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How Much Hot Air is Due to Global Warming?

John Hoskins

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When the Romans ruled Britain, or at least all the parts they could reach without too much military embarrassment, they described it as a damp and foggy place. This it may have been at their forward posts in the North of England and the Welsh borders – but in fact it was overall a rather warmer place than today though winters were severe. Wine production was common across southern and central/lowland areas of Britain and generally the agricultural society was self-supporting. Fortunately, unfortunately, too long ago to even speculate, Rome's political problems were causing an implosion of the Empire. When they left Britain in 410 they took the good weather with them. Well, more or less; it got colder over the next few centuries to the detriment of viticulture but then it warmed up. It warmed up quite a lot by the criteria used to judge these things. A millennium ago the temperature was back to that at the beginning of the twentieth century. Over the next few hundred years after their departure it warmed up, and then over the next few hundred years it cooled down, uncomfortably down. Britain was suffering the "little ice age" which lasted until 1850. Climate scientists do not always agree with each other but here there is consensus. Nobody is quite sure when it started but they do agree when it ended. It ended in 1850 and then it started to get warmer again. It still is getting warmer, with ups and downs, a few warm years then a few cold years, and – never miss a merchandising opportunity – it is all our fault. We call it "global warming" and normally the world does what it wants to do, warms, cools, warms, cools and so on. This time round it has been decided, on the basis of science which was not always of the highest quality, that our profligate burning of fossil fuels to form carbon dioxide is to blame. The finger is pointed by the

grandly named Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change or IPCC. This body of around 2000 people of whom maybe 100 are climate scientists (not all of whom agree with the conclusions) have concluded in a report summary, "most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations". This leads to warming of the earth's surface and lower atmosphere by increasing the greenhouse effect. Scientists try to debate the arguments for and against but an industry has been spawned and politicians are speaking unto politicians. Their message is it can only end in tears unless we do something. The something is anything which keeps the money flowing while ignoring the real problem. We want a good modern hi-tech life, some of us are lucky enough to have it and the rest of the six billion or so people on the planet would like it as well. Unfortunately we are running out of resources. This planet cannot accommodate six billion people living a Western life-style. A billion okay, with some planning and giving a bit here and there maybe up to four billion but that is it. The problem has been noted in passing but such Malthusian ideas are deeply unfashionable and greeted with utter disdain in some circles, including understandably the Catholic church. Were we less sapient we would not know we could be heading towards a population collapse. There is little doubt that some groups on the Earth are. Local resources are often finite – what do you do after you have cut down the last tree?

Anyway, population dynamics, as I said in an earlier editorial, is dangerous territory, best not to go there. Better to concentrate on the dreaded warming. Is it really happening – probably it is. Is it all bad – probably, but

a very different probably to the previous probably and a probably that may well be probably not. Firstly, is it happening? The IPCC, many of whom are politicians said in their recent summary, a repeat, I know but there are annotations: Most of (>50% of) the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-twentieth century is very likely (confidence level >90%) due to the observed increase in anthropogenic (human) greenhouse gas concentrations.

A big problem, then, for all of us but is it true? Even a superficial reading of the literature shows there is much confusion. Firstly, how do you measure global temperature? Not easy, and even harder if you want historical measurements. Historically you need proxies, such as tree growth rings and the like, in recent decades you actually make measurements. One person's measurements it turns out are not accepted by another's. There are those who would say there are few or no changes to global temperature. The official temperature records of the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia, say that for the years 1998–2005 global average temperature did not increase (there was actually a slight, though not statistically significant, decrease). A rather short period admittedly but many of the arguments about global warming are based on short periods. The world has been warming since 1850, it warmed more between the two World Wars; 1940 was reportedly warmer than any warm year in more recent times. If we accept unreservedly the IPCC's findings then all this seems silly. If we believe that global temperature still goes up and down with time as it has done forever then it does not seem silly. Overall, it seems most likely that global mean temperature has increased in recent decades. Whether any consequent 'greenhouse effect' has occurred is a matter still for debate. If it has whether the effect was good or bad is a matter for even more intense debate. Whether it will get worse is a subject which has people at each other's throats. There are somelike Professor Sherwood Idso from Arizona State University, who says: "[W]arming has been shown to positively impact human health, while atmospheric CO₂ enrichment has been shown to enhance the health-promoting properties of the food we eat, as well as stimulate the production of more of it. ...[W]e have nothing to fear from increasing concentrations of atmospheric CO₂ and global warming" [1]. This brings me back to carbon dioxide which the IPCC says is the engine that is driving the global warming. Now, carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas. Not a very powerful one and not by any

means the major one, which is water vapour. We cannot do anything about water but maybe we can about carbon dioxide – and so, with that idea firmly entrenched, a global warming industry was born. Money just poured in, enormous sums of money have been made available to study, solve or ameliorate the problem. Zbigniew Jaworowski, a climate scientist and carbon dioxide denier, wrote recently [2]: During the past six years, the President of the United States devoted nearly \$29 billion to climate research, leading the world with its unparalleled financial commitment (The White House 2007 [3]). This was about \$5 billion per year, more than twice the amount spent on the Apollo Program (\$2.3 billion per year), which in 1969 put man on the Moon. A side-effect of this situation, and of politicizing the climate issue, was described by meteorologist Piers Corbyn in the *Weather Action Bulletin*, December 2000: "*The problem we are faced with is that the meteorological establishment and the global warming lobby research bodies which receive large funding are now apparently so corrupted by the largesse they receive that the scientists in them have sold their integrity.*"

Money on this scale is, of course not spread evenly. It is handed out very selectively. Now is a good time to make windmills, but not, it seems, nuclear power stations. The considerable involvement of governments and politicians and agendas which do not seem an all out struggle to address the problem have led those such as Patrick J. Michaels, who is a Research Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia to say [4]: "It may not quite add up to a conspiracy, but certainly a coalition of interests has promoted the greenhouse theory; scientists have needed funds, the media a story, and governments a worthy cause".

So there is a dilemma. Uncontrolled global warming that we may or may not be able to deal with; the disaster scenario; carbon footprints and as much money as you want – providing you sing from the correct hymn sheet. Or, the earth is just doing what it has always done, warm-up, cool-down, repeat to the end of time. The IPCC do not have it all their own way. There are many who are utterly convinced they are wrong. People such as Senator James Inhofe who concluded a speech in 2003 entitled "The Science of Climate Change" [6]. He asked the following question: "With all of the hysteria, all of the fear, all of the phony science, could it be that man-made global warming is the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people?" You decide.

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