

## **It's the Narrative, Stupid!**

**Robert D. Brinsmead (11/12/2023)**

Movements which bind large numbers of humans together in support of a common cause are based on a narrative that captures the human imagination (See Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens – A Brief History of Humankind*).

The Climate Emergency movement is an illustration of the power of a narrative. The mass of people caught up into believing there is a climate emergency are not driven by any clear understanding of the complexities, much less the uncertainties of climate science. They are driven by a very basic narrative that goes something like this: Human emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) - mostly caused by burning fossil fuel - are a pollutant which is overheating the earth and causing a climate emergency.

The reason why this climate alarmist movement has been so successful is because its proponents take every opportunity to repeat this narrative and remind the public of the urgent need to reduce its carbon emissions. Some highly credentialled scientists now express the view that this narrative embodies the greatest scientific delusion in human history. If the central thesis of this narrative is a Goebel-size Big Lie, it has become widely believed on account of its being endlessly repeated. One fact is certain: if a government is needed to control carbon emissions, it will have to be a centralised regime that controls almost every aspect of human existence – what we can eat, what we can drive, how much we can travel, and in the end, and what we can think or say on social platforms.

The only way to effectively counter this narrative is to propose a better one. A mass of scientific data and arguments will not change the public perception that CO<sub>2</sub> is a dangerous pollutant. What is required in this battle for the mind is a clear and convincing narrative about the benefits of having more CO<sub>2</sub> rather than less.

This counter narrative is suggested by the basic facts of photosynthesis. Plants draw in CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, breathe out the oxygen, then in a process using sunlight, plants use the carbon as food to grow and flourish. In this way, plants use CO<sub>2</sub> to green the earth and to provide food for all creatures great and small.

Before CO<sub>2</sub> began to be demonized as a pollutant, these basic facts about photosynthesis used to be taught to children at school.

The facts about photosynthesis suggest a counter narrative along these lines: CO<sub>2</sub> is the food plants use to green the earth and give us food to eat as well as oxygen to breathe. More CO<sub>2</sub> means a greener earth and more food for humans as well as beasts. CO<sub>2</sub> is therefore vital for the health and well-being of the earth.

Such a narrative, based on the facts of photosynthesis, was the substance of the 1998 *Oregon Petition* drawn up by the *Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine* and signed by 32,000 scientists to protest the 1997 *Kyoto Protocol*. Unfortunately, the *Oregon Petition* was never seriously

considered, but buried by an avalanche of *ad hominin* attacks, misinformation, de-platforming, and threats to the reputation and academic careers of anyone who dared support it.

Not to be silenced, Freeman Dyson (1923 - 2020) was a Princeton physicist who never ceased to champion the narrative that more CO<sub>2</sub> would far outweigh any possible harmful effects. Being a scientist of legendary stature, Dyson was impossible to silence. He lived to see a group of highly credentialed scientists form the *CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition* to challenge the narrative which demonises CO<sub>2</sub> as a dangerous pollutant. The group includes such names as Richard Lindzen PhD. (Atmospheric Physicist), William Happer PhD. (Physicist), Gregory Wrightstone MS (Geologist), Patrick Moore PhD. (Ecologist) and John Clauser PhD (winner of the 2022 Nobel Prize in Physics).

As its name indicates, the *CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition* publishes papers and articles to defend CO<sub>2</sub> as a natural, non-toxic gas which is highly beneficial. Among other things, the *CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition* has delved into the geological record of the earth to show that in past ages, such as the Cambrian and Jurassic periods, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels were many times higher than they are today, yet life proliferated and the earth flourished when CO<sub>2</sub> levels were so much higher than they are now. Rather than the present CO<sub>2</sub> levels being too high, the geological record indicates that CO<sub>2</sub> levels are now at levels where plants are impoverished. This is now being proved every day by horticulturists who raise the CO<sub>2</sub> levels in their indoor greenhouses 2.5 times and raise plant productivity by 40%. The *CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition* reports on hundreds of other experiments which prove that raising CO<sub>2</sub> levels raises the growth and productivity of plants. More CO<sub>2</sub> also means that plants can survive with less water and endure harsher conditions. These are enormous environmental advantages.

The *CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition* keeps its narrative about the benefits of more CO<sub>2</sub> out front and central even when it reviews complex scientific data. Greg Wrightstone's book, *Inconvenient Facts*, deserves its ranking as an Amazon top seller in the climate debate. In all the detail of his 145-page book, this author succeeds in keeping the basic facts understandable and the narrative about the benefits of more CO<sub>2</sub> central.

This good news narrative about the benefits of CO<sub>2</sub> means that there is no need to reduce our standard of living, turn off our air conditioners, cease travelling by plane, stop eating meat or putting up with a government controlling almost every aspect of our existence under the pretext of controlling carbon.

There has never been a time on earth when so many people have lived longer, been better fed, housed, educated, entertained, or enjoyed the bounties of earth as much as now. Are we ready to trade all this in for massive government meddling to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that don't need reducing? If CO<sub>2</sub> levels were reduced to pre-industrial levels of 280 ppm, that would decrease world food production by around 15% - enough to starve a billion people.

As the great optimist Julian Simon put it when the dark clouds of climate alarmism were beginning to gather some 40 years ago: "We – humanity - should be throwing ourselves the party to outdo all the parties, a combination graduation-wedding-birthday-all rites-of passage party, to mark our emergence from a death-dominated world of raw-material scarcity. Sing, dance, be merry – and work. But instead we see gloomy faces. They are spoilsports, and they have bad effects. The spoilsports accuse our generations of having a party – at the expense of generations to come. But it is those who use the government to their own advantage who are having a party at the expense of others – the bureaucrats, the grants-grabbers, the subsidy-looters. Don't let them spoil our merry day." *The Ultimate Resource*, page 408

There are those who reject any climate emergency, but, unfortunately, they are not yet ready to embrace the liberating narrative about the benefits of more CO2. They still think that present CO2 levels are a problem which needs to be addressed, but in ways that will neither damage our standard of living nor hurt the environment. This finds them stuck between a rock and a hard place. They still have one foot firmly stuck in the camp which demonizes the gas of life which enables plants to feed the world and green the earth. To say with the *CO2 Coalition*, "We need more CO2 rather than less," is a step too far them. This leaves them without a winning narrative.

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