

# THE MORAL LIBERAL

## You Ought to Have A Look

### Poor Climate Models, Ethics and Climate Policy, New White House Guidelines

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Here are a couple of items from around the web that caught our eye this week:

The first is an analysis of recent climate model performance undertaken by Steve McIntyre over at his now-famous “[Climate Audit](#)” blog. (Recall that McIntyre began his blog as a place to carefully examine—”audit”—the now infamous “[hockeystick](#)” representation of the earth’s surface temperature history of the past millennium or so.) In his [latest post](#), McIntyre compares climate model predictions against real-world observations of the earth’s temperature over the past several decades—a task that is near and dear to our own hearts. (We have been in San Francisco this week at the annual fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union presenting a [poster](#) on a similar topic.)

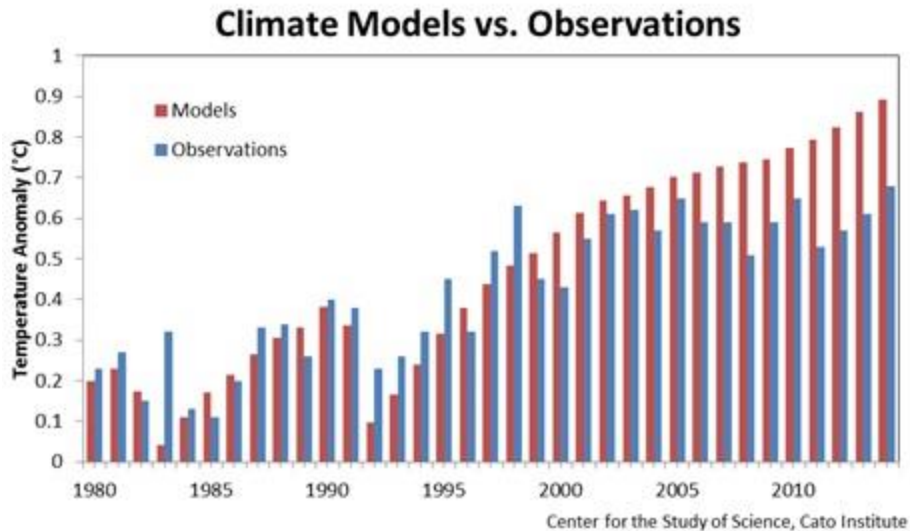
McIntyre finds the discrepancy between models and reality to be “unprecedented” and described the results of his examination:

Equally noteworthy however—and of greater interest to [Climate Audit] readers where there has been more focus on model-observation discrepancy—is that the overheating discrepancy between models and surface temperatures in 2014 was the fourth highest in “recorded” history and that the 5 largest warm discrepancies have occurred in the past 6 years. The cumulative discrepancy between models and observations is far beyond any previous precedent. This is true for both surface and satellite comparisons.

If this all sounds familiar, it’s because we reached a similar conclusion ourselves in our recent post, “[Record Global Temperature—Conflicting Reports, Contrasting Implications](#),” where we noted:

For the past 16 straight years, climate models have collectively projected more warming than has been observed.

Our results (and Steve’s) follow from plots like the one below, showing the average expectations from climate models verses what really happened since 1980.



*Global annual surface temperature anomalies from 1980 to 2014. The average of 108 climate models (red) and observations from NOAA (blue) are anomalies from the 20<sup>th</sup> century average. In the case of the NOAA observations, the 2014 value is the average of January-October.*

There are a lot more details in the full McIntyre post, including an analysis of the satellite-derived temperatures of the lower atmosphere (which shows pretty much the same discrepancy with climate models as do surface observations). Also, there are interesting discussions in the comments section of the post regarding further details of assessments of climate model performance and their appropriateness. You ought to have a look, and while you are there, be sure to add "[Climate Audit](#)" to your "favorites" list—you won't be disappointed.

Another post that caught our attention this week was [this piece](#) by Judith Curry over at "[Climate Etc.](#)" examining the issue of ethics and climate change policy. Curry focuses on a recent [report](#) from the Global Warming Policy Foundation authored by Peter Lee, a lecturer in ethics and political theory at the University of Portsmouth, adding her own comments along the way.

Curry highlights this extract from Lee's paper:

Put more crudely, setting mitigation policy goals that cannot and will not be met, either because they are aiming beyond the scope of the knowable and do-able or because national political interests make them unrealistic and unattainable, is itself in practice less ethical than setting goals that are lower, but more readily achievable. I assume here that the greater the speculation and uncertainties involved, the weaker the ethical claim. Conversely, as the certainty increases, the stronger the ethical claim. If it is not apparent already, I am suggesting that a commitment to mitigation policies has a reduced ethical claim because of the unknowns and unknowables involved, whether those unknowns concern the future of the environment or the future of the poorest citizens on Earth. An ethical commitment to adaptation is at least rooted in actual events as they occur.

She conclude her remarks with:

I spent a lot of time reading and thinking about this essay. I haven't previously encountered Peter Lee's writings; I've googled him and it seems that climate change is a new topic for his writings. Lee is a very welcome voice to the complex debate on climate change ethics. I don't agree with everything in his essay, but I found his overall perspective to be very fresh and I found some of his statements to be remarkably insightful.

The [whole piece](#) at "Climate Etc." is well worth checking out.

Last, but certainly not least, President Obama and his pen remain tireless in throwing up roadblocks to all manner of development in the name of mitigating climate change. The latest congressional end-around comes in the form of proposed new guidelines issued by the White House Council on Environmental Policy for all federal projects (or projects requiring federal approval) to include the project's effect on climate change. The *Wall Street Journal's* Amy Harder [describes the implications](#) this way:

The White House is calling on federal agencies to consider the climate-change impact of a wide range of energy projects that require government approval.

The draft guidelines, released Thursday by the White House's Council on Environmental Quality, are likely to affect fossil-fuel projects the most, such as pipelines, terminals that export coal and liquefied natural gas, and production of oil, natural gas and coal on public lands.

The ironic (if that is the right word) thing here is that while the new guidelines are aimed at climate change, *they strongly dissuade the reporting agencies from actually reporting on the climate change effects of the projects under consideration*. The White House prefers, instead, to limit the discussion to the *greenhouse gas emissions* (both direct and indirect) from the project, and how those emissions affect the larger goal of greenhouse gas emissions targets at the state or national level.

Apparently, it is preferable to [say things like](#) [emphasis in EPA original]:

- All told—the Plan puts our nation on track to cut carbon pollution from the power sector by **30 percent** by 2030—that's about **730 million metric tonnes** of carbon pollution.
- That's equal to the annual emissions from more than **150 million cars**, or almost **2/3s of the nation's passenger vehicles**—or the annual emissions from powering **65 million homes, over half the homes in America**.

But it's not OK to [say things like](#):

This Plan will mitigate global warming by less than two one-hundredths of a degree Celsius by the year 2100.

We note that the [new White House guidelines](#) are only in their draft form and are open for public comment. We won't miss the opportunity to insert our two-cents' worth (and probably a lot more).

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