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The Emperor's New Climate: Is Global Warming Real?

Duncan Maxwell Anderson

Monday, Feb. 16, 2004

Everyone knows that the planet Earth is heating up disastrously. Everyone. If you listen to the news at all, you know that the 1990s was the hottest decade in 1,000 years. That Delaware-sized chunks of Antarctica are melting. That the sea will rise and swallow cities like Amsterdam and New Orleans, and that there has been a record number of storms and killer heat waves worldwide. That tropical diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and Ebola are spreading to northern countries because their climates have become so warm.

Scientists know this: The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) just published a petition with 1,000 signatures saying that computer simulations show that mankind is causing a dangerous warming of the planet.

The United Nations (UN) and the U.S. Catholic bishops know it, as do famous actors and actresses. Little schoolchildren have learned it. So have teenage boys who weren't paying attention in class but who read *Outside* magazine (for young men interested in risky sports and pictures of babes in hiking gear). One of the cover lines on the December 2003 issue reads, "Dude, the Alps are melting!"

Global warming is "a weapon of mass destruction," says Sir John Houghton, the former head of the British Meteorological Office, who also served with other prominent scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a group convened by the UN. American policy and American factories, power plants, and cars are largely to blame, according to UN scientists, because it's disproportionately their exhaust that's putting carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air, causing the planet to heat up.

Global warming has become part of our culture's common sense. Who among us, whether a tree hugger or a free-market zealot, has not shrugged to himself inwardly as he started his car on a frigid winter evening to go pick up the kids? You pull out of your driveway, waiting for the roaring internal-combustion engine to burn some more dinosaurs and kick the waste heat to the defroster and to the heater at your feet – to make you more comfortable, for now. But where is this heat and exhaust going in the end?

It scarcely seems an exaggeration to say the whole world is going to vaporize like an Oklahoma town zapped by a B-movie spaceship, just from you and me driving to the mall and back. But how is this possible?

Here's how Jerry Mahlman of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) explains the "greenhouse effect" – by which, he says, the planet's temperature will probably rise 6 to 8 degrees Fahrenheit this century, and on to even more catastrophic levels thereafter for the next 1,000 years: The sun shines, sending us energy. Some of the energy, mostly in the form of high-frequency waves of visible light, passes through the layer of gases we call our atmosphere and hits the earth. As it does, it changes from visible light into the lower-frequency, invisible waves we call infrared energy – or heat. That's what's going on when the sun shines on a rock and the rock becomes hot to the touch.

Heat is then radiated from the earth back toward space. But because the frequency of infrared waves is lower, they can't pass as easily through the earth's layer of atmospheric gases – including CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, and water vapor – and are trapped.

The heat stays trapped for a time, heating up the atmosphere and the earth below it like a greenhouse

The heat-trapping gases are called "greenhouse gases." The greenhouse effect isn't all bad, though.

"The earth can only sustain life because it is wearing a light blanket of greenhouse gases," Mahlman says. "Without them, the planet would be 65 degrees [Fahrenheit] colder" – which is to say it would be an ice ball.

But Mahlman says we've been making the planet warmer and warmer by adding to the layer of greenhouse gases: Every time we burn something, whether we're driving a car, generating electricity in a power plant that runs on coal or oil, or staring dreamily into the fireplace on a winter evening, we're adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere (especially CO₂), which are formed when burning substances in the fuel combine with gases in the air.

The more we burn, the more gases are released into the atmosphere and added to the earth's insulating layer.

The effect, Mahlman says, is that "each year, the blanket gets a little thicker," less heat escapes into space, and the world gets warmer.

That's the theory of global warming in a nutshell.

"Only a fool," Mahlman warns me, "would argue against this."

Earth in the Lurch

Global warming first became big news as a doomsday scenario about 15 years ago – just as the Soviet bloc was about to collapse. A joint session of Congress held hearings on global warming as a possible threat to life on earth. The environmentalist lobby Friends of the Earth (FOE) arranged for a NASA scientist named James Hansen to testify. Officially, Hansen would be speaking as a private citizen to avoid having his testimony edited by his employers, the (first) Bush White House.

Hansen was originally invited to address Congress in November 1987 but protested to FOE that in the cold of autumn, his remarks wouldn't get much attention. Instead, the following summer, on June 23, 1988, during a drought, with the temperature at 101 degrees Fahrenheit in Washington, D.C., Hansen spoke. He testified that according to computer simulations he and other scientists had been developing, the hot weather was no mere summer heat wave but a sign of much worse to come.

There is "a strong cause-and-effect relationship," he said, "between the current climate and human alteration of the atmosphere." Impatient with the scientific etiquette of probability and uncertainty, Hansen told reporters afterward, "It's time to stop waffling so much, and [to] say that the greenhouse effect is here and affecting our climate now."

Hansen's remarks made a sensation in the media, and Hansen himself was lionized by Senator Al Gore in the Senate and later in Gore's best-selling book, *Earth in the Balance*. By 1990 President George H. W. Bush and the Senate cooperated to begin spending more than \$1 billion per year to fund scientists at universities and institutes to study global warming.

The sense of crisis about the world's climate hasn't abated. The threat of global warming is the heavy breathing behind every weather report. Do you feel a bit guilty when you read that this has been an unusually hot June, a surprisingly mild winter, or a shockingly warm Thursday? I do.

Since the UN's global warming panel – the IPCC – was formed in 1987, it has issued three scientific

assessment reports, which have all relied heavily on computer modeling. You start with an idea of how the earth's climate works, plug in the prevailing winds, so much rainfall, so much sunlight, so many tons of greenhouse gases ... and you try to predict: If CO₂ production goes up 1 percent per year, what will the earth's temperature be in 2050?

Think how many times you hesitate – given the accuracy of weather reports – over whether to bring an umbrella to work, and you have some idea of how hard it might be to project what the average global temperature will be 50 years from now. Nevertheless, the summary of each IPCC report got a little bolder, saying in the Third Assessment in 2001, “There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.”

It also contained something much sexier: a chart of global temperatures from 1000 a.d. to the present, with the early years' temperatures deduced from the fossil record. The researcher was David Mann of the University of Virginia.

His chart showed the global temperature bumping along steadily since 1000 – and then shooting up in the 20th century like the handle of a hockey stick, with the highest recorded temperature occurring in the most recent year, 2000. Beyond that, the line projects the temperature to continue rising even more steeply in future years to reach what appears to be the boiling point of stone.

The IPCC's Sir John Houghton was photographed for the press in front of the chart. It was possibly the high point of the global warming cause.

The National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) in Asheville, North Carolina, uses weather stations, satellites, ocean buoys, weather balloons, and more to measure the atmosphere and its weather from sea level up to the stratosphere. When I called, I reached the chief of the Climate Monitoring Branch, a quiet, steady-sounding man named Jay Larrimore.

I asked Larrimore if the average temperature had risen dramatically in America during the 20th century.

“From 1910 to 1945, there was a pretty rapid increase,” he said. “From 1945 to 1975, the temperature was pretty flat. Then from 1975 to 2000, it went up again.”

“So,” I asked, “what would you say was the total warming for the century?”

“There's not much disagreement that temperatures have gone up about 1 degree Fahrenheit over the past century.”

“That's funny, I thought you just said ‘1 degree.’”

“One degree is about right.”

“One degree? We're spending \$2 billion a year and drawing hockey sticks for 1 degree?”

I continued. “So ... what has a ... 1-degree global warming meant for mankind? Are there more droughts, more heat waves, like we've been told? You know – ‘the greenhouse effect is here.’”

“We haven't seen much of a change in the frequency of droughts,” Larrimore replied. “Some models predict it more than others. And we don't have the data to say heat waves have increased.”

"There are certainly problems with the model runs. That's why they're continually working with them. Our job over here is just to collect the data."

"So, what has happened with a 1-degree warming?"

"Fewer frost days, less snow cover, more precipitation, a rise in minimum temperatures rather than maximum temperatures. ..." Most of the warming, Larrimore tells me, has occurred in the coldest places on earth – such as Siberia and Western Canada.

If global warming is real, then why am I so cold? I live just outside New York. It's 19 degrees Fahrenheit this morning – again. That's 5 degrees below the normal minimum for this date. My son is three weeks old as I write this, and he has already lived through two major snowstorms, one of which set an all-time record for the most inches (16) at the earliest date (December 5).

And winter hadn't even started yet.

Duncan Maxwell Anderson writes on science, religion, and politics when he is not splitting firewood to heat his house in upstate New York.

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Duncan Maxwell Anderson

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2004

[Read Part I - click here](#)

Michael Mann must have been furious. In public, scientists are at least tepidly respectful of each other's reputations and character—which are essential to making a scientist employable. To breach that wall is to invite mutually assured destruction.

Yet in July of this year, Mann sat before James Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and testified that the professional work of the Harvard professor sitting at the table next to him was “pure nonsense” and “fundamentally unsound.” He added, “There is little that is valid in that paper. They got just about everything wrong.”

The object of Mann's ire, Willie Soon, a mild-mannered Malaysian native teaching at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, had done something unthinkable. He and his colleague at the center, Sallie Baliunas, with other researchers, had published a paper in *Energy and Environment* arguing that the 20th century had not been the warmest in the last 1,000 years. It did not seem to mollify global warming's true believers that the basics of Soon's claim had been well established in the peer-reviewed literature for decades.

Soon and Baliunas confirmed that from 800 to 1300 A.D., average temperatures in many regions worldwide were 2 to 4 degrees or more higher than the allegedly sweltering 20th century. It's referred to as the Medieval Warm Period (MWP), and the extra warmth made life better, not worse. It is not only the arcane techniques of paleoclimatology, such as testing core samples of glacial ice for radioisotopes, that testify to the MWP, but history—such as people's contemporary accounts of what they grew in their fields.

Decent wine grapes grew in Merrie England. (No more, alas.) Olives grew in 13th-century Germany, where St. Albert the Great also noted abundant fig and pomegranate groves in Cologne and the Rhine valley—places too cold for those crops today. Renaissance culture awakened and flourished throughout Europe.

The MWP also explains why Greenland, now essentially a glacier, could credibly be called Greenland. It was a Danish colony, and things actually grew there.

Following the MWP, the Greenland colony died out as average temperatures plummeted 3 to 5 degrees—about 2 degrees colder than our climate today. This Little Ice Age (LIA) finally moderated but lasted in most places until about 1900. For whatever reason, many regions have warmed up about 1 degree since 1900.

Because of Soon and Baliunas's paper, Mann's hockey stick was not so much broken as shattered. Interestingly enough, the two studies don't entirely contradict each other. The Mann “hockey stick” study used such a small number of temperature record samples to create its dramatic trend line that the margin of error is substantial. Indeed, it's so wide that you could draw a variety of lines through the chart—including a trend of global cooling.

Soon says: "They're showing incomplete sets of data. If you do that, it's easy to show the curve you want people to see. For explaining this, they called me a 'right-wing extremist.' I don't care what wings are. I want to know what the facts are."

The Soon and Baliunas study included more up-to-date research published in the four years since Mann's study had been released.

Soon speaks enthusiastically of logic and measurement. "One of the most important pillars of the claim that CO₂ is producing global warming," he says, "is the thermometer readings taken over the last 150 years. They show warming from 1900 to the 1940s. But the amount of CO₂ produced then was negligible compared to the next period—from the 1940s to the 1970s—when there was cooling. So how can the CO₂ be producing the warming? That is the contradiction. They have yet to show why this would be."

But there's another reason global-warming scientists have it in for Soon and Baliunas: The point of their work is not merely to demolish the "hockey-stick" model of history. They aim to replace it.

Since they're astrophysicists, Soon and Baliunas know about sunspots—powerful pulses of electromagnetic energy whose effects are felt hundreds of millions of miles distant. It turns out that while increased CO₂ emissions don't correlate very well with global warming, something else does—something as far out of our control and as firmly in the hands of God as it can be: the fluctuating heat of our ultimate heat source, the sun.

More research is needed, but it appears that, stretching back 1,000 years, when sunspot activity went up, the earth got warmer; when the activity went down, the earth got colder. Soon is co-author of a new book on the sun's variability, *The Maunder Minimum and the Variable Sun-Earth Connection* (World Scientific Publishing, 2004).

As Soon painstakingly told me, "I am still trying to disprove my theory, to see if it is correct. But from the data, I still cannot rule out the possibility that I am right."

I'm shocked by the lengths some scientist-believers go for the global warming cause, and I mention this to Patrick J. Michaels—a climatologist, professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia, senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute, and author of *The Satanic Gases: Clearing the Air About Global Warming*. Michaels is surprised that I'm surprised.

He says: "No one in Washington gets large grants by saying something isn't a problem. Meanwhile, the \$10 billion thrown at climate modeling research in the last 15 years was wasted."

I protest, "Where's their concern for the truth? Some of these guys are worse than the politicians!"

"I believe you guys in the Catholic Church have a concept called original sin," Michaels explains. "Picture this: It's 1992 and there's a hearing. Senator Albert Gore says he thinks global warming is a serious issue, and do you think it would be worthwhile to spend \$1 billion or so studying it? No one is going to speak up and say it's an overblown problem. If he did, all his colleagues would take out their knives and throw them into his back before he could leave the hearing room."

The result is a theory of impending doom that's hard to test, since the proof is 100 years away. In the meantime, you could argue that it has become a form of welfare for liberal scientists.

Michaels is fond of bringing in Thomas Kuhn's thinking from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*:

Scientists have created a global-warming paradigm for themselves that benefits them—as a cause and as a livelihood. They won't easily be dissuaded from it.

According to Kuhn, scientists tend to resist new information that upsets their paradigm till a new paradigm from a new generation finally supersedes it. In the meantime, when their hypotheses don't work out, it's typical to see them come up with more and more complicated explanations and lash out personally at their critics.

Duncan Maxwell Anderson writes on science, religion, and politics when he is not splitting firewood to heat his house in upstate New York.

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Duncan Maxwell Anderson

Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2004

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The agreement called the Kyoto Treaty, proposed through the UN in 1997 to limit CO₂ emissions into the atmosphere, is likewise seen by Michaels and many other critics as a vehicle for economic self-interest rather than for the environment.

Long in the works at previous international meetings, Kyoto would have been a ticket to a second Great Depression. Its provisions assume the truth of the CO₂-global warming hypothesis and obligate the wealthy industrial countries to reorder their nations to cut CO₂ emissions to their 1990 levels by 2010.

Since that in effect puts commerce under tighter state control, it pleased the anticapitalist environmentalists of the West. "Developing" states favor the treaty because it puts no limitations on their CO₂ emissions—even though countries like China burn increasing amounts of high-carbon fuel such as coal.

The UN and European Union (EU) support the treaty because it establishes their authority to set CO₂ standards, collect fees, and regulate transportation. For the EU, there's also the chance to entangle the powerful U.S. economy in a web of regulation sufficient to bring it to the 17th-century level of innovation and efficiency that Europe now enjoys.

Meanwhile, even scientists in the global-warming camp deride the treaty as ineffective. As Mahlman put it, "If Kyoto were successful, it would produce a small decrease in the rate of increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere. It would take 40 Kyotos to actually stop the increase." Even after President Clinton, Vice President Gore, and the environmentalist lobbies urged the Senate to ratify the treaty, the Senate passed a resolution 95-0 against it, and Clinton dropped the matter. President Bush opposes the treaty.

To see how profligate a CO₂ offender I might be, I took an audit of my household's "carbon footprint" at www.climatestar.org, which is run by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and Earth Communications Office (ECO).

The Anderson cars drive around 2,500 miles per month, and we burn about 140 gallons of heating oil in the same period. That made us "average," according to the animated key. When I typed the answers in, a little pawn-shaped creature set in a desert landscape came to life. He emitted a little cloud from his hindquarters, propelling him briefly into the air. Nearby, in response, a flower wilted and a flying bird fell down and died.

This is how the progressives see humanity: a collection of gas-producers. But their concerns don't end there. On the site's news feed, I read how New Zealand farmers are chafing at their government's restrictions on—no, I'm not kidding—cow farts. Methane is one of the greenhouse gases, after all, though I don't know how they aim to make Bessy more continent—put Roloids in her salt lick?

I also read that the European Parliament has decided that each country will give out CO₂ credits to each

business in that country, which entitles it to emit so much CO2. If they come out under their limit, they can sell their credits to other, more...flatulent businesses.

The Web site features pictures of Hollywood actors and actresses supporting the war against warming. Kevin Bacon says, "Global warming isn't cool. Stopping it is," while Jacqueline Obradors of NYPD Blue assures us that stopping global warming is "as easy as changing a light bulb or hanging laundry."

The site also features private individuals—global warming saints, if you will—who are held up for emulation.

Here's Mike Tidwell: "For Catherine and me, last January's bombshell findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change motivated us strongly to plot our home energy revolution. Planetary warming of 10.4 degrees by 2100 is doubly horrifying each time you look down at your innocent son playing with building blocks on the carpet."

This is Mike Totten, who brings out an important theme, which is that normal life looks innocent on the surface but is actually desperately evil: "If everyone in the world adopted what appears to be a relatively benign U.S. lifestyle, this would in fact lead to certain disaster for the planet... Thus I've spent the past several decades trying to shrink my carbon and ecological footprints, to 'live simply so others may simply live.'"

Here's one way he does it: "For the past quarter-century I have largely eliminated meat, fish, fowl, cheese, eggs, and most milk products from my diet...."

He goes on: "Stabilizing world population as rapidly as possible is the single biggest long-term, footprint-reducing action humanity can promote. I have joined the growing ranks of families who adopt children rather than have their own biological offspring. I have become the father of a wonderful stepdaughter and stepson, both of whom have accepted me as part of their family since the early 1980s."

And a female Episcopalian minister, Rev. Sally Bingham, is the "Environmental Minister" of Grace Cathedral in (surprise!) San Francisco. She is cofounder of Episcopal Power and Light, which markets "green" electricity (20 percent generated from non-fossil fuel sources) to churches.

There are links to all the usual suspects here, of course, including www.vegan.org, where you'll see a picture of a blond actress kissing an albino turkey. (You can never make this stuff up.)

Global-warming people are trying to be good stewards and plan for the future; the only problem is that their future doesn't include people. Or if it does, the people are living in mud huts and dying very young, so as not to hurt the earth. Their virtues have run amok.

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Editor's note:

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The Emperor's New Climate: Is Global Warming Real? -- Part Four: Disaster Does Not Loom

Duncan Maxwell Anderson

Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2004

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[Read Part II - Are We Warm Yet? Click here](#)

[Read Part III The JKyoto Depression - Click here](#)

A funny thing happened as James Hansen was fielding questions from reporters in Washington, D.C., in 1988, terrifying senators with global warming predictions: The forests of eastern North America—no doubt including the Blue Ridge Mountains 60 miles to the west of the capital—were quietly absorbing CO₂.

A study by Princeton University, Columbia University, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducted between 1988 and 1992 showed that the eastern forests were so efficient a “sink” or absorber of carbon dioxide that they more than made up for all the emissions from America’s factories, power plants, campfires—even its SUVs.

Published in *Science* in 1998, it got comparatively little notice, but if the years covered by the study are typical, the implications for the world’s climate could be enormous. It would mean that America, rather than being a force oppressing the rest of the world with its huge economy and its greenhouse emissions, is actually picking up other countries’ greenhouse “trash.” If CO₂ is a problem, it’s the rest of the world that’s causing it.

Peter Huber, a fellow of the Manhattan Institute, shares the environmentalists’ desire for a cleaner, wilder planet less dominated by man—but he says their solutions are all wrong. Fossil fuels are good, he says, because they take up so little space. Solar cells are bad, because they block out the sun over an area that can’t be a habitat for trees or animals.

He even says that to go a given distance, an SUV is more earth-friendly than a guy on a bicycle, because the extra food consumed by the cyclist to make the journey takes more area to grow than all the space consumed by the SUV, its gasoline, and its share of the road.

America, not the low-tech world, is earth-friendly, because our farms are so efficient that they leave more room for the wilderness that heals the world’s air and serves as wildlife habitat. America’s forests, he points out, have been expanding every year since 1920, as people have left farms to live in cities, while our agricultural production has vastly increased.

Another factor: Feeding the horses and donkeys formerly needed for transportation and farming tied up twice the acreage used today by all our roads and highways, oil pipelines, refineries, and wells. Much of that extra acreage has reverted to trees.

The environmentalists can say, “If everyone lived like Americans, we’d need two planets—one to live on and

one to exploit.” But turnabout is fair play: If the whole world farmed as efficiently as Americans—using fossil fuels, productive cultivars, and modern tillage techniques—and most of the population lived in cities, as in America, there would be no environmental problems.

People would have plenty to eat, even in the Third World, and tropical forests everywhere would be expanding, instead of getting slashed and burned for primitive agriculture. The air would be clean, as it is even in America's industrial cities, instead of choked with ozone, as it is in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Austria. Instead of trying to shackle enterprise in rich countries, Huber says, the greens should be promoting American-style democracy and entrepreneurship in the Third World—which is fast becoming the source of most of the world's pollution.

Out there in the media, the meltdown is still just around the corner. In the December 5, 2003, issue of Science, NCDC's Thomas Karl and NCAR's Kevin Trenberth say the “likely result” of human activity on earth is “more frequent heat waves, droughts, extreme precipitation events, and related impacts, e.g., wildfires, heat stress, vegetation changes, and sea-level rise.”

Yawn. I'm sorry, but “likely” is pretty tepid soup 16 years after James Hansen promised us disaster, standing in the sun by the Capitol. If Hansen could say that global warming is “affecting our climate now,” shouldn't we now be seeing a sign or two that even a nonscientist would recognize? A mass extinction, maybe? A news story about someone's tires melting in a parking lot in Akron in April. No? How about a 15 percent falloff in snowblower sales?

Global-warming believers place their hopes, so to speak, on disasters in the future. Which is to say, on their computer simulations—the limitations of which are creaking audibly. It's not a good sign if sunspot patterns predict the climate better than the UN's favorite scientists, as Soon and Baliunas contend.

The surface of the planet has warmed one Fahrenheit degree over the past century. If that warming had been caused by a blanket of CO₂ trapping heat and transferring it back to Earth, the atmosphere should heat up first, then the surface.

Is that what actually happened? At the end of the 20th century (1976-2000), the surface of the planet was heating up 0.27 degrees Fahrenheit per decade. To warm the earth at that rate, the atmosphere should have been heating up even faster, at 0.41 degrees per decade.

But according to independent readings from weather satellites and weather balloons, the atmosphere warmed more slowly than the surface, at 0.13 degrees per decade. The model is off by a mere 200 percent. It's a pagan temptation to think, as some environmentalists seem to, that God is angry at us for enjoying the comforts of civilization—rather than to accept human ingenuity as His gift to us.

The global-warming believers' vision seems to be for everyone to live like graduate students on a hiking trip: bringing the latest, lightest, high-tech gear, but eating only gorp and dried tofu and bearing no children.

The Emperor's New Climate promised by the computer models should be so warm, we can all go around naked. If you must believe the scare stories, you can plant some palm trees and buy extra sunblock. But I don't suggest you spend much. And if you live where I live, I promise you that for at least one season every year, you can expect to shovel some snow. Thanks be to God, spring is just around the corner.

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