

[Home](#) » [Opinion](#) » Article

## Planet of the apes needs to get real

Dan Cass

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I have spent 20 years in the Green movement and I need to say it as it is: we won the argument but lost the debate. We showed that coal is killing the world and they greenwashed it "clean". We got democracy on our side and they ignore it.

These are manic days for Planet Earth and everyone who lives on it. The ice sheets are cracking up and we're not faring much better. We need to come together to change history, but global consciousness is pixellating into micro-worlds, atoms of meaning so hyper and nano they blast through your mind without touching the sides. Think Tony Blair. Short sentences. Integrity. Twitter.com.

Let's take a breather from these manic times and think the thoughts that count, not prefabricated opinions. Let's find a nice hole in the wall and talk funky green truths over a glass of organic chardonnay.

We must challenge the newsmakers, such as the Prime Minister and Saint Kevin, and with sentences of 10 words or more.

When Kevin Rudd was chief of staff to the Labor opposition leader Wayne Goss in Brisbane in the 1980s, he used to tell people he was the man with a new "paradigm". Goss soon glided into power, surfing the wave of disgust at the dying remains of the corrupt National Party government.

Meanwhile Paradigm, as he was known in the press gallery, continued his long march, to where he is now rattling the gates of The Lodge. Fine then. Let's go talk paradigms with our potential PM.

It was the Harvard University physicist Thomas Kuhn who coined the word "paradigm" in his influential 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn was trying to explain those huge shifts in science, like from the Catholic Church position that the sun goes around the Earth to the opposite, Copernican idea that the Earth orbits the sun.

One of the conflicts between the Earth-centred universe and the Copernican model was the doctrine of heavenly, or "super-lunary", perfection. The church argued that while Earth was subject to human imperfection, up in heaven the trains all run on time. When astronomers observed the inconvenient truth that the moon is riddled with bumps, the geocentrists invented an invisible material that smoothed the bumps and made the "real" surface as perfect as God intended.

This is unprovable nonsense, like the idea that Generation IV nuclear reactors are guaranteed "fail-safe", and thus the cure-all for global warming.

For those in the techno-fix paradigm, not even the sky is the limit. Who remembers the NASA "science" that showed the space shuttle would only fail in one in 100,000 flights? This

management spin was abandoned when the Challenger exploded above Florida on January 28, 1986, killing all on board, after completing only nine successful flights.

The Nobel physics laureate Richard Feynman was appointed to the presidential commission to determine the reason for the disaster. Aside from helping to solve the mystery of the accident, he appended a personal statement in which he railed against the official claim of super-lunary perfection in all things shuttle.

As Feynman wrote: "For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled."

The test for a paradigm to save the Earth from global warming is foolproof. Are there clear timetables to get on the road to deep cuts in carbon emissions? Does the long-term switch from fossil fuels to renewables and efficiency begin today? Is there preparedness to actually do the little things that make a big difference, like domestic solar hot water, or is it all hidden in a fog of policy-speak and prices, mechanisms and machinations?

Saving the world should be engaging - funky even. If the techno-economic gurus and editorial writers spruik you a solution that bores you to tears or requires a degree in astrophysics to understand, reject their solution. You need it like you need a hole in the head.

We need to have plans to reach a target that makes a difference, like a 30 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020. Most of the policies being aired are about mechanisms to achieve the target - like the clean coal mirage, or emissions trading.

These are means to an end and nothing more. We need a promise to end Australia's addiction to coal, but all we get is a schedule for attending meetings of Fossil Fuels Anonymous.

Kuhn showed us that a revolution of ideas changes everything so profoundly that the new way of thinking is "incommensurable" with the old paradigm.

I can't quote exactly what Kuhn said, because I lost my copy of his book during a house party in the 1980s, but I ended up with two copies of Malcolm McLaren's album *Duck Rock*, which is almost as apposite. As McLaren theorised, in as much detail as we need, "I'm an ape, I'm an ape, I'm an ape - I'm an ape."

John Howard and Kevin Rudd well know they are as much ape as the rest of us. Like anyone, their survival depends on getting real about nature. It is up to us to make sure that whoever wins the election has to replace the coal-centred paradigm with an Earth-centred one.

**Dan Cass works for Greenpeace, but these views are his own. This article evolved from a column in *The Manic Times*. [www.manictimes.com.au](http://www.manictimes.com.au)**

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