

# AL GORE'S GREEN GUILT

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*George F. Will*

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Someone retrieved Kipling's poem "Recessional" (the one about "dominion over palm and pine" and "lesser breeds without the Law") from the wastebasket where Kipling had tossed it. Whether that someone did literature a favor is debatable. Clearly Al Gore's book "Earth in the Balance" is wastebasket-worthy. The senator says our civilization is a "dysfunctional family." He favors "wrenching transformation of society," altering "the very foundation of our civilization." Some leaders have effected such changes. Moses, Jesus, Mohammed. But the U.S. government?

His environmentalism is a caricature of contemporary liberalism, a compound of unfocused compassion (for the whole planet) and green guilt about "consumptionism" (a sin that Somalia and many other places would like to be more guilty of). His call to "make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization" is embarrassing. Who wants politicians who are unaware of the comical figure they cut when announcing new "central organizing principles" for civilization?

When Gore asserts, as he did yet again on television last Sunday, that "the world scientific community" is in "consensus" about global warming, he is being as cavalier about the truth as the Bush campaign has been about Clinton's tax increases. Gore knows that his former mentor at Harvard, Roger Revelle, who died last year, concluded: "The scientific base for greenhouse warming is too uncertain to justify drastic action at this time. There is little risk in delaying policy responses." Gore knows, or should know before pontificating, that a recent Gallup Poll of scientists concerned with global climate research shows that 53 percent do not believe warming has occurred, and another 30 percent are uncertain.

Gore is marching with many people who not long ago were marching in the opposite direction. New York magazine's Christopher Byron notes that Stephen Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, is an "environmentalist for all temperatures." Today Schneider is hot about global warming; 16 years ago he was exercised about global cooling. There are a lot like him among today's panic-mongers.

Gore complains that the media, by focusing on controversy, threaten the planet by creating skepticism about the agenda for which he insists there is scientific consensus. Actually, too often skepticism (about Love Canal, acid rain, the -- it turns out -- nonexistent Northern Hemisphere hole in the ozone layer) is vindicated long after being portrayed in the media as a moral failing, rather than an intellectually debatable position.

Gore, who has spent most of his life in Washington's governing circle, overflows with the certitude characteristic of that circle. He knows the future and knows exactly what it requires, which turns out to be an unprecedented expansion of government -- spending, regulating, evaluating technologies, and transferring wealth abroad.

He has mastered the Washington art of arguing that his agenda won't really cost anything. You know: This or that program or regulation will make us healthier or smarter or better behaved, and therefore will make us more productive, so economic growth will increase and so will revenues, and thus everything will "pay for itself." Gore's new wrinkle on this is environmentalism-as-business-opportunity. We shall prosper by making environmentally "necessary" products. Perhaps.

But we know who certainly will prosper. Ronald Bailey in National Review reports a Rand study that shows that 80 percent of the money spent by an environmental program Gore sponsored -- the Superfund, for cleaning up contaminated sites -- has gone in fees to one of the Democratic Party's most powerful, and financially grateful, constituencies: lawyers.

The hoariest cliché in modern American politics is "Marshall Plan" for this or that (nowadays usually "the cities"). It is being given another trot around the track by Gore's call for a "Global Marshall Plan." He is vociferous against the "hubris" of our technological civilization, but he partakes of the hubris of the government class which, having failed at its banal but useful business down the street (schools, bridges, medical care) has an itch to go global.

Gore's particular ideas (lots of new taxes; treating the automobile as a "mortal threat" to civilization, and much more) have no constituency. But what is dismaying is the way he trades in ideas, uncritically embracing extremisms that seem to justify vast expansions of his righteousness and of the power of the government he seeks to lead.

His unsmiling sense of lonely evangelism in a sinning world lacks the sense of proportion that is produced by a sense of history -- and of humor. The planet is more resilient, the evidence about its stresses more mixed and the facts of environmental progress more heartening than he admits. His book, a jumble of dubious 1990s science and worse 1960s philosophy ("alienation" and all that) is a powerful reason not to elect its author to high office in the executive branch, where impressionable people will be bombarded by bad ideas in search of big budgets

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## Hot About Global Warming

In his Sept. 3 op-ed column "Al Gore's Green Guilt," George Will said, "Gore is marching with many people who not long ago were marching in the opposite direction. New York magazine's Christopher Byron notes that Stephen Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder [Colo.], is an 'environmentalist for all temperatures.' Today Schneider is hot about global warming; 16 years ago he was exercised about global cooling. There are a lot like him among today's panic mongers."

This is both false and possibly malicious, because I have repeatedly noted that 16 years ago in my book "The Genesis Strategy," I was relatively neutral about whether warming or cooling was the more likely outcome from continued growth in population, affluence and polluting technologies. Rather, I warned that any rapid climatic changes (of more than a few degrees in a century) could threaten agriculture and natural ecosystems.

That warming or cooling of this rate is likely to pose potentially serious risks is repeatedly endorsed by all official assessments of scientifically balanced groups. Moreover, even if I had forecast cooling 16 years ago, it would hardly be a source of pride for a scientist to keep repeating a forecast for 16 years regardless of new evidence. Back then we didn't know much about the heat trapping implications of gases like chlorofluorocarbons, methane or nitrous oxide. Now, we know that these greenhouse gases (with carbon dioxide) are more likely on a global scale to dominate climatic change than cooling pollutants like sulfur dioxide. Two decades ago my main point then, which is still valid today, is that we insult the environment at a faster rate than we can foresee the consequences and that, in my value system, a prudent response is to slow down our impact on the environment to buy time for scientists to assess the seriousness and nature to adapt to whatever changes eventually unfold.

I am proud, not ashamed, of my small role in helping stimulate and contribute to knowledge of climatic change during the past 20 years (my recent views are detailed in my book "Global Warming: Are We Entering the Greenhouse Century?"). What doctor would be in practice if he or she doggedly stuck to a preliminary diagnosis after all lab tests and X-rays the physician responsibly ordered pointed to a different disease? That is how science works—by hypothesis, testing and new hypothesis.

But in the cases of global warming, acid rain, species loss or ozone depletion, the consequences are more than academic exercises. These experiments are being performed on "laboratory Earth," and I for one appreciate the unprecedented (for a politician) dedication of Al Gore to understand the science and then search for least-cost solutions.

—Stephen H. Schneider

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