

Arrogant Ignorance and Blind Optimism

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Ignorance can be overcome by education, but arrogance is more difficult to combat. When combined, arrogant ignorance is virtually impossible to defeat. Because of this, it is spreading rapidly. People in [denial](#) refuse to examine evidence, often adamantly. Among many examples, a case in point is climate change deniers, whose proponents have gone to great lengths to assert that [climate change](#) is a hoax. Such people have even set up web sites using biased statistics. Another example is the widespread refusal to confront the human overpopulation crisis. Similarly, proponents of so-called “[intelligent design](#)” aggressively deny the overwhelming body of evidence in support of evolution by natural selection. By refusing to think rationally, these arrogantly ignorant creationists have blinded themselves to the ability to understand the living world around them. When faced with unpleasant dilemmas or challenging situations, humans are extremely prone to enter into denial. While refusing to face reality may make you feel safer, it is actually much more dangerous than being realistic.

When people accuse me of being a pessimist, I say “Nope, I’m a realist and you’re a blind optimist.” Pessimists see the glass as half empty, whereas optimists like to think of it as half full. Realists see neither emptiness or fullness, but simply see half a glass. Optimists feel better by refusing to face up to reality. However, like arrogant ignorance, blind optimism can be a dangerous form of denial. For example, blind optimists like to think that technology will solve all our current problems. [Technology](#) has lured us out on to thin ice and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Technological advances, especially the [Haber-Bosch](#) process, by facilitating food production allowed the human population to double and then redouble.

One of the many symptoms of the human overpopulation crisis is that we now face serious energy limitations. Most people seem to think that we just need more energy. In fact, people need to understand more about energy -- humans are not exempt from the laws of thermodynamics. Earth can no longer dissipate the heat it receives from normal incident solar radiation fast enough to stay in balance ([Hansen et al. 2005](#)). Waste heat generated from burning fossil fuels and nuclear reactors only adds insult to injury. Our voracious and insatiable appetite for energy is doing us in. We must learn to live more frugally using much *less* energy.

Humans are extremely versatile, and although we seem to think that we exist outside the laws of nature, we do not. We are Earthlings first and foremost, and [space](#) and other planets will

always remain hostile environments for us. Until recently, [spaceship Earth](#) has provided us with a rather nice place to live. But now, Earth's life support systems are failing . . . we have overpopulated the planet and fouled its atmosphere -- the resultant pollution is contributing to [global weather change](#). Earth is warming rapidly -- ice caps are melting and ocean currents are changing. Polar bears and penguins are facing extinction and though many humans refuse to face the facts, we might not be far behind.

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