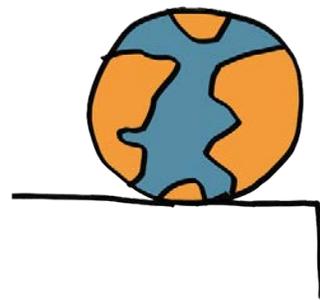


SEIZING AN ALTERNATIVE
Toward an Ecological Civilization
June 4-7, 2015
Section I: The Threatening
Catastrophe:
Responding Now



David Griffin's Session on Climate Morality

(First two points are what I wrote down in my notes. Dwain speaking)

Point 1: Someone would say — This is just an economic problem. David agrees with Jim Hansen, it isn't an economic problem, rather a moral problem.

Point 2: Moral realism. Most moral philosophers say there is no moral truth. It's just what we make up.

(beginning of audio transcription)

DG: This is the greatest moral challenge. **This is Point 3.** Now, one reason it's such a challenge is, we talk about the clash between Duty and Desire, and, you know, Desire often wins out. So, it doesn't have to be a real clash, but it can be a perceived clash. So, in this case, there's a perceived clash between climate morality to bring down the carbon emissions, and economic ones. We can't afford that. So, there's this perceived clash. Now, actually, a lot of people have been writing about this. An economic person, well you, pointed this out this morning, in one area anyway, you're much better off, in even in the fairly short term, to go, in this case, efficiency, in cutting down. But, this perception is still out there. And, in large part, because our media do not educate the people. That should be the media's biggest task. Given, this situation in our history, is to educate the people, to talk about the reality, the climate change, and the realities of clean energy, and the fact that clean energy includes efficiency. It's much cheaper. Now, thirdly, if coal were pulled out. It should be completely to ever use any coal anymore. And, it's not as bad, but still pretty bad with oil. And then, a lot of people say, you see a lot of this on TV, oh, natural gas. It's okay. It's a good clean energy. Well, no. Some people are now saying, natural gas is even worse overall, and particularly when you bring in fracking. So, it's a great moral challenge because of this perceived clash between Duty and Desire, which could be overcome greatly, if we have education. If you read the history of the media, and television in particular, there's some great books about that. There was a great battle, I think in the '20s or '30s, about everything was going to be commercial, or whether we would use the airwaves for the general good of the people. Well, you know which one won out. But just think if the other side had won. Where we would have had our radio, our televisions, newspapers, committed to the general good, rather than what they call the bottom line. Okay, that was point 3.

Unidentified male: I'm not sure what moral realism is. Is this something I need to understand at this point.

DG: Absolutely.

Unidentified male: On the one hand, you were talking about how some people say "there is no death." But, I think you are saying, there is. But, I haven't understood yet how that is so.

DG: Oh, that's because I haven't told you. So, I'm saying that moral norms are objective. And then, the question is, well, how can that be? All of the people that say they are not part of the universe, are not part of the fabric of the universe. They all reject any kind of theism. They all are complete atheists. I mean, they don't count Buddhism which fits in there. Everyone other than late Western materialism, those are the atheists. So, sometimes, I've been toying with the idea of theism, which is very broad, which is any position, Confucianist, or Buddhist, or Sui, or American Indian, or whatever. Let's put it this way, if it is atheist, then there are no moral norms. They aren't part of the fabric of the universe. That would be my definition of atheist. Anyone who

would say, oh no, there are moral norms in the universe, maybe I don't understand how, but I believe they are there, that these are real, people's principals, just as much as ecological principals are objective. So, that's what I mean. So, at least some form of theism is true.

Unidentified male: But, it's a faith position?

DG: For a lot of people, it is. For some people, it is a strong argument for that.

Another unidentified male: You would count it as hardcore common sense argument, then?

DG: I would count it, well, he's referring to a term I use, hardcore common sense. We have common sense. Well, people used to say, oh, that is common sense. Well, it's not really common sense, blah blah blah. Core common sense is not like that at all. But everybody believes, in practice, that they cannot live their lives consistently, without presupposing these things. Like, you can't say, I don't believe there was a yesterday. I don't believe in the past. You can't live that way. And, likewise, with moral norms. So, you know, some of the philosophers agree. They say, well, I have to affirm them anyway. But, they're false. They're illusions. This goes back to David Hume. The stakes between practice and reason.

Unidentified male: You ground it in experience, you don't just say, I'm a theist, therefore, I believe.

DG: That's right. I think the moral realism is hardcore common sense. Now, theism, any kind of theism, is harder to make. I think it's pretty close, but not all the..., kind of, semi hardcore.

Another male: Objectivity and morality is one thing that leads you to theism?

DG (09:53): Yeah, but then you have to say, in this definition, what you mean by theism is, the universe is such that it includes moral norms. Now, some people think they can do that without any kind of moral theism. Plato was accused of believing, and I don't know enough about Plato to know if it is true, but he believed, what he called the ideas, were basically mathematical and moral, and he believed they were just there, all by themselves in the universe. They didn't have to exist in anything. But, Whitehead believed in his later position, that Plato believed that mathematical and morals did exist inside of some kind of deity. So, I don't know. Then Hansen says, I would say about Hansen, he would say, even if we ignore this ultimate context, right, end of civilization, it is a matter of morality (and then, filling out the previous sentence) an intergenerational morality. So, climate morality is, first of all, a matter of intergenerational morality. We, in this generation, don't act in ways that ruin the world for future generations. Most of you know, at least some of native Americans and their seven generations, that anything I do to preserve the world in its context for the next seven generations. That's pretty good. Some people would say, well, not just seven, but seventy times seven. But, seven would be good enough, for starters. And it would be a whole lot better than what we are doing now, where we are not even worrying about the next generation. Not even our children, let alone our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. So, Graham Taylor, an author who said, "preserving life on earth, and protecting our children's future, is not just one task among many, it is the most important ethical and practical issue facing humanity." "If we do not take immediate action to reverse climate change, our children and grandchildren will inherit a dying world."

Unidentified male: Two days ago, Chief Lyons was giving a talk in Australia, and a famous line in the front of *Cradle to Cradle*, and he's quoted as saying, "what you people call natural resources, we call our relatives." And, two days ago, he was talking, and said, "people keep asking about seven generations, you people don't even care about your children, let alone seven generations. We are speaking about our children."

Another unidentified male: So, in its essence, morality has to do with life and death. Whether it's going to be life.

DG: You could say, ultimate morality has to do with life and death.

Same unidentified male: But, I thought morality was tied to whether or not human beings live or die, or have well being, anyway.

DG: Well, I say, that's the *ultimate* morality, you know, if I do something to insult Gary, and make him feel bad, that's immoral. But, it's not going to kill him. So, ultimate morality always involves life and death. And, to illustrate the fact, the climate scientists themselves hold this point. I'll give a leading climate scientist, his name is Ken Caldeira. He says, "Economists estimate, it might cost something like 2% of our GDP to convert our energy system into one that doesn't use our atmosphere as a waste dump. When we burn fossil fuels, and release the waste into the atmosphere, we are saying, I am willing to impose tremendous climate risk on future generations living throughout the world so I can personally be 2% richer today." There are other figures that say it's even worse than that. You might be talking about a half of a point. And others will say, it's actually the reverse. That, if we went completely with clean energy, it's not going to cost us anything. It would save us a lot. Devon was illustrating that with regard to building efficiency, but it's pretty much across the board.

Unidentified male: They're just upset with the down payment, in that case.

DG: Yeah, we can handle that with policy. Take care of the down payment. It's not difficult. I mean, it shouldn't be. It's the ones that say, It's going to hurt my personal life if...fossil fuel...I'm going to become just a billionaire, and not a multibillionaire. Then, you're going to ruin my life. How can I get by with one billion?

DG: Okay. Norm Chomsky, who is not exactly a climate scientist, but he takes this stuff very seriously, at least in the past four or five years. I don't know how long he's been taking it seriously. He says, "A bigger bonus tomorrow outweighs the fate of one's grandchildren." Now, this presupposes that we have a moral obligation to future generations. So, that's why I stress the moral realism. You can only make that argument if there is such a thing as a moral obligation to future generations. But, there are moral philosophers, would better be called (laugh) immoral philosophers, or immoral moral philosophers. There is a book, actually, "Do We Have an Obligation to Future Generations?" (*Moral Obligations toward the Future*). And they argue, no, because there are no obligations, whatsoever. And, certainly not to future generations. They say, morality is a matter of reciprocity. So, you get into a moral relationship with people. And, you help them, and they help you. Well, what can the future generations do for you? You know (laugh), what's the future done for me recently? Actually, there's an answer to that. It gives your life meaning. There's going to be a future. But, nevertheless.

Unidentified male: There is a good answer to that, right. He was born into the future, every day that he lives.

DG: Right, but by the time he got to it, that was yesterday.

Unidentified male: I wondering, is it Boehner who says, estate taxes are immoral. So, they have a sense of morality.

DG: It's just that their morality is, keep their money coming from the fossil fuel industry.

DD: There was a C-Span book review, I don't remember the name of the author. The title was something like, "Burning Fossil Fuels is the Moral High Ground," [*The Moral Case for Fossil*

Fuels] and his argument is, if you can get a larger profit, that was the highest morality thing to be doing.

DG: Yeah, now, on my chapter on economics, my foil is primarily the Yale economist, William Nordhaus, so, if you don't get anything else in that chapter of the book, you will be amazed about Nordhaus. He has been in America and parts of Europe. He's been "Mr. Climate Economist." He created the field. So, the question came up somewhere related to economics and climate, "What is the right position on this?" and the answer someone else gave, "Well, whatever Bill Nordhaus says, that is the right position." So, he was *the* authority. Well then, suddenly comes along the *Stern Report*, and Stern is the big economist in the UK. He's Oxford, and many important positions. So, this is very threatening to Nordhaus, because, now most of us consider Stern as the authority on climate economics.

Unidentified male: Yeah, Nordhaus even got *ad hominem* to Stern. He was very childish.

DG: Yeah, when you've been all alone at the top, and then, someone challenges you, on knocks you off the mountain. So, Nordhaus, his argument was, do a little bit for mitigating climate change, but, it's not going to be terribly bad. And besides, we're going to keep getting richer, and can protect ourselves from it. and so, the best morality is to keep getting richer so we can protect ourselves if this very unlikely thing ever happens, like Florida going under water. Well, Stern goes to the complete opposite of that. He says, the economics says the more rigorous climate mitigation we do right now, that will pay for itself many times over, ten times over, a hundred times over. And then, it's not just Yale, there's another pretty well though of institution known as Harvard. And their leading economist on this issue also disagrees completely with Nordhaus. And so, my chapter builds, primarily, on the positive part of Stern and Harvard's Weinstein. So, it's a big competition. America, still, by and large, follows Nordhaus. They say, the Senate and the House still follow Nordhaus, so he is their authority. So, that is a way to make it look like, not doing very much for climate, and putting all your eggs in making more money his a higher morality. But, in his latest book, [*The Climate Casino*], he keeps the position he had, but then he admits he can't justify any of the reasons he's always had for his positions, so, it is an amazing book. So, I hope people will read it, because, in one respect, it's the best chapter in the book [DRG's book].

DG (27:46): Okay, Universal Morality - [**Point**] **Five**. The claim that opponents would make, that there is no universal morality. And, you've probably heard that idea. There's only particular traditions. But that position presupposes that Moral Realism is not true. They, true, there's no universal morality. We just have our Buddhist morality, and our Hindu morality, our Christian morality, and our Jewish morality. There's a large agreement among that. As theism has declined among the professorial class, then moral realism has declined. So, they still want to believe in morality, so this is a way to do it. If any of you have read Richard Rodin (sp?), that is his view completely. But, even Michael Walzer, he was always known as a complete situationist. What's called communitarianism — you have the morality of your own community. But then, he wrote a book that's about ten years ago, or so, *Thick and Thin*. What we're talking about are thick moralities, that means you've got a moral position on everything; marriage, sex, economics, etc. But, he also says, there's a thin morality, that all the traditions have in common. And so, he affirmed this idea. I mean, the people who followed him were just shocked. They said, yes, there is a universal morality. Now, it might be minimal, it might be mainly negative. He said, various traditions provide the makings of a thin and universalist morality. And, he said, this would be a set of standards to which all societies can be held — negative injunctions. In other words, thou shalt not do this, thou shalt not do that. But, he suggests, there's a large agreement among the various traditions about those negative injunctions. So, morality is not as relativistic as a lot of philosophers are arguing. Oh yes, it's largely relativistic, but there's this central core

that's universal. It's not relative to your time and place. So, one could say an example of this is the silver rule. Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you. Hans Küng had a big book, in which he argued that the Silver Commandment is universal. He had quotes from Buddhism, Confucianism, and so on down.

Unidentified male: Is that different from the Golden Rule?

DG: The Golden Rule is Do Unto Others what you would want them to do to you. That's much more onerous than... If you have to do everything that you would like people to do to you, you would not have any free time. The silver rule, all you have to avoid is doing things to them that you don't want done to you. You don't want people to shoot you, so you shouldn't shoot them. Okay, that was point number five.

Unidentified male: A point of clarification. Are you saying something that is universal is not necessarily real?

DG (32:38): Oh no, we're saying it *is* real. He means, universal to human civilization. But, probably, if there are civilizations on other planets, that would surely be there too. If you are thinking it's based on moral principals in the fabric of the universe, then yes. It would be in every galaxy, even star that had a planet or two, or a million. with intelligent life.

Unidentified male: Would the universal declaration on human rights proposes, it was designed thru world wide inputs.

DG: Yeah, that you Eleanor Roosevelt. Some people think she should have been considered the greatest of the Roosevelts. Debatable. But, did you all see *The Roosevelts* on TV? Wonderful.

DG (34:07): So, I've come up with ten climate commandments. And, Dwain, do you happen to have any of them with you, to hand out? I didn't ask you to bring them.

DD: I do have a business card that is a FaceBook page. It's called Climate Morality. Then, there's a website that has the ten commandments. it kind of points you to them.

DG: So, while he his handing those around, I will read these to you. One: Thou Shalt Not Ruin Civilization's Climate. So, starting with the biggie first. Second: Thou Shalt Not Impose Hotter Weather on People. [Third] Thou Shalt Not Impose Drought on People. Now, the UN has said, drought reigns the single most cause of severe food shortages in developing countries. Draught caused more deaths during the last century than any other natural disaster. Did you know that? And just plain heat causes a lot... Well, we just saw in India here, and that's not the first time it's happened. And England had a big one, what, about ten years ago. Russia. Then, if you combine heat and draught, you know, a hot draught, then it is really deadly.

Unidentified male: *The Years of Living Dangerously* points out, in L.A., how many people die during recent heat waves, I've forgotten the statistics. It's remarkable how many deaths.

DG: Yeah, [Fourth] Thou Shalt Not Increase Destructive Storms. Now, rainstorms? It used to be, people would have last at that. But now, rain is killing hundreds and thousands of people. And, we've talked about it already, Tom talked about it. Because, as the atmosphere gets warmer, there's going to be more water up there. Even if you are having a draught like we are having here, that water is going to come down somewhere, and that somewhere, they're going to get deluged. So, this is one of the patterns of climate change is the draught/deluge cycle. So, people will go thru a draught for many many years, Australia for example, and then they have a deluge that wipes the rest of them out. And, it's going to keep getting worse. And then, beyond

rainstorms, hurricanes, we know about that. What about tornadoes? Are some of them affected by climate change?

Unidentified male: Well, you can measure the number of them, and the frequency of them coming on.

DG: Yeah. Up until just a few years ago, the consensus among climate scientists who specialize in this, said, well *maybe*, we can't say for sure. But, just in the last couple of years, studies have shown, well, yes. Even tornadoes are getting worse. Those are the ones that scare me the most. If I were in Kansas, Oklahoma, I would be more afraid of tornadoes.

Unidentified male: Or, on a river in China.

DG: Yeah, you don't expect to see a tornado on the Yangtze River. Have any of you read in an American newspaper that this had occurred? It might have been the Huffington Post.

Unidentified female: Can I just ask, to whom are these morality commandments being directed:

DG: You!

Same female: As an individual, I'm supposed to not do these things?

DG: Mainly to society, to countries. But sure, for individuals, and on up the state. But, the problem is, of course, that we are imposing these things. The United States could be violating every one of these commandments, big time. Now, we might say, well China is doing it equally so, in fact they are doing worse. Well, that's the way Americans like to argue. But if you look at, first of all, per capita. Carbon dioxide emissions. You still like that (#1), what with a billion sum people over there. And also, the length of time we've been doing this, since the industrial revolution in the West, including England and Canada, and so on, and as Devon was pointing out this morning, the most important thing now, is not parts per million, but the climate budget. How much is left in there that we dare emit? Well, we've been emitting for over a hundred years. While, China has started only very recently. So, if you looked at our total per capita violation of these, or, just looking at carbon dioxide, it would be like this. (China down here, and we, way up here.) And yet, we keep saying, we're not going to do anything until China does, because they're worse than we are. So that's how morality gets twisted. That's where self interest comes in. Twist it around to your own advantage.

DG (42:55): Five: Thou Shalt Not Deprive People of Fresh Water. The National Geographic article said, among the environmental specters confronting humanity in the twenty-first century, this was in 2002 already, shortage of fresh water is at the top of the list. Now, you can say, why isn't food at the top of the list? Well yes, but you can't have food without water. But, why has water become such a problem? How does climate change affect the water supply?

Unidentified male: hotter air sucks up more water.

DG: Okay.

DD: In California, I just learned, with sea level rise, more and more fresh water has to be diverted to keep the sea water from getting into the Delta. It will be a larger and larger percentage that will not be usable for what we normally use fresh water for.

DG: Well, that's around the world. Sea level rise is already ruined some of the island nations, you know, because they are so small, and low, that the sea water has come in and completely ruined the farms. Or, maybe they can farm on one-tenth the land they used to have. So, they have to move. So, they go to New Zealand, Australia. What else about climate change that causes problems?

Unidentified female: Lack of snowfall.

DG: Lack of snowfall. So, when I was doing storms. You know, another big kind of storm are snowstorms. I didn't include it for various reasons, although I could have. So that's why we are almost completely out of water here, we are depending, what, 70% on the Sierras. Something like that.

Unidentified male: LADWP says about 40% from the Sierras for water, so that's just L.A.

DG: Yeah, so, it looks like that's not going to come back. So, for many people, they've gone thru in California, they've had droughts for every 20 or so years. So the people go, oh, it always comes and it goes. We bought the big de-sal plant. We had to put it in mothballs because we didn't need it. Then they had a draught, then they say, they think that's going to happen again. Well, most of the climate scientists don't think it's going to happen again. This is going to be permanent drought. And, in all of the SouthWest. What else? There's another new big change?

Unidentified male: Acidification.

DG: Well, I put that under food.

Unidentified person: Melting glaciers

DG: Yeah, glaciers. In Asia alone, something like 3 billion people are completely dependent on the Malaysia and the 'Third Pole,' that whole area there, for their water. Well, it's a frightening state. I quote, in my book, [James Hansen?] who said, here was a case of preventable disaster. That, if we'd gotten on this twenty years ago, maybe, fifteen, maybe, we could have prevented this. But, we didn't, so now, what are we going to do? How many of those Asian countries are going to be able to afford disal plants for most of their population? China's not even that rich yet, and certainly India is not. But then, around the world. South America? I think those are the two worst parts, Asia and South America. So, within Latin America (South America), it's close to a billion people depending on the glaciers. So, there are probably five billion people around the world who are dependent either partially, or wholly on glaciers. Some of them are great ski places. Now, no more skiing whatsoever. Just rock.

DG: So, Six: Thou Shalt Not Deprive People of Food. Kofi Annan said, the lack of food security for close to a billion people is "an unconscionable moral failure." Well, it certainly is. And in our country, we are primarily in charge of the global economy, and so, this falls primarily upon us. A big moral failure.

DG (51:05) Now, acidification. How does that affect food? What's the connection between acidification and food.

Unidentified male: Well, the plankton get killed off, and then those fish that depend on them as their food die off, as so on up the food chain.

Another male: Coral reefs are lost, and they are important for fish survival.

Another person: I think it is even more ubiquitous than that. It's the same as our own health, when we go in for a physical. If the pH of our blood changes by more than a 10th of 1%, then we're very ill. And, the same thing is happening to the ocean water. That's their second blood stream, more or less. And that's changing, and that's bad for them.

DG: So, what's the connection between the pH and the loss of the phytoplankton?

One person: the absorption of carbon into their bodies.

DG: But what does it do to the snails, let's say? Or the lobsters?

Same person: Their shells won't form.

DG: Right, they won't calcify. So, that goes all the way down to the phytoplankton, which are the crucial thing in the whole planet, obviously for all the sea food, and billions of people. If I can remember my own statement, I think it is three billion people depend primarily on seafood for their own food. And so, if the acidification continues much further...it's already gone between 30 and 40 percent over what it was a century ago. If it goes much further, several scientists say, that there will be no more calcification. So, there will be no more seafood. So there is a film called, *A World Without Seafood* [the film referenced in his book is subtitled *Imagine a World without Fish*]. A good thing to show your people.

Unidentified male: I have the data on that, it's from a conference three years ago. The whole thing was on the acidification of oceans. Wonderful material, available online. It was the Nobel Conference in 2012, at Gustavus Adolphus College, in St. Peter, MN. John Cobb was there.

DG: So, what else with the food? What other food problems?

Unidentified male: Well, the problem with wheat and grain.

DG: A lot of stuff, when you get up to a certain temperature, it won't grow anymore. And then, doubt, obviously. And then, deluge comes in. You've gotten through the season, and then the deluge comes in, wipes out the whole crop. So, almost every part of climate change figures negatively on food. So, one can say, The worse effect of climate change would be on food. And so, literally, (I hate it when people use 'literally'), literally, billions of people will die of starvation, unless we take action very quickly. One of the big things, sensitivity. How many of you know what climate sensitivity is? Yeah, everyone here should know about it. It should be one of the topics we talk about around the dining room table. What's the evidence for what the sensitivity is? So, if you think we double the carbon dioxide, from what it was in the 19th century, how much is that going to increase the temperature? So, that's what climate sensitivity is. There's an estimate about that, so some people make it a very low number. And those are people who generally are deniers, or semi-deniers. And they say, oh, it's not going to cause anything very terrible because the sensitivity is so low. So, if we double CO₂, we might get a half a degree increase. At the opposite end, people say, no, no, it's much more sensitive than that. If we double it, we're definitely going to 4 deg more. And then, of course, you have the IPCC that's in the middle. But, they're getting better on this.

DG: [Seven] Thou Shalt Not Ruin People's Seas. We've talked about that some here. The warmer the water, the more likely you are to get hurricanes. More likely they're going to be extra ferocious. And, so the seafood is dying.

DG: Number eight. Thou Shalt Not Flood Peoples' Lands. And of course, these overlap here. Because, we're flooding peoples' lands. You know, we should have gone from Katrina, where it should have been a wakeup call. But, of course, it wasn't. And now, Sandy was supposed to be. Eh, not so much. It's always a fluke, and all we have to do is build it. After all, look at the Netherlands. They could, so we can. Well, we're bigger than the Netherlands. One of the things that people say, if you live in Florida, and you're not building a boat, then you're not facing reality. But, it's not just going to be the East Coast. The East Coast is going to get hit worse, but the West Coast is going to get hit pretty bad too.

Unidentified male: How high above the beach is that desalination plant?

DG: The one in San Diego. I don't know. And the one in Santa Barbara, they bringing it back. But, it's not high enough. Should have put it up on Mt. Kalway (sp?).

DG: [Number nine] Thou Shalt Not Force People to Migrate. And all these things can do that, of course, sea level rise is the number one cause of that, thus far. But other people are now being forced out because of draught. I mean, they completely tare people's lives up. So, you've got a pretty decent living in your community. You're not getting rich, but you're getting along. You move into the city. You're a beggar, or, you have to go into crime to feed your family.

DG: Number ten: Thou Shalt Not Lie to Justify Any Such Acts. And, we're big time on those lies.

DG: Okay, the opposite of intergenerational justice, the Ponzi Scheme. You all know what a Ponzi Scheme is? You know, the Madoff. Such a monster. Because, he took peoples' savings, and says he's going to give them 20%. But, then he gets other people to get in, and pays the money from the second group to the first group, keeping the 20% commitment. So, he keeps it going until it crashes. So, he cost people billions of dollars. Well, the global economy is a Ponzi Scheme. We are now living off the natural resources, it's actually capital, as they call it, of future generations. So, Madoff ruined the lives of some thousands of people, we are destroying the lives of future generations. If he was a monster, what are we? Subsidies, that's a talk.

DG: I've lost track of time here.

DG: **Point number nine.** The new abolition movement. Similar, that people are making this comparison. That just as we needed to abolish slavery, we need to abolish our mechanical slaves. It's killing us.

DG: And finally, Divestment, [**Point ten**], which we've talked about a lot.

DG: So, those are my ten climate commandments.