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# The Unspoken Failures of "Save the Earth Science": World Destruction with Nuclear Weapons, The Poisoning of the Earth's Ecology

By Edward Curtin
Global Research, May 01, 2017

Theme: Environment
In-depth Report: Nuclear War

*"In our society those who have best knowledge of what is happening are also those who are furthest from seeing the world as it is. In general, the greater the understanding, the greater the delusion: the more intelligent, the less sane." – George Orwell, 1984*

*"This has inspired me to new heights, to wage war against these forces ['the unfruitful ocean'] and subdue them." Faust from Goethe's Faust*

The recent marches on April 22nd to promote science and to celebrate Earth Day were perhaps well-intentioned, but they were delusional and conducted without any sense of irony. They served power and its propaganda. Obviously science has benefited us in certain ways, but it has become untethered from any sense of moral limits in its embrace of instrumental rationality and its unending efforts to sabotage faith in human freedom by rationally "proving" its illogical deterministic credo. And in doing so it has created and sustained a nightmarish world on the brink of destruction and undermined people's will to resist this death march. Ostensibly rational, it has engendered a spiritual alienation that goes to the roots of the world crisis.

"In short," says Dostoyevsky's underground man,

> "one may say anything about the history of the world – anything that might enter the most disordered imagination. The only thing one can't say is that it's rational."

For two of the major problems the world faces – world destruction with nuclear weapons and the poisoning of the earth's ecology and atmosphere – are the result of the marriage of

science and technique that has given birth to the technological “babies” (Little Boy and Fat Man) that were used by the U.S. to massacre hundreds of thousands of Japanese and now threaten to incinerate everyone, and the chemical and toxic inventions that have despoiled the earth, air, and water and continue to kill people worldwide through America’s endless war-making and industrial applications.

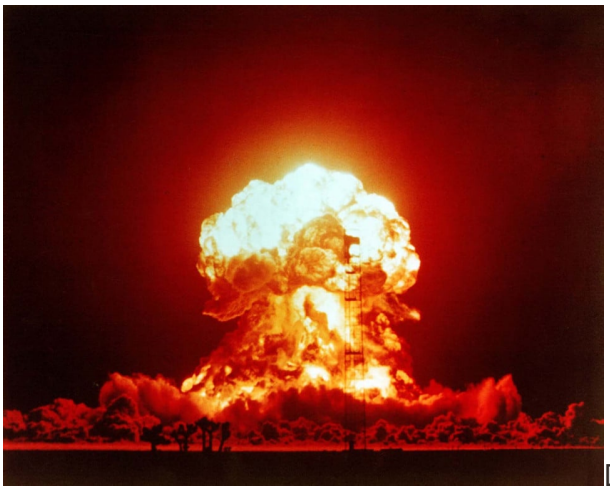
The Save-the-Earth-Science marchers failed, for self-serving reasons or ignorance, to see the obvious. But their failure goes even deeper than omitting the links between science, war, and pollution.

In our technopoly, logical thinking has become illogical; cause and effect, means and ends have been inverted. The causes of our problems are touted as the means to end them. These “solutions” are always offered with a straight face, as if they made perfect sense. This is how societies operate when in the grip of myths. In this case, the myths of science, progress, and history. Such myths render the obvious invisible as they create a hopeless inevitability in people who can imagine no alternative and have been convinced that science is the secret to salvation and the means to the things they have learned to desire, including longevity and perhaps “immortality.”And these things have become the means to additional means in an endless loop from which, by definition, ends are absent. As a result, the search for truth, celebrated as a goal of science, is slyly eliminated.

In this comforting yet absurd myth, science is viewed as the “miraculous knight of reason.” John Saul Ralston elaborates:

> Science led the way in the battle against the forces of darkness. Discoveries were celebrated as if new territories were won on the road to a place of eternal light where knowledge would reign. And yet these very real advances in the uncovering of nature’s secrets seemed increasingly to create a world which escaped the control of society. New knowledge and new positive powers in the hands of man seemed inevitably to be matched with new inaccessible elites and a new sophistication in the arts of violence and destruction….As for the scientists, the vast majority of whom continue to believe in the inviolability of progress, they still do so with the driven purity of terrorists.

Comforted and paradoxically terrorized by our creations, yet immobilized by our myths, we seem to lack the imaginations to conceive a different approach. So we applaud what seems so “sensible”: marching for science to save the planet. Meaning well becomes a substitute for missing the meaning of our contradictory thinking and the myth that sustains it.



Delude ourselves as we might, the probability of

making all possibility impossible is very real. Poised on the edge of nuclear conflagration and environmental collapse, we tell ourselves that reasonable minds will prevail, knowing, if we choose to think at all, that the central experiences of the past century – the mass slaughter of human beings with progressively more "advanced" weapons and ecological destruction as a result of scientific/technological "advances" (we are always advancing in the myth) – were not prevented by such "reasonableness." In fact, instrumental reason and its perverted logic of efficiency – our Gods – caused them.

We inhabit a nightmare, and reason is insufficient to awaken us.

> "The madman," wrote G. K. Chesterton, "is the man who has lost everything except his reason."

This is true even when the reasoning is faulty.

This scientific/technological nightmare is a world where everything has become a means and the ends no longer exist. We are travelling at breakneck speed to nowhere, but as long as long as we keep moving in our "usefulness," no one seems to notice that we are travelling in circles and getting nowhere.

> He's a real nowhere man
> Sitting in his nowhere land
> Making all his nowhere plans for nobody
>
> Doesn't have a point of view
> Knows not where he's going to
> Isn't he a bit like you and me?

I'd say the boys – the Beatles – have a point, wouldn't you? But what do artists know?

We can't conceive of our ends since they conjure up nothing, having been swallowed by the means, while the purpose of our lives is reduced to staying alive as long as possible. The Faustian goal has always been immortality, and we have been infected with the fear that death, and therefore life, may be meaningless. The quest for scientific "immortality" is a means to a means without end. It is a symptom of the profound spiritual crisis of the age.

Writing about our twisted logic that has banished anything "useless" or "gratuitous," – including art, people, and nature – the great French sociologist Jacques Ellul says this about modern science:

> Once, knowledge of truth was what mattered, but then after the philosophers came the scientists. They developed their theories, which were then applied, first in order to prove the truth of these theories, and then because of their usefulness. From that point on, science was lost! Technical means gradually came to dominate the search for truth. Science became more and more about the effectiveness of technical means. Science today takes its meaning from technique; it is completely oriented to application. It is in the service of means. It has become a means of perfecting the means. The ab- straction 'science,' to which we still pay lip service, has replaced the search for truth.

Yes, marching for science is marching for science, but not in the way the demonstrators think. It is marching for a means to a means. Wedded to government support and instantaneously applied to technical applications, science serves no ultimate end but its own existence. Holding signs supporting science as a cure for the planet's ills that science has created is like taking psychotropic drugs for depression because you were told the "cause" of your depression is a brain abnormality for which no causal scientific evidence exists since there are no definitive empirical lab tests. In the former case the cause becomes the solution; in the latter, the imagined cause is remedied by an imagined solution. In both cases, delusional thinking prevails.

Such inverted logic about cause and effect is the way the myth of science works today. No evidence required. The cause is the solution. The means justifies the means.

It is the same "logic" used to support the materialistic, murderous, and imperialistic American empire. Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc. – bomb, invade, kill, destroy – and when those means don't work, double down on them.

Paul Virilio, the great scholar of dromology (the study of speed), asks: "Has the prohibition to prohibit – the basic law of scientific progress – become the only law of a lawless globalism?" His answer: Yes. This prohibition to prohibit informs our science, war-making, rapacious globalization, and capitalist death trip – everything – as we accelerate toward global suicide.

It was Dostoevsky who long ago warned us of the path we were on and the spiritual nihilism that lay at its heart:

> That is not all; then, you say, science itself will teach man (though to my mind it's a superfluous luxury) that he never has really had any caprice or will of his own, and that he himself is something of the nature of a piano-key or the stop of an organ, and that there are, besides, things called the laws of nature; so that everything he does is not done by his willing it, but is done of itself, by the laws of nature. Consequently, we have only to discover these laws of nature, and man will no longer have to answer for his actions and life will become exceedingly easy for him.

But "easy" turned out to be hard, as an uneasiness of profound proportions wed to the spiritual crisis of free will created by science has been dismissed as the rantings of religious fanatics who want to return us to the dark ages. Blinded by the myth of science, we fail to see that the loss of our belief in our own freedom is connected to the instrumental rationality that threatens all life.

Nature and all living creatures, including ourselves, have become our enemies and are rejected as ends in themselves. Everything and everyone is a means. We must bomb, bulldoze, manipulate, drug, control, poison, etc.– all in the service of a diabolical willfulness that brooks no resistance.

American society is nihilistic and the ruling political and intellectual elites are of course the leading nihilists. But this nihilism is widespread because it works at the mythic level. Unable to grasp the circular and repetitive nature of instrumental reason and its propaganda that have resulted in a spiritual/existential crisis that is leading to world destruction, average people fall into a deeper malaise that leads to widespread despair, unhappiness, and

hopelessness. Everything becomes a means to a means in a kaleidoscopic death trap.

The question is: how can we break out of this mystification of experience that has resulted in a double-bind that has trapped us?

I thing Goethe hints at a solution in a “warning” that the devil, Mephistopheles, gives to a student in *Faust*, and which Faust failed to heed:

> Who would study and describe the living, starts
>
> By driving the spirits out of the parts:
>
> In the palm of his hand he holds all the sections,
>
> Lacks nothing, except the spirit’s connection.

But are we capable of taking such a hint? Or have we passed a point of no return?

I will take up this hint in a sequel to this article, and explore the possibility of a path out of the seeming impossibility of escaping the cul-de-sac of our spiritually disinherited current condition.

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