

Quintessential Pragmatism I

I have been fascinated by a number of articles I have read lately regarding any number of controversial subjects all the way from the war on terrorism and global warming to where and how do we drill for oil on the Mason Tract. From every side come individuals and groups foaming at the mouth and screeching doom. It's gotten to the place that no matter where you align yourself, the other half of the people say the world is going to end.

I belong to NRA, TU, FFF, and Anglers of the Au Sable, all of which, to a greater or lesser degree, are concerned about the environment. If you take these organizations seriously and read the editorials and letters to the editor, you will be bombarded with mega doses of "screaming at the darkness." You will also read about some very dedicated people who have done some wonderful things for us and for the environment. In no way in this dissertation do I want to offend these hardworking, devoted people. But I finally read an editorial that really made sense.

In the autumn issue of Michigan Trout, the Michigan Chapter of TU's magazine, I read the editorial "The Right Message" by the Chairman, Carl Hueter. Carl makes two important points about how people approach discussions. This is true about most any debate, be it environmental, political, military, religious, and so on. The first point he makes is that parties involved use a process he calls "inductive reasoning." By this he means only that truth is presented which will make a case for your side. There may be other truths, but you simply do not present them.

The second point he brings up is the process of "messaging." That is, a quick one liner which centers on your "inductive reasoning" and calls attention to it. A case in point may be "Global Catastrophe" and associating it with "Global Warming." Inductively we are let to melting of the polar ice cap, increased occurrence of storms and hurricanes, rising of ocean levels, streams warming and trout disappearing increase of global temperatures, etc. All of these events are somewhere and to some degree true. If I were to stop here and just say this is all true and there is no other side, half of you would think I was right on. And some of that half would grab up the standard and charge off into the sunset to save the world. And maybe they would be right.

There is another side to this story. I am not going to tell you what it is. First of all, the side that charged off into the sunset is already gone. Second, those who did not charge off either already know the other side, or they simply don't care. Any issue that has received this much "inductive reasoning" and "messaging" in every known media available, has already been decided by most individuals and all that is left is to "scream at the darkness."

Carl's editorial ought to be required reading for everyone in any organization concerned with the environment because there usually is a middle ground. One must resist the urge to lock in their conclusions before they have all the facts. This is because with the issues facing the world today, one has to be perfectly practical, and practice "quintessential pragmatism." Cool, I am "massaging."

So to be practical, there are a few billion people on this planet that like to stay warm in cold places and like to stay cool in warm places and like to drive between them. This requires heat transfer. Heat transfer requires energy. The most efficient

form of energy available in massive quantities is fossil fuel. If there were some magical cheap solution to the problem, we would already be doing it. So unless you can eliminate a few billion people, we will use that fossil fuel until it's gone. Period. As fossil fuel depletes, other sources will be exploited, or maybe a billion or so people will die off. This is not going to happen for a number of generations and it will not be our problem. Nor will it be the trout's.

Does this mean we should just gobble up all the energy we possibly can and let future generations fend for themselves? Of course not. We owe it to the world to come up with thoughtful, practical solutions that, while maybe delaying the inevitable, will allow more time for new and innovative solutions. But it does mean that those who want to totally preserve something in time thinking they are saving it for future generations need a lesson in practicality. The oil and gas drills are coming. The resources beneath the earth will be used. Not because of some greedy oil or gas company. Because "we" need it. All of us. The people using that energy are just like the people trying to save the environment. They heat and light houses, drive cars and SUV's, drink beer, cook food, farm fields, buy things at stores and supermarkets, and all those other normal processes of life that require energy. And there are far too many of them to plow with horses, light with windmills, burn wood for heat (actually more pollution than gas), bicycle to school, and stay home in the dark at night.

But we can, in a practical sense, help to control how it is done. When the masses decide to use it all, they can be channeled to recover it wisely and use it sparingly. I have hunted deer and grouse in the middle of oil fields. Deer don't mind. Grouse don't mind. Road in was good. Didn't need a H2 to get through the mud. Maybe they can come up with an oil well that you can't see. Any one ever asked them? The next time someone comes along and wants to drill for oil in the Mason Tract, don't scream "not on my watch." Ask instead, how can we make this practical? How can we accomplish what the world wants without destroying this precious piece of it. Thirty years from now I will be long gone and I hope every wild area around has oil wells in them that you can't even see. Because if we don't compromise, those wells will be there anyway. Just the wilderness will be gone.

Bob Bolton