The Island of Doubt

A lapse of judgment at the CBC: A climate change denier goes unchallenged

Posted by James Hrynyshyn on September 25, 2009
(29)

A few weeks ago the nightly hour-long documentary series on CBC Radio, "Ideas," allowed Canadian climate change pseudoskeptic Larry Solomon an entire hour to make his case against the science of anthropogenic global warming. The producers offered not a single challenge to any of Solomon's arguments, despite the fact that practically every point he made on the science of the subject was either false or grossly misrepresented the science.

Solomon is a "respected" enviromentalist. But he has decided climate change isn't as big a threat as just about the entire climatology community fears it to be. He doesn't believe there is a solid consensus that the humans are responsible for most of the observed changed. He doesn't buy lines like this one from the current edition of *Nature*: "Anthropogenic climate change is now beyond dispute."

All of which is indeed is worthy of attention from journalists. Someone who has a high profile in the Canadian environmental community is dissenting from the consensus. But that wasn't the focus for the Ideas producers, who chose instead to let Solomon make a long list of statements that could easily have been checked against publicly available scientific documents.

A friend of mine, Stephen Ban, who is studying the effects of climate change on coral reefs for his PhD at James Cook University in Australia, found the time to go through the program and supply scientific rebuttals to each of Solomon's points that there is "an enormous amount of contrary evidence."

Here are some examples of what he found and communicated to the CBC:

> **Solomon:** "Antarctica is the main source of potential water. There actually isn't that much ice that could melt in the Arctic."
>
> **Reality:** Ridiculous. Melting of the Greenland ice sheet alone would produce 7.2 meters of sea level rise. (http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/corporate/pressoffice/adcc/BookCh4Jan2006.pdf)
>
> **Solomon**: "There's only one way to measure whether the ice in Antarctica is increasing or decreasing, and that's through satellite measurements"
>
> **Reality:** This is false. The International Trans Antarctic Scientific Expedition (ITASE) collects ice cores from across Antarctica. A paper published in the journal *Science* on August 11, 2006 detailed changes in snowfall over the past 50 years. An article in *Geophysical Research Letters* (August 30, 2006) describes a statistical reconstruction of 200 years of Antarctic temperature change from these cores.
>
> **Solomon:** "What he [Wegman] found was that Mann did not have the academic background in statistics to do the type of modeling he was required to do. He found that Mann's colleagues didn't have that background . . . the model that they produced had no statistical validity"
>
> **Reality:** [the subject is the famous "hockey stick"]: The results of Mann *et al* have been upheld by other studies (see Rutherford et al, 2004. Proxy-based Northern Hemisphere Surface Temperature Reconstructions: Sensitivity to Method, Predictor Network, Target Season, and Target Domain. *Journal of Climate*, 18(13)2309-2329). Further support of the results can be found in: Jones, P.D., Mann, M.E., Climate Over Past Millennia, *Reviews of Geophysic*s, 42, RG2002, doi: 10.1029/2003RG000143, 2004; Mann, M.E., Ammann, C.M., Bradley, R.S., Briffa, K.R., Crowley, T.J., Hughes, M.K., Jones, P.D., Oppenheimer, M., Osborn, T.J., Overpeck, J.T., Rutherford, S., Trenberth, K.E., Wigley, T.M.L., On Past Temperatures and Anomalous Late 20th Century Warmth ,*Eos*, 84, 256-258, 2003; Jones, P.D., T.J. Osborn, and K.R. Briffa, The evolution of climate over the last millennium, *Science*, 292, 662-667, 2001.

The "hockey stick"? It's been verified a dozen different ways by independent researchers and the National Academy of Sciences. For Solomon to be claiming it's evidence against anthropogenic global warming suggests he simply isn't paying attention to the science.

And that's just a few of the errors from the first 16 minutes. I came across another whopper towards the end, when Solomon claims that CO2 used to be consider a "gas of life" and was only recently demoted to a danger. This despite the fact that the idea that CO2 is a greenhouse gas was nailed down 150 years ago.

It goes on and on. Solomon's views are documented his new book, *The Denier*s, which draws on the usual list of non-experts and scientists who have lost the respect of their peers because they have misconstrued and misunderstood the science of climatology, including David Bellamy, Freeman Dyson, Zbigniew Jaworowski, Richard Lindzen, and so on.

I tried to ask the program's interviewer, David Cayley, and the show's executive producer, Bernie Lucht, both of whom are respected journalists with a long history of producing quality reports, to explain their decision to run the program. Ideas, for one, recently ran a long series on the subject at hand that treats the science of anthropogenic global warming as settled.

Cayley refused to discuss the program with me, Lucht replied in an email to Ban and me that:

> The central argument revolved around whether or not "the science is settled" …. We also took it as interesting, and worthy of public note, that a respected environmentalist would challenge the current consensus on climate change. So David Cayley arranged to interview him. Our presumption in doing so was not that Mr. Solomon is necessarily right, but that his view deserves to be heard.

No argument there. His views do deserve to be heard. As do those who deny that vaccines save lives, that biological evolution explains the diversity of life, or that the Earth is a sphere. That dissenting opinion exists is a valid story. But journalists have an obligation to challenge such statements, not just let them propagate into the public sphere with no context or criticism. For them to give Solomon's arguments an unchallenged platform is simply contrary to the professional principles I and most of the journalists I know, live and work with.

Lucht wrote that

> It needs to be said here that Mr. Solomon is not a scientist and does not claim to be. He is an environmental activist who has undertaken to expose the views of reputable scientists, who in some way dissent from the current orthodoxy.

Even though the "reputable" scientists Solomon cites simply aren't.

I asked Lucht if he would give similar treatment to anti-vaccine activists or Holocaust deniers. I have yet to receive a reply.

Ideas has a history of airing iconoclastic reports on scientific issues, such as a 1992 program on Peter Duesberg and his theory that HIV does not cause AIDS. That made for a fascinating,and responsible, program ;;;; in 1992. It wouldn't be so today. The same applies to Larry Solomon's arguments. We're talking about important public policy issues. Arguably climate change is the most important public policy challenge of our time.

That's not to say there won't be some new discoveries in the future that challenge the current consensus. But Solomon hasn't found any real evidence to challenge the consensus. By not challenging his arguments, the CBC effectively said to its audience: this guy may have a point even though any honest effort to evaluate his arguments would conclude that he doesn't.

I'll give the last word to Stephen Ban, whose debunking of the Ideas program should be required reading at the entire CBC, not just the ombudsman's office to which it was addressed:

> Could CBC not have employed a single fact checker to investigate any of Mr. Solomon's claims? Is it responsible journalism to grant a soapbox to Mr. Solomon without examining whether any of his claims and allegations have any merit? Mr. Cayley needs to be held accountable for disseminating what amounts to guileless unscientific propaganda.

Keywords: climate change
(29)

Comments

1. #1 Paul Frawley
   September 26, 2009

   Thank you for bringing to my attention this CBC Radio Series, I had long given up hope that there might be any decent reporters out there, but it seems that Canada might still have a few left.

   While I am sure that was not the intent of your article, it did catch my attention, and has created this response within me, that I will now share with you.

   While I do not claim to be a scientist, I do to some extent understand its principles, which help guide us to understand the world around us. So I find it some one ridicules that a consensus, (which doesn't actually exist) means anything when it comes to a scientific theory, it is still a theory and not a proven fact. A consensus is more of a political tool to end debate, not so in science, especially when consensuses in the past have been proven to be wrong. It was Albert Einstein who said, "No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong". So too with the theory of anthropogenic global warming, which is now been repackaged as global climate change.

   With that out of the way, let me address further some of the points you brought up in this article. Antarctica holds 90% of the worlds frozen water, which is 70% of the worlds fresh water, so when Mr. Solomon states that the Antarctica is the main source of potential water, he isn't misstating anything. Nor is he lying when he says that not much of the ice is melting, cause it isn't only a small part of Antarctica is melting. That leaves 10% for the rest of the world, and that is a whole different can of worms, when it comes to this minority share of the

worlds frozen water and what is happening to it.

Satellites, are the only accurate means from which to measure changes in Antarctica. The kind of data that satellites are providing, is the most accurate way to measure the temperature and other changes in Antarctica. Data that is gained from measuring makers in ice core samples, is only token data when compared to actual data of temperature measurements of the Antarctica from space.

The hokey stick graph has been proven wrong so many times even the IPCC has noticed and they don't even deal in reality. I can't believe that you are actually defending such a monstrosity. I'm honestly too tired to go into this so, I will just leave it to what I said.

"unscientific propaganda"

The last words of your article, is a good way to describe the church of AL-Gore's global warming. It takes a very large leap of faith to continue to give credit to the IPCC computer models, when they fly in the face of reality. But it is pretty easy to see that crisis centered science is a money maker when it comes to playing the political game. This unholy trinity of money, politics, and science should cause most rational people to pause, when judging the validity of their off spring, but people get distracted by crisis and often let fear get the better of them.

Mr. Hrynyshyn, it is important for me to add here there are always "Costs" associated with what ever we do in life. There is no such thing as a free lunch, and the costs associated with acting upon a reactionary policy to this crisis driven political scientific propaganda are both great and wide spread, not only for the developed world but also for the worlds poor. So it is behooved upon us to judge the validity of the such a message, the sincerity of its messengers, and its ramifications for us and the rest of the world.

I am neither perfect nor wise, but I often doubt the sincerity of individuals or groups when they claim to act in my own self interest, especially when they want my money and my unquestioning support, of their "obvious" scientific consensus.

2. #2 Francis Manns
September 26, 2009

…the rest of the story. Climate is changing and always will. The climate celebrities, however, are linking climate and the economy. Yes, there has been warming to end the Pleistocene. Climate is a complex system. The facts and the hypotheses, however, do not support CO2 as a serious 'pollutant'. In fact, it is plant fertilizer and seriously important to all life on the planet. It is the red herring used to unwind our economy. That issue makes the science relevant.

Sulphate from volcanoes can have a catastrophic effect, but water vapour is far more important. Water vapour (0.4% overall by volume in air, but 1 – 4 % near the surface) is the most effective green house blanket followed by methane (0.0001745%). The third ranking gas is CO2 (0.0383%), and it does not correlate well with global warming or cooling either; in fact, CO2 in the atmosphere trails warming which is clear natural evidence for its well-studied inverse solubility in water: CO2 dissolves rapidly in cold water and bubbles rapidly out of warm water. The equilibrium in seawater is very high; making seawater a great 'sink'; CO2 is 34 times more soluble in water than air is soluble in water.

CO2 has been rising and Earth and her oceans have been warming. However, the correlation trails. Correlation, moreover, is not causation. The causation is under scientific review, however, and while the radiation from the sun varies only in the fourth decimal place, the magnetism is awesome.

"Using a box of air in a Copenhagen lab, physicists traced the growth of clusters of molecules of the kind that build cloud condensation nuclei. These are specks of sulphuric acid on which cloud droplets form. High-energy particles driven through the laboratory ceiling by exploded stars far away in the Galaxy – the cosmic rays – liberate electrons in the air, which help the molecular clusters to form much faster than climate scientists have modeled in the atmosphere. That may explain the link between cosmic rays, cloudiness and climate change."

As I understand it, the hypothesis of the Danish National Space Center goes as follows:

Quiet sun allows the geomagnetic shield to drop. Incoming galactic cosmic ray flux creates more low-level clouds, more snow, and more albedo effect as more is heat reflected resulting in a colder climate.

Active sun has an enhanced magnetic field which induces Earth's geomagnetic shield response. Earth has fewer low-level clouds, less rain, snow and ice, and less albedo (less heat reflected) producing a warmer climate.

That is how the bulk of climate change works, coupled with (modulated by) sunspot peak frequency there are cycles of global warming and cooling like waves in the ocean. When the waves are closely spaced, all the planets warm; when the waves are spaced farther apart, all the planets cool.
The change in cloud cover is only a small percentage, and the ultimate cause of the solar magnetic cycle may be cyclicity in the Sun-Jupiter centre of gravity. We await more on that.

Although the post 60s warming period appears to be over, it has allowed the principal green house gas, water vapour, to kick in with more humidity, clouds, rain and snow depending on where you live to provide the negative feedback that scientists use to explain the existence of complex life on Earth for 550 million years. The planet has a thermostat.

Ancient sedimentary rocks and paleontological evidence indicate the planet has had abundant liquid water over the entire span. The planet heats and cools naturally and our gasses are the thermostat. Nothing unusual going on except for the Orwellian politics.

Check the web site of the Danish National Space Center.

3. #3 Francis Manns
September 26, 2009

James – I read your article for argumentum ad hominem. Do you purport to be a science writer? I get you as a propagandist for the anti-scientists.

4. #4 David
September 26, 2009

Journalists and TV programme directors usually do not have the time nor the knowledge to judge the veracity or reliability of the protagonists and the subject matter. Also, it is often in their career interest to stir controversy. Therefore,, instrumentally, the main fault is with the serious scientists. They should stop whining. It is no good just arguing that the 'vast majority' of serious scientists/researchers agree x, y, or z. Nor just saying the facts/research may easily be checked. For the lay journalists and programme makers the facts are not so easily checked: they often wouldn't know where to start looking. It needs a very short, easily digestible, bullet-point summary and conclusions for the intelligent layperson – with references to the detailed evidence at the back, for those with the patience and intelligence to follow the detailed evidence. Where has this 'Climate Change for Dummies' been published? (or 'Vaccination for Dummies', would be another good one) If it is published, why is it not promoted and re-promoted at every opportunity, with regular updates? It would include a short chapter on popular myths, with the debunking evidence. We should become sick of the public references to this layperson's summary, but everyone would fully get the message…apart from the real charlatans and lunatics.

5. #5 Jock Shockley
September 26, 2009

James, has it ever occurred to you that you are wrong? You really do need to go back and check your science. In short, there isn't any actual scientific support left for AGW. The Hockey Stick has been laughed out of court. The models are all based on the same IPCC data and say the same unobserved things. Antarctica and Greenland are growing ice on one side and losing on the other (with a net gain).
If you are still a believer then maybe you should write David's "Climate Change for Dummies" – the fact that nobody has done so is eloquent proof that the AGW theory is dead in the water.

There are only two types of believers left – those who are making money through research funding or trading carbon credits (how GFC is that!) and those who believe because they know no different – they generally only pretend to be up with the science but actually know little of it – they were taught but never kept up as things changed.

6. #6 Francis Manns
September 26, 2009

Bumper stickers for a large bumper.
The danger to the planet is an optical illusion. CO2 is de minimis. Prosperity, however, is being seriously threatened by NGO lobby groups with tunnel vision. It is not heavy industry at fault. It is cynical politicians fishing for constituencies using politically correct red herring for bait.
——
Eric Hoffer, 1951 – "The True Believer – Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements"
P.11
"When hopes and dreams are loose in the streets, it is well for the timid to lock doors , shutter windows and lie low until the wrath has passed. For there is often a monstrous incongruity between the hopes, however noble and tender, and the actions that follows them. It is as if ivied maidens and garlanded youths were to herald the four horsemen of the apocalypse.
And p.12
"People who see their lives as irremediably spoiled cannot find a worth-while purpose in self-advancement…Their innermost craving is for a new life – a rebirth – or failing this, a chance to acquire new elements of pride, confidence, hope, a sense of purpose and worth by an identification with a holy cause. An active mass movement offers them opportunities for both…" [Is this Mr. Gore?]
and P. 13
" It is true that in the early adherents of a mass movement there are also adventurers who join in the hope that that the movement will give a spin to their wheel of fortune and whirl them to fame and power."
And

Eric Hoffer, 1979 – "Before the Sabbath"
p. 7
" I am curious about Pechorin, a Russian intellectual of the mid-nineteenth century who wrote a poem on "How sweet it is to hate one's native land and eagerly await its annihilation."

7. #7 Pierce R. Butler
September 27, 2009

Maybe this blog should be renamed "Island of Denialist-Magnetism".

The majority of the above commenters need to politely ask their mommies to reprogram the parental controls on their browsers, so they can spend their time at the kind of websites actually intended for wanking.

8. #8 Dan G.
September 28, 2009

Pierce you have it right. This place is a "Safe house for AGW denialists. They can come her and recite their long debunked arguments without being abused. The actual blog name says it best. An Island of Doubt (in the Sea of virtual Certainty). The comments above would be laughed off of most science based sites and these posters know it.

9. #9 vg
September 28, 2009

Now its proven to be FRAUD
http://wattsupwiththat.com/2009/09/27/quote-of-the-week-20-ding-dong-the-stick-is-dead/#more-11229

10. #10 James Hrynyshyn
September 28, 2009

@ Francis Mann: I'm having trouble figuring out whether you're serious or not. Dial down the rhetoric a bit your posts might become transparent enough to tell whether you're merely a bad satirist or just plain illiterate.

11. #11 JeffM
September 28, 2009

Mr. Hrynyshyn faulted Soloman for not believing the (quoted) statement from NATURE "Anthropogenic climate change is now beyond dispute."

Lawrence Soloman is correct. He knows there are many scientists of impeccable standing who actually DO dispute ACC. Please tell me this was an error on your part, Mr. Hrynyshyn. Surely you are not that ignorant on this subject.

12. #12 James Hrynyshyn
September 28, 2009

@Jeff M: You have some names you'd like to share? Solomon has lots, but his list of dissidents doesn't include any who are taken seriously in the climatology community.

13. #13 Brian D
September 28, 2009

James: I take it you've never tangoed with ~~Francis Manns~~Dr. No! before? He ain't no satirist.

14. #14 Michel
September 29, 2009

James, Ideas is not a news program. It's a show wherein people present their views of some intellectual issue. Every episode of Ideas gives someone an entire hour to make their case for something.

If you were to check the archives for example, you will note that Ideas gave Gwynne Dyer not one but three hours to make the case for climate change. This is hardly a lapse of judgment unless you think that opposing arguments should be suppressed.

PS: Ironically, it looks like today is not a very good day for the poor hockey stick.

15. #15 Luna_the_cat
September 29, 2009

I'm just curious, why are so many of the scientifically ignorant (Paul Frawley, Francis Manns, et al.) attracted to parade on *this* particular scienceblog about climate?

16. #16 James Hrynyshyn
September 29, 2009

@ Michel: Not billing itself as "news" is no excuse for propagating nonsense.

The fact remains that the producers of Ideas are responsible for ensuring the "ideas" they explore are worth exploring. You don't see them giving hours of time to Holocaust deniers, do you?

As for Dyer: he has demonstrated a respect for the science of climate change. If he made a long list of statements contrary to the facts I'd be annoyed, too. But he didn't. I don't think "opposing" arguments should be suppressed, but those opposed to reason don't deserve the attention of major news outlets, at least not with challenge.

17. #17 Michel
September 30, 2009

With all due respect James, you can't equate a Holocaust denier with a climate change skeptic.

The whole point of the Ideas series is so that people can present personal views on issues. Views that will often challenge the consensus. In a free society, people are, and should be, allowed to make such arguments: even when they are wrong.

All the best, Michel

18. #18 Luna_the_cat
September 30, 2009

you can't equate a Holocaust denier with a climate change skeptic.

Just curious, but why not? So far, the vast majority of climate change denial arguments which I have seen involve lying about physical phenomena, historical observation and measurable physical evidence (see, for example, the common arguments that: "the planet is cooling now", "[Arctic] sea ice has recovered to 1979 levels", "as many glaciers are growing as are shrinking", "no-one has quantified whether or how much CO2 captures IR", "a trace gas can't possibly influence atmospheric heat very much", "volcanoes produce more CO2 than humans do", "climate models don't take into account water vapour", etc. ad nauseam).

Isn't lying about physical reality just lying about physical reality, regardless of the specific issue?

19. #19 Michel
September 30, 2009

Only if you think all physical realities are of the same moral import.

If I claim I wasn't speeding (a physical reality) does that make me the moral equivalent of someone who denies that the Nazis systematically murdered millions of Jews?

20. #20 timot
September 30, 2009

I do not think climate change deniers are in the same category as holocaust deniers or evolution deniers. The latter two categories are both HISTORICAL facts. Claiming that people who are skeptics of FUTURE

PREDICTIONS are deniers is nonsensical. Look at the history of predictions and modeling and you will see the safe bet is always on the side of the status quo.

21. #21 Luna_the_cat
October 2, 2009

Ok, let's talk moral import here for a moment. Regarding denial of the Holocaust, I personally see two issues: dishonoring the memory of those caught in that conflict and trivialising the deaths and suffering; and by trivialising what we know, making it more possible for such enormous crimes to be committed by other political regimes, at some point. Can we agree on that? But basically, the moral import comes from devaluing the lives (and deaths) of others, and possible future danger to the lives of others. Yes?

Regarding denial of climate change, it's true that the majority of the impact is likely to be felt in the future — but by our best understanding, is already being felt by some of the world's poorest populations, subsistance farmers who are hardest hit by storms and drought. The world's subsistence farmers and marginal populations are likely to be the ones who continue to be hardest hit, as well. If the richer industrialised nations are contributing to this problem and refusing to take responsibility for it (which does seem to be the case) are you saying that there isn't a moral culpability there? It would seem to me that the moral import of this denial is in refusing to accept either that the actions of our group impact lives and deaths elsewhere, or lies in devaluing those lives (as in, gee whiz, who cares if a few more Africans starve, they're starving all the time anyway).

Not exactly on the same level as lying about speeding, no.

Regarding timot's argument that it is all speculative and that odds are the status quo will prevail — I think perhaps you are ignoring all the evidence and observation of what has been happening for the last few decades. Much of central Asia is going to be facing massive water crises soon because of the loss of mountain glaciers, which is simply observation. Loss of Arctic sea ice continues apace, to a degree not seen before — simple observation. Loss of Western Antarctic ice shelves is speeding up, even while Eastern Antarctic precipitation increases, but the overall balance of ice is changing, and not in a good way — simple observation. Increased drought in many areas of both America and Africa as precipitation patterns change — simple observation. Everything that we are seeing is that the new "status quo" is the atmosphere and top layer of ocean continuing to warm, precipitation patterns changing, and a disruption of the previous status quo. All the models give us is some idea of how far this might go — and so far, as far as I can tell the vast majority of the models are failing by failing to predict how fast the changes move. This isn't speculation, it's observation. The "business as usual" scenario doesn't exactly seem wise, ***given observation***.

22. #22 Michel
October 2, 2009

The Holocaust is widely perceived as a singularly evil act (I'd say rightly). Climate change just doesn't have that status.

Beyond that, there are very good pragmatic reasons for not making the comparison.

1. Currently, a large segment of the public are skeptical and recent surveys suggest that skepticism is growing not shrinking. If we want to convince these people, insulting them by equating them with Holocaust deniers is not going to win them over. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

2. One immediate effect of bringing Holocaust and Holocaust denial comparisons into any argument is that the person making such comparisons comes off looking like a crank.

23. #23 timot
October 2, 2009

The climate has been changing continuously for 4.5 billion years! It has been mostly getting warmer for over ten thousand years. Where I live, ice was about 1km thick just 10,000 yrs ago, now there is none. This is a dramatic change in just ten thousand years. Almost all of what we call Canada was covered by ice sheets in what was a geological blink of an eye in the past. That glaciers are melting now is meaningless. God did not create an Eden for us. We evolved in a changing world; species come and go. If we cannot adapt, and eventually evolve, then oh well…too bad for us and good news for the Earth and its millions of other species that will happily throw us off like an infestation of flees. (kudos George)

24. #24 timot
October 2, 2009

Anyway, if you are disturbed the CBC "Ideas" program here, check out the series "How to Think About Science" by the same Cayley. It has episodes which are really nutty, including taking seriously Sheldon Drake.

25. #25 Luna_the_cat
October 6, 2009

Michel: Good points regarding argumentation, but I would nonetheless make two observations–

1. Regardless of how people would perceive it or how useful it would be as an argumentational tactic, I still have to say it isn't necessarily invalid to compare climate change deniers to Holocaust deniers, given that it really does boil down to extremely selective acceptance and widespread denial of physical evidence and record.

2. The fact that a large dramatic systematic massacre of millions of people in the course of a few years is seen as unmitigated evil is probably unsurprising. But the fact that a slow, undramatic, unsystematic arrangement which simply allows the deaths of millions through distance, apathy and self-interest is NOT generally seen as the same level of evil may simply point to a lack of perception and perspective.

timot: Gee, the "humans will doom themselves and the rest of the planet will be fine" scenario. Yeah, right. Humans are technologically advanced omnivorous generalists who have colonised almost every ecosystem in every climate on every continent, and in most places reshaped said ecosystems widely so that a tremendous percentage of the biological production goes straight towards providing us with food and fuel. Rats and cockroaches are only half as successful as they are because they follow in our wake and colonise the environments we create. By the time our species disappears, if we really do doom ourselves, we will probably have stripped the planet of species right down to the algae. THAT is what you hope for?

The real issue is not survival of the human species. The species is pretty good at survival, on the whole. I really don't think we are in immediate danger, and certainly, there are an awful lot of species in more danger than we are, and sooner. But in our present and immediate future, there IS an issue of how many *individuals* die of famine, in storm damage, and as a result of preventable endemic diseases, as well as how badly the quality of life is impacted for everyone else by these things and the additional passed-on costs of environmental degradation, economic disruption and the mass immigration of developing countries' populations when driven by hardship.

Unless, for some reason, you *don't* think these are issues — that quality of life doesn't matter, or preserving species and diversity in the face of our own needs — in which case, we have nothing at all to talk about anyway.

26. #26 timot
October 6, 2009

You Doomsday people remind me of Creationists, always changing their story in order to be credible. When teaching Genesis isn't allowed, change it to Creation Science, when it doesn't work, then change to Intelligent Design and so on and so on.

30 years ago it was the population explosion that was going to destroy humanity. The price of precious metals

would skyrocket, the sky was falling! Hmmm that didn't work out, Now the climate is changing and if we do not change our evil ways then the world is going to end as we know it! AAAAHHHH

Oh Brother!

27. #27 Luna_the_cat
October 7, 2009

timot: Are you accusing me of being a "doomsday [person]"?

Crap onna stick, did the breeze from the point I was trying to make even ruffle your hair a little as it whizzed past you?

Where I live, ice was about 1km thick just 10,000 yrs ago, now there is none.

Yes, and 10,000 years ago the entire planet's human population was probably only a few million people, and we certainly didn't have ~1 billion people living in cities within a few meters of sea level. We also didn't have 1.9 billion hectares of land under cultivation in order to feed the world's population, in fact we barely even had agriculture at all at that point, so drought and flood were simply things people moved away from. So it isn't exactly the same situation, now, is it…..and my whole point is, yes, the *species* will adapt. What the financial and health cost to millions of *individuals* is likely to be, not to mention the other species in the world, is the problem.

Have I been clear enough now, or do I need to try again with even smaller words?

28. #28 timot
October 7, 2009

Miss Luna,

I actually wasn't responding to you in my previous post. You are a very good writer. You don't need to use smaller words.

Well, let us agree that the Earth is warming and that we can do something about it. The first premise I do not actually doubt. However, how much it will warm, I do not believe can be predicted. Let's assume the direst predictions are right and that we could do something to alter its course. What should be our response? How can we alter it and what will it cost? How will it be organized and how will we get the major nation polluters to go along with it?

Even if we could have agreement today and the world stopped emitting co2 and other greenhouse gases, there will still be warming and the poorest countries will still suffer, though possibly slightly less. In which case, we need to be spending the trillions of dollars needed both to mitigate effects of AGW as well as the trillions needed to reduce co2 emissions. In a world with limited resources, (and limited knowledge) I think, a decision has to be made as to the one that would have the most impact for the most people, and personally I think we are better off spending money on what is needed to help the poorest nations adjust to the future as it arrives.

Also part of the problem of trying to directly alter the climate is that one) there may be unknown and unintended consequences and two) since the planet changes climate on its own, for reasons not well understood, it seems foolish to try and deliberately alter it.

Well, I am not such a good writer, but I hope I made my points understandable, if not eloquent.

29. #29 Luna_the_cat
October 8, 2009

timot:

Ah.

My apologies, then, for the, hm, *intemperate* response. I should be sure snark is needed before it's used.

We still disagree on a few things, but there is room for discussion here.

What should be our response? How can we alter it and what will it cost? How will it be organized and how will we get the major nation polluters to go along with it?

All excellent questions. Ones that need to be addressed in full technical detail, both by the researchers who have the best understanding of climate systems, hydrological systems and ecosystems, and the politicians who have the power to drive policy…not to mention members of the industries which have the most impact.

Even if we could have agreement today and the world stopped emitting co2 and other greenhouse gases, there will still be warming and the poorest countries will still suffer, though possibly slightly less.

There will certainly still be warming, though as for "possibly slightly less" — the more we do nothing and follow the business-as-usual path, the more it will warm, surely; I cannot find a set of models anywhere which predicts anything different, even if we can't accurately predict just how much warming there would be, and it is both logical and fits with all existing knowledge. Logically, though, the more warming there is the more disruption there is to current weather patterns, the more coastal erosion and loss, and the more overall impact. Therefore, logically, anything done to minimise warming will help at least slow the impact, rather than just hitting the worst possible effect at all levels. If not, how not?

So far, the majority of the failings in the models seem to be failures to anticipate how fast changes can move, which doesn't bode well for how far they are likely to go. Given this, too, how does following the path which seems to lead to the worst case scenario make ANY sense, given that we don't actually know how bad "worst case scenario" might actually end up being?

In a world with limited resources, (and limited knowledge) I think, a decision has to be made as to the one that would have the most impact for the most people, and personally I think we are better off spending money on what is needed to help the poorest nations adjust to the future as it arrives.

I haven't seen anyone arguing that we shouldn't allocate resources to mitigation and adaptation. However, the best mitigation efforts cannot necessarily replace resources lost; it is both logical and cost effective to try to minimise resources lost in the first instance. Coastal erosion, drought or flood, and ecosystem impoverishment is certainly to a degree inevitable, but to turn efforts away from fighting root causes even in the face of the need for mitigation efforts is something I think would end up coming back to bite everyone.

So how to do that kind of balancing act? That, I think, is where the devil is in the details and there aren't any easy answers. But I'm confident that the answer of "let's just get on with business as usual and adapt" is actually one of the worse answers available.

Not to mention the fact that as an aspiring biologist, species extinctions really bother me, and I *am* talking about non-human species here. The argument that there have been mass extinctions in the past which the planet has bounced back from don't really carry a lot of weight with me, for several reasons. For one, the bounceback from a mass extinction is in no way immediate; there is generally 10-15 million years of recovery to former levels of biodiversity, and each leaves in one way or another a permanent mark in existing flora and fauna. For another, species extinctions and ecosystem impoverishment have immediate impacts on wider food webs and human well-being as well; even if we are talking about human impacts alone we can't ignore this (for example of one concern — the collapse of African fisheries under mismanagement and the overfishing by European fleets, plus drought and crop failures on land, leads to more inroads into formerly pristine forests in the hunt for bushmeat — which in turn leads to the introduction of novel zoonotic diseases as previously isolated animal populations become food for humans, as well as the loss of some of our nearest primate relatives…which latter has the additional effect of losing one of our best windows into many biological and medical developments in humans. It's a bitch of a causality chain, but unfortunately it is already both a real problem and mappable).

For a third concern, on purely a moral level, things which have caused mass extinctions in the past have been things like meteors, volcanism, and similarly "inanimate" causes; we, on the other hand, are conscious creatures, capable of understanding what we are doing, *capable of doing things differently*, and in light of that we have a

> level of responsibility that no meteor ever had whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. So I am not ok with our being the cause of mindless, massive destruction on the basis that “it’s happened before.”
>
> Hopefully, this makes sense; I’m not just absolutely sure of my own eloquence right now, long words or short — three days of little sleep does that to me.

New comments have been temporarily disabled. Please check back soon.

Search This Blog

Search for: Search

Subscribe

Subscribe via:

- RSS2
- Atom
- Subscribe via a feed reader

No Widgets Yet!

It looks like you haven’t added any widgets to this sidebar yet. To customize this sidebar, go add some!
