

The greatest threat to humanity?

A great deal of hype surrounds the issue of Global Warming today. Many people with no expertise or training in climatology have voiced concern over what the future might hold with regards to the environment. Some have suggested that there will come an environmental “point of no return”, after which the entire planet and all of humanity will be lost. All three of the major candidates for President of the United States have lengthy statements about environmental policies they hope to enact once elected, but each one is predicated on the understanding that Global Warming is happening, that it is the result of human activity, and that it will have significant repercussions for humanity if left unchecked.

Fighting global warming does not merely imply recycling paper, plastics and bottles in bright, blue containers. Reducing greenhouse gases is an expensive endeavor. Neither is it always a simple, cut-and-dry matter. Implementing environmental policy often adds other costs and other unintended effects on society. Furthermore, the atmosphere and the planet's ecosystem is incredibly complex. For example, reducing particulate matter in the atmosphere might appear to be a good idea, but it also lead to an increase in Global Warming because it decreases light reflection. So whatever a government decides to implement policies, a careful, critical examination must be made of its real effects on the environment and on society. Particularly with Global Warming, scientists must ask what the evidence really says about man and climate change before forming any kind of rational policy.

Green Evangelism

People are bombarded from all sides with messages about the environment. Presumptive

Presidential nominee John McCain declared that the debate over Global Warming is "over".<sup>1</sup> On the other side of the political aisle, Al Gore, former Vice President of the United States, has spoken about Global Warming on dozens of occasions and has even released "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006, an Oscar winning documentary on the issue. He testified before Congress that the planet is in for a "planetary emergency".<sup>2</sup> Most serious politicians in the US today address Global Warming from the point of view that it is dangerous to humanity and that it is caused by mankind. These politicians are themselves not climatologists, and so it is naturally easier to focus on the predicted effects of Global Warming rather than debate whether it is actually happening or causality, adding to the growing hysteria.

Politicians are not alone in spreading the bad news of Global Warming and environmentalism. Ted Turner created "Captain Planet" in 1990 to promote awareness amongst children about Global Warming. Captain Planet was a superhero summoned by a multi-ethnic group of teenagers who fought against often inhuman enemies who were ought to destroy the environment. The lines were clearly drawn: environmentalists are good people fighting against bad pig-men who are out to, at best, make a profit, or, at worst, pollute for its own sake. More recently, the film "The Day After Tomorrow" warned millions worldwide about the dangers of Global Warming.<sup>3</sup> The Statue of Liberty and New York City are annihilated by large waves, the result of Global Warming and melting ice caps.

A big part of the bad news of Global Warming is that the United States is the chief villain. China has declared that the burden of taking care of the environment should fall squarely on the

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1 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/02/17/wgreen17.xml>

2 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/22/washington/22gore.html>

3 <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1808417410/details> One can assume, based on its domestic gross of \$186 million, that it reached a sizable audience.

United States and other "developed nations".<sup>4</sup> Chinese Ambassador Yu Qingtai goes even further: "The United States and the developed states as a whole are the countries that created the problem, caused the problem of climate change in the first place. In my view, that's what a culprit means."<sup>5</sup> That being said, "victim" China finally overtook "culprit" US as the chief culprit of CO2 emissions, according to the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.<sup>6</sup> One wonders, if Global Warming were such a dire threat to all life, would people really be targeting the US and developed nations? If it is cheaper to reduce emissions in developing countries, why is it so important that US emissions be reduced rather than worldwide emissions?

Just the facts, ma'am

Beyond all of the hype and hysteria surrounded Global Warming, governments have to carefully examine the available data and see what it really says. Climate prediction is an extremely complex science, therefore any policy decisions related to Global Warming should take into account the latest data with analysis by the top minds in the field. Presumably, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change would meet these criteria. It was certainly intended to be as such, and directs its findings towards policymakers.<sup>7</sup> The synthesis of the report is, however, not particularly helpful to the development of policy. It states that human factors in climate change, such as population and technological development are difficult to predict, and "plausible and internally consistent" scenarios have been developed to compensate for this difficulty.<sup>8</sup> But how does one predict technological development? If someone in 1908 were

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4 [http://www.usatoday.com/weather/climate/globalwarming/2007-11-22-china-warming\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/weather/climate/globalwarming/2007-11-22-china-warming_N.htm)

5 <http://sweetness-light.com/archive/china-culprit-us-created-global-warming>

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<http://www.mnp.nl/en/dossiers/Climatechange/moreinfo/Chinanowno1inCO2emissionsUSAinsecondposition.html>

7 IPCC. "Climate Change: Synthesis Report". 2001. pp ix

8 Ibid. pp 60

asked to predict the technological advances that would around in 2008, how accurately could he or she have done so? Moreover, the report contains the now infamous "hockey stick" graph, showing temperatures decreasing over the last thousand years until sometime after 1900, when the temperature begins rapidly increasing. However, Michael Crichton has pointed out that this graph is based on very flawed premises and even randomized data used as input for its equations yields "hockey stick"-looking graphs. From a skeptical point of view, the IPCC shows how much work and research is still needed

If prediction is precarious at best, at least the latest data can be examined. The most obvious place to begin is temperature. According to the Hadley Climate Research Unit (HadCRUT), the average global temperature dropped 0.595 C between January 2007 and January 2008.<sup>9</sup> In fact, over the last decade, HadCRUT, Remote Sensing Systems, and the University of Alabama Huntsville show a flat lined trend. This is a very large anomaly and does not fit in well with predictions of increasing temperatures. The one dissenting voice is NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which does show some temperature increase. However, GISS also uses a different methodology for calculating average global temperature than the rest which is more speculative.

Perhaps more indirect measurements can shed some light on the subject, such as polar ice levels. The ice between Greenland and Canada, which had previously been receding, has now hit a 15 year high, having extended further south due to minus 30 degrees Celsius weather in western Greenland.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Antarctica is experiencing the highest levels of ice since they began recording.<sup>11</sup> However, this receiving little or no attention in the media. Instead, stories are run about ice shelves collapsing, without any kind of mention of the overall ice level or

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9 <http://wattsupwiththat.wordpress.com/2008/02/19/another-global-temp-index-dives-in-jan08-this-time-hadcrut/>

10 <http://sermitsiaq.gl/klima/article30834.ece?lang=EN>

11 <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/noel-sheppard/2007/09/12/record-antarctic-ice-levels-ignored-media>

whether or not these are regular occurrences.<sup>12</sup> But what about the decreasing Arctic ice levels? According to GISS, the recent decline in Arctic ice levels is being attributed, at least in part, to polar winds.<sup>13</sup>

None of these decisively show that Global Warming is not happening. They do, however, indicate that *perhaps* Global Warming is not happening as some scientists and Al Gore have presented it to the public in recent days. If Global Warming evangelists are reductionists in their approach, skeptics can not afford to be. Michael Crichton rightly blasts the IPCC when they stated in 2001: "Climate models now have some skill in simulating changes in climate since 1850."<sup>14</sup> Climatologists, in other words, have limited success in predicting what has already happened and all of the human factors are known. How successful can they possibly be then in determining the future with hundreds of unknown factors?

### The Rising Religion of the Intelligentsia

Environmentalism is more than numbers and statistics. It has implications for individuals ethics. If one believes that the world is coming to an end as a result of human activities, it will naturally color how one sees the world and people. The environmentalist movement is profoundly anti-human at its core. For an environmentalist, if a decision comes down saving an endangered animal or economic hardship for people, the animal wins regardless of whether people had anything to do with its extinction, regardless of the economic status of the community effected, regardless of the fact that over 99% of all species that have inhabited the earth are extinct. Some issues, however, hit even closer to home. Bill McKibben wrote *Maybe One: A Personal and Environmental Argument for Single-Child Families*, which argues that

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12 <http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/science/03/25/antartica.collapse.ap/index.html?iref=newssearch>

13 <http://wattsupwiththat.wordpress.com/2007/10/03/nh-sea-ice-loss-its-the-wind-says-nasa/>

14 <http://www.michaelcrichton.com/speech-ourenvironmentalfuture.html>

parents should limit themselves to one child for the sake of the environment. McKibben would probably be delighted to know that many are answering his call, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Population growth is in a steady decline as families have fewer and fewer children.<sup>15</sup> In fact, during the 21st century, the world will transition from population growth to population decline if the current trend continues. Is this because of a concern for the environment or because of financial factors? Perhaps it is. The presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Schori, explained in an interview that the number of Episcopal Christians in the US is at a low because "We encourage people to pay attention to the stewardship of the earth and not use more than their portion."<sup>16</sup> This is a striking change from the Old Testament perspective that having children was a blessing from God. Now it's being selfish and demonstrates a lack of concern for the environment. In fact, there are even some women who have had themselves sterilized because they believe children to be assault on nature.<sup>17</sup>

Environmentalism is a kind of new religion, one that is particularly attractive to academics in modern society, many of whom have fallen away from their old Christian traditions. Michael Critchon made a compelling case that environmentalism is simply a remapping of traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs in his speech, "Environmentalism as Religion", delivered in 2003. It has a paradise -- previous societies where man lived in harmony with nature. A fall took place -- man began to sin, especially with the Industrial Revolution. And salvation? "Sustainability is salvation in the church of the environment."<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, he concludes that environmentalism is so resilient in the face of shaky evidence and facts to the

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15 Ibid.

16 <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/1106/steyn112706.php3>

17 [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/femail/article.html?in\\_article\\_id=495495&in\\_page\\_id=1879](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/femail/article.html?in_article_id=495495&in_page_id=1879)

18 Critchon, Michael. "Environmentalism as Religion". 2003

contrary because it is a religion, not a hypothesis.

Even if one accepts global warming hook, line, and sinker, some environmentalist policies still fly in the face of reason. Environmentalists constantly target carbon dioxide emissions, rather than methane emissions which are significantly more harmful to the environment. Environmentalists would rather attack the US economy through the automotive industry than face up to the threat which causes more greenhouse gases than all forms of transportation together: the dreaded cow.<sup>19</sup> From a purely numbers point of view, reducing the world's 1.5 billion cattle, the largest producers of methane, would seem like a better strategy than trying to eliminate the automobile.

Where do we go from here?

With all of this in mind, what kind of public and industrial policies make sense? Clearly the hysteria must be brushed aside in favor of documented, verifiable science. Rather than policies which financially cripple countries, particularly the United States, which are at best anti-human, policies are needed which are economically viable and target serious problems that endanger the lives of people. Despite apocalyptic predictions, governments need to move slowly to combat environmental threats. One of the worst examples of hastily and ill informed policies is the DDT ban. DDT may have reduced the thickness of certain eagle egg shells, but it also helped fight malaria, which claims the lives of two million people a year in Africa. The fight against DDT may have saved hundreds or thousands of eagles, but it also killed tens of millions of people. Governments need to move slower and more carefully. Real results, not models, need to be considered in drafting legislation and signing treaties. Priority needs to be given to living

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/cow-emissions-more-damaging-to-planet-than-cosub2sub-from-cars-427843.html>

human beings. A real Orthodox response to Global Warming would give at the very least the benefit of the doubt to humanity.