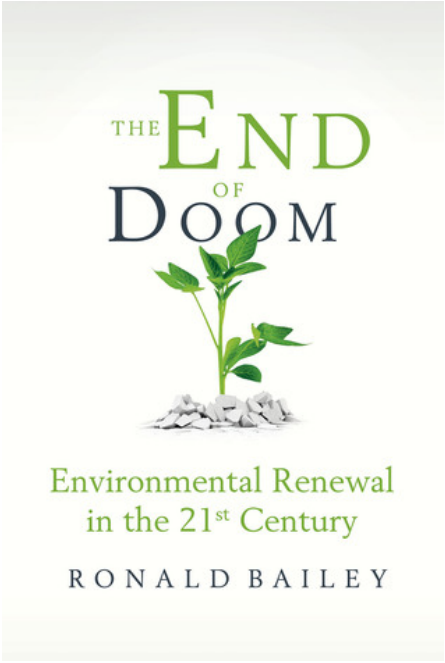

The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century

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In the past five decades there have been many, many forecasts of impending environmental doom. They have universally been proven wrong. Meanwhile, those who have bet on human resourcefulness have almost always been correct.

In his widely praised book *Ecoscam*, Ronald Bailey strongly countered environmentalist alarmism, using facts to demonstrate just how wildly overstated many claims of impending ecological doom really were. Now, twenty years later, the Reason Magazine science correspondent is back to assess the future of humanity and the global biosphere. Bailey finds, contrary to popular belief, that many present ecological trends are quite positive. Including:
Falling cancer incidence rates in the United States.
The likelihood of a declining world population by mid-century.
The abundant return of agricultural land to nature as the world reaches peak farmland.
A proven link between increases in national wealth and reductions in air and water pollution
Global warming is a problem, but the cost of clean energy could soon fall below that of fossil fuels.

In The End of Doom, Bailey avoids polemics and offers a balanced, fact-based and ultimately hopeful perspective on our current environmental situation. Now isn't that a breath of fresh air?

The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century Details

Date	:	Published July 21st 2015 by Thomas Dunne Books (first published April 28th 2015)
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From Reader Review The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century for online ebook

E says

Ronald Bailey is not going to give in to environmental doomsayers. And neither should you. This book tells you why. In seven long chapters he shows why overpopulation is not an issue (world population will peak in the 21st and then start to go down), that there is no shortage of energy (whether carbon-based or non-carbon, especially nuclear; can you imagine nuclear power plants the size of a pickup truck that will provide energy for 100,000 people? they'd be here sooner than you'd think if certain people wouldn't get in the way), how cancer is not becoming a larger issue (we only see more of it because people are living longer, but in terms of human age-years, its incidence is in fact going down), that GMOs haven't caused as much as a cold or rash, let along the sky-is-falling scenarios people envision), that global temperatures can be controlled relatively cheaply, but again, environmentalists are actually the ones getting in the way of cooling schemes! undoubtedly because there are ulterior motives at work), and that species are not dying out at any atypical rate.

This is really just the tip of the iceberg. Bailey has surveyed hundreds and hundreds of scientific studies (which is why the book only gets 4 stars; too often the book reads like little more than a survey of such studies). Forestation is going up, not down. Cropland is going down, not up. Urbanization is helping, not hurting. And so on and so forth. If you need a little environmental optimism (or realism!), this book is for you.

Mark Howell says

Outstanding. Should be required reading for every politician and policy maker.

Santosh Mathew says

Superb book with an excellent overview into environmental alarmism and the truth behind renewable energies. Very well balanced and positive outlook on these topics. Definite must read for folks who are interested in energy crises, species extinction and all the evils of "modern generation" on the ecology...

Terry Earley says

I liked Bailey's treatment of such theories as "The Population Bomb", which played out while were were young parents. I am glad I did not believe Ehrlich at the time.

Bailey treats other issues coming and going, each to be treated with caution. It was good to see an opposing view that was well written.

Tom Meyer says

A very welcome antidote tone kind of Malthusian conventional wisdom to be found in sections of Lauato Si. Bailey acknowledges the challenges ahead, but aptly describes how humanity's ability to innovate and problem-solve mean that our planet's, our biosphere and --most importantly -- us will have our best days ahead.

My one criticism is that some of the chapters could easily have been split.

JP says

What I like most about this book is that I come away from it feeling like I now have a solid grounding in the environmental debates of our time. Bailey argues that we should be not only hopeful about the future, but even should expect things to continue to improve. It will be hard for many environmental radicals to accept this outlook, but for me at least, it was compelling that Bailey accepts climate change as an important trend. It's a critical problem, but one that can be solved through innovation and economic forces, just as has happened with all of the previous eco-risks. The arguments in this book are supported with plenty of evidence, including consideration for opposing views.

Paul says

Bailey doesn't detail his conversion from global warming skeptic to believer (I would have been interested), but the book is probably stronger given his current viewpoint. One does not need to be skeptical of how "settled" the science is to see the correct path forward: allow the free market to operate and deliver the wealth and innovation that will minimize the costs and ameliorate the consequences. What surprised me was how clearly the various IPCC reports acknowledge this. Still, we're left to fight on against the various progressives and interventionists who would command and control us to penury in the name of saving the planet.

The book is a level-headed, calm, factual and devastating critique of several of the alarmist hobby horses from overpopulation to resource depletion to biodiversity (and more). A good read, though at times a bit tedious (a consequence of the careful completeness of the argumentation).

Georgia hillstrom says

I received this book through goodreads giveaway, thank you so much. This book should be mandatory reading for all the people making rules, laws in our country, world, especially senators voting making decisions for all of us now and in the future. This was a refreshing book to read. I thought when I saw the cover it may be hard to read to understand, not true at all. I admire the author for taking time to research, reference scientific studies, quite a few of these here. He exposes the truth behind the cover ups. He talks about testing of new drugs, and organizations, such as Greenpeace what they tell people to get donations,

may not be the truth.
I felt a little more optimistic for the future of humans after reading this book. Don't read this book if you want to continue to believe all that you hear on TV that world is in dire straits and coming to an end.
After reading tis book I finally have a glimmer of hope for humanity, at least some people like this author believe we can survive.

Kirsten says

Full disclosure: I hold a degree in environmental science and work in natural resources, so you can take my opinion with however many grains of salt you want, but this book could seriously have used some fact checking. It read a little bit like a witch hunt/Republican debate.

This book just came across weirdly. I can see some of the author's points, sure, but the rest it seemed like someone in these industries was paying him to write what he did. He treats people who are concerned like idiots. I would argue that it's good to show awareness and concern for your surroundings, even if you aren't presently hurtling towards doom, it never hurts to keep making sure you aren't about to get hit by a bus kind of thing. Inducing environmental panic in people isn't the right answer probably at this point, but neither is telling them nothing is wrong and we can continue consuming ALL THE THINGS. Climate change or no, that's just not realistic.

Robert P. Hoffman says

So far this is an excellent book. The author has done much research and is not in the camp of the climate skeptics. Here are some of his best points.

Point One: when we look at policies we need to carefully compare the costs and benefits and not simply assume that if something has a cost it shouldn't be pursued. Many great examples.
(1) After Fukushima Germany shut down its nuclear reactors and relied more on coal fired power plants. This resulted in a dramatic increase in CO2 emissions. (pp. 80-81)
(2) Subsidies for bio-fuels. The subsidies were motivated by the desire to generate fuels that would generate less pollution. But it caused farmers to plow up land that had been set aside for conservation programs, used much more fertilizer (that resulted in runoffs that produced dead zones in the seas) and decreased wildlife habitat. In addition it resulted in an increase in the price of good that has hurt people in poorer regions. (p. 84)
(3) Opposition to fracking. Natural gas generates substantially less pollution than coal fired power plants and oil. Fracking has dramatically reduced the price of natural gas. But opposition to fracking focuses on its costs and ignores its benefits.
(4) Opposition to pesticides. Pesticides increase the per acre yield of food which reduces the amount of land that needs to be devoted to growing food. The opposition to this fails to look at the benefits and dramatically overstates costs (e.g., claiming pesticide use has resulted in increases in cancer and birth defects, claims that are not supported by any evidence).

This last examples connects to the second key point.

Point Two: the opposition to genetically modified foods is misguided. There is absolutely no evidence that such foods pose any risk. Genetically modified foods reduce the need for pesticide use, reduces the amount of fertilizer required, and allows foods to be grown in higher temperatures and with less water required. The opposition is akin to the claims about vaccines and autism and is about as correct as the people who claim that human activities do not contribute to global warming.

Some examples of the consequences of the misguided opposition to genetically modified foods.
(1) Nitrogen fertilizer runoff contributes to global warming. Crops use only 30-50% of the fertilizer which requires more fertilizer to be applied and leads to runoffs that contribute to water pollution. Genetically modified crops use nitrogen fertilizer more efficiently reducing by 50 to 60% the amount of fertilizer needed. Yet many environmentalists oppose the genetically modified crops. (There seems to be some belief that nature is pure and anything that changes nature is corrupt.) (p. 167)

Point Three: some environmentalists invoke the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle states that if an activity poses threats of harm to human health or the environment that precautionary measures should be undertaken even if the cause and effect not clear. The burden is on the people proposing the activity to show that there are no threats. (pp. 86-87)

One assumption behind this is that new technologies are riskier than

Key conclusion: in trying to deal with climate change subsidies are not a good strategy. It assumes the government can determine optimal responses, it has government picking winners and losers, it is subject to political pressures, and it reduces the ability of new technologies to emerge. Much better is to impose taxes that force users of energy to pay the full costs of using energy. This gives incentives to reduce consumption and to find ways of generating energy that rely less on common resources.

The key assertion the author makes (p. 238) is the claim that "it is surely the case that if future generations deal with climate change, the best policies are those that encourage rapid economic growth." A different way of phrasing this which occurs on the same page: "Whatever slows down economic growth will also slow down environmental cleanup and renewal."

One good example of how economic growth helps the environment occurs on p. 251 where the author discusses how smaller farmers in tropical areas are moving to the cities because of economic opportunities. The abandoned farms are seeing the growth of secondary forests (which regenerate more quickly than some believe and have much diversity). The author has a short section on pp. 248-249 in which he argues that as more people move to the cities it helps the environment (which of course is connected to economic growth).

Overall a great book in which the author has read so many studies, has attempted to analyze what is going on, and comes up with excellent insights.

Mark says

In 2005, Bailey changed his mind about climate change: He concluded that the balance of the scientific evidence showed that man-made global warming could likely pose a significant problem for humanity by the end of this century. It is gutsy and all too rare, for a public intellectual to so clearly make an about-face on an

issue of import, particularly climate change. I took this to serve as compelling evidence of a man working honestly to navigate the truth of a difficult problem. And for that reason, was looking forward to reading this book.

I found it to be excellent. Bailey lays out the many reasons, exhaustively backed up by sound research, for which we should have optimism about mankind's ability to adequately face the challenges of our future climate. He is also refreshingly clear and direct about separating climate science from what we might do about it as a species. As Bailey has written elsewhere: "Scientific evidence does not mandate any particular policy."

The chapter which explores the precautionary principle (view spoiler) is worth reading by itself if you have a free hour at the local library.

A later chapter which examines the costs and benefits of combating climate change was striking in that it is such an obvious question to explore and yet gets little air time in the discussion which I have followed. What is the impact of 1 F° warming and what would it cost to reduce future warming by 1 F°? How well can we answer either question and how might those answers, imperfect as they are, influence public policy?

One quibble is Bailey's rather narrow choice to discuss positive or negative outcomes only in terms of economic value. There is plenty of room to explore the value of planetary species diversity or the value of a functioning ecosystem without lapsing into sentimentality. The focus on economic outcomes does nothing to detract from the work, but rather leaves this book as one chapter within a larger discussion, rather than encompassing that entire discussion itself.

While somewhat dry, due to Bailey's insistence on through documentation, this book is highly recommended. It adds an important voice to this ongoing societal debate.

Mart Roben says

It’s a book that clusters all the positive news about environment, that never got published. If you want to feel that things are getting better and there is still hope for humanity, read it! The best part is that it has a lot more scientific backing than the everyday panic mongering headlines.

A few examples:

There are signs that thanks to advances in agriculture, we have already reached peak farmland. With a bit of luck, no more forests need to be cut down to feed the population of Earth.

Speaking of advances in agriculture, there is a huge difference in yields, depending on farming techniques. The corn yields in US are 5 times bigger than in India. If we could reach the same efficiency all around the world, we could feed 10 billion with half the current farmland.

And the best thing is that in today’s hyperconnected world, it could be done. Once a level of technology is reached in one part of the world, others can leap to the same level without all the trial-and-error in-between. Just like developing countries started using mobile communication, without having to build the costly infrastructure for landline telephones first.

The book also has interesting points about politics that affect the environment.

Contrary to the myth of evil corporations, it seems that private companies are much more environmentally responsible in drilling oil, than governments. Governments often use natural resources at their disposal to patch other social problems with loads of cash. Private companies keep a longer perspective.

Another interesting political discussion is about the climate change. The author doesn’t deny the climate change, but he draws his point from a comparison between the estimates of climate change damages and estimates of economic growth.

If we did nothing, what would be the effect on the standard of living 100 years from now? What would the effect be, if we severely restricted our economy, to slow down the climate change? According to the data presented, there is only a tiny difference. So the question is, how much should people living now sacrifice, so that the living standard of people 100 years from now, whose incomes will likely be 6 to 14 times higher, isn’t reduced by a couple of percentage points?

All in all, a delightful and thought-provoking book. It has a ton of examples and research citations for anyone who has to debate environmental doomsayers.

Ryan Hebert says

It has been a really challenging book to read because it has forced me to defend my beliefs in certain things like climate change and social/corporate policy. The book basically pokes holes in environmental arguments of both the far left and far right and there's been times where I'm like, yes I agree and other times where I've thought, this is total nonsense. It's kind of nice to read something that doesn't just confirm all my beliefs.

However at the end of the day, not many real solutions or ideas come out of this book. It's more of an attempt to comfortably reassure everyone that the smart people have it under control. One that did though, was Bailey's finger pointing at energy subsidies as stifling innovation in he affordability of renewable alternatives. If fossil-fuel based subsidies were phased out, one can't help but believe something would take its place before we entered an energy cost crisis. Anyways, the book makes you think and question and that's the point, yeah?

Jim Robles says

O.K. - I get it. The prophets of doom have not been right, so far, and those on the left are motivated by lust for power (and influence and funding of course), but this book is simply too celebratory and optimistic. Not having been caught so far does not mean that we will never be caught.

On the other hand the "peak oil" folks were/are just silly.

I was disappointed by the discussion of Climate Change, which missed both of the fatal flaws in the argument that the very real warming we have experienced is anthropogenic.

The ninety-ninth book I have finished this year.

1. Peak Population

p. 9. . . . Duke University researcher Russell Hopfenberg . . .

The countries with the greatest food security are also the countries that are experiencing below replacement fertility.

O.K. - The prophets of doom from Malthus to Hopfenberg have, so far, seemed pretty clueless. Perhaps also politically (lust for power) motivated. Still this section is too celebratory: we should be worried about population growth and doing our best to stop it.

p. 17. The chief difference between the two population forecasts is the issue of the education of women.

p. 27. In other words, economic freedom actually serves as an invisible hand of population control.

2. Is the World Running on Empty?

p. 43. As the IEA 2013 report succinctly notes, "Fossil fuels are abundant in many regions of the world and they are in sufficient quantities to meet expected increasing demands."

p. 45. In their April 2013 study "The Global Energy Outlook," Duke University researchers Richard Newell and Stuart Iler . . . .

p. 60. Consider that the EPA reports that between 1980 and 2011, US gross domestic product increased 128 percent, vehicle miles traveled increased 94 percent, energy consumption increased 26 percent, and the US population grew by 37 percent. During the same period, total emissions of the six principal pollutants dropped by 63 percent.

p. 62. As increases in efficiency make goods cheaper . . . . but this is likely wrong.

Does Mr. Bailey know the Jevons Effect?

3. Never Do Anything for the First Time

p. 82. This has eliminated considerable swaths of wildlife habitat, and fertilizer runoff has created an extensive low-oxygen dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

p. 94. But there are billions of people who still yearn to have their lives transformed.

4. What Cancer Epidemic?

p. 99. Muller, DDT's inventor, was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948.

p. 100. . . . . in 1820 about 72 percent of the population worked in agriculture, the proportion in 1950 was only about 15 percent," reported Weiss. . . . to under 2 percent today.

p. 113. . . . . DDT remains unquestionably remains one of the most effective . . . malaria . . . The 200 million people who come down with malaria and the 600,000 who die of the disease every year might well wonder what authoritarian made that decision.

5. The Attack of the Killer Tomatoes?

p. 144. When it comes to biotech crops and pesticide use data, the go-to guy for anti-biotech activists is Charles Benbrook. . . . at Washington State University.

p. 154. Continued environmentalist opposition to this technology is just plain evil.

p. 163. This corporate concentration is the predictable result of the restrictive regulatory system promoted by the activists themselves.

6. Can Cope with the Heat?

p. 185. The upshot is that many researchers remain convinced that natural fluctuations in the climate unaccounted for in the computer models are responsible for keeping average global temperature flat for the past sixteen to eighteen years.

p. 196. . . . the weather is not necessarily getting worse; there are simply more people and property for storms to damage.

p. 200. . . . . boosting the wealth of poor people through economic growth is their best protection against meteorological disasters in the long run, ...

p. 201. . . 2C, global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 must be between 40 and 70 percent lower than they were in 2010.

p. 219. The group uses a theory of cultural commitments devised by Aaron Wildavsky, ...

p. 232. However, potentially disruptive innovations like the solar subcell developed by German Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems that can turn 44.7 percent of sunlight that strikes it into electricity or Sakti3's new high-capacity battery that the Michigan - based company claims offers double the energy density of current lithium - ion technology at a fifth the cost could accelerate the wider adoption of solar power.

7. Is the Ark Sinking?

p. 240. "Current rates of extinction are about 1000 times the likely background rate of extinction," starkly asserts . . . Duke University biologist Stuart Pimm and his colleagues.
