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OUR VIEW

Two truths and a lie

Topic: Planet Earth

There are a few things every human being has in common — our general genetic makeup, our mortality, our need to make every written list consist of three items. But the biggest similarity may be our home planet, Earth.

Look at a picture of the universe and you'll realize how small of a speck we all share. And yet that speck amazingly has the perfect balance of resources to support and nurture life. It's no wonder some call her "mother."

Today is Earth Day, an internationally recognized day set aside to celebrate and thoughtfully consider this home of ours. So whatever your views are on the way we humans interact with the earth, take a minute to think about the wonder that it is. To help, here are some amazing details about this great blue ball.

TRUTH: The earth is as smooth as a billiard ball.

Mount Everest is the highest point on earth, rising more than 29,000 feet above sea level. If it was a cliff above the sea and someone were to jump, it would take more than two minutes of free fall to hit the surface of the water.

But of course billiard balls aren't covered in water. So imagine draining all the water from the ocean, leaving deep grooves where the oceans once were. The deepest pit would be the Marianas Trench at about 36,000 feet.

The total difference between the highest height and deepest depth on our planet is 65,000 feet.

And yet, if you were to shrink the globe down to the size of a billiard ball (about 2-and-a-half inches) it would be smooth enough to qualify for use in a World Pool-Billiard Association sanctioned game — no bumps or divots greater than 0.005 inches.

TRUTH: Water is what makes earth special.

OK, pour that water back into Earth's oceans and you've got the exact reason our planet is unique. We're the only planet on which NASA can confirm stable bodies of water on its surface.

As we all learned in grade school, 71 percent of the earth's surface is water, and 97.5 percent of that is salt water. While other planets show signs that water may have once existed there, or have traces of water in the atmosphere or ice on the surface, the earth is primed for life.

Speaking of the oceans, between 700,000 and 1 million species of plants and animals live there and only about a third of them have been documented. The oceans make up 99 percent of livable space on this planet.

It becomes clear how valuable the resource is when drought hits a region, like it is in the West right now. In Southern California residents are being asked to conserve water in their daily routines to make sure there's enough to go around this summer. Because no matter how advanced we get, we'll never outsmart the need for H₂O.

LIE: Humans are destroying the earth.

So maybe we're doing some things that make life on this planet less hospitable — from spitting our gum out where people walk to clear-cutting large swaths of rain forest to make room for cattle ranches. But even if a Star Wars-inspired super-villain with unlimited resources made it his goal to destroy the planet, he could only make a dent.

It's a nearly 6 sextillion-ton ball of iron that has taken a constant beating from intergalactic rubble since the day it was born. If you think a Death Star floating by can fire a laser powerful enough to end its existence, think again. Scientists speculate it would take an explosion with as much energy as the sun creates in a week to dismantle our planet. Good luck with that, evil genius.

There are theoretical discussions of black holes, ion colliders and impacts by foreign objects, but the probability of that kind of destruction being brought on by human beings is all but impossible.

Of course, that's not really the discussion. Literal destruction of the earth and eradication of life as we know it are two very different things. But remember, this planet was here before us and it will be here when we're gone.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

As cultures shift

In January 1969, two quarterbacks played against each other in Super Bowl III. Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath were both superstars. They were both from western Pennsylvania, but they came from different cultural universes. Unitas was reticent, workmanlike and deliberately unglamorous. Namath was flashy and a playboy. He turned himself into a marketing brand and wrote a memoir jokingly called, "I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow 'Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day."

The contrast between these two men symbolizes a broader shift from a culture of self-effacement, which says, "I'm no better than anybody else and nobody is better than me," to a culture of self-expression, which says, "Look at what I've accomplished. I'm special."

The conventional story, beloved especially on the right, is that this cultural shift took place in the 1960s. First there was the Greatest Generation, whose members were modest and self-sacrificing, but then along came the baby boomers who were narcissistic and relativistic.

As I found while researching a book, this storyline doesn't really fit the facts. The big shift in American culture did not happen around the time of Woodstock and the Age of Aquarius. It happened in the late 1940s, and it was the members of the Greatest Generation that led the shift.

The real pivot point was the end of World War II. By the fall of 1945, Americans had endured 16 years of hardship, stretching back through the Depression. They were ready to let loose and say farewell to all that. There followed what the historian Alan Petigny called "the renunciation of renunciation." The amount of consumer advertising on the radio exploded. Magazines ran articles on the wonderful lifestyle changes that were going to make lives easier - ultraviolet lights that would sterilize dishes in place of dishwashing.

There was a softening in the moral sphere. In 1946, Rabbi Joshua Liebman published a book called "Peace of Mind" that told everybody to relax and love themselves. He wrote a new set of commandments, including "Thou shalt not be afraid of thy hidden impulses;" thou shalt "love thyself." Liebman's book touched a nerve. It stayed atop The New York Times' best-seller list for 58 weeks.

A few years later, Harry Overstreet published "The Mature Mind," which similarly advised people to discard the doctrine based on human sinfulness and embrace self affirmation. That book topped the list for 16 weeks.

In 1952, Norman Vincent Peale came out with "The Power of Positive Thinking," which rejected a morality of restraint for an upbeat morality of growth. That book rested atop the



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

best-seller list for an astounding 98 weeks.

Then along came humanistic psychology, led by people like Carl Rogers, who was the most influential psychologist of the 20th century. Rogers followed the same basic line: Human nature is intrinsically good. People need to love themselves more. They need to remove external restraints on their glorious selves.

"Man's behavior is exquisitely rational," Rogers wrote, "moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goal his organism is endeavoring to achieve."

Humanistic psychology led to the self-esteem movement and much else, reshaping the atmosphere in schools, human-resources departments and across American society.

In short, American popular culture pivoted. Once the dominant view was that the self is to be distrusted but external institutions are to be trusted. Then the dominant view was that the self is to be trusted and external constraints are to be distrusted.

This more positive view of human nature produced some very good social benefits. For centuries people in certain groups in society had been taught to think too poorly of themselves. Many feminists and civil rights activists seized on these messages to help formerly oppressed groups to believe in themselves, to raise their sights and aspirations.

But I would say that we have overshot the mark. We now live in a world in which commencement speakers tell students to trust themselves, listen to themselves, follow their passions, to glorify the Golden Figure inside. We now live in a culture of the Big Me, a culture of meritocracy where we promote ourselves and a social media culture where we broadcast highlight reels of our lives. What's lost is the more balanced view, that we are splendidly endowed but also broken. And without that view, the whole logic of character-building falls apart. You build your career by building on your strengths, but you improve your character by trying to address your weaknesses.

So perhaps the culture needs a rebalance. The romantic culture of self-glorification has to be balanced with an older philosophic tradition, based on the realistic acknowledgment that we are all made of crooked timber and that we need help to cope with our own tendency to screw things up. That great tradition and body of wisdom was accidentally tossed aside in the late 1940s. It's worth reviving and modernizing it.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard and a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly.

YOUR VIEWS

BMCC touches everyone, everyone should pitch in

I have been an avid supporter of Blue Mountain Community College since 1963. I had no idea how I was going to attend college until I learned about BMCC. I enrolled and was awarded a scholarship. As a college freshman, I tagged along as President Wally McCrae and members of the board visited service clubs and attended community meetings asking for support of passage of the bond to finance the college. I fondly recall visits to Rotary meetings and other club events in Hermiston, Heppner, Milton-Freewater and Athena. I told my story and asked for "yes" votes. The night the votes were counted, I waited with a pounding heart. Really! I was pleased and grateful that voters recognized the value of BMCC. I could not vote in that election because I was not old enough. I certainly am old enough now! I intend to vote YES for the bond.

The college has grown considerably since 1963. The student body includes people from all walks of life — from teens to octogenarians. Some students enroll in only one class while others take a complete load. The program opportunities are numerous and the college has continually responded to the needs of the surrounding communities and businesses. The nursing program is a gem. In addition to academics and training programs, the college provides cultural opportunities. The rodeo and sports teams are stellar. There is something for everyone. BMCC has created an environment that supports, educates and encourages people to learn and grow.

BMCC is a strong economic force in our area. It is an asset that provides an excellent return on investment. This bond will provide funding for much needed program development that will ultimately result in good family wage jobs. If you visit campus you can readily see that the buildings are in need of attention. If you have taken a class, you know that you can either freeze or fry! The HVAC systems need to be replaced. Technology must be upgraded.

Cold hard facts: If your house is valued at \$145,000, the household cost to support this bond is only \$36.25 yearly, or \$3.02 per month. If it is valued at \$290,000 the cost per year is only \$72.50, or \$6.05 per month. More bond information is available at: bondinfo@bluecc.edu or www.bluecc.edu/about-bmcc/bond-measure. Take a look.

I urge you all to vote YES!

Carole L. Innes
Pendleton

Don't dismiss Pendleton fuel tax so quickly

A short time ago a letter appeared here proposing that Pendleton again enact a local gasoline tax. I have been waiting breathlessly for someone else to take up the cry — in vain. I guess nobody else was brave enough to risk echoing the vile "I" word, especially, perhaps, at this time of year. And some, never at any time.

A gasoline tax dedicated to the upkeep of city streets seems perfectly reasonable to me, with the obvious need to salvage badly deteriorated street surfaces in some

areas, notably Southwest Perkins Avenue and Southwest 45th Street, as well as a stretch of Southwest Second Street. Just as important as making the city a tourist magnet is for residents to be able to travel home after work on decently maintained streets.

It certainly can't have escaped notice that, over the last few years, the price of gasoline has yo-yoed crazily, with far greater swings than almost any other commodity. In just the last few months, after plummeting to two dollars per gallon, the price at a local station increased 10 cents from one day to the next and, within one month, had risen 70 cents per gallon.

Under conditions like these, who could be narrow enough to complain about a fixed, few cents per gallon tax to provide a much-needed service? I know, the previous exercise in local gas taxation was doubly stigmatized by having the burden of being dubbed "The Road to Nowhere," but it did demonstrate that a little bravery and concerted effort actually can accomplish something. At the very least, this idea ought to be worth mulling over.

Harvey Foreman
Pendleton

BMCC tied to a strong regional economy

Citizens can invest in themselves by voting yes for the upcoming BMCC bond. The presence of a local community college boosts the regional economy by providing a skilled workforce for local employers and additional opportunities for our high school students.

BMCC students enrolled in training programs for health care careers, business careers, and technical careers get good jobs, and a portion of their salaries are invested back in the region. Many students who already have families and are in the workforce can't easily quit their jobs and move to an area with a major university, so enrollment at their regional community college makes a lot of sense. High school students can earn college credits through BMCC at bargain prices.

A strong community college is closely linked to a strong economy, so help keep BMCC modern and relevant by voting yes for the bond measure in May.

John and Gail Turner
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.