

# Why We Don't or Won't Deal With Climate Change

By Rick Doble

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# Why We Don't or Won't Deal With Climate Change

We all know that animals adapt to their environment. This is not just true with long term evolution, it is true from year to year and season to season. If a watering hole dries up in Africa, a herd of wildebeests does its best to find another watering hole. If your favorite morning coffee shop goes out of business, you try to find another that is not too far from the route of your morning commute.

I was thinking about this when I wondered why we humans are having so much trouble coping with the certainty of climate change and the terrible consequences if some scenarios turn out to be true. In a sense this blog is my answer to the following question for this conference in Australia.

**The Centre for Time**  
**at the University of Sydney in Sydney, Australia**  
offered the following conference about the future of humanity:  
An interdisciplinary conference on the relationships  
between time, personal identity, and the future of humanity.  
Blue Lagoon Geothermal Spa, Grindavik, Iceland: 6th-8th July, 2015  
[http://sydney.edu.au/centre\\_for\\_time](http://sydney.edu.au/centre_for_time)

*Despite being aware (and reminded on a frequent basis) of the difficult future we face (both as individuals and as whole, including future people) if we don't curb our consumption, our numbers, our carbon footprints and so on, in general we tend to fall back into our old ways. This is despite the fact that the future people might include ourselves and our family and offspring. Why is this? Is it not deeply irrational? Why do we privilege the now (present selves) and discount the future (and future selves)? Of course, there has been much work conducted on impulse control, self-regulation, temporal discounting and on the identity over time of selves, but rarely are these approaches brought together in the study of the pressing problem of humanity's future. Time is deeply entangled with the problem, and so this conference aims to bring together researchers from a diverse set of fields, all engaged in some way with our behaviour over time, our stance towards time, or the nature of time in the universe, to think of new ways of integrating knowledge both to get a better grasp on the sources of humanity's projected problematic future, and to possibly serve up some initial strategies for resolution.*

[http://sydney.edu.au/centre\\_for\\_time/events/past\\_events/2015.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/centre_for_time/events/past_events/2015.shtml)

And then it occurred to me: With modern civilization we live most of the time in a man-made environment. The natural environment is removed from us. [See my blogs about this listed at the bottom of this page.] So what we are doing, without really thinking about it, is adapting to our man-made environment since that is the environment we actually do live in.

For thousands of years humans worked to tame, cultivate and conquer nature. We have been so successful we live in a world almost entirely of our own making with all-weather roads, cars, antibiotics, central heat and air conditioning, etc.

Now the problem is that we must conquer our own nature -- which is to not passively adapt to this man-made environment but instead to shape our overall man-made environment so that it is in tune with the larger natural environment of the Earth.

*Mankind has made an extraordinary advance in the natural sciences and in their technical application and has established his control over nature in a way never before imagined. Men are proud of those achievements, and have a right to be. But they seem to have observed that this newly-won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, which is the fulfilment of a longing that goes back thousands of years, has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier. ...a suspicion dawns on us that...a piece of unconquerable nature may lie behind - this time a piece of our own psychical constitution.*

**Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents***

*We have met the enemy and he is us.*

**Walt Kelly, Pogo**

[https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Walt\\_Kelly](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Walt_Kelly)

However, it is only with a major storm, tornado, flooding, heat wave, blizzard, drought and such that the larger natural environment gets our attention.

As a result most people don't bring their own cup to a coffee shop, but drink out of a disposable cup that they then discard. Bringing your own cup every day would take some time and organization. You'd have to wash it each night, remember to bring it in the morning, then remember to take out of your car and wash it etc.



A simple coffee cup is not so simple. (Left) Cutaway of a coffee cup showing the air layer that insulates the coffee to keep it hot. (Middle) More accessories added to a simple coffee cup: a sleeve, a lid and a 'hot stopper' to keep hot coffee from splashing. (Right) A full trash can of disposable coffee cups.

*Most paper cups are designed for a single use and then disposal. Very little recycled paper is used to make paper cups because of contamination concerns and regulations. Since most paper cups are coated with plastic (polyethylene), then both composting and recycling of paper cups is uncommon because of the difficulty in separating the polyethylene in the recycling process of said cups...Over 6.5 million trees were cut down to make 16 billion paper coffee cups used by U.S. in 2006, using 4 billion US gallons (15,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of water and resulting in 253 million pounds (115,000,000 kg) of waste.*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper\\_cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper_cup)

People don't go slower down the highway, even though they would get much better mileage, because they are in a hurry.

**Remember that song with the line, "I can't drive 55."**

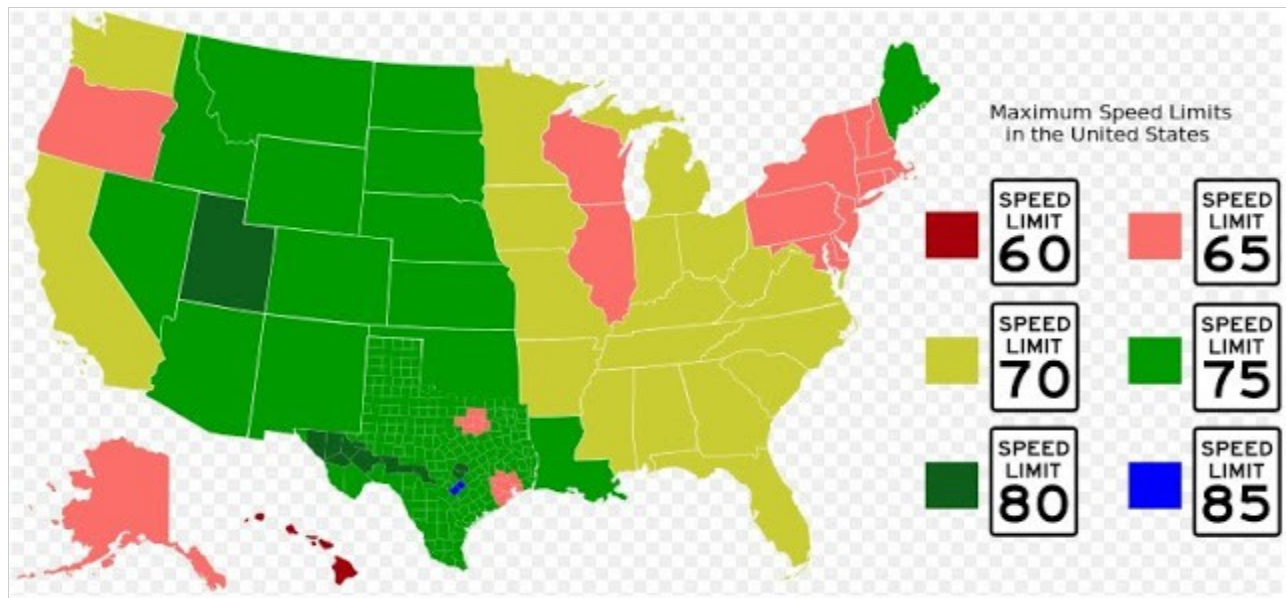
***I Can't Drive 55* by Sammy Hagar**

*"When I drive that slow, you know it's hard to steer.*

*And I can't get my car out of second gear.*

*What used to take two hours now takes all day. Huh!"*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Can%27t\\_Drive\\_55](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Can%27t_Drive_55)



With a popular attitude such as in this popular song,  
states ramped up their speed limits as high as 85 mph.

**However, "If the national speed limit were reset to 55,  
it would save 1 billion barrels of oil per year."**

<http://www.mpgforspeed.com/>



Texas proudly displaying its new higher speed limit.

Texas, for example, has speed limits of 75-85 mph. At 85 mph the average car is 30% less efficient. At 75 mph more than 20% less efficient.

<http://auto.howstuffworks.com/fuel-efficiency/fuel-economy/question4771.htm>

In the US time is precious and people want to 'save time' and not 'waste time.' So spending time to use less resources, to recycle, to avoid throw-away items is not easy -- instead we are moved in the opposite

direction: We are pushed to find more ways to save time. In addition the man-made environment we live in puts pressure on us to be on time, to be focused on the task at hand -- which becomes our immediate concern. The natural environment is, for most people, far removed and even remote.



A busy highway at night.

But the cost to the environment is huge.

People do not worry about global warming, for example, because their car, office, home and mall are all air conditioned.

And the consumer environment does not help either. Products are packaged for convenience, for the throw-away culture. The market place does not make it easy to live an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

And then there is the natural competitive nature of humans, where we want to have great car, a good house -- at least as good as our neighbors. Keeping up with the Joneses is still very much alive, as people often measure themselves and their worth against that of their neighbors.





Our modern world has created the problem,  
now we must use our sophisticated technology to solve the problem.

*"No society has ever yet been able to handle the temptations of technology...  
We have to learn to cherish this Earth and cherish it as something that's fragile, that's only one, it's all we  
have. We have to use our scientific knowledge to correct the dangers that have come from science and  
technology."*

**Margaret Mead**

## SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We are asking a reasonable logical question but getting a basic survival-instinct response. We should expect nothing different. We are, after all, simply animals whose instincts evolved over millions of years and direct our behavior. Only by recognizing this will we be able to deal with the problem.

Speaking about the movement of early humans from Africa across the globe, Dr. David Burney made this observation in his TED talk.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDl4S31xlbI>

*A global pattern of human arrival to previously uninhabited land masses, followed by faunal collapse and other ecological changes, appears WITHOUT KNOWN EXCEPTION. No one has contradicted or found exception to this idea.*

***Rewilding, Ecological Surrogacy, and Now... De-extinction?***

**Dr. David Burney at TEDxDeExtinction**

What this means is that the arrival of humans to new areas, areas where humans had not lived before, caused many or most of the native animals to go extinct or radically decline along with other major ecological changes. Or in other words, where ever humans migrated they caused drastic changes in the environment. But there is a second part to this. Humans, after having caused massive changes, must themselves have adjusted to the new environment that they themselves created.

In other words humans changed the environment where ever they went and, I have to assume, adapted to this new environment that they changed.

To use an oversimplified example, when humans went from foraging to farming, they not only changed the environment with their farming system, they also had to adapt to the new demands that their farming put on them, such as when to plant, harvest, store, prepare tools, etc.

According to Dr. Burney this basic pattern of behavior has been going on for hundreds of thousands of years without exception. This means we have to assume this is part of human nature.

And so today we find ourselves in the same situation. We have radically changed the world's environment and now we have adjusted to the environment that we, ourselves, created. We have adjusted to our modern world of mass production but not considered the overall and larger effect on the environment of the Earth.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

We have to be realistic. Are we hardwired to deal with the moment but ignore the future, for example? And if so, how can we deal with this problem?

But if you were hoping I would have a fix for this, you are mistaken. The best I can do is to help people recognize the nature of the problem as I have described it.

I do, however, have some tentative ideas that might get us started -- and that hopefully others might build on.

If there is hope, I believe the next generation is much more aware and in tune with the Earth's environment. Humans seem to do better with problems that they understand from childhood. This next generation will grow up with a concern that most of us only realized in adulthood.

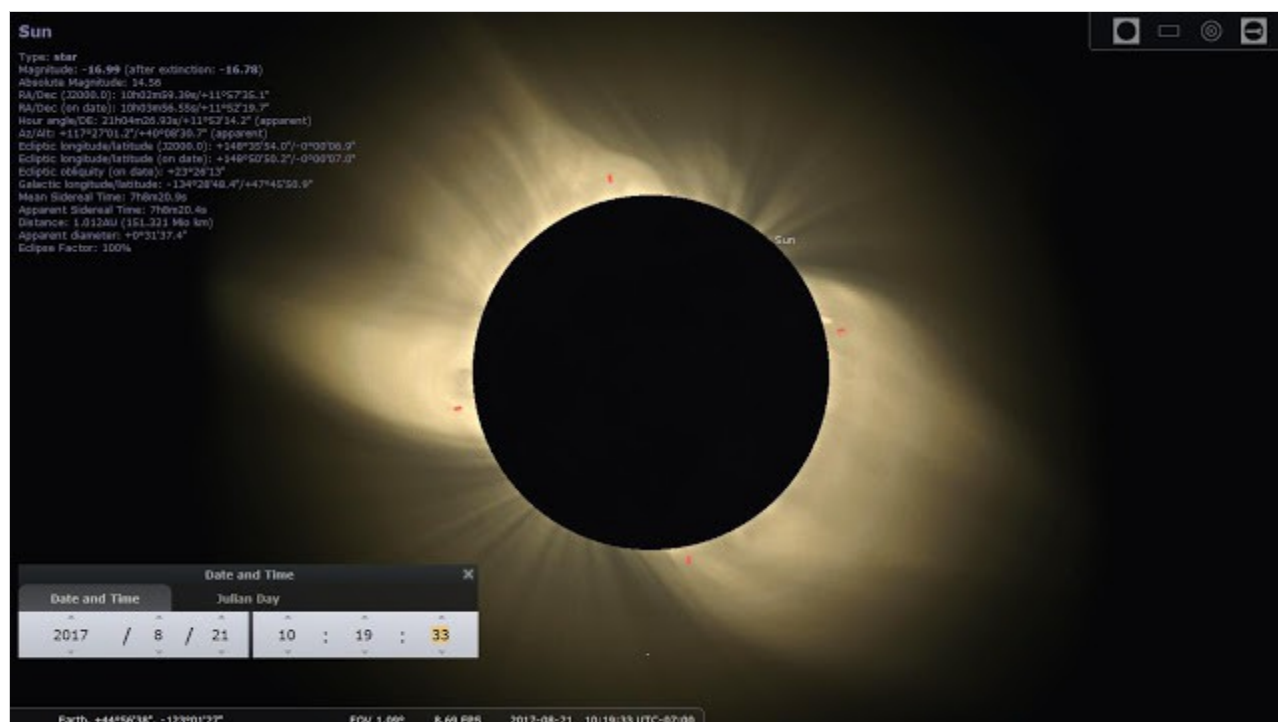
I also find it encouraging that the idea of the 'knowledge society' is starting to take hold. With this concept the knowledge you have is most important and the car you drive or the house you live in less important, for example.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge\\_society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_society)

And I do feel that there are some things people can do today to get in touch with the natural world.

# START WITH ASTRONOMY

People need to get back in touch with the natural environment. And nothing is more natural or more accessible, with a bit of driving, than the stars in the sky.

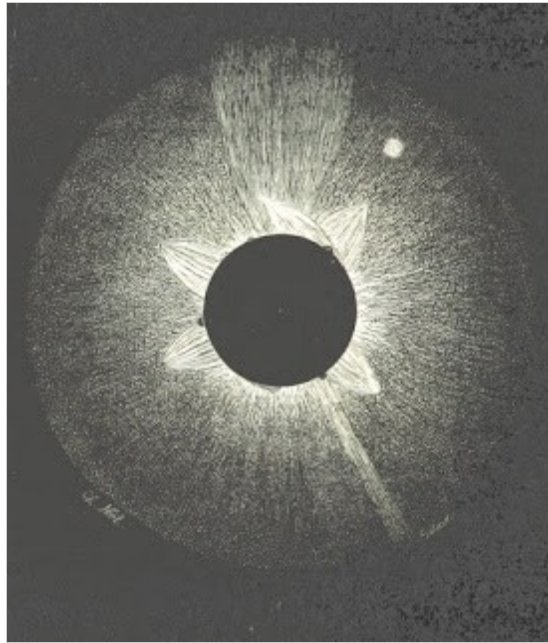


A view of totality during a solar eclipse. The recent interest in the eclipse shows that people can become excited and involved with the sun, the moon, and the stars.

So I would suggest starting with astronomy. I know that sounds strange, since the stars are so far away, but stars are a natural wonder and have been a major part of human culture for at least several hundred thousand years. Viewing the millions of stars that make up the Milky Way Galaxy will give you a new perspective and take you out of the man-made bubble of cities and civilization that we live in.

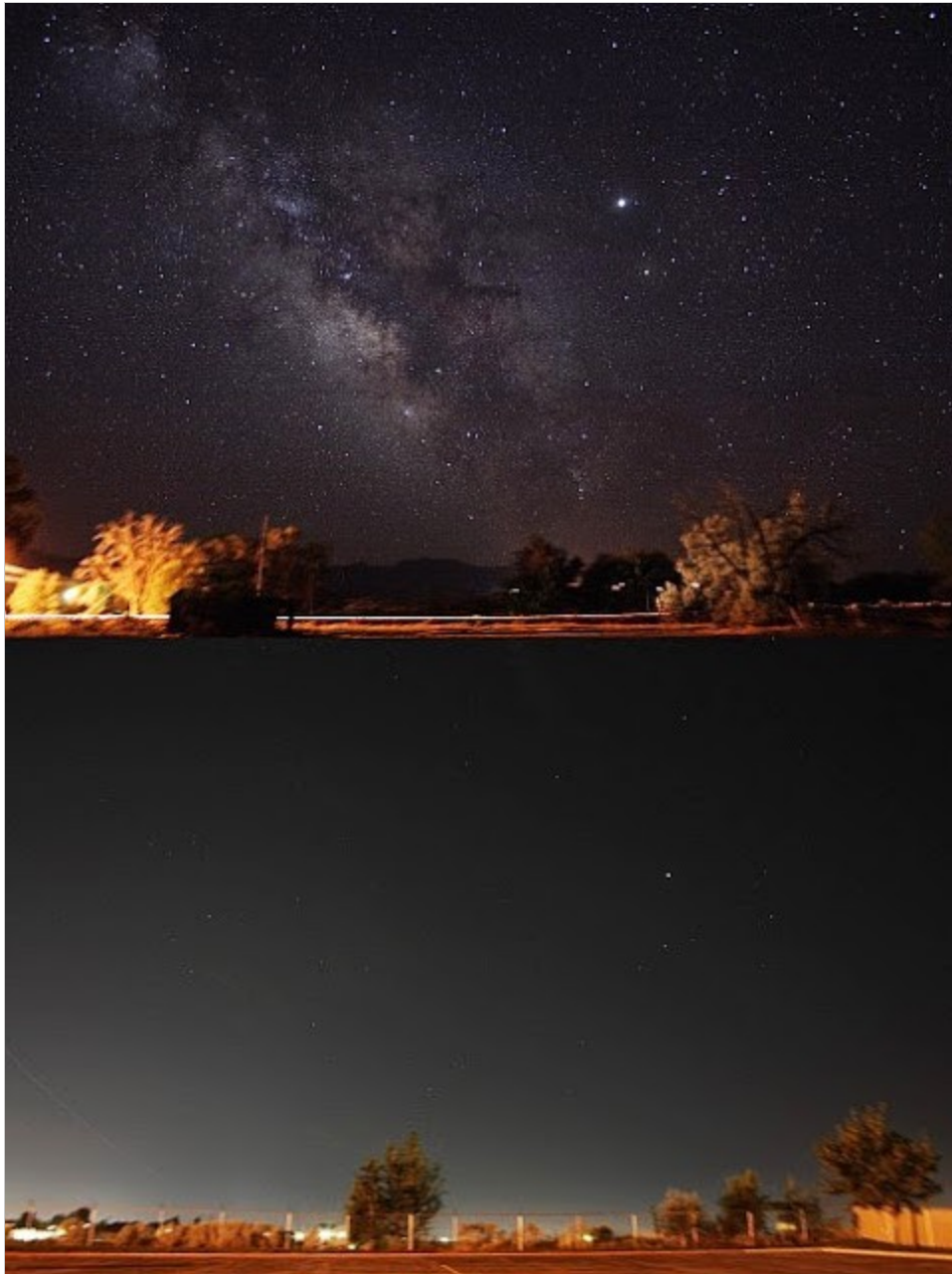
Astronomy used to be essential for telling time and keeping track of the seasons. It is only in the last hundred years that we have lost touch with the stars. And why? For the same reason we want to drive 80 mph down the highway and drink coffee out of disposable cups.





A picture of a solar eclipse totality in 1858.  
The interest in the stars is as old as mankind.  
Learning about them also puts you in touch with ancient civilizations  
that named the constellations and the planets.

**Our contemporary environment with our ever-present modern lights, makes finding a dark sky difficult. It might take you up to an hour to get far enough away. Google your area for a map that will tell you where dark areas are located. Go out on a clear night when the moon is a quarter or less or not visible in the sky. You can Google the phase of the moon and also a star chart for your location and time of year.**



The same region of sky near a town of about 200 people (top) and near a city of about 400,000 people (bottom) in Utah, USA. The light pollution near any urban area blots out much of the sky.

**Make a night of it. Once you arrive don't be in a hurry. Let your eyes adjust to the dark which can take up to 20 minutes. Don't turn on lights during this time unless you have a special red filter on a flash light which will keep your eyes from having to readjust to the darkness after you turn off the light.**



Screen shot from the [Stellarium](#) app  
of the constellation Orion with optional lines and labels.

Download the wonderful free open source app [Stellarium](#) which shows you the night sky at any location and time of year along with the constellations. Fully customizable and available for Windows, Apple and Linux. It is a virtual planetarium for your computer.

If possible look at the long 'cloud' that makes up a local band of the Milky Way. With binoculars you can see that this band is made up of individual stars in the millions. Ask a friend to help you locate the Big Dipper and the North Star since these are always visible in the Northern Hemisphere. With only a few exceptions every star you see with the naked eye is in the Milky Way.

Quite simply, the Milky Way is our home, our place literally in the Universe. To not know about the Milky Way is similar to not knowing where your family came from and who your relatives are.

Yet there is one galaxy outside our own that you can see with the naked eye and is even better with a telescope or binoculars. And that is our sister galaxy, the Andromeda Galaxy. The hundred billion stars that make up the Andromeda Galaxy will help you see our/your world in a totally different light. It is a miracle that we conscious thinking beings are alive; we should do everything we can to protect what we have.



Virtually all stars you see at night are in our Milky Way Galaxy,  
However, our sister galaxy, the Andromeda Galaxy (above),  
is quite faint but visible to the naked eye.



# AFTERWORD

FROM MY BLOG

***Light Pollution Is Blotting Out the Stars***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2014/07/light-pollution-is-blotting-out-stars.html>

Here is a quote from a discussion group about why astronomy is not important:

**Science & Mathematics > Astronomy & Space**

*I think that most people are focused on a few things that are critical to their own existence. For some, that means family; for others, a career. In those specific areas, they are generally articulate and knowledgeable...What this means is that astronomy is a backwater in the knowledge pool for most folks. They could understand it if it was a priority, but it's not.*

If we wonder why so many urban people today feel alienated, it could be that they are no longer in touch with the cycles of the Earth and the Sun and the natural sense of time told to us by the stars.

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## Here are some of my other blogs that relate to climate change.

***The Protective Bubble of Civilization***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-civilization-bubble.html>

***Climate Change & Our Age of Denial***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2014/05/climate-change-our-age-of-denial.html>

***Global Warming & The Future: Part 1***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2013/06/global-warming-future-part-1.html>

***Global Warming & The Future: Part 2***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2013/06/global-warming-future-part-2.html>

***The History of the Future***

<http://deconstructingtime.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-history-of-future.html>