# Fact or Fiction?



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## Future Generations

"The time will come when diligent research over long periods will bring to light things which now lie hidden ... And so this knowledge will be unfolded only through long successive ages. There will come a time when our descendants will be amazed that we did not know things that are so plain to them ... Many discoveries are reserved for ages still to come, when memory of us will have been effaced."—Seneca, First Century<sup>1</sup>

Environmental control strategies are often justified by the claim that people today have a moral obligation to protect the earth for future generations and must alter their behavior, and consumption, so as not to compromise the ability of future human beings to meet their own needs, reports Kendra Okonski.<sup>2</sup> She adds: "The



idea may sound appealing, but as a guiding principle for action today, it fails to account for the benefits that our activities and decisions may have for future generations. In an editorial last year in the UK's *Sunday Telegraph* at the time of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a South African economist suggested that the best we can do for future generations is generate maximal wealth to let them live better lives ... If anything is unsustainable it is the alternatives to development: stagnation and regressions."<sup>2</sup>

By focusing our priorities on future generations, we focus less on improving the lives of people who are alive today. These future generations bear no closer relationship to us than those now living in developing countries whose lives we disdain to save. Why are we not feeding people in this world who are hungry? Why are we not giving clean water to the almost billion people who don't have clean water? The greatest source of environmental degradation is poverty. Why aren't we cleaning up poverty? One answer is that perhaps its a lot easier worrying about future generations than trying to fix present day problems.

Lawrence Summers, writing for The Economist notes, "The premise that our first priority should be to do more for our descendants is debatable. Surely, it is ethically relevant that our grandchildren will in all likelihood be much better off than we are. While nobody can accurately predict long-term growth rates, remember that standards of living are three times higher than 60 years ago in the United States, seven times higher in Germany and almost ten times higher in Japan. Should my American grandparents have reduced their standard of living when life was considerably more nasty, brutish and short than now, to leave raw materials in the ground for my benefit?"3

To put this into more specific detail, Wilfred Beckerman calculates that the average growth rate of real national income per head in the world over the last 40 years or more has been 2.1 percent per annum and he predicts the future growth rate is likely to be at least as high as this, if not higher. Using a low figure of 1.5 percent growth rate for the next 100 years Beckerman calculates that world average incomes would be 4.43 times as high as they are now.

His use of the 1.5 percent figure is not something as fanciful as it might seem at first blush. As he points out, "The various scenarios of possible growth rates used by the IPCC (the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) to estimate the likely range of carbon emissions per capita GWP at between 4.3 times as high as it is today and 20 times as high." So Beckerman's guesstimate is at the bottom of the range adopted by the IPCC and, thus, is a conservative and modest estimate.<sup>4</sup>

More from Beckerman: "In light of this growth in per capita (real) incomes, it is reasonable to assume that mass 'absolute' poverty on the scale that currently exists in many parts of the world can and will be eradicated. It is also in this perspective that one should appraise predictions of global environmental disaster, such as those associated with predictions of climate change. A recent report by the IPCC has suggested that a doubling of the atmospheric carbon concentration could reduce GWP per head by between 1 and 2 percent. In other words, the world's population in the year 2100 will have to wait until the year 2101 or 2102 to enjoy the level of income that they would otherwise have enjoyed in the absence of climate change. It is to be hoped that they will not be too impatient. Instead of average incomes per capita being 4.4 times as high as today, they would be only about 4.3 times as high."4

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#### **Midwest Florida**

The AESF Midwest Florida Branch held its final meeting of 2004-05 season on May 25. The meeting featured a tour of the manufacturing facilities of the CONMED Linvatec Headquarters in Largo, FL. Several members off the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME) joined AESF members on the tour.

Following the dinner that was provided by Linvatec, Scott Maurer, vice president of the Branch, conducted a short business meeting. Reports from the secretary and treasurer noted that items being sent to "Branch News" are now being published regularly, and that the financial condition of the Branch is stable.

A discussion about local AESF members deserving recognition resulted in a recommendation that honorary or emeritus membership be granted to Jim Richardson, which was unanimously approved. The members were also briefed on the response received from AESF National Headquarters regarding bylaws about where funds from closed AESF Branches go, and a discussion was held regarding an inquiry on the AESF National Library.

### In Memoriam: Richard J. Norris

Richard J. Norris of Springfield, VA, a past president of the AESF Baltimore-Washington Branch, died on April 2, 2005. He was active in the metal finishing industry for more that 50 years as a consulting engineer. His clients included the U.S. Departments of the Navy and Army, the National Bureau of Standards, and the Harry Diamond Laboratory.

Norris held patents in the fields of electroforming, super lightweight microwave circuits and electrolytic recovery of metals.

A World War II veteran of the U.S. Navy, Norriz was among those who witnessed the treaty signing in Japan. He was preceded in death by his wife, Carol O. Norris.

New business included a discussion on the proposed bylaws that will be addressed at the Council of Delegates meeting held during SUR/FIN® and the election of officers. The AESF Midwest Florida Branch re-elected the same slate officers: Rob Mason (Concurrent Technologies Corp.), president; Scott Maurer, vice president; and Clay Mueller, treasurer. Skyler Ford (Linvatec) will serve as secretary.

Actions to be implemented by Branch officers over the summer include compiling a list of resources within the Voytko Surface Engineering Library and placing the list on the Branch Web site (www.aesf-dangler.com). In addition, a centrally located meeting of all Florida AESF Branches will be planned over the summer

Members were treated to an interesting and informative tour of Linvatec. The tour drew professionals from more than 15 local organizations. Following the tour, the Linvatec organization, and especially Skyler Ford (who conducted the tour) were recognized for their contributions.

At the conclusion, long-time Branch member Will Askew of IDSC, Inc., was presented with a 25 year service award.

-Scott Maurer

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#### What Will Energy Needs Be In the Future?

Predicting what humanity's energy needs will be in a hundred years would be like expecting even very smart people to have predicted in 1900 what we would be using in 2000. The best scientific panel available in 1900 would simply not have been able to plan for hundreds of millions of automobiles and trucks, ubiquitous electric lighting in tens of millions of houses and office buildings, fuel for thousands of jet planes, and tens of millions of refrigerators, air conditioners, computers, telephones, radios, televisions, and the like. Virtually none of the devices on this nearly endless list had even been invented by 1900. Given the increasing rate of technological innovation, we undoubtedly have even less chance of foreseeing the future than people in 1900.5

#### Summary

The IPCC, mentioned earlier in this column, makes this important point about developing countries: "If we take aggressive action to limit climate change they may regret that we did not use the funds instead to push ahead development in Africa, to better protect species against the next retrovirus, or to dispose of nuclear materials safely ... Alternatively, if the developed countries choose to embark on an aggressive control regime now, and if this cuts into their growth rates, the result will shrink export markets for developing countries and, thus, reduce growth there. In addition, if developed countries view their greenhouse efforts as, in effect, aid to developing countries, they may cut back on other programs (sanitation, education for women, etc.) that have a more immediate impact on life expectancy, health and well-being."6

Clearly, even this organization, which is the group providing much of the doom and gloom about global warming, raises the flag about future generations. This is the same IPCC whose scenarios predict that by 2100, nations that are poor today will at least be as rich as we are at present, and more likely will be two to four times more wealthy.

Bjorn Lomborg observes, "Imagine if you were a rich Chinese or a rich Rwandan or a rich Bolivian in 2100, looking back on 2004, saying how odd that the people of 2004 were so concerned about helping me a little bit through climate change, and so relatively unconcerned about helping my grandfather and my great-grandfather who needed the help much, much more."7

#### References

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- 3. Lawrence H. Summers, The Economist, May 30, 1992.
- 4. Wilfred Beckerman, "The precautionary principle and our obligations to future generations," in Rethinking Risk and the Precautionary Principle, Julian Morris, Editor, (Oxford, Butterworth Heinemann, 2000), 52.
- 5. John Jennrich, "Fueling the Future," in Global Warming and Other Eco-Myths, Ronald Bailey, Editor, (Roseville, CA, Prima Publishing Co., 2002), 260.
- 6. Wilfred Beckerman, "The precautionary principle and our obligations to future generations," 53.
- 7. Marc Morano, "Ignore Global Warming Say Former Greenpeace Members," cnsnews.com, December 14, 2004.