

How might we all die tomorrow? Let me count the ways.

RiskTalkers Toastmasters presentation, 16May07

(Note: the speech departed from the text considerably...)

It is my belief that every generation throughout history has its own reference book full of fashionable apocalyptic scenarios. We've always known that the human race will be destroyed, either because of our wickedness, or because of a Satan, or just because some god isn't paying attention and will accidentally drown, crush, drown, or burn us. What we don't know is when and how our wretched end shall befall us. And of course, our apocalypses today are far bigger, far better, far more scientific, and far more true and imminent than any before.

First, I will summarize a sampling of recent and current apocalyptic scenarios as a background.

Second, I will focus in on the immensely popular cult of a man-made climate catastrophe that is supposed to destroy mankind, and the rest of the planet at the same time.

Third, I will conclude by showing that our self-made climate catastrophe is actually a remake of a recurring reality that pre-dates civilisations, man-kind, and that traces its origins back to the origins of life.

1. Recent Apocalyptic Scenarios

Let's take a quick look at some of the favoured apocalypses of the last three generations.

1. **Nuclear warfare is passé** - that was two generations ago so its out of fashion even if the risks are far greater now than at the time. Nuclear weapons proliferation is well under way in countries with psychopath leaderships, and almost the countries that tend to believe in freedom from torture, democracy and free markets have been continually cutting defense budgets. But there are no more protests, there is no more media hype.
2. **Chemical toxins** - were supposed to have killed us all, and deformed all of our babies. In spite of a huge rise in chemical production, and vastly more products on the market, our local environments continue to improve immensely - water and air quality within major urban areas hasn't been this clean for centuries, if ever. However, this apocalypse scenario will remain, because its just too convenient to blame mystical chemicals for our problems, whereas its now politically incorrect and racist for us to blame our enemies for all of our problems as we've done throughout history.
3. **Ozone hole** - We were supposed to all die from massive radiation getting through to us through a hole in the ozone layer. But we're not dead yet, and as far as I know, no scientist has apologized and pointed out that the ozone hole is pretty much a function of solar activity. But the oncoming solar cycle should be a doozie, and death-by-ozone-hole should be back in fashion within five or six years.
4. **Meteorite impact** - Because large meteorite impacts are relatively rare, it is entirely understandable that we can sustain fear for too long. However, periodically when our tracking systems pick up a potential calamity, it should come back as a revived apocalyptic scenario.

So we see that our generations are no less creative than the rest of history in identifying ways to die. Most of these examples are of the "self-inflicted" type. The "self inflicted" apocalypses are substantially the product of very bad science, mixed with very bad policy, and the media's recognition that what we really like is apocalyptic reporting. It is strange, though, that ancient prophesies of apocalypse might describe the present day situation - Armageddon for the Mid-East, and the end of the Mayan calendar (actually not an apocalyptic scenario).

2. Recent "Fashionable" Apocalypses

The second part of my presentation is to quickly summarize perhaps the dominant apocalyptic scenario of today:

The Kyoto Premise - *that human activity, and in particular man-made GreenHouse Gases (GHGs) will drive our climate to extremes that have never existed before, and that this will destroy our environment and mankind.*

I won't go into the details of that, as you can refer to my website and many other sources of information describing the Kyoto Premise. Suffice it to say that this is yet another a modern-science based apocalyptic scenrio that is no better than any other throughout history - it will soon either become a religion or dissipate. My bet is on the former, as it has the basis for a new religion and a new type of god (that resembles many ancient gods).

3. Today's "In" Apocalypse

The third part of my presentation, and the inspiration for this talk, is a million-year model of the Earth's climate. as shown on the handout. Talking about turning points, tipping points, unsuspected catastrophes, or the wrath of the gods, what has always occurred far surpasses mankind's imagination.

Didier Paillard and Frederique Parrenin are French scientists who have build a "threshold model" for glaciations over 1 to 5 million years. Note that temperatures "crash up" at the end of glaciation and "dipsey doodle down" into glaciation. As opposed to all of the man-made disaster scenarios that constantly don't work, this works like a dandy.

So perhaps the best current model for climate does confirm (but not prove) fairly radical changes in state or phase that have long been discussed. These changes would be catastrophic even for modern society. But they would also be opportunities, rather like the discussions surrounding the collapse of historical civilisations.

Conclusion

So in the next five years as yet another series of apocalyptic scenario arises, you can always rest assured that these will also prove fruitless. They too will join the long-standing and continuing failure of the man-made apocalyptic predictions.

But if you really want to worry about a catastrophe to kill us all, then you can always rely on the natural processes like asteroids and rapid glaciation. And on the regional scale, volcanoes, floods, drought, famine, plagues and pestilence might not kill off the entire world, but they can still be serious cause for worrying. You just have to be patient and wait for a few hundred, a few thousand, or a few million years.

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Last updated:

Illustrations

Figure 3: Illustration of Milankovic cycles

Reference: www.Wikipedia.com encyclopedia,

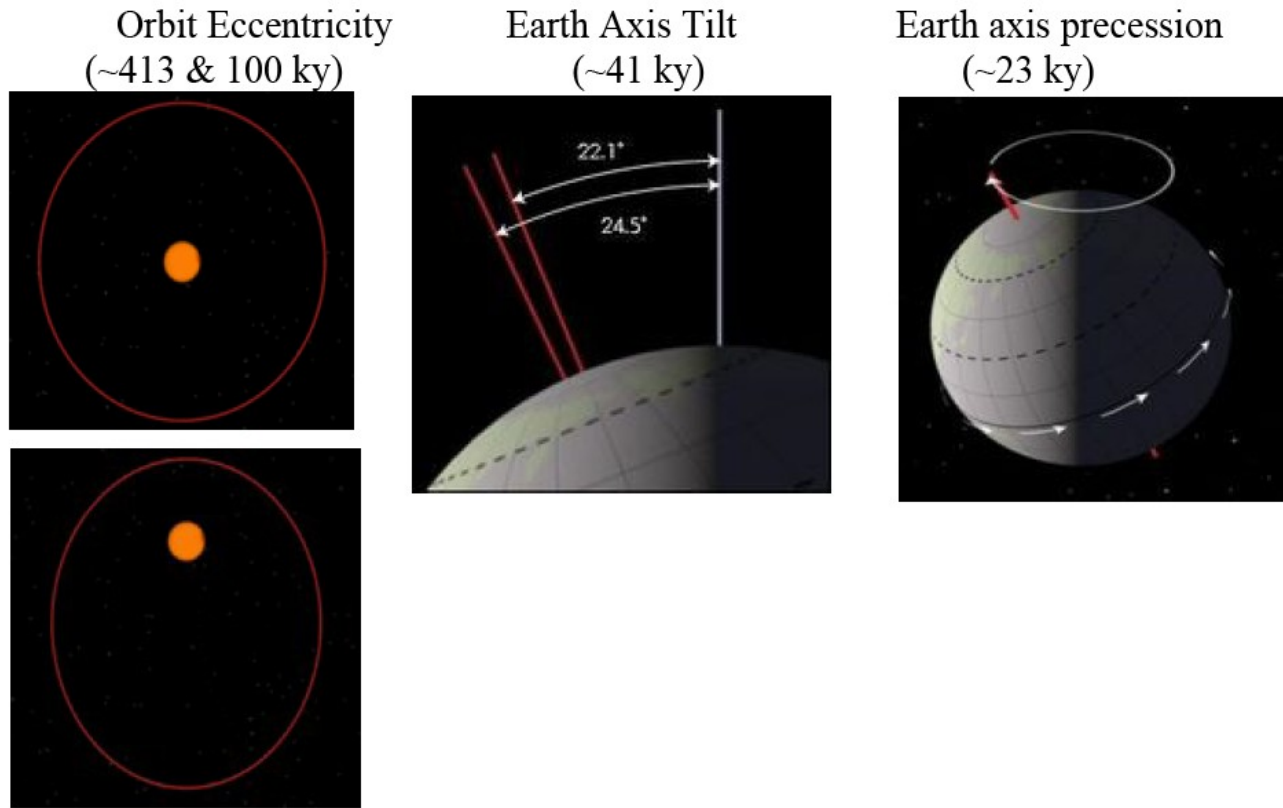


Figure 6: Paillard's Milankovic threshold model for 1 My of glaciations

Reference: Frédéric Parrenin, Didier Paillard 2003

<http://glaciog.ujf-grenoble.fr/~parrenin/publications/download/articles/parrenin-paillard-EPSL2003.pdf>

Forecasts: Didier Paillard (2001)

