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Blake Adams

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Global Warming: Sunny Side Up

Blake Adams

The most certain aspect about the Earth's climate is that it perpetually changes. From massive global trends such as the different Milankovitch cycles to more tangible temperature movements over the past few hundred years, we see the Earth as either in a period of "warming" or "cooling"—never truly in homeostasis. So why all the debate about anthropogenic Global Warming? The answer, in my opinion, is the same reason why "Global Warming" is capitalized at all: the concept has largely shifted from a scientific reality to a product advertised and sold through hysterical media reports and "environmental" movements. It's easy to quickly assume that humans are creating an environment through CO₂ output that teeters on apocalyptic doom, but when one looks at the actual data involved in these doomsday theories, one can see that human being CO₂ output is so incredibly minor compared to other geologic and cosmic mechanisms that affect and dictate climate on Earth (Spencer, 2008).

The Earth's climate has changed an incredible amount since the beginning of time, and even man himself was driven to expand and evolve due to these shifts in climate and terrain, with receding water levels initially spurring man out of Africa as glaciers grew and the climate cooled. However, some believe that the only "normal" weather patterns are those seen in the past 2000 years or so (Durkin, 2007). This idea is actually taken to the extreme in the controversial "hockey stick curve," published by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which disregards the Medieval Warm Period all together and manages to create a picture of doom—the last 20 years highlighted in red as they spike above the mean line. Current temperatures are nowhere near the maximum temperatures achieved during the Medieval Warm Period, and the world has been hospitable to nature and man at temperature extremes much greater than temperatures today. Taking that into consideration, a rise in temperature alone should not lead to mass extinctions or an apocalyptic positive feedback loop (Durkin, 2007).

There is truth, however, as I see it, behind the concerns of the *rate* at which the current temperatures are rising. Some scientists warn that with such a rapid warming, many species will be unable to adapt to the changing climate fast enough to save them from extinction. That is a valid point—with niche habitat areas shrinking due to subtle climate changes as well as encroaching industrialization, many species simply will not have time to complete the biological processes necessary to evolve in a rapidly changing environment (Gugenheim, 2006; Kolbert, 2006). However, many attribute this increased rate of warming to anthropogenic greenhouse gasses. Citing a figure pairing the carbon levels and temperature levels over (relatively) recent history, the two factors appear, at first, to fit very well together and create a nice correlation. But looking closer, one notices that the carbon lags behind the temperature—suggesting that instead of carbon driving temperature, it is the other way around (Nova, 2009). Not only is there an 800 year lag between temperature and carbon level change at points on the graph, but also during the 1940's to the 1970's the temperatures actually dropped despite growing industrialization prior to and during that time period. Following the commonly accepted carbon-level-driving-temperature model, the temperatures should have spiked during that time, not dropped (Nova, 2009; Durkin 2006).

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I am not against environmental action. I strongly believe that many environmental movements and conservation efforts are necessary endeavors. For example, I strongly believe in preventing the clear-cutting of rainforests, and in preserving ANWAR as a natural reserve. I believe research and development of renewable energy is necessary, and I believe that mankind should not (and ultimately cannot) remain dependent on fossil fuels. But nature preserves and engineering advances are not the focus of this paper. What I mean to say is that there are some environmental movements built to promote and encourage the existence of man, and some environmental movements that project man and human progress as nothing more than a disruption of the “purity of nature.” To me, a balance is necessary. Without living in harmony to some extent with nature, man will inevitably fail. However, to put nature above man is inherently anti-human (Spencer, 2008).

Consider this—is it right that hundreds of thousands of people continue living in primitive conditions while many others enjoy basics such as heat and running water? By preventing developing countries from accessing the “dirtier” and cheaper forms of energy, there is no way for those countries to develop. The concept of “leap-frogging” over the developed countries in terms of technology is not economically feasible (Kolbert, 2006). What they need are roads and a safe way to cook food—not nuclear or wind-generated power (Spencer, 2008). It’s easy to repeat phrases such as “environmental responsibility” when we have these basic necessities, but why are we forcing developing nations into technologies that even *we* deem as too costly and fail to fully implement for ourselves?

If one looks at the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, it is currently around 385 ppm, or parts per million. That means for every million particles, 350 are carbon. When that number is taken in consideration with all the other geologic and cosmic events and cycles that play into the still fairly mysterious climate system, anthropogenic carbon is a miniscule factor (Spencer, 2008; Durkin, 2007; Nova, 2009). Along with the data actually indicating a temperature-led carbon cycle, what fits much better with temperature records are records of sunspots. Sunspots are disturbances on the sun that lead to powerful releases of energy out into space and over the Earth. Placing sunspot activity data with the temperature history leads to a much closer correlation than carbon and temperature—high temperatures correlating to periods of greater sunspot activity, and low temperatures corresponding to a less active sun. One example of this is the Maunder Minimum in the Little Ice Age. During that time, very few (if any) sunspots were recorded and that period corresponds to the lowest temperatures during that period. Another interesting fact is that the past couple of years have also corresponded to a very inactive sun—a possible sign of cooling temperatures ahead (Spencer, 2008; Long 2007).

With such a culture and mass frenzy created around “Global Warming,” the natural phenomenon of a changing climate has become something closer to a religion—a fanatic movement where skeptics are targeted as heretics and non-believers. With most of the reports regarding anthropogenic climate change coming out of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) one must look at the machine for what it is—a government backed organization with both scientists and policy makers on the boards. In recent years, several prominent scientists have even spoken out against the IPCC—former members highlighting the panel’s biases and speaking out against faulty science (Nova, 2009; Spencer, 2008; McKittrick, 2004; Durkin 2007).

Extreme stories, radical views, and doomsday predictions all make for effective, attention-grabbing news stories. In the Global Warming game, the most sensationalist journalism wins, and the public swallows the 24 hour news reports—taking the material for granted without thinking to look behind the issue. Yes, there is evidence of warming trends, but this warming is nothing out of the ordinary for a planet constantly shifting and changing since the beginning of its existence. To blame the increasing temperature on humans is flattering, but with so many other factors such as the geologic motion of the Earth, clouds (which the current climate prediction models still cannot model accurately), and the Sun, humans appear to have a minor role, if any, in the climate affair. To blame industrialization for all the problems of the world is naive, and to see man only as a perverter of nature undermines the entirety of humanity (Spencer, 2008; Long 2007). We have a duty to protect our species as well as our planet. We must learn to live in harmony with nature, but not to the extent where we forgo development or fall victim to scare tactics that cripple our potential for achievement.

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