

An Ethical Defense of Global-Warming Skepticism

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Too many people have not done their homework on global warming. Most philosophers who have written on the subject have not scrutinized the science, but instead have appealed to the authority of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).¹ Robin Attfield, for example, rather honestly admits, "Not being a climate scientist, I am taking for granted the overall findings of successive IPCC reports on global warming and of [sic] the scientific consensus they embody."² Authority, though, does not settle matters in science, especially when there is significant disagreement among authorities, as there is concerning the issue of global warming. While we will cite authorities in this article, our purpose is not to settle the issue of global warming, but rather to show that the issue is not settled. Contrary to popular belief, the science of global-warming skepticism is not akin to corporate-backed cigarette science. Like many other skeptics, the authors of this article (a philosopher and a scientist, respectively) have no vested interest or corporate backing.

While the science of global warming is technical and specialized, the big-picture arguments can readily be grasped and evaluated by the layperson. If anthropogenic global warming (AGW) is occurring, the earth's climate should show temperature increases that are clearly linked to human CO₂ production and clearly distinguishable from natural causes. The warming trend shown in Figure 1 occurring from 1980 to the present is frequently presented as evidence that industrialization has warmed the planet.³

¹ A notable exception is Jeffrey E. Foss, *Beyond Environmentalism: A Philosophy of Nature* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009).

² Robin Attfield, "Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming, and the Scope of Ethics," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40 (2009), p. 230.

³ Phil Jones, *CRU Information Sheet No. 1: Global Temperature Record*, March 2010, accessed online at: <http://www.cru.uea.ac.uk/cru/info/warming/>.

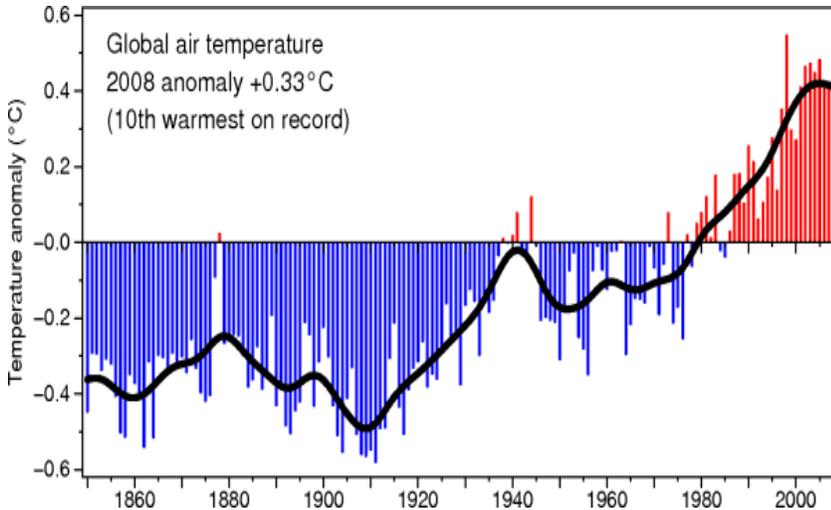


Figure 1

One problem with this claim, however, is that the slope and magnitude (about 0.4 to 0.5° C) of warming from 1980 to the present is virtually identical to the warming that occurred between 1910 and 1940, a period of warming that climatologists do not typically attribute to human activity, partly because it puts them at a loss to explain credibly the decline in temperature after 1940 when CO₂ concentrations were actually increasing.⁴ If natural forces caused the 1910-1940 warming period, a rational and parsimonious explanation would be that natural forces also caused the most recent similar rise. As alluded to above, another related problem for AGW theory is that from 1940 to 1980 temperatures did not increase along with CO₂ concentrations in the way AGW theory would predict.⁵

⁴ Some proponents of AGW theory appeal to aerosols to explain the decline, but since aerosols are largely unknown both as to distribution and properties, they can be adjusted and fudged to “explain” anything. See Stephen E. Schwartz, Robert J. Charlson, Ralph A. Kahn, John A. Ogren, and Henning Rodhe, “Why Hasn’t Earth Warmed as Much as Expected?” *Journal of Climate* 23 (2010), pp. 2453-64.

⁵ Roy W. Spencer, *The Great Global Warming Blunder* (New York: Encounter Books, 2010), pp. 19-20.

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As we broaden our view of the data, our reasons for skepticism increase. Figure 2 affords a broader perspective and hopefully a deeper appreciation of nature's power and ability to have an impact on climate.⁶

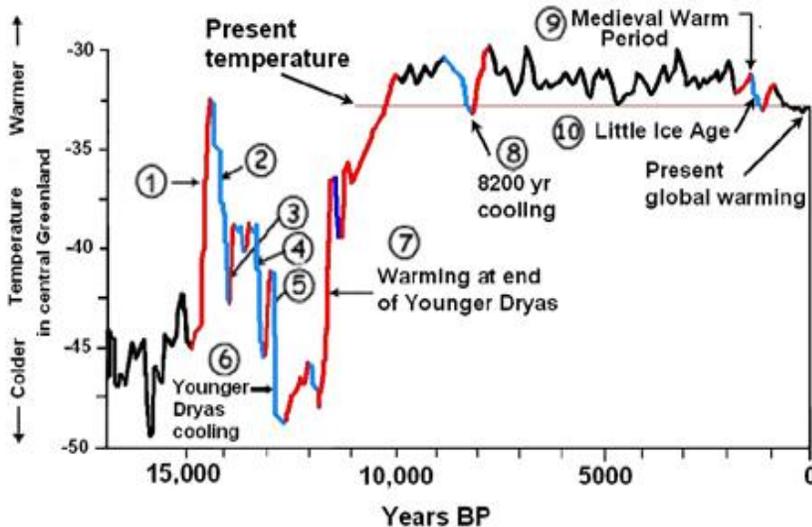


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows the temperature changes in central Greenland over thousands of years and illustrates that Earth's climate must have changed dramatically in the past. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that it will change just as dramatically in the future. Climate change is the norm and not the exception. Furthermore, the present global warming of 0.4 to 0.5° C since 1980, indicated on the top right portion of the chart, is insignificant compared to historical occurrences (+10.0° C). Soon et al., for example, have shown large natural warming and cooling across broad geographical and climatic zones during the Medieval Warm Period (800-1300 A.D.) and the Little Ice

⁶ Don J. Easterbrook, *Paleobotany and Paleoclimatology*, Western Institute for Study of the Environment Colloquium, October 30, 2008, accessed online at: <http://westinstenv.org/palbot/2008/10/30/global-cooling-is-here-evidence-for-predicting-global-cooling-for-the-next-three-decades/>.

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This is not a smokescreen. Climate science is in its infancy, and it deals with chaotic systems. Indeed, scientists' current understanding of climate is so incomplete that it is simply impossible to measure and quantify the massive number of climate-impacting variables so as to filter out each influence and confidently attribute small temperature changes (of 0.5° C) to any one cause such as anthropogenic carbon dioxide production. Furthermore, models are not objective instruments; rather, they depend crucially on human interpretations and choices. Soon et al., for example, have spelled out some of the fundamental issues related to climate models, stressing not only the uncertainties but also the unknowns or gaps in our current knowledge.⁹ Indeed, it strains credulity to think that proponents of AGW theory have accurately projected the influence of all of these complex variables and as such have produced reliable computer modeling. Countless examples of refined or completely erroneous predictions by proponents of AGW theory over the last decade are testimony to the unreliability of those models.¹⁰ In fact, the cause of the often-touted temperature rise between 1980 and the present (shown in Figure 1) has become contentious due to a lack of warming during the most recent ten years that does not fit with what models predicted.

Figure 4 shows that a trend line for the global average temperatures from 1999 to 2008 is roughly horizontal despite a continued rise in atmospheric CO₂ concentrations.¹¹ This flat period was not predicted; it took proponents of AGW theory completely by surprise. Thus it is not good science for proponents of AGW theory to insist that human behavior has caused a few tenths of a degree temperature change when they failed to predict this recent flat period and as yet do not know its cause. Susan Solomon, a co-chair of the 2007 IPCC report, recently offered an unexpected

⁹ Willie Soon, Sallie Baliunas, Sherwood B. Idso, Kirill Y. Kondratyev, and Eric S. Posmentier, "Modeling Climatic Effects of Anthropogenic Carbon Dioxide Emissions: Unknowns and Uncertainties," *Climate Research* 18 (2001), pp. 259–75.

¹⁰ See, e.g., David H. Douglass, John R. Christy, Benjamin D. Pearson, and S. Fred Singer, "A Comparison of Tropical Temperature Trends with Model Predictions," *International Journal of Climatology* 28 (2008), pp. 1693-1701.

¹¹ J. Knight, J. J. Kennedy, C. Folland, G. Harris, G. S. Jones, M. Palmer, D. Parker, A. Scaife, and P. Stott, "Do Global Temperature Trends Over the Last Decade Falsify Climate Predictions?" *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 90 (2009), S56–S57.

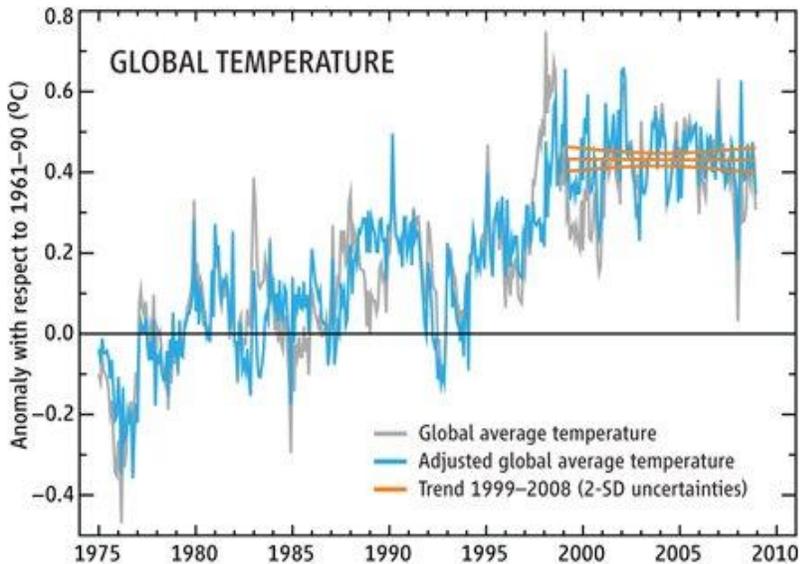


Figure 4

explanation of this flat period in the journal *Science*.¹² Solomon argues that “[t]he decline in stratospheric water vapor after 2000 should be expected to have significantly contributed to the flattening of the global warming trend in the last decade.”¹³ Solomon refers to the flat period as the “10, 10, 10 problem. A 10% drop in water vapor, 10 miles up has had an effect on global warming over the last 10 years.”¹⁴ That Solomon refers to a phenomenon that minimizes or halts global warming as a “problem” is in itself quite telling and reminiscent of the “travesty” discussed by Kevin E. Trenberth: “The fact is that we can’t account for the lack of warming at the moment and it is a

¹² David Adam, “Water Vapour Caused One-Third of Global Warming in 1990s, Study Reveals,” January 26, 2010, accessed online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/jan/29/water-vapour-climate-change/print>; Susan Solomon, Karen H. Rosenlof, Robert W. Portmann, John S. Daniel, Sean M. Davis, Todd J. Sanford, and Gian-Kasper Plattner, “Contributions of Stratospheric Water Vapor to Decadal Changes in the Rate of Global Warming,” *Science* 327 (2010), p. 1219.

¹³ Solomon et al., “Contributions of Stratospheric Water Vapor to Decadal Changes in the Rate of Global Warming,” p. 1219.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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travesty that we can't. The CERES data published in the August BAMS 09 supplement on 2008 shows there should be even more warming: but the data are surely wrong. Our observing system is inadequate.”¹⁵ Trenberth is head of the Climate Analysis Section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, and he was a lead author of the 2001 and 2007 IPCC Scientific Assessment of Climate Change. The real travesty is that Trenberth has sought to defend AGW theory despite the fact that he clearly recognizes that AGW theory has been so off the mark in its prediction.

The unexpected thing about Solomon's explanation of the flat period is the role she attributes to water vapor. Carbon dioxide is a minor greenhouse gas and as such anthropogenic increases in atmospheric CO₂ should have a minimal impact on temperature. However, according to AGW theory, CO₂ is involved in a positive feedback loop with tropospheric water vapor. A positive feedback loop is something that amplifies the initial change (whereas a negative feedback diminishes the initial change). AGW theory requires CO₂ increases to cause a minor elevation in surface temperatures, resulting in a positive feedback loop by increasing tropospheric water vapor. This subsequent increase in water vapor, the main greenhouse gas, is hypothesized to cause the catastrophic global warming by absorbing additional heat. It is the theoretical increase in water vapor that is supposedly so damaging to the climate. But uncertainties surrounding water vapor, rainfall, and clouds¹⁶ have led to wildly different and largely inaccurate computer model projections.

In her article Solomon says that “it was not clear if the water vapor decrease after 2000 reflects a natural shift, or if it was a consequence of a warming world. If the latter is true, then more warming could see greater decreases in water vapor, acting as a negative feedback to apply the brake on future temperature rise.”¹⁷ Here Solomon is invoking the possibility of stratospheric water vapor acting as a negative feedback loop and countering the positive feedback loop from increasing tropospheric water vapor.

Since water vapor is the predominant greenhouse gas, Solomon's findings show quite clearly that representing water vapor remains an unsolved

¹⁵ Climategate Document Database—1255496484.txt, *Climategate*, accessed online at: <http://www.climategate.org/email.php?eid=1051&s=kwour%20observing%20system%20is%20inadequate>.

¹⁶ For discussion of the role clouds may play, see Spencer, *The Great Global Warming Blunder*, pp. 71-103.

¹⁷ Adam, “Water Vapour Caused One-Third of Global Warming in 1990s, Study Reveals”; Solomon et al., “Contributions of Stratospheric Water Vapor to Decadal Changes in the Rate of Global Warming,” p. 1219.

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problem. Until the relationships between water vapor and the physical processes involving rainfalls and clouds are better understood, it will be impossible to confirm the greenhouse effects of CO₂ with a reasonable degree of confidence.

Solomon, however, says “the new finding does not challenge the conclusion that human activity drives climate change,” leaving us to wonder what would challenge the conclusion in her mind.¹⁸ Solomon also suggests that changes in sea surface temperatures may have caused the unforeseen fluctuation in water vapor and the resultant flat period. While that is possible, it is more likely that human greenhouse gas contribution has a minor impact on climate compared to other factors, such as Earth’s ocean cycles, which have caused climate change in the past without human help.

Correlations between global temperatures and ocean temperatures are to be expected since Earth’s surface is predominantly water and much of its heat is contained in the oceans. Don J. Easterbrook, Professor Emeritus of Geology at Western Washington University, says the following about the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO):

The IPCC prediction of global temperatures, 1° F warmer by 2011 and 2° F by 2038, stand [sic] little chance of being correct. NASA’s imagery showing that the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) has shifted to its cool phase is right on schedule as predicted by past climate and PDO changes. The PDO typically lasts 25-30 years and assures North America of cool, wetter climates during its cool phases and warmer, drier climates during its warm phases. The establishment of the cool PDO, together with similar cooling of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), virtually assures several decades of global cooling and the end of the past 30-year warm phase. It also means that the IPCC predictions of catastrophic global warming this century were highly inaccurate.¹⁹

¹⁸ Solomon et al., “Contributions of Stratospheric Water Vapor to Decadal Changes in the Rate of Global Warming,” p. 1219.

¹⁹ Don J. Easterbrook, *Global Research*, CA Centre for Research on Globalization, November 2, 2008, accessed online at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10783>.

Figure 5 shows the most recent oscillations of the PDO from warming to cooling along with a possible outcome to 2038 put forth by Easterbrook.²⁰

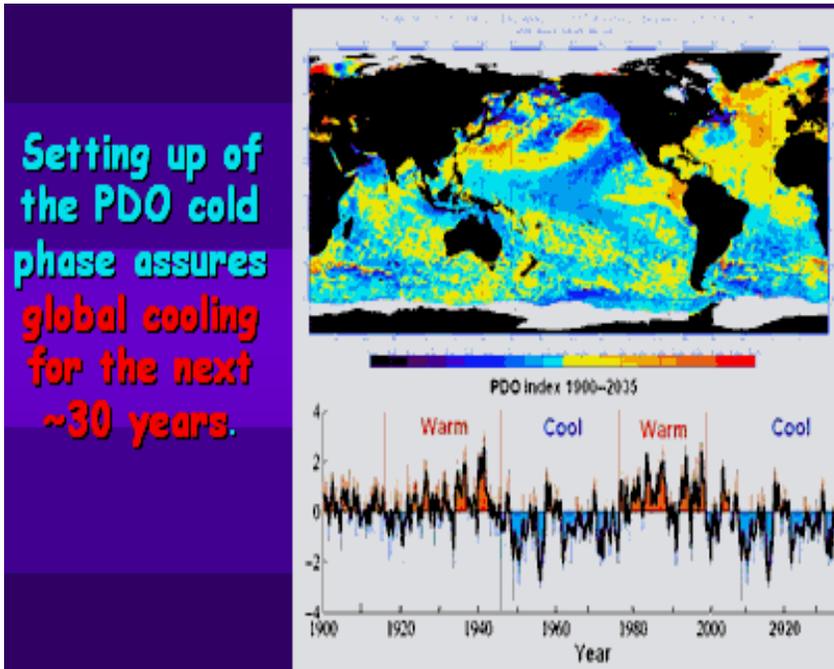


Figure 5

According to Easterbrook, these ocean cycles alternate from warming to cooling approximately every 25-30 years and date back long before major anthropogenic CO₂ production. As Figure 5 shows, we are possibly at the beginning of a cooling cycle that could last for several decades.²¹ But it is unlikely that several decades of cooling will end claims of catastrophic warming. When presented with the possibility of an extended cooling period, many proponents of AGW theory assert that the cooling

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In fact, the PDO correlates well with the ups and downs of temperatures in the twentieth century. For a discussion of how the PDO and clouds may explain changes in climate, see Spencer, *The Great Global Warming Blunder*, pp. 109-23.

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would be much worse if it were not for the underlying warming.²² We take issue with this response.

Everyone acknowledges that CO₂ is a greenhouse gas. Skeptics, however, believe that human contributions will likely not result in catastrophic warming, since combinations of other forces play a larger role in heating and cooling the planet. When proponents of AGW theory assert that the warming may be occurring beneath the cooling, this amounts to admitting the skeptic's position that there are other, more powerful factors that affect temperature and control the climate. It is inconsistent to say that anthropogenic infusions of CO₂ will control the climate and cause catastrophic warming one minute and the next minute to say that the influence of this same CO₂ is masked beneath larger factors.

Many leading proponents of AGW theory have predicted catastrophic warming, not imperceptible or inconsequential changes masked beneath larger trends. Among the more notable examples of catastrophe that come to mind are: intense hurricanes causing mass destruction, melting ice killing off polar bears, and rapidly rising oceans drowning cities. Figure 6 shows the frequency and intensity of land-falling hurricanes on the U.S. from 1851 to 2005.²³ There has in fact been no appreciable increase in either the frequency or intensity during this time period. Not shown on the chart are years 2006 to 2009 during which hurricane frequencies actually dropped. Globally, levels are now the lowest they have been in about thirty years.

²² Among others, Kyle Swanson says this in Michael Reilly's article, "Global Warming: On Hold?" *Discovery News*, March 2, 2009, accessed online at: <http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2009/03/02/global-warming-pause.html>.

²³ Anthony Watts, *Watts Up With That?* February 21, 2008, accessed online at: <http://wattsupwiththat.com/2008/02/21/noaa-hurricane-frequency-and-global-warming-not-the-cause-of-increased-destruction/>.

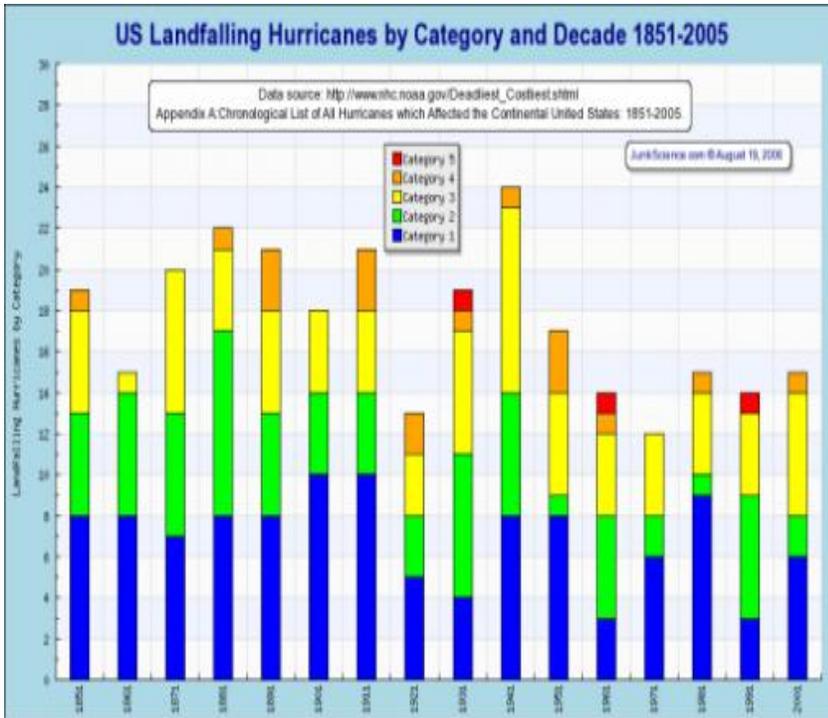


Figure 6

Sensational news has been made about melting sea ice in the Arctic (supposedly threatening polar bears²⁴), while much less attention has been given to increasing sea ice in the Antarctic. Figure 7 shows the global sea ice area with seasonal variations from 1979 to 2008.²⁵ Contrary to what we have

²⁴ See counter-explanations in M. G. Dyck, W. Soon, R. K. Baydack, D. R. Legates, S. Baliunas, T. F. Ball, and L. O. Hancock, "Polar Bears of Western Hudson Bay and Climate Change: Are Warming Spring Air Temperatures the 'Ultimate' Survival Control Factor?" *Ecological Complexity* 4 (2007), pp. 73-84; and J. Scott Armstrong, Kesten C. Green, and Willie Soon, "Polar Bear Population Forecasts: A Public-Policy Forecasting Audit," *Interfaces* 38 (2008), pp. 382-405.

²⁵ Christopher Monckton, *SPPI Science and Public Policy Institute*, November 24, 2009, accessed online at: http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/monthly_report/sppi_monthly_co2_report_october.html.

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been led to believe by proponents of AGW theory, Earth is not losing catastrophic quantities of ice. Note also that precise scientific records of sea ice date back to only 1979. But we know anecdotally from ships' logs and newspaper reports that much sea ice was lost in the late 1930s and early 1940s. To put this in perspective, consider that the Northwest Passage was navigated without an icebreaker between 1940 and 1942. The passage's opening in 2007 was not an unprecedented event, as some reported.²⁶

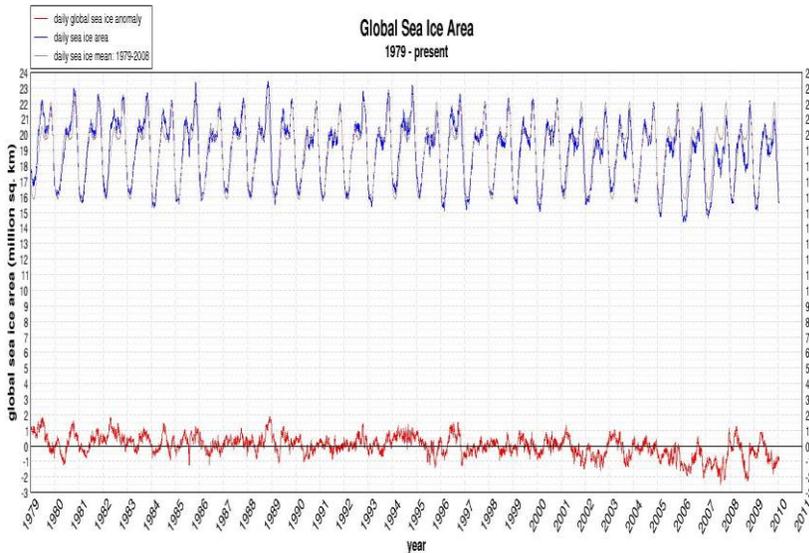


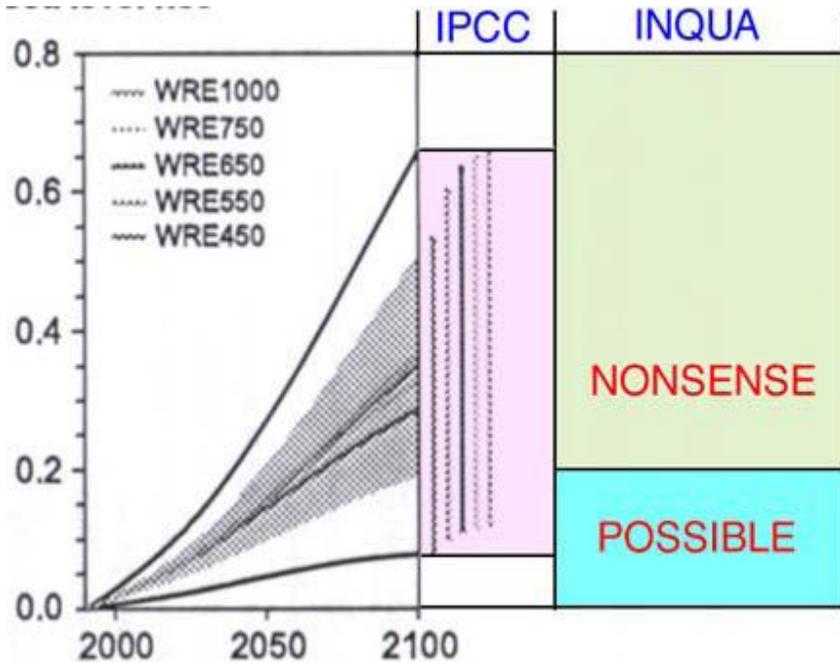
Figure 7

Another frequently publicized consequence of global warming is rising sea levels, creating fears that sea water will inundate the world's coastal populations.²⁷ Extensive sea-level studies have been performed in the

²⁶ Spencer, *The Great Global Warming Blunder*, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ See N. L. Bindoff, J. Willebrand, V. Artale, A. Cazenave, J. Gregory, S. Gulev, K. Hanawa, C. Le Quéré, S. Levitus, Y. Nojiri, C. K. Shum, L. D. Talley, and A. Unnikrishnan, "Observations: Oceanic Climate Change and Sea Level," in *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis, Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. S. Solomon et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 387-432.

Maldives because of concerns that global warming will cause sea levels to rise and submerge the islands. Nils-Axel Mörner, the former head of the Paleogeophysics and Geodynamics department at Stockholm University and former president of INQUA (International Union for Quaternary Research), has been studying sea levels for thirty-five years and sees no cause for alarm.



Projected Sea-Level Rise in the Maldives in Meters

Figure 8

Figure 8 shows sea-level projections for the Maldives by the IPCC and INQUA.²⁸ In Figure 8 the left vertical axis represents projected sea-level rises in meters while the bottom horizontal axis is divided into three columns. The left column contains IPCC projection curves for sea-level increases at various CO₂ concentrations (WRE 1000 = CO₂ at 1,000 ppm, etc.) until year

²⁸ Gregory Murphy, "Interview: Dr. Nils-Axel Mörner Claims That Sea Level Is Rising Is a Total Fraud," *Executive Intelligence Review* 34, no. 5 (June 22, 2007), pp. 34-37.

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2100. The second or central column simply shows a bracketing of the range of the IPCC projections, while the right column shows INQUA's response to the IPCC.

Responding to the sea-level predictions by the IPCC, Mörner says:

That is terrible! As a matter of fact, it is a falsification of the data set. Why? Because they know the answer. And there you come to the point: They "know" the answer; the rest of us, we are searching for the answer. Because we are field geologists; they are computer scientists. So all this talk that sea level is rising, this stems from the computer modeling, not from observations. The observations don't find it! I have been the expert reviewer for the IPCC, both in 2000 and last year. The first time I read it, I was exceptionally surprised. First of all, it had 22 authors, but none of them—none—were sea-level specialists. They were given this mission, because they promised to answer the right thing. Again, it was a computer issue. This is the typical thing: The meteorological community works with computers, simple computers. Geologists don't do that! We go out in the field and observe, and then we can try to make a model with computerization; but it's not the first thing.²⁹

Mörner's comments about modeling are significant because they draw our attention to the main problem with the AGW argument. Proponents of AGW theory know that the small increases in CO₂ produced by human activity will not cause catastrophic warming, and, as mentioned, their theory relies on a massive positive feedback loop with water vapor. The expectation of a positive feedback loop was not unreasonable at first, since warm air can hold more water vapor than cold air can. However, solid evidence did not exist for a massive feedback loop, and negative (cancelling) feedback mechanisms such as changes in cloud cover were not properly included. This resulted in unrealistic modeling outcomes.

Studies have since suggested that water vapor is not closely linked to CO₂ levels.³⁰ Simply stated, the assumption that CO₂ would cause a massive positive feedback loop with water vapor, the backbone of global-warming theory, is in contradiction with the evidence. This explains the large systematic overestimation of warming by virtually all of the computer models used by proponents of AGW theory.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Warren Meyer, *Climate Skeptic*, November 10, 2009, accessed online at: <http://www.climate-skeptic.com/phoenix>.

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We have presented just a few examples in which proponents of AGW theory have made inaccurate predictions. Many more exist. The credibility of a scientific theory depends on its predictive power. Thus AGW theory's record of prediction and the clear reasons for the record show that global-warming skepticism is justified.

So far we have considered the epistemological dimension of AGW theory. But this leads us to consider the ethical position of AGW theory proponents, some of whom fail to demonstrate the virtues of honesty and intellectual integrity. All rational inquiry, including the scientific method, is based on a moral and intellectual duty and obligation to investigate matters with an open mind and to form beliefs based on evidence. Unfortunately, there has been a culture of coercion and group-think among proponents of AGW theory, including some philosophers. James Garvey, for example, in *The Ethics of Climate Change* declares, "There is no room at all for uncertainty about the existence of the problem of climate change."³¹ Similarly, sociologist Eileen Crist says, "There is no longer even a semblance of a debate about the reality of global warming, its causes, and the climate change it has effected and portends."³² Rather than inviting debate and encouraging dissent, such declarations close off legitimate debate. Likewise, the mantra that the debate is over is meant to silence and disparage opposing voices. In addition, the scare tactics involved in the injunction to "act now" ignore the fact that questioning, skepticism, and open debate are necessary for scientific progress. As John Stuart Mill argues, silencing a minority opinion harms the majority even more than the minority, for the majority may be deprived of the truth if they are wrong. And if the majority is right, then they are deprived of the chance fully to know and understand their views through spirited debate.³³ In line with Mill's rationale, public scrutiny of theories has traditionally been welcomed by scientists interested in learning the strengths, weaknesses, and validity of their theories. This has not always been the case among proponents of AGW theory, however.

In November 2009 unidentified persons hacked the server at the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit (CRU) and presented to the world voluminous personal correspondence among many of the world's leading proponents of AGW theory. The hacked emails make clear that the

³¹ James Garvey, *The Ethics of Climate Change: Right and Wrong in a Warming World* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 93.

³² Eileen Crist, "Beyond the Climate Crisis: A Critique of Climate Change Discourse," *Telos* 141 (2007), p. 29.

³³ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 76-79.

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CRU has denied legitimate requests for the data on which its calculations have been made. In addition, some scientists at the CRU have conspired to subvert peer review and to ostracize journals, editors, and scientists who disagree with them.³⁴ This is no way for science to proceed in a free society, or in any society for that matter.

The motivation of some proponents of AGW theory seems to be akin to the “noble lie” of Plato’s *Republic*, which sought to set up the class divisions of the ideal society through the myth of the metals.³⁵ The rationale of the AGW noble lie seems to be that no harm and much good will come from perpetuating belief in AGW theory. It would seem that some politicians and scientists do not actually care whether global warming is scientific fact or not. They want it believed true because it serves their noble political purpose of pushing for environmental reform and the redistribution of wealth. Consider these representative quotations:

Al Gore: “Nobody is interested in solutions if they don’t think there’s a problem. Given that starting point, I believe it is appropriate to have an over-representation of factual presentations on how dangerous (global warming) is, as a predicate for opening up the audience to listen to what the solutions are”³⁶

Tim Wirth, while U.S. Senator of Colorado: “Even if the theory of global warming is wrong, we will be doing the right thing—in terms of economic policy and environmental policy.”³⁷

³⁴ The Climategate investigations that cleared the CRU were a whitewash, as even many proponents of AGW theory agree. See, for example, Clive Crook, “Climategate and the Big Green Lie,” accessed online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/07/climategate-and-the-big-green-lie/59709>.

³⁵ See Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), 414b. Frank Furedi also mentions the noble lie in “Turning Peer Review into Modern Day Holy Scripture,” accessed online at: <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/8227/>.

³⁶ Quoted in David Roberts, “An Interview with Accidental Movie Star Al Gore,” *Grist Magazine*, May 9, 2006, accessed online at: <http://www.grist.org/article/roberts2/>.

³⁷ Quoted in “Climate Götterdämmerung,” *National Review*, February 10, 2010, accessed online at: <http://article.nationalreview.com/424508/climate-gotterdammerung/the-editors>.

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Christine Stewart, while Minister of the Environment of Canada: “No matter if the science is all phony, there are collateral environmental benefits. . . . Climate change [provides] the greatest chance to bring about justice and equality in the world.”³⁸

Stanford University climatologist Stephen Schneider: “We need to get some broad base support, to capture the public’s imagination. That, of course, entails getting loads of media coverage. So we have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts we might have. This ‘double ethical bind’ we frequently find ourselves in cannot be solved by any formula. Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest. I hope that means being both.”³⁹

For such politicians and scientists, this would be a “noble lie” in the sense that the end justifies the means. Even if it turns out that the science does not support the theory, we will be better off by acting on the theory. The general public cannot be trusted to survey the big-picture evidence and decide for themselves because skepticism is a highly appropriate response to such a survey. While some scientists have crossed the line in becoming political activists committed to the noble lie, others may just be unable to give up a theory in which they have become invested, much like a sheriff who continues to go after a suspect even when the exculpatory evidence exonerates the suspect. Yet other scientists are sincere, no doubt.

Proponents of AGW theory have indeed found the media eager to air their “over-representations” and “simplified dramatic statements.” Global warming has been a good story, and one that fits with the politics of most mainstream media outlets. Catastrophe is always more exciting for a reporter than no catastrophe; this is simply human nature. But a true professional would fight against this tendency and not participate in creating sensation for its own sake. Unfortunately, many media outlets have consistently reported even the most ridiculous anecdotal evidence for global warming, such that the average person blames every warm day in February on global warming. Incredibly, CBS, NBC, and ABC neglected to run a single story on the hacked

³⁸ Quoted by Terence Corcoran, “Global Warming: The Real Agenda,” *Financial Post*, December 26, 1998, from the *Calgary Herald*, December 14, 1998.

³⁹ Quoted in Jonathan Schell, “Our Fragile Earth,” *Discover* (October 1989), p. 47.

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CRU emails for fourteen days.⁴⁰ It seems likely they would have ignored the story altogether had it not been for the Copenhagen meeting which they had to report on—and which reporting necessitated some mention of the hacked emails. Of course the hacked emails themselves make for a great story, and the contents of the emails have been taken out of context and misreported by some right-wing media outlets. Indeed, there is no shortage of ignorant and embarrassing advocates on either side of the debate. However, the failure of the mainstream media to run the story suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that they are more concerned with the political noble lie than the sensational story. This is not a conspiracy, of course, just widespread bias and close-mindedness.

While some proponents of AGW theory may engage in willful deceit, charitably we must assume that most non-scientists who support AGW theory simply allow themselves to focus only on reports that confirm their views. But such willfully limited perspective cannot be condoned. Philosopher James Garvey, for example, spends much of the first chapter of *The Ethics of Climate Change* telling the reader that there is complete agreement on the scientific facts of global warming and that the IPCC can be trusted as a final authority: “There is, though, nothing like a debate among scientists when it comes to either the fact of climate change or the human role in it.”⁴¹ Garvey assures his readers that he is not inappropriately appealing to authority, all the while doing so. The U.N. is a political body, and it is no surprise that its IPCC turned out to be a political body as well, contrary to its mission statement. Despite what Garvey and others believe, the IPCC is not the final authority on AGW theory. There is not complete scientific agreement on AGW theory, and in fact there never has been. Leading climate scientists such as Richard Lindzen (of MIT) and Roy W. Spencer (formerly of NASA) have long voiced opposition and have usually met with retribution. As Lindzen says,

[s]cientists who dissent from the alarmism have seen their grant funds disappear, their work derided, and themselves libeled as industry stooges, scientific hacks or worse. Consequently, lies about climate change gain credence even when they fly in the face of the science that supposedly is their basis.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Day Fourteen and Counting,” Media Research Center, December 4, 2009, accessed online at: <http://www.mrc.org/press/releases/2009/20091204124643.aspx>.

⁴¹ Garvey, *The Ethics of Climate Change*, p. 13.

⁴² Richard Lindzen, “Climate of Fear,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2006, accessed online at: <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110008220>.

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While at one time many people refused to believe that this kind of subversion of dissent was taking place, there can be little doubt of it since the CRU emails have become public.

The reasons for skewing the science of global warming appear to be not just political, but economic as well. Many proponents of AGW theory denounce skeptics as “in the pocket of big oil.” And indeed there have been some global-warming skeptics who have had such financial interests—but some proponents of AGW theory have their own economic motivations. The government-researcher “complex” has created a funding cycle that rewards (funds) sensational theories such as global warming and does not reward the less sensational skepticism, thereby creating a self-fulfilling feedback loop and a biased environment.⁴³ While this may not constitute “big science,” careers have nonetheless been staked on the truth of AGW theory, and pride and money will be lost if the theory is disproven.

The truth is sometimes inconvenient, but we have an ethical obligation objectively to assess evidence and proportion belief to evidence. In general it is true that if a conclusion is uncertain and the action it calls for is not certainly urgent, then it would be wrong to force others to act on it urgently. Skepticism is warranted in response to the evidence presented for AGW theory; we have an ethical duty to admit that we do not have sufficient knowledge concerning AGW theory. And consequently we have a duty not to impose extreme and urgent measures and hardships, based on what we do not know, on people who do not consent to them in an informed way. Analyzing the economics of carbon cuts, Bjorn Lomborg, even while accepting AGW theory, argues that cutting carbon emissions is an ineffective way of addressing the environmental situation. As he says, “The big problem with cutting carbon emissions Kyoto-style is that it costs a lot now and does very little, far into the future.”⁴⁴ Thus, with warranted skepticism concerning the reality of AGW theory, individuals and companies should be allowed to decide policy in good conscience for themselves until such time when clear evidence is offered by the scientific community. If in the future massive carbon cuts (beyond those Lomborg criticizes as ineffective) are shown to be necessary by proof of AGW theory, and if not making those cuts has imminent, dire consequences, then we ought to make such cuts. But given the

⁴³ See Jeff Kueter, “Funding Flows for Climate Change Research and Related Activities,” in *The Marshall Institute Policy Outlook*, accessed online at: <http://www.marshall.org/pdf/materials/289.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Bjorn Lomborg, *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 52.

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current state of knowledge, urgently to rush into action in the name of science would be unethically to subvert science.

Some AGW proponents make dire predictions that might lead us to think that we should take aggressive action even if we think there is only a very small chance that AGW theory is a reality and will have dire consequences. We should certainly follow the precautionary principle to the extent that it tells us that it is “better to be safe than sorry.” Along those lines, then, we should continue research into geoengineering and alternative energy sources. Geoengineering has the advantage of solving a warming problem relatively cheaply, by seeding the atmosphere with compounds that would counteract warming.⁴⁵ If warming is shown not to be a problem or if geoengineering can solve the problem, then the massive amount of research and money spent on carbon cuts could be spent on truly pressing problems such as malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, other diseases, and other environmental issues such as “mass extinction of species, the devastation of the oceans by industrial fishing, continued old-growth deforestation, topsoil losses and desertification . . . and so on.”⁴⁶

The only clear reasons to reject geoengineering research are ideological, not scientific. As Crist says,

[e]ven if they work exactly as hoped, geoengineering solutions are far more similar to anthropogenic climate change than they are a counterforce to it: their implementation constitutes an experiment with the biosphere underpinned by technological arrogance, unwillingness to question or limit consumer society, and a sense of entitlement to transmogrifying the planet that boggles the mind.⁴⁷

Crist is not rejecting the science of geoengineering; rather, she is rejecting “the unredeemable socioeconomic reality in which we live.”⁴⁸ Like others

⁴⁵ On the use of sulfur dioxide, see P. J. Crutzen, “Albedo Enhancement by Stratospheric Sulfur Injections: A Contribution to Resolve a Policy Dilemma?” *Climatic Change* 77 (2006), pp. 211–20. For a clearly eco-friendly possibility, see physicist John Latham’s suggestion that we could increase the reflectivity of low-lying clouds by creating more salt droplets from the ocean, in Stuart Blackman’s article “Every Silver Lining has a Cloud,” *Spiked*, November 14, 2006, accessed online at: <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/2097/>.

⁴⁶ Crist, “Beyond the Climate Crisis,” p. 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

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opposed to geoengineering, Crist simply thinks “this strategy calls for countering one form of pollution with another.”⁴⁹ Geoengineering, however, is not necessarily pollution and will not necessarily have any adverse environmental consequences. It is thus time for proponents of AGW theory and global-warming skeptics to find common ground in the prospects for geoengineering.

Global-warming skeptics can find further common ground with proponents of AGW theory in the search for alternative energy sources. The United States and many other countries are terribly dependent on oil from nations which are not our friends, and a world of political trouble has been caused by this dependence. For this reason, and not because of AGW theory, the sooner we develop alternative energy sources the better. Certainly, we can all agree on that much.

In the meantime, perhaps we can also agree on the significant level of uncertainty concerning AGW theory. We have not disproved AGW theory in this article. Instead, we have shown that there are very good reasons to be skeptical of this theory. We are ready and willing to embrace AGW theory if the scientific evidence ultimately points in that direction. In fact, as of this writing, 2010 is shaping up to be a warm year that may depart from the recent flat period. If 2010 begins a new warming trend, that would certainly count against skepticism and cause us to reevaluate the merits of AGW theory. In the interest of preserving the credibility of science in public discourse, we ask only that proponents of AGW theory adopt a similar mindset.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ For helpful feedback we wish to thank Derrick Boucher, Alan Clune, William Drumin, Kyle Johnson, Richard Lindzen, Megan Lloyd, Marc Marchese, Massimo Pigliucci, Scott Sheridan, Barry Smith, Willie Soon, Ronald Supkowski, Stanley W. Trimble, and Birute Williams. None of the individuals named here should be taken as endorsing our argument. Any mistakes in our argument are our own.

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