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Climate-change education: more ideology than science?

A few years ago, a commercial for Nissan motors, advertising its environmentally friendly, electric-powered car, named the Leaf, ran frequently on American television. It captured one's interest and even had a certain charm. The commercial opened with arresting images of glaciers melting and arctic ice crashing into the sea. The camera zooms into a lone polar bear, looking forlorn, adrift on a small patch of ice. Next, we see the polar bear swimming miles to a distant shore. Coming to land, he finds himself in a populated metropolitan area, where he walks relatively unnoticed (go figure). Eventually, he appears on the driveway of a Nissan owner. He approaches the owner who is about to enter his car. The polar bear embraces him. The motorist reciprocates with a generous hug of his own. The message, not lost on even the casual viewer, was twofold: (1) global warming is a threat to our planet's survival, and (2) already global warming is a threat to the survival of polar bears. The commercial was bound to be effective in the United States, since tens of thousands of American school children, as a matter of educational policy, were subjected to Al Gore's sensational film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. One of Gore's arresting claims, as any American student can tell you, is that the polar bear population is declining catastrophically. "Thank God for a corporation with a conscience, like Nissan Motors," I could hear the chorus sing. "We wish there were more

of them! At least, somebody is trying to liberate us from fossil fuels.”

With the commercial in mind, I became curious enough to investigate the extent of the decline in the polar bear population. If that species’ population is being devastated, are there any polar bears left? After a few minutes of internet research, I came upon the work of Susan Crockford. Her scientific vocation has been dedicated to the study of polar bears. I examined her book *Polar Bear Facts and Myths*, published in 2016.¹ One of the myths she debunks is that the polar bear population is in decline. On the contrary, polar bears are thriving. Imagine my surprise. I thought it was established science that polar bears were hurtling toward extinction? Not so, declares Crockford. Scientists now count the polar bear population at 30,000, a 50 year high! She reiterates these findings in her more recent publication, *The Polar Bear Catastrophe That Never Happened*.²

Dr. Crockford’s research got my attention. In its wake, I began to wonder whether there weren’t other exaggerations, if not deceptions and overt falsehoods, in global warming science. After my own amateur research, I’ve become convinced that a lot of global warming science is more ideology than science. Let me share reasons why I’ve come to that conclusion.

1. The Cultural Shift from Global Warming to Climate Change as the Accepted Nomenclature

The popularizing of the expression “Climate Change” is a device to make global warming look more evidentiary or verifiable than it really is. We’ve all noticed the shift in environmentalists’ terminology. Not too long ago, global warming was the expression of choice used by environmentalists. These

¹ Susan Crockford, *Polar Bear Facts and Myths*. Victoria, British Columbia: Susan J Crockford, 2016.

² Susan Crockford, *The Polar Bear Catastrophe That Never happened*. London, United Kingdom: Global Warming Policy Foundation, 2019,

environmentalists broadcasted the fact that over the last 125 years the planet's temperature measured a 0.8 degree Celsius increase. Many environmentalists, some of them having a megaphone in the mainstream media, have become alarmists, arguing that global warming is a trend, bound steadily to increase into and through the 21st century, threatening our planet's health and economy. Of course, this increase in global temperature is due to increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, brought about by human use of fossil fuels. Hence, significant reduction, perhaps even elimination of fossil fuel, is prescribed to remedy global warming.

However, the facts have complicated this global warming narrative. As the end of the 20th century neared, the climate measurably cooled. In fact, global warming has not occurred in 20 years. Instead of admitting that the significance of global warming is debatable environmentalists cleverly broadened what counts as "global warming." On their hypothesis, global warming, supposedly driven largely by man-made production of carbon-dioxide, affects conditions for climate alterations around the world. Accordingly, global warming is compatible with global cooling, and the latter is actually evidence of the former! On this view, variations in climate are largely symptoms of global warming. This means that climate changes everywhere are evidence of global warming. Since the climate is always changing, no matter what extremes take place, they can all be attributed to global warming, whether a drought or a flood, whether a hurricane or absence of wind. By this reasoning, which is really a sophisticated sleight of hand, every change in climate is a verification of global warming.

2. Avoidance of Falsifiability as a Scientific Standard

We're not supposed to notice that since climate change is presumably supported by every climate event that it gives up its claim to being a real science. Environmentalists pay a big price

for inflating global warming to mean climate change. Once global warming means climate change, its claims become non-falsifiable. For something to be a genuine science, it must be falsifiable. But so-called climate change includes so much that it's difficult to see how anything could ever challenge it. If everything verifies climate change, what could refute it? In other words, if a scientific hypothesis is designed in such a way that nothing could ever conceivably refute it, how could it qualify as a scientific hypothesis? Science can't progress if hypotheses cannot be, conceivably at least, refuted. At any rate, this seems to be an embarrassing criticism. In sum, climate change enthusiasts violate Karl Popper's standard of falsifiability for genuine science.

3. Declaration of Global Warming as Scientific Consensus

This is another claim that doesn't stand up to examination. In his book and film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore asserted that "97 % of scientists agree" that there is man-made global warming and that it is caused by increasing CO2 levels.³ While there is some scientific consensus on the matter, it is not nearly as significant for the climate change cause as it may appear. True, scientists agree that CO2 and other greenhouse gases have increased, but they don't at all agree on the extent of its impact on global warming. Nor do they all agree that increased global temperatures, even approaching levels climate change environmentalists (like Al Gore) worry about, would be harmful to the planet.⁴

³ Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 2006).

⁴ A catalogue of such contrary evidence is available in the following books: (1) Christopher C. Horner, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2007). (2) Alan Moran, editor, *Climate Change: The Facts* (Woodsville, New Hampshire: Stockade Books, 2015). (3) Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, editors, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming: The NIPCC Report on Scientific Consensus* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Heartland Institute, 2015). (4) Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Silver Crown Productions, 2017). (5) Marc Morano, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Climate Change* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2018).

In fact, some scientists argue that the relationship between CO₂ and global warming is harder to establish than it may appear, arguing that the relationship is more of a correlation than an established cause and effect. This is because the geological record indicates that increased global temperatures have often antedated increases in CO₂ rather than the other way around.⁵

In geological history, CO₂ concentrations have been exceedingly high. At one time levels approached 8000 ppm! During such times, plant life flourished. In modern times, CO₂ has increased from 280 ppm in 1750 to 406 ppm in 2019. Al Gore and other alarmists assert that such an increase indicates a trend that will send the earth toward climate catastrophe. However, once CO₂ levels are put in perspective, it's clear we need not worry very much. That perspective is supplied by the geological record. In geological history, there have been CO₂ levels many times more than in modern times. Several million years ago, CO₂ levels were 20 times what they are now (8,000 ppm).⁶ Plant and animal life flourished during those times. In fact, it's been argued that significant reduction of CO₂ is where catastrophe is risked. The 400 ppm concentration that we now have is arguably a boon to the planet compared to the 1750 280 ppm, when measurements began. Had numbers since 1750 gone the other way, life on the planet could well be extinct. This is because when CO₂ concentrations dip below 150 ppm, life on this planet cannot be sustained. So, arguably, increased CO₂ is a good thing.⁷ Furthermore, global warming need not have dire effects. Over the ages, when there have been episodes of global warming, some of them of considerable length, human beings lived productive lives. Over the last 10,000 years, there have been several periods of contracted warming: the Holocene climate optima, Egyptian Old Kingdom, the Minoan Period, the Roman

⁵ Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts*, p. 23.

⁶ Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts*, p. 16.

⁷ Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts*, pp. 9-11.

Period, the Medieval Warming period—these were periods when the climate benefited human lives agriculturally and economically.⁸ During times of global cooling, human productivity statistically declined. So why would the prospect of 21st or 22nd century global warming necessarily be different? And keep in mind, global warming may not be the trend it is claimed to be. As I mentioned before, there has been no global warming the last 20 years. But even if there is global warming, it need not be a bad thing. As CO₂ increased in the 20th century and as the earth warmed, crop yield growth increased measurably. In fact, much scientific research in recent years, such as studies of ice core samples from Greenland and Antarctica show that over many millennia life has thrived during periods of global warming.⁹

The question “is not whether the climate warmed since the Little Ice Age (the 18th century) or whether there is a human impact on climate, but whether the warming is unusual in rate or magnitude; whether that part of it attributable to human causes is likely to be beneficial or harmful on net and by how much; and whether the benefits of reducing human carbon dioxide emissions—i.e., reducing the use of fossil fuels—would outweigh the costs, so as to justify public policies aimed at reducing those emissions.” Considering these issues brings a whole new set of perspectives on the debate about climate change. Skeptics argue that climate change alarmists have much to lose if they engage these questions.¹⁰ As a result, the alarmists try to avoid confronting them.¹¹

Such difficulties have caused many scientists to dissent from the accepted climate change position, in numbers that are

⁸ Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts*, p. 24.

⁹ Gregory Wrightstone, *Inconvenient Facts*, pp. 20-24.

¹⁰ For example, the evidence of recent cooling counts against the environmentalists' iconic “hockey stick,” which is supposed to illustrate a spike in global warming as increased carbon dioxide is the cause of increased temperature, also predictive of future increase. Unfortunately, recent cooling calls into question the “hockey stick” paradigm.

¹¹ Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming*, p. 14.

surprising. A 2014 bibliography compiles 1,350 articles written by prominent global warming skeptics, such as Richard Lindzen, and Patrick Michaels.¹² Such a body of scientific literature suffices to challenge Al Gore's claim of consensus. "... the claim of 'scientific 'consensus' on the causes and consequences of climate change is without merit. There is no survey or study showing 'consensus' on any of the most important scientific issues in the scientific disagreement about many of the most important issues that must be resolved before the hypothesis of dangerous man-made global warming can be validated."¹³

A survey of meteorologists in 2006 determined that a majority dissented from the conclusion that increased CO2 causes global warming. "A 2006 survey of scientists in the U.S. conducted by the National Registry of Environmental Professionals, for example, found 41 percent disagreed the planet's recent warmth 'can be, in large part, attributed to human activity,' and 71 percent disagreed recent hurricane activity is significantly attributable to human activity."¹⁴

But the most decisive statement of scientific disagreement came with the *Global Warming Petition Project* in 2015. 31,478 dissenting American scientists signed on to the following statement:

We urge the United States government to reject the global warming agreement that was written In Kyoto, Japan in December, 1997, and any other similar proposals. The proposed limits on greenhouse gases would harm the environment, hinder the advance of science and technology, and damage the health and welfare of mankind. There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane and, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable

¹² *Popular Technology.net, 2014*

¹³ Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming*, p. xvii.

¹⁴ Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming*, p. 26.

future, cause catastrophic heating of Earth's atmosphere and disruption of the Earth's climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth.¹⁵

A study by two German scientists, Dennis Bray and Hans von Storch, is revealing about lack of scientific consensus.¹⁶ And yet it is also revealing about how scientists as individuals often react to scientific disagreement. When pressed, most scientists will assert that climate change models are dubious. Bray and von Storch discovered that in their surveys scientists significantly disagreed about the following questions: (a) How well do atmospheric models deal with the influence of clouds?; (b) How well do atmospheric models deal with precipitation?; (c) How well do atmospheric models deal with atmospheric convection? (d) How well will global climate models predict extreme events for the next 10 years? These are not marginal issues in the climate debate.¹⁷

In spite of this wide disagreement in the way scientists in their surveys answered these questions, Bray and von Storch nonetheless discovered something remarkable: This dissent does not “prevent most scientists from expressing their opinion that man-made global warming is occurring and is a serious problem.” Bray and von Storch were struck by the fact that the same scientists who are skeptical about the evidence for anthropogenic global warming and its supposed dire effects are nonetheless convinced that global warming is serious, so much so that it requires political intervention. This they discovered by asking a final question: “In spite of admitted grounds for skepticism, are

¹⁵ Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Bray, D and von Storch, H. *The Perspective of Climate Scientists on Global Climate Change*. http://www.gkss.de/central_departments/library/publications/beriche_2007/index.html.en.

¹⁷ Craig D. Idso, Robert M. Carter, S. Fred Singer, *Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming*, p. 22.

you certain or uncertain about climate change?” Although they themselves gave a plurality of answers of a skeptical kind, the majority answered that they were sure that anthropogenic global warming was damaging the planet and would worsen in the future.

Bray and von Storch commented on the contradiction this way: The scientists declaration out of harmony with their own science is “an empirical example of postnormal science, the willingness to endorse a perceived consensus despite knowledge of contradictory scientific knowledge when the risks are perceived as being great.”¹⁸ Somewhat cynically, they suspect that this kind of cognitive dissonance, holding contradictory opinions simultaneously, is evidence of what researchers call “herding, the well-documented tendency of academics to ignore research that questions a perceived consensus position in order to advance their careers.”¹⁹ Not to mention that fund-raising and political support are enhanced if one panders to the climate-change authorities.²⁰ All this attests sadly to the politicization of science. Climate change: not so much science but ideology.

¹⁸ Bray, D. and von Storch, H. “Climate Science: An Empirical Example of Postnormal Science.” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, Number 80, 439-455.

¹⁹ Baddeleya, M. “Herding, Social Influence and Expert Opinion.” *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 2013, Number 20, 35-44.

²⁰ An egregious example of such compromise is so-called “Climategate,” a scandal revealing how scientists at East Anglia University conspired to coordinate efforts to suppress evidence that challenges climate-change orthodoxy. See Marc Morano, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Climate Change*, chapter 10, pp. 143-163.