

## Climate Deniers, Skeptics and Warmistas: “Sticks and stones will hurt ...”

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The debate on climate change has seen such anti-scientific venom that one wonders about the whole project. The debate essentially involves two sides: One takes the view that climate change is caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases but adds to it a policy conclusion that, unless world governments immediately take action to limit greenhouse gas emission, particularly carbon dioxide from fossil fuel burning, a catastrophe will occur. The catastrophe is not clearly specified, although, depending on the commentator, it involves everything from the loss of biodiversity, reduced crop yields and adverse health impacts to the very destruction of the human race as we are either ‘burned’ to death or, more likely, engage in a cataclysmic war caused by mass migration of climate refugees, resource grabs or some other factor. Apparently, once some threshold concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is reached, the climate feedbacks are all lined up to overheat the globe. Technological solutions such as those that dramatically reduce solar radiation by increasing the Earth’s albedo, which are implemented once we discover that warming appears to be ‘running away on us’ (i.e., catastrophic), are ruled out. Mitigation by reducing fossil fuel use, and not adaptation or some sort of technological fix, is considered to be the only solution to the threat of climate change.

The alternative view actually consists of several positions, all of which are treated by the first group as implausible. Several take the view that, while CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases do lead to some warming, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> currently in the atmosphere, and expected to enter the atmosphere in the near future, is extremely small so the warming will be tiny as well. The feedbacks, on the other hand, are just as likely to increase temperatures as reduce them. The Earth’s climate system is resilient and, therefore, there is no need to implement expensive, even draconian, policies to stop fossil fuel emissions. Others in this broad camp simply assert that there is no link between atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> and global warming, so we need to look elsewhere to explain why temperatures have risen somewhat in the past 150 or so years (and why they have not risen for the past decade or more).

What concerns me is that both sides have been involved in name calling. Some of those taking the second viewpoint have referred to the former as ‘warmistas,’ a derogatory term that conjures up dictatorship. In using this term, they wish to emphasize the point that many of the policies that have been promulgated smack of coercion. Governments will set targets – either emission targets or targets concerning the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere – and do whatever it takes to achieve them. Indeed, a recent paper in *Nature* plays into the hands of this group

because it calls for a global government to set and enforce global targets. Rather than employing the derogatory term 'warmistas,' it might be better to address how national and/or global institutions might be developed in a way that incentivizes people to rely less on fossil fuels, while enabling them to decide freely whether they are truly willing to make the sacrifice for themselves and future generations. As Archie Brown clearly demonstrates in his book, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, free people make wiser choices.

Those who fear anthropogenic catastrophic climate change have also engaged in some nasty name calling that is unbecoming of scientists. They often refer to those holding an alternative view as 'deniers.' This is a clear reference to the holocaust deniers, who deny that the Nazis murdered some six million Jews during WWII. Sir John Houghton, one-time chief executive of the UK Meteorological Office and a co-chair of the Scientific Assessment Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), was quoted in 2003 as saying: "... the impacts of global warming are such that I have no hesitation in describing it as a 'weapon of mass destruction'" (van Kooten, p.3).

In 2006, Bill McGuire of University College, London, was quoted as making the most explicit connection between holocaust and climate deniers: "Every time you address the Holocaust, you don't bring somebody in that says it didn't happen. And we're at that stage now. We have Holocaust deniers; we have climate-change deniers. And to be honest, I don't think there is a great deal of difference" (quoted in MacRae, p.17).

Along similar lines, James E. Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, is quoted in 2008 testimony before a U.S. House of Representatives committee as stating that the "CEOs of fossil energy companies ... should be tried for high crimes against humanity and nature" (van Kooten, p.3).

Clearly, the term 'denier' is derogatory and it would not be surprising if one day someone sued a person for slander for using it to describe them. In any event, the term is unbecoming to any serious scientist, regardless of what side of the debate they are on. It characterizes the person using the term as a charlatan, a scientist in disguise as they lack enough science and credentials to support their views.

The proper term used to describe those with a different viewpoint is that of 'skeptic.' A skeptic is one who views the same data as the proponent of anthropogenic warming but comes to a different conclusion. This different conclusion can be based on the data without further analysis of that data or after further analysis of that data.

Finally, the climate debate is no longer about science. In many cases, rationality and science have been casualties. As I described in an earlier blog, the clearest evidence of this occurs when future generations are brought into the debate. Proponents of the first view often argue that

the poor will suffer most from climate change. However, the emission scenarios that serve as the foundation for the climate models – the models that are used to justify that the poor will suffer most – assume that poverty will be done away with! Even the per capita incomes of the very poorest in today's world will rise from about \$250 to at minimum \$3800 (measured in 1990 US dollars), with the worst case climate scenarios based on even higher per capita incomes for the poorest. If climate change does occur as predicted in the IPCC's analyses, we should rejoice because the projections will be based on such a huge gain in the wellbeing of those in developing countries that a warmer world is a small price to pay!!

## **References**

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MacRae, Paul, 2010. *False Alarm: Global Warming – Facts versus Fears*. Victoria, BC: Spring Bay Press.

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