

SCOTT THOMPSON (cont)

Let's look at some of these entitlements.

But first, I ask you to bear in mind that that a trend that characterizes a group – think of a bell curve – will often not apply to many of that group's members.

Epistemologically challenged readers may find that fact a bitch to deal with.

The basis for liberal entitlement is a compassionate, but ideologically utopian worldview, often rigidly held, which aims to protect people perceived as oppressed or otherwise vulnerable. I think that as a group, liberals have been avoiding serious public dialogue about overpopulation because they are afraid that efforts to reduce it will be used as an excuse for persecuting vulnerable groups. That's an understandable fear, but silence isn't a rational strategy for them in the long run. By silencing each other and most of the rest of us, liberals may well be endangering the lives and well being of the very people their ideological commitments have sworn them to protect.

Liberals may have another problem with addressing overpopulation. For decades the foundation of their politics has been wealth redistribution based on continuing economic growth: they claim that everyone should get at least a narrow slice of the pie. Certainly including themselves. Radically reducing our numbers, however, will bring an end to cornucopia economic expansion. It will mean a satisfying but far less materialistic way of life; something many liberals may not be prepared for.

Right-wing business entitlement is barefaced; right-wingers see themselves as the realists, after all. In order to maximize business profits, and therefore growth, and therefore spiraling profits, they need hordes of frightened, desperate, and therefore compliant laborers to hire and underpay. Cheap labor is to soaring profits as warm ocean water is to growing hurricanes. Reducing the human population will make inexpensive workers more difficult to find, therefore making wages climb, therefore reducing profits, therefore dampening business growth. And it will reduce consumption, exacerbating the downward cycle. Our metaphorical hurricane will transmogrify into an unremarkable series of thunderstorms, perhaps with interesting displays of lightning.

I enjoy a good thunderstorm.

Right-wingers revere individual property rights. I cannot imagine them putting the health of an ecosystem first if that will limit the profits they can derive from their investments in private property, or will reduce the market value of that property. They will see changes of this nature as de facto Marxism, decrying climate scientists as henchmen in a sinister plot against free enterprise (but of course they'd never hack into scientists' e-mails in order to conjure "evidence" for such an imagined conspiracy).

Yet another entitlement is pronatalism, the perceived right to have children up to one's biological capacity. This has been the predominant tradition since the end of humanity's hunter-gatherer days.

Pronatalism is backed by big time Western religion. Consider, for example, the Old Testament's "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28). In general, Judeo-Christian religious

authorities have felt entitled to perpetuate the credibility of their traditional teachings and scriptures, despite Sinai-sized evidence that their pronatalist stances are a disaster for living systems (the Catholic teaching against birth control deserves its own Flat-Earth award, with a free coupon for all the credible books on climate science and climate change biology Pope Benedict and the College of Cardinals are willing to read).

Given that mainstream religions do have a lot of good teachings, why can't they figure out that to "fill the earth" with homo sapiens means up to, but not exceeding, each ecosystem's carrying capacity? That they refuse to figure this out in the face of escalating danger to us all is religious entitlement.

Nevertheless, there is a helpful trend. It's become clear that as more women are educated and given opportunities outside the home, as well as access to birth control, birth rates predictably drop; at least they have thus far. If humanity does somehow avoid a series of population-related catastrophes, women and the women's movement will deserve the credit.

The danger, as ever, is complacency. It's easy to forget that even with lower fertility rates the world population will continue to grow at an alarming rate, simply because there are more people around to reproduce. And that the climate is now unstable for the first time since the beginning of the Holocene 11,000 years ago, and that it will steadily grow more unstable for centuries to come, imperiling fresh water supplies, agricultural production, and of course the ecosystems that vitally sustain us.

Centuries from now, as teams of archeologists turn their trowels through the debris of our ex-civilization, I wonder if they'll conclude that we trivialized the most important signal of approaching disaster: the loss of enchantment of the land. Perhaps after a scorching day sifting through the ruins, one of them will lean back and say to her team mates, "You know, it's like a critical mass of Arizonans way back then, certainly the most influential ones, were walking around with their eyes shut. They literally didn't see what was happening to the landscape."

The crew will nod and smile sadly.

Over the years Gail and I have visited the following Indian reservations: Mescalero Apache, Wind River Shoshone, Arapaho, Flathead, Blackfeet, Taos Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Navajo, Hopi, Hualapai, Havasupai, Yavapai, Acoma, and Zuni. On every one of these reservations, wherever the tribe has retained enough land and political power, it has carefully preserved the enchantment of the land. While the tribes may explain this differently according to their own paradigms, that's what they've been doing.

My opinion? A critical mass of Native Americans are walking around with their eyes open.

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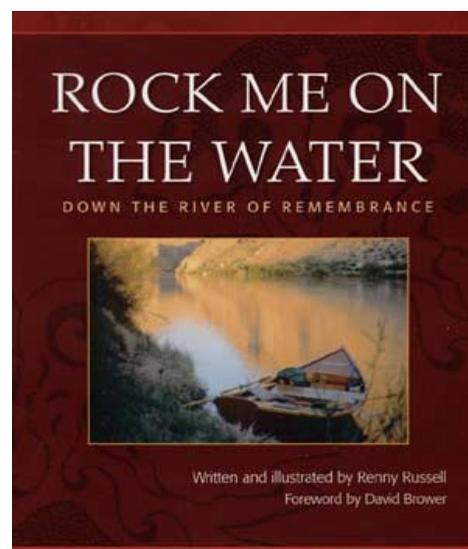
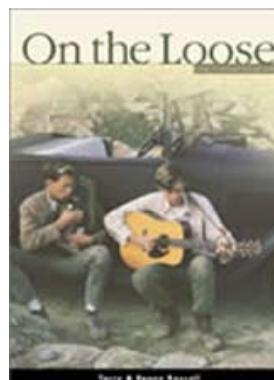


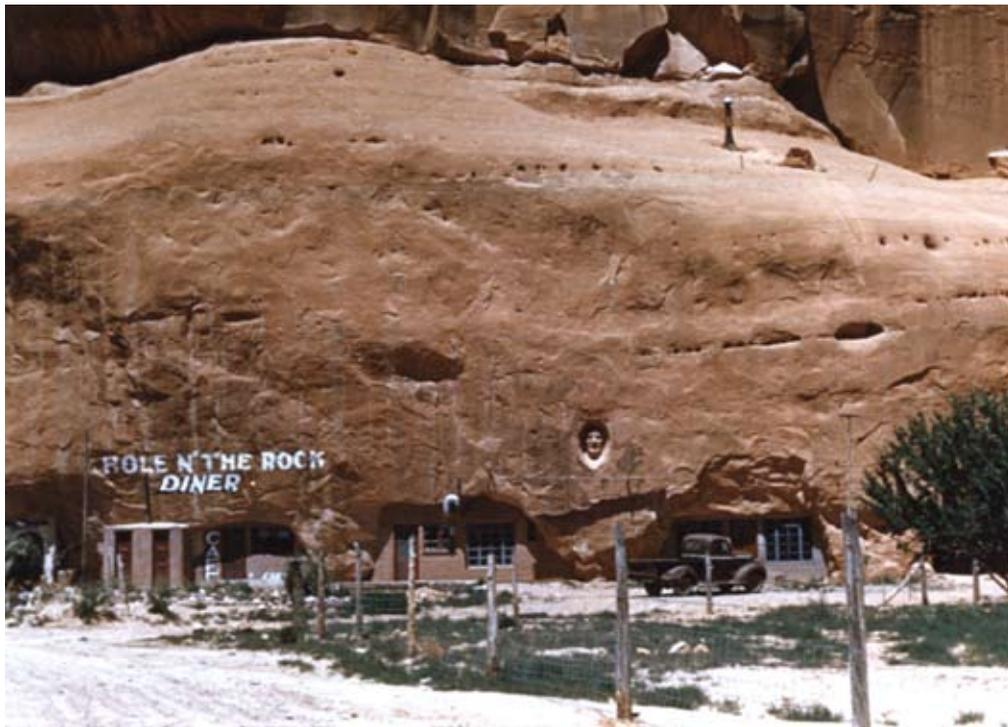
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My dear friend died on December 11, 1998...JS