to do so.” (p. 7) Flannery also believes that this can be done within the existing capitalist economic system. So Flannery, like May and Caron has no anti-capitalist perspective.

Although Flannery speaks disparagingly about carbon emissions trading – an intrinsic part of the Koyoto Protocol – he ultimately accepts it. Like May and Caron, he has nothing to say about deep ecology. But he has a much more non-human centered perspective, because he has a Gaian world view, seeing everything as connected to and influencing everything else. In this sense, Flannery’s perspective is open to deep ecology. Yet **The Weather Makers** also comes through as pro-nuclear power. These are similar sentiments to those expressed by James Lovelock and James Howard Kunstler, but fortunately not by May and Caron. I think we can consider Tim Flannery an “inspiring leader” in the climate change emergency, subject to the limitations here noted which, unfortunately, undermine his considerable contributions on this topic.

Regarding George Monbiot:

For May and Caron, George Monbiot, in his 2006 book, **Heat: How To Stop The Planet From Burning** is “developing what appears to be a feasible plan for a 90-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2030.” (p. 323) Moreover, the **Dummies** authors say Monbiot “offers a truly radical approach to avoiding atmospheric tipping points.” (p. 265) I

have previously reviewed [Monbiot's book](#) in the U.S.-based publication **Synthesis/Regeneration: A Magazine of Green Social Thought**.

Monbiot says his book “seeks to show how a modern economy can be decarbonized while remaining a modern economy.” (p. xviii) He uses the United Kingdom as his model, but he is trying to speak generally. I cannot evaluate the accuracy of the data used in the climate change discussions, but Monbiot puts forward the position that 1.2 tonnes per capita, from his own calculations, is a sustainable yearly figure for carbon dioxide emissions. He says that in Canada the per capita average is over 19 tonnes a year. Accepting these figures at their face value, one can see the situation is extremely dire in Canada. The social, and consequently personal, changes required to come into carbon compliance are revolutionary.

Monbiot, while a person of the Left, unlike the writers of **Dummies** (and Tim Flannery and Al Gore), has no ecological understanding, and non-human species are not really discussed. Deep ecology is not mentioned. **Heat** remains human-centered. There is no discussion of population in his climate change analysis. Carbon rationing, along with measures to improve poor peoples' housing, and low carbon technologies as in renewable energy and public transport, are advocated. Monbiot presents a good critique of the European Emissions Trading Scheme as “a classic act of enclosure. It has seized something which should belong to all of us – the right, within the system, to produce a certain amount of carbon dioxide – and given it to the corporations.” (p. 46) (Most curiously, an earlier book by Monbiot, the 2003 **Manifesto For A New World Order**, gave extensive support to carbon emissions trading, attacked Green support for “localism”, and embraced the industrial globalization model. See my **Manifesto** review “[Which Way Forward?](#)”)

I do not agree with Monbiot's basic assumption in **Heat**, clearly supported by May and Caron, that a 90-percent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions “is compatible with the survival of an advanced industrial civilization.” (p. xii) This is speculative fantasy. While there is much to admire in **Heat**, I do not consider Monbiot an “inspiring leader”, as do May and Caron, because he refuses to think outside the industrial society survival box, no matter the boldness of his thinking. Yet there is a curious final paragraph message in the **Heat** text, which, if followed through, would have made this person more worthy of an inspirational categorization: “For the campaign against climate change is an odd one. Unlike almost all the public protests which have preceded it, it is a campaign not for abundance but for austerity. It is a campaign not for more freedom but for less. Strangest of all, it is a campaign not just against other people, but also against ourselves.” (p. 215)

For Monbiot, the overall message of his book on climate change is not the above, but the view that the existing industrial lifestyle can be kept, if certain carbon reducing changes are made. It will be tough, says this author, but it can be done.

Regarding Al Gore:

A positive aspect of Gore's book, **An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency Of**

Global Warming And What We Can Do About It, is that it lays out a convincing case for the reality of climate change. There is much interesting data and illustrations that are striking visually. They can be used in argumentation, by activists, as examples of climate change happening now. This is a major contribution of this book and the film “An Inconvenient Truth”. The major problem with Gore (and his film and book of the same title), has to do with “And What We Can Do About It”.

Gore’s own inconvenient truth is that he has been part of a ruling class in the United States, one of the “movers and shakers” – particularly when he was Vice President for eight years under the Bill Clinton administration – of a society which has hugely contributed to global warming. While Gore does show oil and gas corporate opposition to climate change, he will not say that it is capitalism itself which is a basic problem. Gore is all for stimulating more capitalism: “One of the keys to solving the climate crisis involves finding ways to use the powerful force of market capitalism as an ally...You can make a contribution to stopping climate change, support global sustainability, and do well financially if you choose your investments wisely.” (p. 270)

Gore does present, as do May and Caron, some good suggestions for personal lifestyle changes, of a certain, limited range, which will make humans less burdensome to the planet. He promotes carbon offset purchase for greenies who want to continue their air travel with the comforting illusion of a guilt-free conscience (p. 313), as do May and Caron. His book is also a self-promotion of himself and his family. Gore gives the view that we can keep the existing industrial capitalist system, with more economic growth, profits, and consumerism, plus existing and growing human populations, and still roll back climate change. This includes, “We can use our planet’s plentiful coal resources without heating the planet.” (p. 11)

Back in 1993, Al Gore wrote a book called **Earth In The Balance: Ecology And The Human Spirit**. (See my 2001 review “[Al Gore’s Ideological Limitations: A Commentary](#)”) This earlier book is revealing in that it presents Gore’s basic beliefs, which were not fully given in the climate change-focused **An Inconvenient Truth**. I had decided to read **Earth In The Balance** because of the polemics within the US environmental and green communities over the presidential election campaign, in which Gore was the Democratic candidate and Ralph Nader ran for the Green Party. May has made it clear on several occasions that she supported Al Gore over Ralph Nader.

Earth in the Balance is an erudite and environmentally informed text, but Gore is hostile to deep ecology: “The new story of the Deep Ecologists is dangerously wrong.” (p. 218) Gore does call for a fundamental spiritual change in values in the way humans relate to the Earth. I also like his statement that “We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization.” (p. 269) But Gore’s vision is a God-centered (Baptist) Christian “stewardship” position. He is a prisoner of his own U.S. imperial culture, with support for nuclear weapons along with all the above industrial capitalist values already alluded to in **An Inconvenient Truth**. For Gore, the existing industrial capitalist paradigm of

values is not up for fundamental challenge. He cannot grasp that what he calls and hails as “Western principles” – and a “philosophical victory” over communism – have also brought about the global ecological crisis. (p. 298) So in this most dangerous of times, he cannot be an “inspiring leader.”

An author not mentioned in **Dummies** is Brian Fagan. Reading his 2008 book **The Great Warming: Climate Change And The Rise And Fall Of Civilizations**, made me realize what small differences in climate can mean. This is a very interesting but difficult book to read, with lots of data and showing a wide knowledge of the world. Fagan studied what he calls the Medieval Warm Period from AD 800 - 1300. He says that drought “was the silent killer” of this period and that it was “a harsh reality that challenged human ingenuity to the limit.” (Preface xvi) During this time, rainfall went down by about 10 percent and temperature change were quite small, rising “between 0.9 and 1.8 degrees F (0.5 and 1 degree C).” (p. 35) Just imagine some of the temperature changes and their consequences with today's projected run-away climate change scenarios! An example from Fagan's book particularly conveyed to me why climate change has to be taken seriously by all of us: “Deserts and semiarid environments are extremely sensitive to even tiny variations in rainfall. An inch (25 millimeters) more rain can shrink the frontiers of a desert by hundreds of square miles.” (p. 46)

CONCLUSION

In some ways, the **Dummies** title seems appropriate, because climate change ideas are really dumbed down by the two authors. Climate change is important in its own right, but it is a reflection of the larger issue of humankind treating Nature as a commodity. I believe a very misleading picture is presented of what trying to address climate change means for the fate of industrial capitalist societies. The authors refuse to say that we need to move to a post-industrial age, where the old ways of economic activity go to the dust bin and an Earth-centered all-species spirituality is embraced, as we seek a way out of the climate change crisis.

As Naess has said “The earth does not belong to humans.” This basic position means that it is only by human-made social conventions, which should not be supported, that humans acquire “ownership” or private property rights over the Earth. Thus, from a deep ecology point of view, we should oppose carbon emissions trading both within and outside the Kyoto Protocol, because this is putting a price on the atmosphere. Asserting that the Earth does not belong to humans, is also a stand against treating other life forms, living or dead (e.g. fossil fuels), as “resources” for human or corporate use. All life forms have value in themselves, independent of any human valuation. All life is ultimately one, so there are no absolute distinctions between living and non-living ecosystem components.

For industrial capitalism to commodify the Earth, its spirituality had to be undermined. Greens who are influenced by deep ecology see the necessity for a new spiritual relationship to the natural world. This means that we come to see the Earth as alive and part of ourselves. We need to extend our sense of personal self-identity to include the well-being of the Earth, if we

are to seriously engage with climate change.

Given the importance of fossil fuels, clearly they should not “belong” to corporations. If they do, as in Canada, they should be taken back by the appropriate collectivity – here the Canadian state. Fossil fuels, in today’s world of ever increasing carbon dioxide emissions, should only be minimally further exploited in our country, and only as a transition to a non-fossil fuel, post-industrial economy. All fossil fuel exports should be ended, NAFTA notwithstanding. A national oil and gas pipeline should be built, in order to have some national self-sufficiency, as we wean ourselves off fossil fuels, in moving to an ecocentric, carbon-free economy. In Canada, deeper Greens should be calling for the end of the Alberta tar sands’ exploitation, shutting down the oil and gas wells off the East Coast, and stopping the projected Mackenzie Valley pipeline. We have to get out of the “business” of fossil fuels in Canada. Also, in order to have international moral authority in climate change negotiations, Canada must be seen as walking the talk within its own national boundaries. The long term economic direction is to a much more bioregional or localized self-sufficient world, as globalization starts to unravel with the “peaking” of oil and natural gas. Masses of people have to relearn basic life skills of survival in place. In **Renewable Energy**, Ted Trainer calls this “The Simpler Way” and outlines what he sees as some basic principles for low ecological footprint and energy use and Earth-bonding lifestyles.

Climate change, the growth of industrial societies and the expansion of human populations (now approaching seven billion persons), are directly linked to the exploitation and consumption of fossil fuels. (Richard Heinberg’s **The Party’s Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies**, 2005 revised edition, is a powerful and convincing antidote to the mental sedatives given in the May/Caron book.) These same fossil fuels have not only contaminated the atmosphere, but, when worked into biocides, fertilizers, and plastics, have contaminated large areas of the Earth – people, wildlife and, increasingly, the oceans. The kind of climate change debate set forth in **Global Warming for Dummies** is clearly inadequate from any deeper perspective. Greens need to set their sights on transforming popular consciousness, in order to build a base for the needed revolutionary changes. The task is not to dumb down climate change and other ecological messages in order to gain parliamentary seats.

This book is “Pollyanna-ish” and non-threatening regarding fundamental changes to lifestyles. As May and Caron say in one memorable remark, "You can use a dishwasher without guilt." (p. 292) What is very worrying is that this book is now being promoted by the federal Green Party of Canada as a “Green” view of climate change. It is not.

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