The Politics, Science, and Politicized Science of Climate Change

Edward Ring

March 2, 2019

One has to wonder if the shock and despair described in David Bowie's 1971 hit, "Five Years," would be the preferred collective mentality for humanity, at least if the relentless propaganda campaigns of climate change activists are successful. And one must admit they have powerful allies at their disposal. A climate alarm consensus informs America's entire educational, entertainment, and media establishments, along with most corporate marketing, and most political platforms from the local city council to the United Nations.

Climate alarm shouldn't be a hard sell, and it isn't. The horror inspired by natural conflagrations taps into primal, instinctual fears; when vividly imagining terrifying acts of nature, even the most hardened skeptic might have a moment of pause.

California's horrifying wildfire that incinerated the town of Paradise in November 2018 is a good example. Later that month, retiring Governor Jerry Brown appeared on "Face the Nation" and predicted, "In less than five years even the worst skeptics are going to be believers."

Taking shameless advantage of every natural disaster to stoke fears of climate change has become normal. In October 2018, the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a special report predicting imminent global climate catastrophe. A month later, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released a grim "Fourth National Climate Assessment." In both cases, news reports included cataclysmic images designed to tap our deepest, most unreasoning and terrifying species memories; tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, fires.

And every time there's a hurricane, or a flood, or a wildfire, we're reminded again by the consensus establishment; we caused this. We are to blame. And nothing, absolutely nothing, is too high a price to pay to stop it.

Bjorn Lomborg, a Danish economist and author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, puts the cost of the U.N.'s climate recommendations at over $100 trillion for a reduction of 0.5 degrees centigrade. But rarely explored, and difficult to find, is data on how much it costs to adapt to climate change versus how much it would cost to stop climate change. Equally hard to find is information about the extent to which climate change might actually *benefit* humanity.

Political Categorizing of Today's Eco Intellectuals

In 2014, Matthew Nisbet, a professor of communications at Northeastern University, in a paper titled "Disruptive ideas: public intellectuals and their arguments for action on climate change" made an interesting attempt to classify influential activists and experts on climate change into three categories: Ecological Activists, Smart Growth Reformers, and Ecomodernists.

The focus of Nisbet's analysis was how these public intellectuals "establish their authority, spread their ideas, and shape public discourse."

While retaining Nisbet's framework, it is useful to speculate as to how each of the mass political ideologies and major political movements in 2019 America would align with each of Nisbet's three categories. After all, how "climate action" is implemented, now and in the future, arguably is the most significant variable determining how Americans and everyone else in the world will cope with challenges relating to energy development, economic growth, technology deployment, individual freedom, property rights, national sovereignty, international cooperation, and, of course, environmental protection.

Making this leap, a plausible match for each of Nisbet's categories would be as follows: The "Ecological Activists" are mostly socialists, the "Smart Growth Reformers" are mostly liberals, and the "Ecomodernists" are mostly libertarians. It is important to reiterate that this only roughly overlaps with the influencers Nisbet has characterized in his three groups. Moreover, there is a fourth important category that Nisbet ignored (or dismissed), which might be defined as practical skeptics. More on that later. Here is Nisbet's chart depicting his three categories of environmental influencers:

Public Intellectuals and their arguments for action on climate change

Group	Problem Framing	Outlook on Nature	Outlook on Technology	Policy Proposals	Model of Social Change
Ecological Activists					
Examples: • B. McKibben • D. Suzuki • C. Hamilton • G. Monbiot • N. Klein • P. Kingsnorth	Capitalism, consumerism has exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet, risking catastrophe, or certain collapse.	Sacred, fragile nature provides human salvation. Must be kept separate, protected against human influence.	Advocate small-scale, locally owned renewables. Warn that nuclear energy, genetic engineering too risky, promote consumption.[1]	Call for strong regulation of industry, rationing of energy use, localization of economies, food systems, governance.	New consciousness spread through grassroots organizing, social protest. Artistic attention to 'ecocide', myth of progress.[3]
Smart Growth Reformers					
Examples: • T. Friedman • Gore • N. Stern • J. Sachs • A. Lovins	Climate change is ultimate market failure, corrected by putting price on carbon. Progress blocked by 'deniers'.	Nature has limits, but 'dangerous interference' can be avoided by smart policy, 'stabilizing emissions', enabling 'sustainable growth'.	Market pricing will drive adoption of renewables, energy efficiency. Need government to catalyze nuclear, carbon capture.[2]	Call for binding international agreement, national carbon pricing, and government investment in innovation.	Market mechanisms drive change. More recent calls for grassroots pressure, third-party movements, new 'mindfulness'.
Ecomodernists					
Examples: • S. Brand • M. Hulme • R. Pielke Jr • S. Rayner • T. Nordhaus/ M. Shellenberger • A. Revkin	Misdiagnosed as environmental problem and market failure. Should be re-framed as energy innovation and societal resilience challenge.	Nature is more resilient than fragile. Innovative, high-energy planet can promote human progress, while conserving, managing nature.	Renewables not capable of meeting energy demand. Need government to develop natural gas, nuclear, carbon capture, other innovations.	Argue for portfolio of 'clumsy' policy approaches across levels of society, government investment in energy technologies and resilience strategies.	Technologies that lower cost of action, public forums that challenge assumptions create conditions for cooperation, innovation.

Socialist Environmentalists

The first of Nisbet's three categories are the Ecological Activists. Based on Nisbet's description, their political ideology is most likely socialist. This group has the most negative perspective on climate change, seeing it as a consequence of capitalism run amok. They argue that the carrying capacity of planet earth has reached its limit and that only by radically transforming society can the planet and humanity avoid catastrophe.

This group is Malthusian in outlook, and the solutions they advocate—returning to small scale, decentralized infrastructure, "smaller scale, locally owned solar, wind and geothermal energy technologies, and organic farming"—are not practical or even internally consistent for several reasons.

"Ecological Activists argue on behalf of a fundamental reconsideration of our worldviews, aspirations, and life goals, a new consciousness spread through grassroots organizing and social protest that would dramatically re-organize society, decentralize our politics, reverse globalization, and end our addiction to economic growth," Nisbet writes. It must be a very selective subset of globalization the Ecological Activists wish to reverse, however, because this most radical of Nisbet's cohorts tend to be the same people who favor open borders and the erasure of national governments. Can they truly believe small communities will constitute what remains of governance when nation-states and multinational corporations wither away?

But in their commitment to achieving 100 percent decentralized, renewable energy, the Ecological Activists make their greatest departure from reality.

The algebra of global energy consumption and population trends are well known. For everyone on earth to consume half as much energy per capita as Americans currently consume, global energy production would need to double. Currently, renewables, for the most part very large scale renewables—primarily wind and solar—contribute less than 4 percent of global energy production, while fossil fuels contribute nearly 90 percent. Scenarios involving wholesale abandonment of centralized, fossil fuel based energy production cannot have any basis in reality unless people are prepared to accept outcomes that are horrific. Some Ecological Activists acknowledge this.

For example, in his 1968 bestseller *The Population Bomb*, early ecological activist Paul Ehrlich suggested international "triage," wherein nations lacking the ability to achieve self-sufficiency would have foreign aid cut off. Implicit in this strategy was that millions, if not hundreds of millions, of people would die. Ehrlich was talking about food aid, but he might as well have been talking about energy. The chances that a developing nation reliant on coal and oil can make a smooth transition to wind and solar energy using only their internal economic resources are zero.

Not mentioned in Nisbet's paper, but easily fitting into the Ecological Activists category, are the "deep greens," a group typified by the "Deep Green Resistance." They reject "green technology and renewable energy," both in terms of its ability to meet the total energy requirements of modern civilization, and in terms of how "green" it actually is. Their solution is to "create a life-centered resistance movement that will dismantle industrial civilization by any means necessary."

Most Ecological Activists believe in phasing out the use of fossil fuel in a manner they perceive to be as benign as possible. But to achieve this, and unlike the Smart Growth Reformers, the Ecological Activists do not believe in market-based solutions. They support carbon rationing and carbon taxes as the means both to curtail the use of fossil fuel and to fund development and deployment of renewable energy solutions.

In Congress today, the Ecological Activists would be most represented by the Democratic Socialists, led by their media-anointed leader, Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (D-N.Y.). The policies promoted by Ocasio-Cortez and her allies in the "Green New Deal," in its

undiluted form, read like a socialist manifesto. The fundamental "economic rights" of all Americans, according to the Green New Deal, as described on the U.S. Green Party's website, are:

(1) The right to employment through a Full Employment Program that will create 25 million jobs by implementing a nationally funded, but locally controlled direct employment initiative replacing unemployment offices with local employment offices offering public sector jobs which are "stored" in job banks in order to take up any slack in private sector employment.

(2) Workers' rights including the right to a living wage, to a safe workplace, to fair trade, and to organize a union at work without fear of firing or reprisal.

(3) The right to quality health care which will be achieved through a single-payer Medicare-for-All program.

(4) The right to a tuition-free, quality, federally funded, local controlled public education system from pre-school through college. We will also forgive student loan debt from the current era of unaffordable college education.

(5) The right to decent affordable housing, including an immediate halt to all foreclosures and evictions.

(6) The right to accessible and affordable utilities—heat, electricity, phone, internet, and public transportation—through democratically run, publicly owned utilities that operate at cost, not for profit.

(7) The right to fair taxation that's distributed in proportion to ability to pay. In addition, corporate tax subsidies will be made transparent by detailing them in public budgets where they can be scrutinized, not hidden as tax breaks.

It should come as no surprise that these "economic rights" are integral to the "Green New Deal" as it is envisioned by most all of the socialist environmentalists. The actual "green" portion of the Green New Deal is equally ambitious. Depending on the source, the goal of Green New Deal policies is to make the United States achieve "zero emissions" within the next 10-30 years. The Green Party proclaims specific, and very ambitious goals, declaring "The Green New Deal starts with transitioning to 100% green renewable energy (no nukes or natural gas) by 2030." The young activists running the website "Data for Progress"declare "The full U.S. economy can and must run on a mix of energy that is either zero-emission or 100 percent carbon capture by mid-century."

It is impossible to catalog the profusion of activist groups and activist websites now promoting the Green New Deal. There are too many. But almost invariably they perceive "social justice," socialist economics, environmentalism, and abolition of fossil fuels as interlinked goals sharing common values. One of the explicitly political online promoters of a congressional Green New Deal is the Sunrise Movement. The group claims already to have secured the endorsements of 45 members of Congress, along with hundreds of environmentalist organizations.

The organizations supporting a congressional Green New Deal are impressive not only by the sheer numbers of participants but their institutional diversity—labor unions, youth movements, women's organizations, "interfaith" groups, progressive democrats, anti-war groups, anti-nuclear groups, Native American groups, college associations, "clean energy" advocates, and countless

environmental pressure groups. Examining the websites of these organizations reveals that in most cases they are set up either as political organizations, or they are set up to conduct political advocacy and public education while coordinating their efforts with political affiliates. A typical political agenda for one of these organizations would be to "recruit the army" in 2019, then swing elections in 2020 through voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts.

But how can Americans possibly expect to replace conventional energy with more expensive renewable energy, at the same time as they pay additional trillions to secure the "economic rights" for everyone living in the United States? The very idea is so preposterous it is difficult to take the socialist environmentalist movement seriously. That would be a mistake.

Liberal Environmentalists

If the Ecological Activists tend to lean socialist, the second of Nisbet's groups, the Smart Growth Reformers, appear to be conventional liberals. They are more business-friendly, and while they agree that a climate catastrophe is inevitable without dramatic changes in policy, they believe "market forces" can be harnessed to change the energy economy of the world. Where the Ecological Activists support carbon taxes and carbon rationing, the Smart Growth Reformers support carbon trading.

The best known of the so-called Smart Growth Reformers is former Vice President Al Gore, who has enjoyed a career since 2000 that, if anything, eclipses his accomplishments as a politician. In addition to producing Oscar-winning documentaries on climate change, writing bestsellers on the topic, and receiving a Nobel Prize for his proselytizing on the issue, he has become fabulously wealthy. As a co-founder of Generation Investment Management, with over $18 billion in assets under management, and as a senior partner at the elite venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins, Gore falls firmly into the pro-business political camp, along with plenty of other liberal democrats. A likely Gore ally among the Smart Growth Reformers would be U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), whose net worth is estimated at $29 million.

It isn't hard to see why emissions trading would appeal to pro-business liberals, although embracing this terminology requires a very specific sort of definition for the phrase "pro-business." Why enact a carbon tax, where only the government gets to be the middleman, when with emissions trading, you can engage the global financial community, and create completely new categories of economics, as armies of accountants, economists, environmental scientists, and myriad additional, highly-credentialed ancillary experts engage in cradle to cradle assessments of carbon molecules?

Here's how this byzantine scheme is supposed to work:

First, companies—*all of them*, from manufacturers, to dairy farmers, to public utilities—are required to report how much carbon they emit. But is this just "value-added" carbon, or would it also include carbon embodied in the raw materials and other inputs they source, and the carbon emitted by the transportation assets they utilized to acquire those materials?

Then each company is assigned a "baseline" annual carbon allowance, based on their current level of carbon emissions. But what if some companies already became highly carbon efficient, and have less capacity to reduce their emissions compared to their competitors? No worries, the experts will take that into account.

The government, working in partnership with "stakeholders" including the affected companies as well as the facilitators in the financial community, awards an initial annual carbon emission allocation to each company. If they wish to emit more, they have to purchase emission credits; if they plan to emit less, they may sell their unused emission allocations.

The financial community, working with government regulators, creates an exchange where permits to emit units of CO2, as well as credits to fund unit reductions of CO2, are traded, with the price per unit set by market supply and demand.

The government, working in partnership with all "stakeholders" including the affected companies as well as the facilitators in the financial community, will then issue a reductions schedule, whereby each participating company (participation is mandatory) will be awarded fewer emissions allowances each year. This means that over time they will be forced to either buy more emissions credits on a trading market, or invest in innovative technology that will allow them to achieve their productivity goals with fewer emissions. In aggregate, emission allowances will systematically decline in conformity with national and international objectives.

At that point, private companies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies will emerge with the mission of creating "carbon credits." This is where the scheme gets even more interesting. These organizations may plant forests to sequester carbon, or they may actually inject carbon dioxide gas into underground caverns to "sequester" it (nothing could go wrong there), or, as government agencies, they may zone ultra high-density neighborhoods in order to create a "carbon footprint" for their community that is lower than it would have been otherwise.

This last example introduces the concept of "additionality," whereby, for example, the experts determine how much CO2 might have been emitted if none of the zoning rules or building codes had been changed (imagine detached homes with reasonably spacious lots, a few of them with solar panels installed by choice of the homeowner) versus how much CO2 would be emitted if aggressive changes are made (imagine homes squeezed 14 to an acre, with all rooftops covered with photovoltaic panels).

Emissions-trading schemes pose all kinds of problems. Think of the subjectivity inherent in measuring significant variables, the stupefying complexity, the huge, nonproductive overhead, consisting of a veritable army of bureaucrats, consultants, experts, and, of course, financial middlemen. Or consider the vast potential for corruption, or just multiplying schemes that turn out to do more harm than good, saturate the prospect of emissions trading from end to end.

A recent ignoble example would be how carbon emissions trading in the European Union funded palm oil plantations. To purchase the right to emit more CO2 than their allotment, European companies bought "carbon credits," investing in "carbon neutral" biofuel plantations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and elsewhere in the tropics. Thousands of square miles of tropical rainforest, valuable wildlife habitat, were incineratedto accommodate the new market for biodiesel made from palm oil. By the time the Europeans realized what they were doing, it was too late. Just ask the orangutans of Borneo, if there are any left.

The "smart growth reformers" advocate more than just carbon trading, but it is difficult to overstate its centrality to their much broader agenda. And it's important to emphasize that the scope of its implementation will go far beyond regulating energy. Because there is a "carbon footprint" to virtually every development—all housing, all infrastructure, all transportation; not

just power plants, but bridges, dams, water and wastewater treatment plants, solid waste management, the energy grid, inland waterways, levees, ports, public parks, roads, rail, transit, schools, every durable good, every gadget, everything.

In the hands of a creative carbon accountant, there isn't any human activity that might not have earnings potential, taxation potential, or become a target for regulation. Government agencies view this as a gold mine. Code enforcement departments and planning commissions will become profit centers—so long as people are forced by law and ordinance to use less and consume less. And to enable, monitor, and enforce the great ratcheting down: the internet of things.

Libertarian Environmentalists

It may not be entirely accurate to claim that most Ecomodernists are libertarians. While libertarians appear to overlap more with the Ecomodernists than with Smart Growth Reformers or Ecological Activists, there are plenty of libertarians who have been seduced by the "market-based" solutions of emissions trading. Moreover, according to Nisbet's paradigm, Ecomodernists "argue for 'clumsy' policy approaches across levels of society, government investment in energy technologies and resilience strategies," hardly something you would expect from a Libertarian. Nonetheless, many self-proclaimed Ecomodernists identify as libertarians. One of the public intellectuals who is cited by Nisbet as an Ecomodernist is Michael Shellenberger. An apt choice, as Shellenberger co-authored "An Ecomodernist Manifesto" along with 17 other notables.

Released in 2015, the manifesto's mission statement includes the following: "We offer this statement in the belief that both human prosperity and an ecologically vibrant planet are not only possible, but also inseparable. By committing to the real processes, already underway, that have begun to decouple human well-being from environmental destruction, we believe that such a future might be achieved. As such, we embrace an optimistic view toward human capacities and the future."

The Seven Key Sections of the Ecomodernist Manifesto

(1) Humanity has flourished over the past two centuries.

(2) Even as human environmental impacts continue to grow in the aggregate, a range of long-term trends is today driving significant decoupling of human well-being from environmental impacts.

(3) The processes of decoupling described above challenge the idea that early human societies lived more lightly on the land than do modern societies.

(4) Plentiful access to modern energy is an essential prerequisite for human development and for decoupling development from nature.

(5) We write this document out of deep love and emotional connection to the natural world.

(6) We affirm the need and human capacity for accelerated, active, and conscious decoupling. Technological progress is not inevitable. Decoupling environmental impacts from economic outputs is not simply a function of market-driven innovation and efficient response to scarcity.

(7) We offer this statement in the belief that both human prosperity and an ecologically vibrant planet are not only possible but also inseparable.

While reading the opening sentences of the seven sections of the Ecomodernist Manifesto don't begin to do it justice, it's enough to clarify some of the main points. The repetitive themes are that humans are better off than they've ever been, that primitive societies were not more in harmony with nature than modern societies can become, that plentiful energy is a prerequisite for human development, and that it is possible and necessary to "decouple" economic growth from environmental destruction.

Ecomodernists may not all embrace the libertarian desire to let the unfettered free market solve every challenge facing humanity (note point No. 6), but perhaps in a more important sense they are very libertarian, in their commitment to encouraging a free market of ideas.

All in all, the Ecomodernist category is an intriguing way of gathering together an eclectic group of thinkers. Also included on Nisbet's list of Ecomodernists is Roger Pielke Jr., a political science professor at the University of Colorado and another co-author of the "Ecomodernist Manifesto." Pielke's situation is one that many Ecomodernists (and Practical Skeptics) face, he is condemned by the "consensus" community merely because he is occasionally willing to criticize their work. In a commentary in the *Wall Street Journa*l in 2016, he wrote:

I believe climate change is real and that human emissions of greenhouse gases risk justifying action, including a carbon tax. But my research led me to a conclusion that many climate campaigners find unacceptable: There is scant evidence to indicate that hurricanes, floods, tornadoes or drought have become more frequent or intense in the U.S. or globally. In fact we are in an era of good fortune when it comes to extreme weather.

Where Pielke is attacked for exposing politically motivated hyperbole that violates the integrity of the scientists that produce it or condone it, Danish economist Bjorn Lomborg(who is *not* on Nisbet's list of Ecomodernists but perhaps should be) is attacked for exposing the deeply flawed economic logic underlying many of the most urgently promoted policies designed to mitigate climate change.

In a tweet in December, Lomborg lamented the persecutory culture of the climate change community:

What happens when you can't keep cool on global warming: Everyone labeled "deniers" unless they don't just support the science, but also every climate policy, no matter how inefficient. This is how panic and politicization lets bad policies dominate.

What Pielke, Lomborg, and many others have in common is their overt, unequivocal agreement with the fundamental premise—Earth *is* warming, and anthropogenic CO2 *is* the cause. And yet they are at times marginalized because they question certain critical assumptions or conclusions relating to that premise. As these two examples show, the twin hearts of the climate change movement—the science and the economics—have hardened against the voices of contrarians. Along with being eclectic, contrarian might be another widely shared quality of the Ecomodernists.

Unlike the Socialist Environmentalists or the Liberal Environmentalists, Ecomodernists are not as quick to condemn contrarian points of view.

Shellenberger, for example, through his organization Environmental Progress, is a strong advocate of large scale development of new nuclear power plants to produce environmentally

friendly electricity. While this solution generally attracts condemnation from the Socialist and Liberal Environmentalists, it is attracting growing support among Ecomodernists.

The Ecomodernist, or, if you will, the Libertarian Environmentalist, as a category, is elusive and heterogeneous. These qualities make its output less predictable, its potential greater. It is best defined simply as not belonging to the two preceding categories, nor willing to cross the red line into overtly questioning the theory of anthropogenic global warming. It has much to offer.

Practical Skeptics

The failure of Nisbet to include climate skeptics as a fourth category may be a forgivable oversight on his part, because climate skeptics almost have been erased from public dialogue. As a result, it makes sense that Nisbet would not consider the members of this group to qualify as influential public intellectuals.

Another reason Nisbet may not have included climate skeptics would be because he was analyzing differing approaches by "public intellectuals arguing for action on climate change." It's certainly debatable, but understandable to assert that climate skeptics are arguing for no action on climate change. Equally likely, of course, was that Nisbet chose to avoid the opprobrium he would invite if he legitimized climate skeptics by including them in his analysis.

Climate skeptics have been demonized and ostracized by the socialist and liberal environmentalists. The Ecomodernists, for the most part, scrupulously avoid allowing their laudable contrarianism to overflow into questioning the theory of anthropogenic global warming.

For example, and as previously noted, Bjorn Lomborg is condemned because he points out the undesirable economic consequences of the recommended solutions. Roger Pielke Jr. is condemned for pointing how the actual data does not support the activist contention that severe storms are increasing in frequency. And Michael Shellenberger invites criticism for offering the heresy of clean nuclear power as a solution to energy challenges. Maybe persecution engenders empathy. Whatever the reason, while none of these three individuals are "skeptics" in the harshest sense of the term, neither do they go out of their way categorically to denounce skeptics.

Practical Skeptics have a range of positions that earn them the "denier" label, and everything that comes with that: suppression of their work, savaging of their reputations, and banishment from the public square. Some of them, such as "Climate Etc." host Judith Curry, former professor and chairwoman of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, maintain that while anthropogenic CO2 is contributing to global warming, the likely amount of warming is far less than what alarmingly is being projected. Curry has also criticized the growing calls by congressional Democrats to criminalize the free speech of skeptic scientists, by attempting to expose their links, if any, to fossil fuel corporations.

One of the most distinguished, and most demonized, of living climate skeptics is Richard Lindzen, an American atmospheric physicist who is a senior fellow with the Cato Institute. Until his retirement in 2013, Lindzen was the Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lindzen was one of the early participants in the early IPCC reports on climate change, but became disillusioned because he perceived the organization had become politicized.

Lindzen's specific criticisms of conventional climate change theories are many: He acknowledges there are moderate warming trends, but that it is merely our emergence from the

"little ice age" of the 19th century. He claims that if the earth were warming significantly, extreme weather would diminish, not increase. He questions the assumptions built into the computer programs that model global climate and produce predictions. He believes predicted warming is overstated. He states that the natural feedback mechanisms governing the global climate have offsetting impacts, and that if they did not, the earth would have experienced catastrophic warming eons ago.

There are dozens of credible climate skeptics, credible enough, that is, to deserve a place on panels at climate conferences or congressional testimony, editorial pages, scientific journals, and press coverage, on what are arguably the most consequential policy decisions of modern times. Along with Curry and Lindzen, other skeptical scientists include Roy Spencer, Fred Singer, and Anastasios Tsonisalong with many others who are keeping their heads down.

Lindzen has said that many climate scientists will criticize alarmist pronouncements in whatever may be their specific area of expertise. A glaciologist will challenge a press release predicting an ice-free Himalayan mountain range by 2035. A meteorologist will challenge a press release asserting an increase in extreme weather. But none of them will take the further step of criticizing the overall "consensus."

Along with scientists willing to offer their contrarian views on global warming and climate change, there are useful websites tracking and reporting on the debate—a vibrant scientific debate that is alive and well despite being institutionally suppressed—Anthony Watts and Jo Nova both produce excellent daily summaries that offer updates on the ongoing scientific and political discussions surrounding climate change.

There remains a handful of organizations that will provide equal time, or even promote, climate skeptics. They include Cato, AEI, The Heartland Institute, and the Heritage Foundation. But these scientists, these online reporters, and these nonprofit organizations are vastly outgunned by most of the political establishment (with the major exception of the Trump administration), the media and entertainment communities, prestigious scientific journals, the K-12 public education system, higher education, local, state, federal, and international government bureaucracies, virtually every major corporate or financial player, and spectacularly wealthy nonprofit educational foundations including powerful environmental pressure groups.

Even the American judiciary is demonstrably biased, underscored on April 2, 2007, where in their ruling in *Massachusetts v. EPA*, the Supreme Court found that greenhouse gases are air pollutants covered by the Clean Air Act.

But scientific "consensus" does not constitute scientific *truth*. Just ask Galileo. And the overwhelming institutional consensus on a course of action, even if there is such a thing, does not mean that course of action is the optimal course of action.

Solutions Require Renewed Debate

Even if anthropogenic CO2 emissions are driving the planet headlong into an apocalyptic nightmare, climate skeptics should be heard. Because as it is the scope of acceptable debate is relentlessly narrowing. Should Bjorn Lomborg's valuable economic analysis be ignored, simply because he's willing to point out the absurdity of spending trillions for the remote possibility of slowing warming by a half-degree? Should Roger Pielke, Jr. be silenced, when the data he

presents suggests extreme weather may not be the primary type of havoc for which we need to prepare?

Should Ecomodernists who recognize market forces aren't always best able to predict and quickly adapt to environmental challenges be shunned by "true" libertarians? Should Ecomodernists who promote nuclear power be shunned by the broader anti-nuke environmentalist community—joined by the commercial interests that benefit from eliminating a competitor? And what if the skeptics are right? What if global warming, regardless of the cause, will not race catastrophically upwards? What if some warming, and somewhat more CO2 in the atmosphere, is mostly good for the planet and for humanity? What if extreme weather is not bound to become more extreme than ever?

Most importantly, what if spending trillions to replace fossil fuel with far more expensive alternatives robs us of the resources needed to lift billions of people out of poverty, thwarting their aspirations at the same time as providing them no means or incentive to reduce their fertility? What if the money we spend covering the world with solar panels, wind farms, and electric transmission lines, could better be spent to replant the mangrove forests that used to buffer tropical coastlines against tsunamis, or desalinate seawater so coast dwellers no longer watch their land sink below sea level because of subsidence caused by overpumping groundwater?

A healthy policy synthesis would be to promote and invest in projects and technologies that make sense no matter what climate outcome is destined to befall the planet. But the chances of getting that right are improved if skeptics are allowed to rejoin the conversation.

The notion that skeptics are the beneficiaries of vast sums of dark money is by now ludicrous. Every major corporation, certainly including the oil companies, has worked out their lucrative pathway into a profitable "carbon-free" future. But which set of public intellectuals, along with their powerful institutional allies and grassroots constituents, will prevail?

Will it be the Socialist Environmentalists, who are funded by a European-style leftist oligarchy, backed up by populist agitators, with growing support from the electorate? And if so, will any of the stupendous sums of new tax revenues they collect actually make it onto the ground in the form of renewable energy, and if so, will it do any good? Or will climate change just be the Trojan Horse of socialism that finally made it through the gates?

What about the Liberal Environmentalists, the "Smart Growth Reformers"? Will they win? And if so, do we want to live in their hyper-regulated world, where the "free market" survives in the form of cronyism, and every aspect of our lives is monitored in order to ensure we each maintain our "carbon neutrality"? And will that do any good? And when the predicted climate disasters don't happen, will any of them admit those disasters weren't going to happen anyway, or will they claim the green police state they built saved the world?

The Ecomodernists, we hope, will excuse being associated in any context with the Practical Skeptics, but here goes: in terms of divergent, undogmatic thinking, and general optimism regarding the ultimate fate of humanity, these two groups have much in common. It used to be accepted that the person holding the sign on the street corner, proclaiming the imminent doom of mankind was the crazy one, and the person suggesting that actually, mankind is probably not

doomed, was the sane one. But in the crazy world of climate alarmism, those roles have been inverted.

Shock. Despair. Change everything, overnight, or else. We've got five years. When it comes to climate change, that is the prevailing message, and deviation from that message invites demonization, banishment, erasure.

In a recent and very typical development, the BBC, in response to pressure from activists, announced in September 2018 they would no longer cover the arguments of climate skeptics. This is a natural progression that began in 2007 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled—in an ominous endorsement of politicized science and a staggering violation of common sense—that CO2, part of our atmospheric blanket against the cold cosmic emptiness, the food of all plant life, whose rise perhaps delays the past-due next ice age, is a pollutant. Nisbet's omission of climate skeptics from his panoply of public intellectuals driving the climate debate is just another part of this sad, possibly misanthropic, potentially tragic course.

It is unclear who is right, nor whether reason will prevail. But it would be far better if every voice was heard.