

WHETHER, WITHER - THE WEATHER? A PARABLE

Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.

Charles Dudley Warner

One of the brightest gems in the New England weather is the dazzling uncertainty of it.

Mark Twain

Scenario 1.

The year was 3003 AD. It was a clear and balmy evening in metropolis 1. Actually the weather was exactly the same throughout all regions of the planet Earth. As you will shortly ascertain, one of humankind's major problems, that of not only foreseeing but of controlling the weather, had been resolved. This technological marvel had occurred exactly two hundred years earlier and throughout the planet the bicentennial of this fabulous breakthrough was being celebrated.

However, it was not being feted by everyone. All over the world small groups of dissidents had been protesting for years against this technological marvel on the grounds that it was not natural, that it was against God's laws to tamper with such a fundamental force, that it was ecologically and environmentally unsound, and that the social, political and economic consequences had been largely unanticipated. However, these heretics were ignored because there were so few of them and because they were regarded as harmless simple minded Luddites. Oh, how wrong a perception that turned out to be.

On this particular occasion groups representing all regions, various relevant interests and ideologies assembled for the first time in a major conference center in metropolis 1. There were a variety of reasons the attendees came. Some came with the hope that they would be able to plan a course of action to convince the skeptics of the righteousness of their cause so that over time the weather controlling technology would be dismantled. Others expected that a more dramatic course of action could be planned and immediately acted on. And others still, simply came for the opportunity to express their frustrations and views to sympathetic ears. Also present were a few members of the news media who were there either because of mild curiosity or because of their superiors' orders.

The conference was opened By Dr. Gordon Fairweather, a leading historian and anthropologist who also headed the "back to nature" environmental movement and who was largely responsible for the organization of this conference. In essence, his remarks chronicled the events leading up to the technological breakthrough that occurred 200 years before and the subsequent consequences. Summarily, he said:

"Before we discuss any course of action, we may want to review some historical events.

In the years preceding the somewhat successful attempt to control our atmospheric environment, humans were subject to unpredictable extreme weather fluctuations. While we still do not know their exact cause, we are reasonably certain that they were due to a combination of a plethora of natural phenomena such as the famous El Nino, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes, and an assortment of very dubious human activities such as the unbridled use of fossil fuels coupled with the excessive

herding of domestic animals for human consumption, leading to what was labeled the 'Greenhouse Effect'.

It became apparent that these disproportionate vacillations in the weather were having dire effects of an economic, social, geologic and geographic nature. As an example, agriculture, a universal backbone industry, and one whose reliance on weather stability is paramount, went into a serious decline leading to untold suffering throughout the world. This had a domino economic effect resulting in a world-wide depression that provoked social unrest, wars and the rise of anti-democratic forces. It was clear that something had to be done, but what? Some of the best minds available were put to work on the problem with no discernible payoff. Then one day and from a most improbable quarter a short essay was received by the group, reminding them of a twentieth century original, Fuller and his work with geodesic domes. In short order this led to the idea of encasing the planet with a shield in which the climate would be totally manageable. The rationale was that this was no more than an extension of the various edifices we live and work in and in which the temperature and humidity were readily controlled to suit humanity's purposes and comfort.

After many years of multi-disciplinary research and development and after many failures, successful results were finally achieved and were implemented as fast as possible. Today we live in a geodesic encasing that consists of a force field which we can control by regulating the input of external solar energy. In essence we are protected from what a small elite have deemed the undesirable elements of our natural environment.

We object to this arrangement for the following reasons.

- 1) There was no public discussion and debate allowed. The decision to go ahead with this revolutionary technology was imposed with a top-down approach. All decisions concerning our environment continue to be made by the powerful elite few.
- 2) More importantly, no real environmental and social impact analyses were undertaken. We would all be at a loss of what to do if this technology broke down.
- 3) And more importantly still, we now find ourselves living in an artificial fishbowl, totally divorced from our natural roots and in an uniform environment which has turned us into a planetary species of identical or homogeneous automats.
- 4) And finally and perhaps most significantly we feel profoundly that this decision goes against the will of the almighty who created the earth, sky, and therefore the weather. Who are we to alter God's plan just because sometimes we find it inconvenient?

If any here have anything further to add, please do so now."

There was a momentary silence and then the assemblage broke into a clamor, screaming for action. Dr. Fairweather waited patiently until the noise had subsided, raised his arms to further quiet the crowd and then resumed speaking.

"You are absolutely right. We need action and we need it now before it is too late. We have tried all reasonable means possible to be heard. Instead we have been ignored and ridiculed. A small team of experts has put together a plan to circumvent our enemies. For obvious reasons we cannot publicly state what the plan is. We hope that you have enough trust in us to approve this initiative, despite not knowing exactly what it is. Do you endorse our enterprise?"

The crowd roared its unanimous approval. Within days the plan was put into action and within three weeks all vertebrate life on the planet was extinguished. The plan was simple enough. The experts had discovered a way to either totally destroy the force field enveloping the earth or to punch holes in it. Reasonably, they calculated that the risks associated with totally eliminating the field in one fell swoop were too high. They concluded that incremental reductions in it by a small but spreading and increasing number of perforations would achieve their aims with an acceptable level of related risks. Unfortunately, they did not practice what they had preached. No environmental assessment had been undertaken so that they were totally unaware that over the years natural forces on the outside of the force field with no means to dissipate had been increasing at an exponential rate. Sooner or later these forces would have become strong enough to destroy the force field resulting in an unimaginable catastrophe. It was as if nature were preparing to exact revenge with a fury never before experienced on the planet. Humankind's technological genius allowed it to do just that a lot sooner. The weather became impossible for vertebrate life. The insect world had a field day.

Scenario 2.

Bill Underweather was contemplating life on the way home from another dreary day at the office. He seemed to be fixated on a familiar citation attributed to John Donne, one of his favorite poets.

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

As much as he favored the sentiments behind that quotation, he couldn't help feeling that it was totally out of joint with the realities of the day. Humans were now as isolated as they could possibly be from each other. Social relations hardly existed and sexual intimacy had become somewhat perfunctory. With the exception of some primitives located in very remote places, individuals carried out their activities in an insular fashion even when these routines were part of a unified whole necessary for needed goods and services.

"Who would miss me if I suddenly disappeared or died?" Underweather sadly asked himself. The answer was equally depressing. "No one!"

How had this sorry state of affairs come about? Well, if one had to identify a first cause, it would not be remiss in naming the weather as the culprit. Up to about one hundred years ago, it played a prominent and an often disturbing part in everyone's lives. The weather determined one's attire, means of travel, oftentimes health, occupation, disposition, type of abode, etc. It also played a prominent role in various governmental policies and public works, much of which was based on weather forecasting, often wrong. In its more dreadful phases it caused unparalleled damage and took copious lives.

Underweather continued to muse on the state of humanity and how weather had played a prominent part in affecting it. He acknowledged that much of technological

development throughout history had enabled humans to survive many of nature's vicissitudes particularly those stemming from weather extremes. Clothing, dwellings, various means of transportation, and energy transformations were examples of technologies that allowed us to not only successfully withstand the weather's foibles but to create pleasant and enjoyable conditions inside artificial structures which were located in rather hostile environs. It seemed quite natural that efforts to develop technologies that would further protect humanity from adverse weather and other natural occurring calamities would be promoted.

One such technology emerged. One, that Underweather had played a large role in refining and one that had literally replaced all others because the costs associated were very small and the market immense. It had become possible for every human being in the developed, developing and underdeveloped world to wear a force field, much like one wears clothing. This afforded protection from any change in weather conditions. Only benevolent energy forms and matter were allowed through so that the body was exposed to the same comfortable and healthy temperature and humidity at all times. It also provided a defense against harmful materials such as dangerous objects stemming from avalanches, earthquakes and wind storms, and from lethal toxins and micro-organisms. At the same time it allowed necessary gases such as oxygen and nitrogen to penetrate the field and the body's waste gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane to exit through it.

Underweather, whose discipline was electronics engineering, had been very proud of the role he had played. He was now having serious doubts. What had not been foreseen was that to a very large degree everyone was rapidly becoming islands unto themselves. Except for sexual mating, humans had turned into asocial entities, since no longer was anyone physically and therefore psychologically vulnerable. One would have thought that under these relative benign circumstances love and friendship would flourish. This was not the case. These noble attributes may have been nothing more than survival mechanisms and now were no longer needed. Even sexual activity diminished. Females had more power than ever before and could easily resist men's aggressive sexual behaviour. They were the ones who now chose when and how they were going to engage in sexual activity. It was as if Aristophanes' Lysistras had been reborn. What appeared to be lost was the need for human interaction on a very basic biological and psychological bedrock. Life had become drab. Nothing exciting was happening.

Underweather had come to appreciate fully the costs that the revolutionary technology had wrought. He became determined to do something about it. After months of contemplating the problem he came up with some tentative answers. Actually, it was a beautiful young lady, named Belle Beautemps, that served as a spur. He not only wanted carnal relations, but he dreamt of eternal bliss with her as two, together taking on the vagaries of this most cruel and drab world.

After much intense research and trials, he finally succeeded in merging two force fields into one in which two people could cohabit. He quickly convinced his love to marry him. The two were joined in wedlock whereupon they combined their force fields. Curiously no one paid attention until little ones arrived. They were provided with their own force fields by the state. Underweather had noticed that the force fields were extremely flexible. It did not take him long to merge his children's force fields with his and Belle's. This he could not hide. Therefore, he decided to take commercial advantage of his discovery. He quickly became a very wealthy man.

Soon all families were being shielded by force fields. What no one appeared to notice or were not willing to acknowledge was the occurrence of intra family violence. This did not prevent the force fields from being enlarged to include the extended family, then the community, then the region and then the nation. Within the nation, sub force fields were quickly put to use to provide a buffer for religious groups, racial and ethnic minorities and those with sexual preferences that were viewed as menacing by the homophobic majority.

Secretly, the public and private sectors of many nations were engaged in seeking means to break the force fields while strengthening theirs. It didn't take too long for a breakthrough to occur. Predictably the means to destroy force fields became widespread. The resulting chaos was absolutely horrific. It was as if all the hatred in the world, with no outlet, had been growing inside a balloon. The bubble had to burst and the human race quickly destroyed itself using all the means it had at its disposal, namely chemical, biological and nuclear.

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