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Bombing the Sky, and Other Solutions for Global Warming

Max Lieberman

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In the Spring 2009 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Pat Joseph poses a question that I would hope would be considered ludicrous by any reasonably intelligent individual. A timely question indeed, Joseph asks, “Can man [sic] engineer the climate?” Though a question so patently stupid and presumptuous would ideally be met with a resounding “no,” the idea of geoengineering a solution to global warming is becoming increasingly popular

But what, exactly, would this geoengineering entail? Joseph notes that the “schemes range from the merely goofy-sounding to the wildly implausible. They include: fertilizing the ocean with iron to stimulate carbon-absorbing plankton blooms; sending ships to sea equipped with huge fans to whip up banks of sea spray and enhance marine clouds; and launching trillions of tiny reflectors into geostationary orbit to shield the planet from the sun.”

One possibility, however, seems to have garnered the most favor among proponents of geoengineering — stratospheric sulfate injection. The basic idea is to begin to cool the planet by regulating incoming solar radiation through the implementation of sulfate

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particles into the stratosphere. Joseph writes, “suggested methods of delivering particles to the upper atmosphere include naval artillery, airplanes burning sulfur-doped fuel, and hoses tethered to high-flying balloons.”

Less sunlight, shooting rockets at the sky, and putting more shit in the oceans — this sounds to me less like methods of “particle delivery” or “climate control” than it does the responses of an insane culture attempting to control a situation which has, at last, become uncontrollable. Are these last-ditch efforts to become the “masters and possessors of nature” Descartes wished for humans to be? To maintain an illusion that we are the masters of wild nature, which continues to prove that, hard as the civilized may try, it can never be truly contained? While the desire for control is obviously a large motivation, the bizarre nature of these proposed solutions leads me to believe that we are finally achieving the near-universal neuroticism Freud predicted would accompany the growth of civilization.

When filling the water and air, the planet itself, with more particles, or satellites, or bombs — purposely tampering with the natural world — becomes the solution to tampering with the natural world, the appropriate response should be clear — as John Zerzan bluntly said, “We have to dismantle all of this.”

For what could you say to the person in hysterics who wants to bomb the sky, or the psychopath who wishes to block out sunlight? This sort of erratic behavior makes it clear — the civilized will never relinquish their notions of control, no matter what the cost.

A biologist at Harvard, Edward Wilson has predicted that half of all species (both animal and plant) will be extinct by the end of the century. There isn’t time to geoengineer our way to a cooler planet, or to cut carbon emissions by an arbitrary percentage, or recycle and compost our way to sustainability. None of these ideas are real solutions anyway, only pipe dreams or symbolic gestures to make us feel good about ourselves — we get to pretend we’re trying, pretend we care. They are not real solutions because they do not address the cause of the destruction — civilization itself. They

address, in fact, nothing as far as causation is concerned — they are remarkably similar to all other destructive practices that have led to this point.

The truth is, we find ourselves experiencing the repercussions of 10,000 years of living in a mediated world, removed from our true, wild selves. It is these 10,000 years of civilization, these 10,000 years of living unsustainably, which have led to today's poisoned, dying planet.

And yet humankind continues to overwhelmingly choose fast food, hot showers, personal computers, cell phones, and every other convenience, luxury, or vice over a healthy planet. We would rather fire weapons at the sky in the vain hope of cooling the globe rather than attempt anything, no matter how simple, which would have even a remote chance of helping to heal the Earth, our only home.

Today's industrial world will end — since the advent of civilization, all civilizations have fallen. If we are operating with this understanding, where does personal responsibility come in? Will we wait for nuclear Armageddon, or further ecological disaster, or the end of oil, or any other event to put an end to this industrial hell? Maybe we won't be quite so lucky. Maybe industrial civilization will continue to slowly rot, continuing to consume everything living, everything good. When the last forest is gone, and the oceans are dead, and concrete and steel have covered all they can, we will wish we had acted sooner. It is not enough to know that civilization is a mistake — that knowledge must, somehow, become action.

It is clear that there is only one way to stop the holocaust of the natural world. The end of civilization, and the rediscovery of a sustainable way of living, is our only hope for a future not only for human life, but more importantly for all life. For more than 99 percent of our existence as a species, humans have lived in relative harmony with nature, with the wilderness. It is these past 10,000 years, this short and terrifying mistake, which threatens everything. If you don't want to live in the coming world, the world

where everything wild, everything beautiful, has been inalterably damaged, destroyed by the civilizing process, it should be evident that waiting for collapse is not an option. In the words of Doctor Theodore Kaczynski, “It would be better to dump the whole stinking system and take the consequences.” Before they can bomb the sky, let us fight against this 10,000 year nightmare — for ourselves, for the future, for life — for the wild!