# Re: global warming: is it us, or is it the sun?

***Source:*** http://sci.tech−archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2004−08/0248.html

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***From:*** jjustwwondering (*jwasilewsky_at_hotmail.com*)
***Date:*** 08/03/04

Date: 2 Aug 2004 17:45:12 −0700

Mike Atkinson <Mike@ladsyhotNO.demonSPAM.co.uk> wrote in message
news:<cej4un$d54$1$830fa795@news.demon.co.uk>...
*> jjustwwondering wrote:*
*> > The study should therefore continue*
*> > *as long as it takes* to achieve adequate clarity.*
*> > Judging by the rate of progress, mere 10 years*
*> > is not nearly enough.*
*> >*
*> > Maybe 30 or 40 years can do it. But it might take centuries.*
*> > Climatology has made some interesting advances, but it is not*
*> > as mature a science as even pre−Newton physics was.*
*> >*
*> > Angry activists anxious for action must just learn*
*> > waiting − longer, perhaps forever: the practical problem*
*> > may go away before it is solved. This happened with*
*> > the Global Freeze problem of the Seventies.*
*>*
*> There is a real possibility that waiting 30 or 40 years will mean that a*
*> 10C temperature rise is inevitable. Are you willing to take the chance?*

Consider some logical ramifications of
admitting such a possibility.

A temperature rise on such a scale, in a foreseeable future,
would be way outside the range estimated
by the consensus of climatologists
(as represented, e.g., by IPCC).

Is it possible that the consensus is *wrong*?
Yes.

But *if* we assume it to be wrong, then *all kinds* of
possibilities − not just the one you mention − *also*
become real; and *then* we have even less basis for any
*particular* action. In that case, we must equally admit
the other "real possibility" that, for example,
curbing CO2 emissions would have direct or indirect
disastrous consequences − "are you willing to take the chance?"

The principle "aim before you fire" still remains the
only prudent one. To act otherwise would be (to extend that
metaphor) to (1) waste valuable cartridges, (2) probably leave
the enemy intact and (3) possibly hit one's own troops.

We *must* have clarity before we act, if our actions are
to be helpful and not harmful.

This clarity can come about in *two* ways.
Either the situation may be clarified theoretically − or
it may clarify itself practically, by getting much better
or much worse. E.g., if the temperature rise is reversed, we'd
know we had another false alarm.

If, on the other hand, an unexpected, runaway,
self−reinforcing rise in either CO2 content or temperatures
began, *then* would be the time to stop and
reverse it even before it is explained. That could be done,
by (in the first case) sequestering extra CO2 or
(in the second) screening sunlight with aerosols.

*> The "Global Freeze problem of the Seventies" was the general realization*
*> that interglacials usually last about 10,000 years and we are about*
*> 10,000 years into the current one. There was nothing man−made about that*
*> problem, or much that could be done with 1970's technology.*

That is neither historically true (see below)
nor relevant. It is not relevant because (whatever the cause)
further cooling was in any case a widely expected effect (like
further warming now) that failed to materialize.
The problem went away.
Granted that the consensus now is stronger and
there is more data.
But all the factors in play *now* were in play *then*; − and they
are *still* inadequately understood (in the sense that
some major, first−order factors are still not accounted for).
If one prediction based on such incomplete analysis of
an intractable problem failed
then, another may well fail now.

As for the historical point: one of the two major mechanisms
considered at that time responsible for the cooling
was *industrial aerosol emission* − just as now
*industrial greenhouse emission* is considered a
major factor of present or future *warming*. The two
theories are remarkably symmetrical; the
popular recommendations are quite similar (reduce
industrial emissions); and even some of the proponents
of both theories are the same!

To quote:

|| There was a paper by S. Ichtiaque Rasool
|| and Stephen H. Schneider, published in the journal
|| Science in July 1971. Titled "Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide
|| and Aerosols: Effects of Large Increases on Global
|| Climate," the paper examined the possible future effects
|| of two types of human environmental emissions:
|| greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide;
|| particulate pollution such as smog, some of which
|| remains suspended in the atmosphere in aerosol form
|| for years. [...] In their paper,
|| Rasool and Schneider theorized that aerosols were more
|| likely to contribute to climate change in the
|| foreseeable future than greenhouse gases, stating that quadrupling
|| aerosols "could decrease the mean surface temperature (of
|| Earth) by as much as 3.5 degrees K.
|| If sustained over a period of several years,
|| such a temperature decrease could be sufficient to
|| trigger an ice age!"

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(http://www.fact−index.com/g/gl/global_cooling.html#1971%20Paper%20on%20Warming%20and%20Cooling%20Fa

> *We now know*
> *that interglacials are quite variable in length and the current one is*
> *likely to be longer than average. Comparing it to the global warming is*
> *a red herring.*

See above!

> *We know that most of the current global warming is man induced*

As the article quoted at the root of this discussion shows,
we do not *know* it. There is not even an expert consensus
(much less *knowledge*) that *most* warming
is manmade. IIRC, even the IPCC deliberations used much
more cautious expressions, such as "discernible human influence".

> *and that current pattens of behavior will cause C02 levels to rise*

True enough, so far.

> *causing the problem to get worse.*

That, we do *not* know. We do not even know there *is*
a practical problem (there certainly is a *scientific* problem).

Moderate warming is not, *per se*, a universally bad thing −
therefore not a global "problem" in that sense
(it may cause some local problems, as well as
some local benefits). The most important
global effect, so far, has been the increase in vegetation

and in crop yields − that's hardly a "problem", we could use
more of that.

Will warming ever become *immoderate* (absent any collective action)?
That *would* be a problem. But nobody knows if it ever will.
It *may* moderate itself through a
negative feedback mechanism (I could name a couple of
plausible ones that may or may not do the job).
It may be offset or overwhelmed at any
time by a turnaround in solar activity.
And its anthropogenic component is quite likely to
be reduced or reversed by future trends in
energy technology.

If none of this occurs before we have a *true* problem (in
the bad sense of the word) − then will be the time
to act, not *blindly* as we would act now, but targeting that
particular problem. With environmental problems, it is as
with redcoats at Bunker Hill: hold fire until you see the
whites of their eyes!