



STATE OF FEAR

*Science, Ethics, and the
Impossibility of Prediction*

Michael Crichton ♦ Ken Wilber

[00:00:00] **Assistant:** Constant C Productions.

[00:00:10] **Ken Wilber:** Yes, Ken Wiler calling for Michael.

[00:00:12] **Assistant:** Okay, one second. Ken.

[00:00:17] **Michael Crichton:** Yo.

[00:00:17] **Ken Wilber:** Hey buddy. How are you doing?

[00:00:18] **Michael Crichton:** Good. How are you?

[00:00:19] **Ken Wilber:** Good. What are you doing having a week with some time off?

[00:00:23] **Michael Crichton:** Well, it's just, you know, one of those things. Between projects I float a little bit.

[00:00:33] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Have you started writing something already?

[00:00:35] **Michael Crichton:** No.

[00:00:36] **Ken Wilber:** Oh man. Isn't that a wonderful period?

[00:00:38] **Michael Crichton:** It is, but it's a little, I don't know. It's, it's nice and it's also a little anxiety provoking.

[00:00:44] **Ken Wilber:** They say that without that, something actually a life. We both put ourselves in... we don't want the state of fear out there we created our own minds when we write novels.

There's so many things I wanted to talk to you about. Let's do two things in particular. I wanted to go over the talk you gave to the National Press Club, because actually, the

issue you raised there leads into the book I'm writing on the many faces of terrorism. Because I actually use the loophole that you raise, which is the, really, impossibility of predicting the future.

And yet everybody seems to think it's sort of like, if you let go of a shoe, it will drop. Which we know isn't true. Then I use that to sort of drive anything I want to through that hole, that gaping hole of unpredictability. And so I drive a whole series of unbelievable things through.

But let's do first things first, do you want? And just talk a little bit about that, and about State of Fear and what's going on with that?

[00:01:44] **Michael Crichton:** Sure!

[00:01:46] **Ken Wilber:** It did get you invited to the White House, you know.

[00:01:48] **Michael Crichton:** It did. Yeah, which was pretty interesting.

[00:01:51] **Ken Wilber:** Pretty interesting.

[00:01:52] **Michael Crichton:** Never met a president before.

[00:01:56] **Ken Wilber:** No. Well, and what got you there is one of the things that I wanted to talk about because there is the strangest thing that when you politicize something, and environmental studies, ecology, environmentalism has become one of the most politicized areas that ought to be science, at least there ought to be part of it left that is still science, and even the science part that's left has been politicized to an extraordinary degree. And so it's one of the very, very strange... sort of like, double negatives get you a positive. In other words, there was simply no way that you were saying that you were taking a Republican stance, or that you were favoring that.

You were saying that, in a sense, you were against two things: you were against bad science, and bad politics, and that it's mixing them in unwarranted ways. And so the fact that you would simply disagree with the exaggerated, politicized nature that is

sometimes associated with liberal politicians was taken to be that you're basically coming out with a conservative tract, and get you invited to the White House.

[00:03:09] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. You know, this is the internet world, so I'm being forwarded emails from inside environmental organizations talking about how they're gonna handle the book. And they clearly decided to present it as Republican propaganda. And that was the sort of media line from the beginning. And I think it's the easiest way to dispose of it.

[00:03:33] **Ken Wilber:** So they wanted to basically not approach the science in the book and deal with it scientifically.

[00:03:38] **Michael Crichton:** No, nobody wants to talk about that.

[00:03:40] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Oh, well, but that's what's so sad in a sense. Yeah, we can come back to that. But you were getting in the internet age, some of these things forward, and so it was pretty clear to you that the way they were going to handle the book was what could be called a smear campaign, it was...

[00:03:54] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. I mean, it's anything but address the issue. In other words, the issue, in that sense is, you know, I'm an outside person, I don't have an ax to grind. I'm just looking at this, and I'm concluding that to me as an outside person, the evidence is surprisingly unpersuasive. That's all I'm saying.

[00:04:11] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah.

[00:04:13] **Michael Crichton:** And you know, in another world, somebody says, "no, let me show you, let me take you through it, and let me correct what you don't understand." And in the world that we're in, they say, "no, you're just a lying member of the opposite party and a paid flack of the oil industry", which is my favorite thing. I never thought anybody would imagine that I'm paid by the oil industry, but they just, you know, and people just claim it. That's where we are.

[00:04:44] **Ken Wilber:** Well, it really hinges in large part on computer scenarios and future predictions and so on, and you know what's so funny about those is, every time you look at future projections from today, then it seems that you have to agree with 'em if it's become politicized or psychologized or if it touches something other than science. Cause the science would simply say, "I don't know, there's a 400% variability", as you pointed out, "in even the extreme best of the environmental predictions." But for you not to take, well, close to the party line, is perceived as really almost evil. It's being really wicked in the deepest sense.

But if you go back, the only time you get a sense of history about this, a sense of what's happening, is if you review past projections. And then it's just...

[00:05:32] **Michael Crichton:** Which no one wants to do.

[00:05:33] **Ken Wilber:** Nobody wants to do that. Now, we're not saying this means we disagree with you. We're just saying, wait a minute, let's just take a breath and look at this. I did the same thing in Quantum Questions. We got this whole "physics proves mysticism", Tao of Physics craze. It started in 1970s. And it was like some new quantum mechanics was proving mysticism for the first time, and wasn't it extraordinary. And so I went back and did a history review all the way back to Plato, and found, you know, advocates saying, "oh, the new physics completely proves Spirit" and so on. I mean, it's a very, very old argument. But the identical data was used by the other half of the community to prove the Spirit doesn't exist. And so you get into this for other reasons than science.

The long and short is they can't predict the present accurately if you give them the data from the past. So you have first Earth Day in 1970, Kenneth Watt said "if present trends continue, the world will be about four degrees colder in 1990 and 11 degrees colder by the year 2000." This is about twice what it would take to put us in an ice age. I don't feel that cold.

[00:06:39] **Michael Crichton:** I think everyone would agree that's a major, a major miss.

[00:06:44] **Ken Wilber:** But it's a history of major misses.

[00:06:46] **Michael Crichton:** Yes. The two things, Ken, that I'm not able to really get people to understand clearly is, I think people are enormously resistant to facing up to how often their predictions are wrong in the past. And it may have something to do with the need to acknowledge really how uncertain the future is. But the other thing is, you know, if in fact this is not a genuine problem, either because it doesn't really exist or because technology in the form of hybrids and improved solar and blah, blah, blah, over the course of the coming centuries is just gonna take it away, irrespective of any government action. If either of those things are true, and we go and spend a gazillion dollars on that instead of feeding hungry people, then we have done a terrible, terrible, terrible thing. And no one that I see in the environmental movement will acknowledge that there is the possibility of making a tremendous grave misallocation that will kill millions and millions of people. And they just don't know.

[00:07:55] **Ken Wilber:** It doesn't... I know. And if you start doing a cost analysis sheet, basically, which is one of the things you've suggested for our ideas in general, but if you do it for the environmental movement, going back to DDT up to the present with resource allocation, it's not a very pretty picture.

[00:08:12] **Michael Crichton:** No, it's not. It's really not. And you know, I mean I think the short version of all that is that public health measures are tremendously effective, cost effective. The early environmental regulations and so on, which, except for DDT, which were by and large were almost in the area of public health, cleaning up the waterways and stuff, were terrific. The farther you go into regulating things that we can't see, regulating things that we're not sure what they do, the more that you get into situations where you can be spending literally tens or hundreds of millions of dollars per man-year of life saved, it's a mistake.

[00:08:58] **Ken Wilber:** Yep. Yep. Well, and your book is kind of a bellwether for this in certain ways, and kind of a barometer as well. And just to have it not addressed, and the issues that we're talking about right now, for example, rather straightforwardly, you don't hear these kinds of conversations that often. And so what I would think of as a smear campaign, anyway, about you were you know, a lackey of the oil companies and all of that. It coincides, like I say, in a strange double negative way with the fact that the Bush administration now would be tempting to say, "well, they got the science right." But the fact of the matter is, even if the science was tending in the other direction, they would tend to not follow the science either. In other words, they politicize science just as much

as the liberals do.

[00:09:41] **Michael Crichton:** Absolutely.

[00:09:41] **Ken Wilber:** It's just even a broken clock gives the right time twice a day. And so they just happened to be getting it right this time, in certain ways, but for all the wrong reasons. But for enough to get you invited to the White House. Isn't that kind of funny?

[00:09:57] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. I mean, I think actually that, you know, there's more people than we know. For example, the House of Lords just today sent Tony Blair a report saying "drop Kyoto. It's a waste of time and money." Yeah. You know, I think there are a lot of areas where people are saying, you know, what are we doing here?

[00:10:18] **Ken Wilber:** So in other words, some of those folks might, might be getting the science right, in the sense that they just can't...

[00:10:22] **Michael Crichton:** I mean, what I feel about the administration is in this case, they have the science right. But they have the politics wrong.

[00:10:28] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Well, that's what I meant by saying that there's, they're mixing them.

[00:10:31] **Michael Crichton:** No, but I'm saying from my point of view, they haven't really mounted an educational campaign.

[00:10:36] **Ken Wilber:** I see.

[00:10:36] **Michael Crichton:** They haven't really gone out and said, "look, we don't agree with it, and this is why we don't." They haven't really made platforms for people in their administration to... They haven't, I think whatever the criteria are for selecting people, I don't feel that this is an eloquent administration.

[00:10:56] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, here's the issue on that, and this is what, so one of the second topics I'm gonna talk about, because you and I both still talk in a funny, weird way, which is that we think if we lay out the facts and the evidence in a coherent fashion, people will get it. Silly us, silly us. And the fact of the matter is...

[00:11:17] **Michael Crichton:** I still believe in it!

[00:11:21] **Ken Wilber:** I know, it's an inherent, natural, naive mistake that we tend to do. But there're at least two reasons... There are many, but there're at least two reasons that people won't see facts, that even any community of the knowledgeable 30 years from now would, looking back, would agree were facts that people simply would not see. And one of them is what you call state of fear, and I'll just call psychological, sociological, psychological factors in a sense. And another one that I talk about a lot is frankly just, you know, stages of development, that people see different things at different stages of development. And if you're not at a, you know, a particular stage sufficiently, then you're just not going to see it.

And we tend not to notice that too much because everybody gets a pretty good education. We're all sort of in the same ballpark. But I've come down again and again and again to, there are really nuances and facts and things like being systems theory and that kind of information. And it really does take a certain cognitive level to even see the data, or a certain level of self-development to see the data. And if people aren't developed to that, they just don't tend to see the data. And you know, that's a difficult issue, but I think it's a very important issue.

[00:12:30] **Michael Crichton:** I think there's no question you're right. And I've had... I've had people just sort of say to me bluntly, you know, "this issue's not going to be resolved based on the evidence." Which is, you know, creepy in a way. But yeah, it is, you know, I think it is a reality. I mean, and you know, you told me before the book was published, you said, "you know, a certain percentage are going to get it immediately, a certain percentage are gonna mull it over, and this much larger percentage is just gonna say no."

[00:13:00] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. And a certain percentage is gonna say no, and they did.

[00:13:03] **Michael Crichton:** Yep. Yeah, I think you're pretty accurately called it.

[00:13:06] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, the stage or level of development, and there's always higher levels for all of us, so it's not an elitist thing, or it's an elitism to which everybody's invited, but that's one factor. Another factor is really that psychological fear, the fear factor, state of fear. The fear itself doesn't match the reality. And so even if people say, well, "but what if we could be wrong? We could be wrong, and so therefore we have to..." and they keep themselves in a constant state of panic. And if they are wrong, you know, you run worst case scenarios. Okay. It goes a fourth of a degree, and what's gonna happen? Well, last time we made 15 trillion dollars extra in agriculture, because they had the longer growing season.

[00:13:47] **Michael Crichton:** That's right. That was the last El Nino.

[00:13:49] **Ken Wilber:** That's right. The El Nino. Exactly. Yeah, people were saying, "oh, look what's gonna happen?" I said, yeah, I know, this is great! But they want to be afraid. And so we're not in any way saying that, "don't be concerned about it", we're saying "look at the science for it". But there is this state of fear, and in part a sociological state that's generated, in part it's a political state that's generated. You explore that. And in part it's a state of psychological fear, and a kind of an edgy knowingness about it. And that particular product I call Boomeritis. Which, Boomeritis is basically pluralism plus narcissism. And so pluralism says "all views are equal," and narcissism says, "that's exactly right, all of these are equal, and I'm right." And so pluralism gives a happy home for narcissism, because it's sort of like a, it's a theoretical stance in academia, it's kind of a liberal-ish, not liberal, I don't wanna identify it with political party, but it's a liberal-ish stance in society. Nobody can challenge me, everybody has a right to their own truth. So under the tent of pluralism, narcissism makes a happy home.

And it's a classic, in my opinion, pre/post confusion. Post-conventional freedom is confused with pre-conventional egocentric license, and just anything I want to do is right. And that strangely has got hooked up with environmental concerns and all sorts of liberal concerns. And it's produced really a both... a state of both fear on the one hand, and a state of me-ism, you know, that's just really bizarre. You know, I'm no prude or anything like that at all, but I'm getting shocked. I mean, it's just off the wall.

Did you see the latest one? The woman is suing NASA for putting that rocket into that comet because it screwed up her astrological health?

[00:15:34] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. Although I tend to think, Ken, this is a demonstration that we have too many attorneys. Because somebody had to file that, you know what I mean?

[00:15:43] **Ken Wilber:** Listen, I agree with you, but there has to be a cultural climate that actually would let that get in the door. And the door is...

[00:15:49] **Michael Crichton:** And to say nothing of the cultural climate that will report it as news!

[00:15:52] **Ken Wilber:** Well, exactly. Oh, I totally agree. Well, the lawyers have greased the skids of Boomeritis. There's just, there's no question. It's every ego now has its lawyer. It's just like a 50,000 car...

[00:16:05] **Michael Crichton:** You know? We have something like, you know, we used to have 50% of the world supply of lawyers. I think we now have 90%.

[00:16:10] **Ken Wilber:** I hear anywhere from 70 to 90.

[00:16:12] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. I don't know that we really need that many attorneys.

[00:16:16] **Ken Wilber:** I can't tell which causes which, because in a nation of egos, you better have a lawyer. You know? I think it's both, I mean, clearly both, but it's like, my goodness, you can't go anywhere now without really having to watch every single thing you do.

[00:16:31] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. But see, I think part of that is, for example, the medical profession had a very influential study, I think from the sixties, in which they found that the... they looked at neurosurgeons and they found that the amount of neurosurgery performed in the community was a function of the number of

neurosurgeons. And they then very quietly began to discourage certain specialties, you know, beyond the numbers that were really perceived to be... I mean, you don't need very many neurosurgeons in any place. And I think if we were to raise the bar, so to speak in terms of attorneys, this highly intelligent group might go do something more useful.

[00:17:20] **Ken Wilber:** But here's the problem. The only people in charge of doing that are the lawyers. Seriously, this deeply worries me. They started to think about it when I noticed that Bill Clinton had his diversity cabinet, you know, 18 people, more or less, that were this and this and one were this and more that. They were all lawyers. And I thought about it. I thought, oh, there's something that's deeply sick here, and it's just unbelievable. And I don't know how to get out of it, because the only people that could get you out is a lawyer. So I'll be hire a lawyer and take a class action lawsuit out against lawyers.

[00:17:52] **Michael Crichton:** That's a nice idea, actually.

[00:17:55] **Ken Wilber:** That might work.

[00:17:55] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah. Oh, I like that.

[00:17:58] **Ken Wilber:** Oh my God. Well, has anybody picked up the movie rights?

[00:18:03] **Michael Crichton:** No.

[00:18:04] **Ken Wilber:** See, that to me is... we talked about this, we said almost certainly this would be the first novel you have ever written that doesn't become a film. Now, probably eventually it will, because it's just too gripping. And I told you, I think it's one of the best things you've done in, really, years. I love all of your stuff, but there's just some aliveness to this, I think possibly because, you know, we're both so concerned, that there's a kind of emotional charge that helps drive a certain kind of edgy clarity of writing. Do you think that's true?

[00:18:36] **Michael Crichton:** I'll take your word for it. No, I think, no, I do think it's true, actually. There's no question that, if you have strong feelings, you...

[00:18:44] **Ken Wilber:** Got it right.

[00:18:45] **Michael Crichton:** I'm very proud of having done that, because, you know, I, like everybody, crave approval. And, you know, to go out and disagree with what most of the world says is true was a big step for me personally.

[00:18:58] **Ken Wilber:** Exactly. And I was, you know, when I read it, I read some of the early drafts, I really was worried about really some fanatics actually targeting you. It's become so politicized that at the extreme end, you're such an influential voice, and I think this is so... I think it's so compellingly drawn, that I was really concerned. And so it must have been a, you know, a step for you to do it. And I think it's fantastic. I really do. I think it's fantastic that you stepped into that.

[00:19:27] **Michael Crichton:** Well, I'm pleased that, you know, I think the effect of having done that is not... cuz of course you don't get into debates. Academics wouldn't debate a novelist, but what it does is it opens the door for people to start to talk. So, you know, I noticed that Stewart Brand had a, you know, who's certainly an early environmentalist, did the whole catalog, you know. He has a thing where he says, yes, population is gonna go down, the population bomb is not going off.

[00:19:54] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah, he did. He did.

[00:19:56] **Michael Crichton:** And Robert Samuelson in the Washington Post said, yeah, Kyoto's getting to be a bunch of lying politicians. You know. So it's starting a little bit that people are, I think, are able to begin to express things that they might have hesitated to before, because...

[00:20:16] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Well I had to tell you too about one of the things I admire about your writing, and I've mentioned this before, because I still don't quite see how you do it. And it's this, and it's a very interesting thing. Some novelists you read, some various types of writers even, and sometimes you find different levels of the artistic presentation that you can particularly admire. In some, you can admire sentence

structure. I've actually looked at sentences and gone, "that's such a beautiful sentence". And then you thought, of course, great poets steal. Okay, I'm gonna use that kind of sentence the next time I do. And then others, it kind of, it can kind of go up there... sometimes you really enjoy a novel, but you can't really figure out why. Not putting anything you'd walk away from or anything like that, or steal.

And one of the things that I find so compelling about your work is, images pop into my mind as I read. Intense, vivid images. I can see you, where you are. It's just really interesting because I tried to break it down and look at sentences, and sometimes the sentences are really deceptively very simple, elegant sentences. What we would say, just plain English. But they come together in a way that I... and I was looking for it this time. I was watching my own mind as I read the draft that you sent of state of fear. So I thought, I'm gonna figure it out this time. So I was watching really close, and I was watching really close. Okay, next sentence. Next sentence. No, next sentence. Pow. Up comes the scene. And it's like, it's some... and you probably have, you know, no idea how you do this, cuz you don't consciously sit there and do it. But you somehow convey sentences in a way that all of a sudden these really vivid textures and scenes and locales, just come right up into view, almost like a hologram in your mind. And then you've done this from the beginning, which I'm guessing why it so naturally converts to something like film. But it's really quite astonishing, and I think that's why, you know, you're such a, just a really premier storyteller, in that sense.

[00:22:17] **Michael Crichton:** Well, thanks. I think it's... I think it's just description of my process, because that's what happens in my head. I see pictures, so I describe the pictures. To the extent that I have any idea about how it works, I think it's very dependent on the specific order in which the information's presented.

[00:22:37] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Well that's good. Well, ah, ah, ah, I'm sorry. That's exactly what the many faces of terrorism and it, but go ahead and finish that, cuz I wanna tell you why it..

[00:22:47] **Michael Crichton:** Well, you know, I noticed it in other people's work. In Capra's first Godfather, there's this scene where, Michael Corleone is explaining to his fiance about the guys who work with his father, and there's this extended thing where he begins with what sounds like a discussion of a contract that ends with a with a threat of murder. And it's maybe seven or eight sentences, but the exact way that it's laid out,

and exactly how he goes from point A to point B, is really beautifully done. Worth looking at for just to see how he did it.

[00:23:25] **Ken Wilber:** Yeah. Well, order of presentation is true even when you are disordering it. In other words, there's a way to do that, that's still... you have to do it in a certain way that is almost faithful, I almost wanna say to the rules of the brain or something.

[00:23:41] **Michael Crichton:** I agree.

[00:23:41] **Ken Wilber:** You know, or else it just, it jars so badly. And I'm sure that those rules include hidden syntactical rules. And I bet they're even like narrative archetypes or all sorts of things. And if you violate those, you're in trouble, because then it's fingernails on the blackboard, and you can't really convey content if you don't get the, you know, syntax right, so to speak.

[00:24:04] **Michael Crichton:** But there's other things too that are very mysterious to me. For example, repetitiveness is very destructive.

[00:24:11] **Ken Wilber:** How? Say how.

[00:24:13] **Michael Crichton:** Well, I think there's a great tendency for writers to, especially if they're working from notes that they've made, to sort of say the same thing twice. Or either one right after another in the same page.

[00:24:27] **Ken Wilber:** That's a good point.

[00:24:28] **Michael Crichton:** And they say it 20 or 50 pages later.

[00:24:29] **Ken Wilber:** That's good point.

[00:24:30] **Michael Crichton:** And I don't know why it is, but it greatly diminishes the impact, because you're reading along and go, "oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, no, I heard that

already." And the reader for some reason, at least in my experience, heavily penalizes that. And often writers are kidding themselves saying, 'well, you know, I know I said something like this, but this is a little bit different.'" And I think that the people who ruthlessly cut those redundancies out, you know, you got a lot more life in there, in what they're doing.

[00:25:04] **Ken Wilber:** I heard a phrase once from an editor that's very close to this: cut out your darlings.

[00:25:09] **Michael Crichton:** Yes. That was, um, actually I think Collette wasn't it, to Hemingway.

[00:25:15] **Ken Wilber:** Oh, wow. Well, John Brockman told me... Very briefly now, cause I do want to get your hit on this. Well, I'm trapped in a bad Michael Crichton novel, and I don't know how to get out.

[00:25:28] **Michael Crichton:** Well, how'd we get in?

[00:25:29] **Ken Wilber:** I have no idea.

[00:25:32] **Narrator:** Then follows an hour and a half of Michael Crichton helping Ken Wilber fix his bad Michael Crichton novel.

[00:25:38] **Ken Wilber:** So now I'm ba I'm still looking at this thing going, okay, all right, I've got a bad Michael Crichton novel in three parts. And can this all be shaken down and shook out and shrunk and all that kind of stuff in any way that is interesting to anybody at all?

[00:25:56] **Michael Crichton:** Well, whip it over.

[00:25:58] **Ken Wilber:** Ah, this is great buddy. I thank you a ton. And it'd be probably about, you know, like I said, maybe three weeks.

[00:26:04] **Michael Crichton:** Okay.

[00:26:04] **Ken Wilber:** Can I get that to you?

[00:26:05] **Michael Crichton:** Sure.

[00:26:06] **Ken Wilber:** Thanks pal.

[00:26:07] **Michael Crichton:** Nice to talk to you, Ken.

[00:26:08] **Ken Wilber:** It's great talking to you buddy.

[00:26:09] **Michael Crichton:** See you later.

[00:26:10] **Ken Wilber:** Let's do it again.

[00:26:11] **Michael Crichton:** Yeah, sure, absolutely.

[00:26:12] **Ken Wilber:** Great. Bye bye.