

RHETORIC

Editor's Note

If we believe that the choices we make have a negative impact on the environment, then why don't we change our behavior? In the following essay, "Our Worldly Problem of Delusion," Henry Scott Winsor addresses this question in a problem-solution format. Notice that while he agrees with what his sources say, he also faults a couple of them for failing to provide solutions to the problem of ecological damage. Winsor, like all writers, must make certain rhetorical choices. Is it a good idea to point out weaknesses in source information? Is his choice of first-person plural a good one, given his topic and approach to it? Do you agree with his position on this current debate?

Our Worldly Problem of Delusion**Henry Scott Winsor**

As humans, we believe ourselves to be a worldly power, a formidable force. We have braved new frontiers and invented incredible technology, yet we fail to realize how infinitesimally small we truly are. Carl Sagan describes this in his essay "Reflections on a Mote of Dust." He goes on to say, essentially, that we fight and kill to gain control of a small fraction of this small "dot" that we live on. He explains his point best by saying, "Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light [the Earth]" (124). As inhabitants of Earth, we must realize that our planet is the only one we have and we really only have one chance not to destroy it or ourselves. Finding a way to keep the Earth running smoothly and cleanly is a priority we must all put on our lists.

From a universal standpoint, the Earth is but a small particle floating in a giant sea of black. We take our cosmically tiny planet for granted. Most of us live without many "cosmic" fears, or even global fears. This is due in part to media and our ability to look past things and ideas we don't like. Bill McKibben demonstrates this in his essay "Worried? Us?" by saying that "people think about 'global warming' the same way they think about 'violence on television' . . . as a marginal concern to them" (202). McKibben believes that we have the ability to clean up our act and make the Earth a cleaner place, but most people just brush it off as if it doesn't matter. He believes that since our planet has changed so slowly and uniformly in its relatively young cosmic life, most of us don't worry too much about any drastic changes happening during our lifetimes.

Our short lifetimes only let us see a small fraction of the problem, and now, as the problem has been presented again and again, not much has been done to fix it. I, too, am a hypocrite simply because I have not done much in the way of cleaning the Earth. I drive a 1977 truck with a V-8 and very few smog

RHETORIC

components; I am no better than anyone else. I just believe that we need to open our eyes and realize that we really only have *one* planet, *one* home. Instead of just focusing on global warming as a global threat, maybe we should focus on other things, too; wars, dissention among countries, violence and intolerance are among other things we can work to solve. Carl Sagan vaguely describes how the human race has failed to deal with its problems effectively.

Sagan uses an emotional appeal to present his point by saying, "To my mind, there is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than [the] distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish that pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known" (124). He makes very valid points and not only suggests that we must preserve our planet, but we must treat each other with respect and compassion as well. Getting people to treat each other with respect is an entirely new and difficult subject to convey effectively. However, the tangible problems can still be solved, but what are the solutions?

There is so much we can do to help alleviate some of these problems. Alternate energy sources play a key in solving our global warming problem. We can institute all forms on non-fossil fuel energy sources. Wind, hydro-electric, and nuclear are among the cleanest and safest. Nuclear power has long had a bad connotation attached to it, but this is all but a false impression. I believe nuclear power is the answer to our growing dependency on fossil fuels. Wind and hydro are good alternatives, too, but as of recently they are not efficient enough to power entire cities. Advancements in these alternative sources will, hopefully, lead them to replace the fossil fuel sources sometime in the near future.

McKibben and Sagan both make valid points in their essays but fail to really appoint a solution. McKibben, I believe, realizes to its full extent that humans are incredibly hard headed, especially Americans. I can use myself as an example: If I had a chance to cut emissions by selling my V-8 powered smoker to buy a small, brand new, nearly emission free car, I wouldn't do it. My truck is too important to me. This hardheadedness, as I have displayed, is a recurring problem with most Americans. I don't want to give up what's in front of me for the greater good of something that I may not even notice in my lifetime. To change American core values, is, as I can imagine and help display, nearly impossible.

As hard as it will be, we must open our eyes and just become more humble, myself included. Once it has been instilled in everyone's mind that our planet is fragile and small, maybe then we will change our ways. McKibben states, "Biologists guess that the result of rapid warming will be the greatest wave of extinction since the last asteroid crashed into earth. Now we are the asteroid" (204). I'd imagined that in the near future this will become a very harsh and scary reality. That is why we must work to change ourselves now;

RHETORIC

we must sit down and realize what is really going on. We need to support “green” ideas and new energy sources. The human race has been presented with problems before and solved them; this, however, may be the ultimate test. If these “ideas” do not motivate change soon, a harsh reality soon will. Our time on the planet is short, we must do our best to preserve and protect it while we still can. McKibben aptly describes the predicament and a hope to fix it by saying, “Our ultimate sadness lies in the fact that we know that this is not a preordained destiny; it isn’t fate. New ways of behaving, of getting and spending, can still change the future: There is, as the religious evangelist would say, still time, though not much of it, and a miraculous conversion is called for” (204).

Works Cited

- McKibben, Bill. “Worried? Us?” *Seeing and Writing 3*. Eds. Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 202–4.
- “Pale Blue Dot.” *Voyager I. NASA/JPL/Voyager. Seeing and Writing 3*. Eds. Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 125.
- Sagan, Carl. “Reflections on a Mote of Dust, May 11, 1996.” *Seeing and Writing 3*. Eds. Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 202–4.

Henry Scott Winsor is an aerospace engineering major at Cal Poly.