

THE NEED TO BELIEVE IN THE ‘SOLUTION’ TO GLOBAL WARMING

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There’s a Consensus among scientists that if you take a long walk off a short dock, you’ll get wet. Non-scientists concur. Just as they agree with scientists that fire is hot, that arsenic is not nutritious, that the heart pumps blood throughout the body, and that juggling knives is deleterious to one’s health.

There is not complete unanimity between scientists and civilians. Not all civilians agree with scientists that the earth orbits the sun. In a survey of college student Earth Day participants long ago, I discovered a result that has since been verified many times: a goodly proportion of the “well educated” are sure that the sun revolves around the earth.

A harmless mistake, really, considering how little the difference makes in every day life. And anyway, once informed, the mistaken are always happy to throw their lot in with scientists. They are happy because the *word* of scientists is proof enough. It has to be. This is because most civilians can’t be brought to understand *why* the earth does what it does. Orbital mechanics is a closed book.

Appeal to authority is not always necessary. Civilians don’t need scientists to tell them *that* planes can fly. They can see that for themselves; and since everybody travels by air, this knowledge is both welcome and sufficient. *Why* these heavy steel tubes don’t prang out of the sky like stricken birds is of no interest. *That* they don’t is enough.

Folks are used to trusting that medications given to them by doctors will mend their bodies. They trust because they have often seen for themselves that cures are effected, and because believing is desirable in and of itself. This is also true for flying. People want to believe aircraft are safe.

There is nothing wrong with this, logically or psychologically. That people, for purely interested reasons, *desire* aircraft to stay aloft or for pills to cure in no way implies that aircraft can’t fly or that pills are biologically inactive. That scientists agree with civilians on these matters-of-fact is comforting, but inessential.

Now there are other subjects in which people believe one thing, and scientists another. The vast majority of scientists tell us that Unidentified Flying Objects piloted by “greys” from Alpha Centauri have never visited us. Many civilians disagree. Why? There are two reasons.

The first and weakest is physical evidence. Blurred photographs, reports from a friend of a friend who knew a guy who once saw mysterious lights, purported artifacts, testimony from ex-government agents, and so on. This evidence *is* probative, but it is such that untrained civilians are not fully capable of understanding or critiquing it.

And then, physical evidence pales in comparison next to the *need* to believe. People *want* there to be UFOs, so there *are* UFOs. This is proved in any conversation with a True Believer. No amount of “dialogue” about the incredible vastness and harshness of space, the technicalities and severe limitations of space travel, the existence of contradictory eyewitnesses, or whatever, will put so much as a dimple in their armor of belief. True Believers always have a counter at the ready for every point.

And they are indefatigable. Your crazy Uncle Gavin steers every dinner conversation to alien autopsies. Do you leave the table? Stay and wait for him to exhaust himself? Or do you engage him in debate? Here’s what’s fascinating. The more you rebut, the *surer* the True Believer becomes. Carry on too long and you yourself become part of the conspiracy that is denying him his “truth”!

The only hope is to convince the True Believer *not to want* to believe. That means figuring out and then dismantling the reasons for his odd desire. Not easy, especially if believing in UFOs makes him *who* he is.

Anyway, arguing isn’t worth the trouble. Beyond causing boredom or indigestion in their victims, UFO True Believers do no harm. None has ever organized a march to demand the government acknowledge that *they are among us*, for instance.

Now, scientists are split over global warming. By “scientists” I mean genuine experts with training in fluid flow, thermodynamics and the like; certainly I do not include reporters, economists, sociologists, mechanical engineers, even, or others whose opinion about, say, the best cloud parameterization scheme is lacking. Though its unpublicized, *relevant* scientific opinions about what will happen and when and where and why are so varied it’s a wonder much useful can be said about the subject.

Yet people *do* say things about it, and say them with all the ardency and shrill plaintiveness of the poor soul who claims he was abducted—and probed—by aliens. I speak here about civilians. And not just

civilians, but those, regardless of their credentials, who do not have the background or capability of comprehending the rigorous, highly technical arguments of physical climatology. This is most of the population. I also want to separate ordinary citizens from politicians, whom I’ll discuss later.

There are two camps of civilians. One believes in global-warming-of-doom, and one not. Global-warming-of-doom is a vague concept, but roughly it is this: anything that has or will go wrong in the world is or will be caused or exacerbated by global warming, and that global warming itself is caused by mankind.

If global-warming-of-doom creates “problems”, what are their “solutions”? These are just as fuzzy as the problems, but grossly “The Solution” is this. That government, preferably world government, should eliminate “unfettered” capitalism and that *all* activities should be monitored for their influence on the environment, and subsequently banned or heavily regulated. If The Solution isn’t implemented “soon”, the climate will pass a “tipping point” and the world will end in fire.

True Believers desire The Solution, which itself presupposes mankind is an environmental menace. To these civilians, global-warming-of-doom exists because The Solution doesn’t. Contrariwise, the skeptical camp distrusts The Solution and so disbelieves in global-warming-of-doom. But be careful. If global-warming-of-doom is true, then it is irrelevant that its followers come to believe it because they desire The Solution, just as it is irrelevant if a patient believes in the efficacy of his medicine because he desires health. On the other hand, if global-warming-of-doom is false, then it is also irrelevant that its detractors come to *disbelieve* because they hate The Solution.

There is *no* symmetry here, because who is right and whom wrong depends on whether global-warming-of-doom is true. And it is almost certainly false.

The desperate need to believe in The Solution is why True Believers consider questions about the science of global-warming-of-doom personal attacks. They lash out. Skeptics are greedy or have an animus against the poor. Believers shriek *Denier!*, *The Science is settled!* They lapse into scientific incoherence and make impossible claims, like we are *Destroying the planet*, or that we can *Stop climate change*, that *Skeptics are murderers!*

Non-scientist True Believers even wage war against actual climate scientists. Against their persons, I mean, and not against the scientists’ arguments because, of course, they haven’t the ability. True Believers say skeptical scientists cannot be trusted because these scientists have been funded by sources who do not share the True Belief. They never

see the irony in this. They call for the firing of skeptical scientists and or seek to deny them employment.

Some True Believers have descended into madness and demanded skeptical scientists be prosecuted or outright imprisoned for “crimes against humanity.” Others have called for the *death* of scientists. I don’t mean anonymously on some Internet forum—even foolish skeptics have sunk as low—but by men of some position and publicly, and with every expectation that their bloodlust will be echoed.

The reason for this childishness is simple. True Believers are devoted to The Solution and to their environmental identities. It is *who they are*. If they cannot be who they are, then they are nothing. If “the science is settled” to their satisfaction, *unsettling* it by conducting new research must be prevented, because that new research might prove what *cannot* be tolerated.

There is no escaping this predicament without convincing True Believers that environmentalism and The Solution are false. That can’t be done with science. It requires a change in their deepest personal faiths. Tough task.

Politicians are like civilians in the sense that most of them do not possess in-depth scientific knowledge. And this is fine; their skills lay elsewhere—like in relying upon the judgement of people who do have this knowledge.

But there is a lesser breed of politician who is happy to profit from the ignorance of the citizens he represents. This politician believes in The Solution. Rather, he believes in the civilian’s belief in The Solution. This politician sees himself *as* The Solution. Somebody has to be in charge, and it ought to be him. Unlike the civilian, to whom it matters a great deal whether global-warming-of-doom is true or false, it is irrelevant to this politician. He only cares that it can be used.

The environmental dogma behind The Solution does not define the identity of the politician, like it does with civilian True Believers. The identity of the politician is politics. This is proved by example.

When a paper which questioned “settled” science by Lord Christopher Monckton, Willie Soon, David Legates, and myself was published and publicized internationally, civilian True Believers had a conviction fit of apocalyptic proportions. The Internet erupted. Reporters had splenetic convulsions. The situation became so grim that we worried True Believers’ unquenchable fury would cause a spate of coronaries.

Thank God, nobody died. But the extreme agitation of these civilians did catch the attention of some immoral politicians who saw in it an opportunity for self-aggrandizement.

A member of the House of Representatives wrote letters to the employers of several scientists this member assumed were skeptics and demanded these employers hand over information regarding the scientists (emails, funding sources, and so forth). Amusingly, the list was in some error. But facts are irrelevant. Political action was what counted.

The member at least had the intelligence to understand that if skeptical scientists successfully refuted global-warming-of-doom, there would be no need for The Solution, and thus even less need for himself.

Then a group of Senators wrote letters to scores of companies who might have, directly or indirectly, funded skeptical scientists. The Senators demanded full details of such funding. As with the House member, the intent was intimidation, but in this case with sinister overtones. Why?

The Senators were displeased about “scientific studies designed to confuse the public and avoid taking action to cut carbon pollution.” *Confuse the public. Prevent The Solution.* This is Lysenkoism, the denouncement of “anti-revolutionary” research. Lysenko, it is to be remembered, not only fired scientists for “politically incorrect” science (Lenin’s term), but had several executed or banished to labor camps.

Yet on the whole, it has to be admitted that these attacks were both incompetent and unsuccessful. If anything, they have had the opposite of their intended effect. The continuing Heartland conferences are proof of that.

But how do we prevent future political attacks? Only one way. Remove the source of power of scurrilous politicians. And what’s that? True Believers.

So we’re right back at the hard problem of changing culture itself. Can we convince civilians that big government is not The Solution but The Problem? And that man is not an environmental evil but a necessary facet of Nature? I’m not sanguine. The task is daunting.

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