THE TROUBLE WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

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The Global Warming Policy Foundation

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About the author

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The Trouble with Climate Change

Nigel Lawson

There is something odd about the global warming debate – or the climate change debate, as we are now expected to call it, since global warming has for the time being come to a halt.

I have never shied away from controversy, nor – for example, as Chancellor – worried about being unpopular if I believed that what I was saying and doing was in the public interest. But I have never in my life experienced the extremes of personal hostility, vituperation and vilification which I – along with other dissenters, of course – have received for my views on global warming and global warming policies.

For example, according to Climate Change Secretary, Ed Davey, the global warming dissenters are, without exception, 'wilfully ignorant' and in the view of the Prince of Wales we are 'headless chickens'. Not that 'dissenter' is a term they use. We are regularly referred to as 'climate change deniers', a phrase deliberately designed to echo 'Holocaust denier' – as if questioning present policies and forecasts of the future is equivalent to casting malign doubt about a historical fact.

The heir to the throne and the minister are senior public figures, who watch their language. The abuse I received after appearing on the BBC's *Today* programme last February was far less restrained. Both the BBC and I received an orchestrated barrage of complaints to the effect that it was an outrage that I was allowed to discuss the issue on the programme at all. And even the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons shamefully joined the chorus of those who seek to suppress debate.

In fact, despite having written a thoroughly documented book about global warming more than five years ago, which happily became something of a bestseller, and having founded a think tank on the subject – the Global Warming Policy Foundation – the following year, and despite frequently being invited to appear on *Today* to discuss economic issues, this was the first time I had ever been asked to discuss climate change. I strongly suspect it will also be the last time.

The BBC received a well-organised deluge of complaints – some of them, inevitably, from those with a vested interest in renewable energy – accusing me, among other things, of being a geriatric retired politician and not a climate scientist, and so wholly unqualified to discuss the issue.

Perhaps, in passing, I should address the frequent accusation from those who violently object to any challenge to any aspect of the prevailing climate change doctrine, that the Global Warming Policy Foundation's non-disclosure of the names of our donors is proof that we are a thoroughly sinister organisation and a front for the fossil fuel industry.

As I have pointed out on a number of occasions, the Foundation's Board of Trustees decided, from the outset, that it would neither solicit nor accept any money from the energy industry or from anyone with a significant interest in the energy industry. And to those who are not – regrettably – prepared to accept my word, I would point out that among our trustees are a bishop of the Church of England, a former private secretary to the Queen, and a former head of the Civil Service. Anyone who imagines that we are all engaged in a conspiracy to lie is clearly in an advanced stage of paranoia.

The reason why we do not reveal the names of our donors, who are private citizens of a philanthropic disposition, is in fact pretty obvious. Were we to do so, they, too, would be likely to be subject to the vilification and abuse I mentioned earlier. And that is something which, understandably, they can do without.

That said, I must admit I am strongly tempted to agree that, since I am not a climate scientist, I should from now on remain silent on the subject – on the clear understanding, of course, that everyone else plays by the same rules. No more statements by Ed Davey, or indeed any other politician, including Ed Miliband, Lord Deben and Al Gore. Nothing more from the Prince of Wales, or from Lord Stern. What bliss!

Alarmism and its basis

But of course this is not going to happen. Nor should it; for at bottom this is not a scientific issue. That is to say, the issue is not climate change but climate change alarmism, and the hugely damaging policies that are advocated, and in some cases put in place, in its name. And alarmism is a feature not of the physical world, which is what climate scientists study, but of human behaviour; the province, in other words, of economists, historians, sociologists, psychologists and – dare I say it – politicians.

And *en passant*, the problem for dissenting politicians, and indeed for dissenting climate scientists, who certainly exist, is that dissent can be career-threatening. The advantage of being geriatric is that my career is behind me: there is nothing left to threaten.

But to return: the climate changes all the time, in different and unpredictable (certainly unpredicted) ways, and indeed often in different ways in different parts of the world. It always has done and no doubt it always will. The issue is whether that is a cause for alarm – and not just moderate alarm. According to the alarmists it is the greatest threat facing humankind today: far worse than any of the manifold evils we see around the globe which stem from what Burns called 'man's inhumanity to man'.

Climate change alarmism is a belief system, and needs to be evaluated as such. There is, indeed, an accepted scientific theory, which I do not dispute and which, the alarmists claim, justifies their belief and their alarm. This is the so-called greenhouse effect: the fact that the earth's atmosphere contains so-called greenhouse gases (of which water vapour is overwhelmingly the most important, but carbon dioxide is an-

other) which, in effect, trap some of the heat we receive from the sun and prevent it from bouncing back into space.

Without the greenhouse effect, the planet would be so cold as to be uninhabitable. But, by burning fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – we are increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and thus, other things being equal, increasing the earth's temperature.

But four questions immediately arise, all of which need to be addressed, coolly and rationally.

First, other things being equal, how much can increased atmospheric carbon dioxide be expected to warm the earth? (This is known to scientists as climate sensitivity, or sometimes the climate sensitivity of carbon.) This is highly uncertain, not least because clouds have an important role to play, and the science of clouds is little understood. Until recently, the majority opinion among climate scientists had been that clouds greatly amplify the basic greenhouse effect. But there is a significant minority, including some of the most eminent climate scientists, who strongly dispute this.

Second, are other things equal, anyway? We know that, over millennia, the temperature of the earth has varied a great deal, long before the arrival of fossil fuels. To take only the past thousand years, a thousand years ago we were benefiting from the so-called Medieval Warm Period, when temperatures are thought to have been at least as warm, if not warmer, than they are today. And during the Baroque era we were grimly suffering the cold of the so-called Little Ice Age, when the Thames frequently froze in winter and substantial ice fairs were held on it, now immortalised in contemporary prints.

Third, even if the earth were to warm, so far from this necessarily being a cause for alarm, does it matter? It would, after all, be surprising if the planet were on a happy but precarious temperature knife-edge, from which any change in either direction would be a major disaster. In fact, we know that, if there were to be any future warming (and, for the reasons already given, 'if' is correct) there would be both benefits and what the economists call disbenefits. I shall discuss later where the balance might lie.

And fourth, to the extent that there is a problem, what should we, calmly and rationally, do about it?

Surface temperatures, past and projected

It is probably best to take the first two questions together. According to the temperature records kept by the UK Met Office (and other series are much the same), over the past 150 years (that is, from the very beginnings of the Industrial Revolution), mean global temperature has increased by a little under a degree centigrade – according to the Met Office, 0.8°C. This has happened in fits and starts, which are not fully understood. To begin with, to the extent that anyone noticed it, it was seen as a welcome and natural recovery from the rigours of the Little Ice Age. But the great bulk of it –

0.5°C out of the 0.8°C – occurred during the last quarter of the 20th century. It was then that global warming alarmism was born.

But since then, and wholly contrary to the expectations of the overwhelming majority of climate scientists, who confidently predicted that global warming would not merely continue but would accelerate, given the unprecedented growth of global carbon emissions as China's coal-based economy has grown by leaps and bounds, there has been no further warming at all. To be precise, the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),[1] a deeply flawed body whose non-scientist chairman is a committed climate alarmist, reckons that global warming has latterly been occurring at the rate of – wait for it – 0.05°C per decade, plus or minus 0.1°C. Their figures, not mine. In other words, the observed rate of warming is less than the margin of error.

And that margin of error, it must be said, is implausibly small. After all, calculating mean global temperature from the records of weather stations and maritime observations around the world, of varying quality, is a pretty heroic task in the first place. Not to mention the fact that there is a considerable difference between daytime and night-time temperatures. In any event, to produce a figure accurate to hundredths of a degree is palpably absurd.

The lessons of the unpredicted 15-year global temperature standstill (or hiatus as the IPCC calls it) are clear. In the first place, the so-called General Circulation Models which the climate science community uses to predict the global temperature increase which is likely to occur over the next 100 years are almost certainly mistaken, in that climate sensitivity is almost certainly significantly less than they once thought, and thus the models exaggerate the likely temperature rise over the next hundred years.

But the need for a rethink does not stop there. As the noted climate scientist Professor Judith Curry, chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, recently observed in written testimony to the US Senate:

> Anthropogenic global warming is a proposed theory whose basic mechanism is well understood, but whose magnitude is highly uncertain. The growing evidence that climate models are too sensitive to CO_2 has implications for the attribution of late-20th-century warming and projections of 21st-century climate. If the recent warming hiatus is caused by natural variability, then this raises the question as to what extent the warming between 1975 and 2000 can also be explained by natural climate variability.[2]

It is true that most members of the climate science establishment are reluctant to accept this, and argue that the missing heat has for the time being gone into the (very cold) ocean depths, only to be released later. This is, however, highly conjectural. Assessing the mean global temperature of the ocean depths is – unsurprisingly – even less reliable, by a long way, than the surface temperature record. And in any event most scientists reckon that it will take thousands of years for this 'missing heat' to be released to the surface.

In short, the effect of carbon dioxide on the earth's temperature is probably less than was previously thought, and other things – that is, natural variability and possibly solar influences – are relatively more significant than has hitherto been assumed. But let us assume that the global temperature hiatus does, at some point, come to an end, and a modest degree of global warming resumes. How much does this matter?

The question of impacts

The answer must be that it matters very little. There are plainly both advantages and disadvantages from a warmer temperature, and these will vary from region to region depending to some extent on the existing temperature in the region concerned. And it is helpful in this context that the climate scientists believe that the global warming they expect from increased atmospheric carbon dioxide will be greatest in the cold polar regions and least in the warm tropical regions, and will be greater at night than in the day, and greater in winter than in summer. Be that as it may, studies have clearly shown that, overall, the warming that the climate models are now predicting for most of this century is likely to do more good than harm.

This is particularly true in the case of human health, a rather important dimension of wellbeing. It is no accident that, if you look at migration for climate reasons in the world today, it is far easier to find those who choose to move to a warmer climate than those who choose to move to a colder climate. And it is well documented that excessive cold causes far more illnesses and deaths around the world than excessive warmth does.

The latest (2013–14) IPCC Assessment Report[3] does its best to ramp up alarmism in a desperate, and almost certainly vain, attempt to scare the governments of the world into concluding a binding global decarbonisation agreement at the crunch UN climate conference due to be held in Paris next year. Yet a careful reading of the report shows that the evidence to justify the alarm simply isn't there.

On health, for example, it lamely concludes that 'the world-wide burden of human ill-health from climate change is relatively small compared with effects of other stressors and is not well quantified' – adding that so far as tropical diseases (which preoccupied earlier IPCC reports) are concerned, 'Concerns over large increases in vector-borne diseases such as dengue as a result of rising temperatures are unfounded and unsupported by the scientific literature'.

Moreover, the IPCC conspicuously fails to take proper account of what is almost certainly far and away the most important dimension of the health issue. And that is, quite simply, that the biggest health risk in the world today, particularly of course in the developing world, is poverty.

We use fossil fuels not because we love them, or because we are in thrall to the

multinational oil companies, but simply because they provide far and away the cheapest source of large-scale energy, and will continue to do so, no doubt not forever, but for the foreseeable future. And using the cheapest source of energy means achieving the fastest practicable rate of economic development, and thus the fastest elimination of poverty in the developing world. In a nutshell, and on balance, global warming is good for you.

The IPCC does its best to contest this by claiming that warming is bad for food production: in its own words, 'negative impacts of climate change on crop yields have been more common than positive impacts'. But not only does it fail to acknowledge that the main negative impact on crop yields has been not climate change but climate change policy, as farmland has been turned over to the production of biofuels rather than food crops. It also understates the net benefit for food production from the warming it expects to occur, in two distinct ways.

In the first place, it explicitly takes no account of any future developments in bioengineering and genetic modification, which are likely to enable farmers to plant crops that are drought-resistant and which thrive at warmer temperatures, should these occur. Second, and equally important, it takes no account whatever of another effect of increased atmospheric carbon dioxide, and one which is more certain and better documented than the warming effect, namely, the stimulus to plant growth: what the scientists call the 'fertilisation effect'. Over the past 30 years or so, the earth has become observably greener, and this has even affected most parts of the Sahel. It is generally agreed that a major contributor to this change has been the growth in atmospheric carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels.

This should not come as a surprise. Biologists have always known that carbon dioxide is essential for plant growth, and of course without plants there would be very little animal life, and no human life, on the planet. The climate alarmists have done their best to obscure this basic scientific truth by insisting on describing carbon emissions as 'pollution' – which, whether or not they warm the planet, they most certainly are not – and deliberately mislabelling forms of energy which produce these emissions as 'dirty'. In the same way, they like to label renewable energy as 'clean', seemingly oblivious to the fact that by far the largest source of renewable energy in the world today is biomass, and in particular the burning of dung, which is the major source of indoor pollution in the developing world and is reckoned to cause at least a million deaths a year.

Compared with the likely benefits to both human health and food production from CO_2induced global warming, the possible disadvantages from, say, a slight increase in either the frequency or the intensity of extreme weather events is very small beer. It is, in fact, still uncertain whether there is any impact on extreme weather events as a result of warming (increased carbon emissions, which have certainly occurred, cannot on their own affect the weather: it is only warming which might). The

unusual persistence of heavy rainfall over the UK during February, which led to considerable flooding, is believed by scientists to have been caused by the wayward behaviour of the jetstream; and there is no credible scientific theory that links this behaviour to the fact that the earth's surface is some 0.8°C warmer than it was 150 years ago.

That has not stopped some climate scientists, such as the publicity-hungry chief scientist at the UK Met Office, Dame Julia Slingo, from telling the media that it is likely that 'climate change' (by which they mean warming) is partly to blame. Usually, however, the climate scientists take refuge in the weasel words that any topical extreme weather event – whatever the extreme weather may be, whether the recent UK rainfall or last year's typhoon in the Philippines – 'is consistent with what we would expect from climate change'.

So what? It is also consistent with the theory that it is a punishment from the Almighty for our sins (the prevailing explanation of extreme weather events throughout most of human history). But that does not mean that there is the slightest truth in it. Indeed, it would be helpful if the climate scientists would tell us what weather pattern would *not* be consistent with the current climate orthodoxy. If they cannot do so, then we would do well to recall the important insight of Karl Popper – that any theory that is incapable of falsification cannot be considered scientific.

Moreover, as the latest IPCC report makes clear, careful studies have shown that, while extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and tropical storms have always occurred, overall there has been no increase in either their frequency or their severity.[4] That may, of course, be because there has so far been very little global warming indeed: the fear is the possible consequences of what is projected to lie ahead of us. And even in climate science, cause has to precede effect: it is impossible for future warming to affect events in the present.

Of course, it doesn't seem like that. Partly because of sensitivity to the climate change doctrine, and partly simply as a result of the explosion of global communications, we are far more aware of extreme weather events around the world than we used to be. And it is perfectly true that many more people are affected by extreme weather events than ever before. But that is simply because of the great growth in world popu lation: there are many more people around. It is also true, as the insurance companies like to point out, that there has been a great increase in the damage caused by extreme weather events. But that is simply because, just as there are more people around, so there is more property around to be damaged.

The fact remains that the most careful empirical studies show that, so far at least, there has been no perceptible increase, globally, in either the number or the severity of extreme weather events. And, as a happy coda, these studies also show that, thanks to scientific and material progress, there has been a massive reduction, worldwide, in deaths from extreme weather events.

Scientific standards

It is relevant to note at this point that there is an important distinction between science and scientists. I have the greatest respect for science, whose development has transformed the world for the better. But scientists are no better and no worse than anyone else. There are good scientists and there are bad scientists. Many scientists are outstanding people working long hours to produce important results. They must be frustrated that political activists then turn those results into propaganda. Yet they dare not speak out for fear of losing their funding.

Indeed, a case can be made for the proposition that today's climate science establishment is betraying science itself. During the period justly known as the Enlightenment, science achieved the breakthroughs which have so benefited us all by rejecting the claims of authority – which at that time largely meant the authority of the church – and adopting an overarching scepticism, insisting that our understanding of the external world must be based exclusively on observation and empirical investigation. Yet today all too many climate scientists, in particular in the UK, come close to claiming that they need to be respected as the voice of authority on the subject – the very claim that was once the province of the church.

If I have been critical of the latest IPCC report, let me add that it is many respects a significant improvement on its predecessors. It explicitly concedes, for example, that 'climate change may be beneficial for moderate climate change' – and moderate climate change is all that it expects to see for the rest of this century – and that 'Estimates for the aggregate economic impact of climate change are relatively small...For most economic sectors, the impact of climate change will be small relative to the impacts of other drivers.'[5] So much for the unique existential planetary threat.

What it conspicuously fails to do, however, is to make any assessment of the unequivocally adverse economic impact of the decarbonisation policy it continues to advocate, which (if implemented) would be far worse than any adverse impact from global warming.

Even here, however, the new report concedes for the first time that the most important response to the threat of climate change must be how mankind has responded throughout the ages, namely intelligent adaptation. Indeed, the 'impacts' section of the latest report is explicitly entitled 'Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability'. In previous IPCC reports adaptation was scarcely referred to at all, and then only dismissively.

The importance of adaptation

This leads directly to the last of my four questions. To the extent that there is a problem, what should we, calmly and rationally, do about it?

The answer is – or should be – a no-brainer: adapt. I mentioned earlier that a resumption of global warming, should it occur (and of course it might) would bring both benefits and costs. The sensible course is clearly to pocket the benefits while

seeking to minimise the costs. And that is all the more so since the costs, should they arise, will not be anything new: they will merely be the slight exacerbation of problems that have always afflicted mankind.

Like the weather, for example – whether we are talking about rainfall and flooding (or droughts for that matter) in the UK, or hurricanes and typhoons in the tropics. The weather has always varied, and it always will. There have always been extremes, and there always will be. That being so, it clearly makes sense to make ourselves more resilient and robust in the face of extreme weather events, whether or not there is a slight increase in the frequency or severity of such events.

This means, in the UK, measures such as flood defences and sea defences, together with water storage to minimise the adverse effects of drought; and in the tropics better storm warnings, the building of levees, and more robust construction.

The same is equally true in the field of health. Tropical diseases – and malaria is frequently (if inaccurately) mentioned in this context – are a mortal menace in much of the developing world. It clearly makes sense to seek to eradicate these diseases – and in the case of malaria (which used to be endemic in Europe) we know perfectly well how to do it – whether or not warming might lead to an increase in the incidence of such diseases.

And the same applies to all the other possible adverse consequences of global warming. Moreover, this makes sense whatever the cause of any future warming – whether it is man-made or natural. Happily too, as economies grow and technology develops, our ability to adapt successfully to any problems which warming may bring steadily increases.

Yet, astonishingly, this is not the course on which our leaders in the Western world generally, and the UK in particular, have embarked. They have decided that what we must do, at inordinate cost, is prevent the possibility (as they see it) of any further warming by abandoning the use of fossil fuels.

Even if this were attainable – a big 'if', which I will discuss later – there is no way in which this could be remotely cost-effective. The cost to the world economy of moving from relatively cheap and reliable energy to much more expensive and much less reliable forms of energy – so-called renewables, on which we had to rely before we were liberated by the fossil-fuel-driven Industrial Revolution – far exceeds any conceivable benefit.

It is true that the notorious Stern Review,[6] widely promoted by a British prime minister with something of a messiah complex and an undoubted talent for PR, sought to demonstrate the reverse, and has become a bible for the economically illiterate. But Stern's dodgy economics have been comprehensively demolished by the most distinguished economists on both sides of the Atlantic.[7] So much so, in fact, that Lord Stern himself has been driven to complain that it is all the fault of the computer models used, which – and I quote him – 'come close to assuming directly that the im-

pacts and costs will be modest, and close to excluding the possibility of catastrophic outcomes'.[8]

It may well be the case that these elaborate models are scarcely worth the computer code they are written in, and certainly the divergence between model predictions and empirical observations has become ever wider. Nevertheless, it is a bit rich for Stern now to complain about them, when they remain the gospel of the climate science establishment in general and of the IPCC in particular.

But Stern is right in this sense: unless you assume that we may be heading for a CO_2-induced planetary catastrophe, a view for which there is no scientific basis, a policy of decarbonisation cannot possibly make sense.

A similar, if slightly more sophisticated, case for current policies has been put forward by a distinctly better economist than Stern, Harvard's Professor Martin Weitzman, in what he likes to call his 'dismal theorem'.[9] After demolishing Stern's cost–benefit analysis, he concludes that Stern is in fact right but for the wrong reasons. According to Weitzman, this is an area where cost–benefit analysis does not apply. Climate science is highly uncertain, and a catastrophic outcome which might even threaten the continuation of human life on this planet cannot be entirely ruled out, however unlikely it may be. It is therefore incumbent on us to do whatever we can, regardless of cost, to prevent this.

This is an extreme case of what is usually termed 'the precautionary principle'. I have often thought that the most important use of the precautionary principle is against the precautionary principle itself, since it can all too readily lead to absurd policy prescriptions. In this case, a moment's reflection would remind us that there are a number of possible catastrophes, many of them less unlikely than that caused by runaway warming, and all of them capable of occurring considerably sooner than the catastrophe feared by Weitzman; and there is no way we can afford the cost of unlimited spending to reduce the likelihood of all of them.

In particular, there is the risk that the earth may enter a new ice age. This was the fear expressed by the well-known astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle in his book *Ice: The Ultimate Human Catastrophe*,[10] and there are several climate scientists today, particularly in Russia, concerned about this. It would be difficult, to say the least, to devote unlimited sums to both cooling and warming the planet at the same time.

At the end of the day, this comes down to judgment. Weitzman is clearly entitled to his, but I doubt if it is widely shared; and if the public were aware that it was on this slender basis that the entire case for current policies rested I would be surprised if they would have much support. Rightly so.

The global dimension

But there is another problem. Unlike intelligent adaptation to any warming that might occur – which in any case will mean different things in different regions of the world,

and which requires no global agreement – decarbonisation can make no sense whatever in the absence of a global agreement. And there is no chance of any meaningful agreement being concluded. The very limited Kyoto accord of 1997 has come to an end; and although there is the declared intention of concluding a much more ambitious successor, with a UN-sponsored conference in Paris next year at which it is planned that this should happen, nothing of any significance is remotely likely.

And the reason is clear. For the developing world, the overriding priority is economic growth: improving the living standards of the people, which means among other things making full use of the cheapest available source of energy: fossil fuels.

The position of China, the largest of all the developing countries and the world's biggest (and fastest growing) emitter of carbon dioxide, is crucial. For very good reasons, there is no way that China is going to accept a binding limitation on its emissions. China has an overwhelmingly coal-based energy sector – indeed it has been building new coal-fired power stations at the rate of one a week – and although it is now rapidly developing its substantial indigenous shale gas resources (another fossil fuel), its renewable energy industry, both wind and solar, is essentially for export to the developed world.

It is true that China is planning to reduce its so-called 'carbon intensity' quite substantially by 2020. But there is a world of difference between the sensible objective of using fossil fuels more efficiently, which is what this means, and the foolish policy of abandoning fossil fuels, which it has no intention of doing. China's total carbon emissions are projected to carry on rising – and rising substantially – as its economy grows.

This puts into perspective the UK's commitment, under the Climate Change Act, to near-total decarbonisation. The UK accounts for less than 2% of global emissions; indeed, its total emissions are less than the annual increase in China's. Never mind, says Lord Deben, chairman of the government-appointed Climate Change Committee, we are in the business of setting an example to the world.

No doubt this sort of thing goes down well at meetings of the faithful, and enables him and them to feel good. But there is little point in setting an example, at great cost, if no one is going to follow it; and around the world governments are now gradually watering down or even abandoning their decarbonisation ambitions. Indeed, it is even worse than that. Since the UK has abandoned the idea of having an energy policy in favour of having a decarbonisation policy, there is a growing risk that, before very long, our generating capacity will be inadequate to meet our energy needs. If so, we shall be setting an example all right: an example of what not to do.

Unreason and morality

So how is it that much of the Western world, and this country in particular, has succumbed to the self-harming collective madness that is climate change orthodoxy? It

is difficult to escape the conclusion that climate change orthodoxy has in effect become a substitute religion, attended by all the intolerant zealotry that has so often marred religion in the past, and in some places still does so today.

Throughout the Western world, the two creeds that used to vie for popular support – Christianity and the atheistic belief system of Communism – are each clearly in decline. Yet people still feel the need both for the comfort and for the transcendent values that religion can provide. It is the quasi-religion of green alarmism and global salvationism, of which the climate change dogma is the prime example, that has filled the vacuum, with reasoned questioning of its mantras regarded as little short of sacrilege.

The parallel goes deeper. As I mentioned earlier, throughout the ages the weather has been an important part of the religious narrative. In primitive societies it was customary for extreme weather events to be explained as punishment from the gods for the sins of the people; and there is no shortage of this theme in the Bible, either – particularly, but not exclusively, in the Old Testament. The contemporary version is that, as a result of heedless industrialisation within a framework of materialistic capitalism, we have directly (albeit not deliberately) perverted the weather, and will duly receive our comeuppance.

There is another aspect, too, which may account for the appeal of this so-called explanation. Throughout the ages, something deep in man's psyche has made him receptive to apocalyptic warnings that the end of the world is nigh. And almost all of us, whether we like it or not, are imbued with feelings of guilt and a sense of sin. How much less uncomfortable it is, how much more convenient, to divert attention away from our individual sins and reasons to feel guilty, and to sublimate them in collective guilt and collective sin.

Why does this matter? It matters, and matters a great deal, on two quite separate grounds. The first is that it has gone a long way towards ushering in a new age of unreason. It is a cruel irony that, while it was science which, more than anything else, was able by its great achievements to establish the age of reason, it is all too many climate scientists and their hangers-on who have become the high priests of a new age of unreason.

But what moves me most is that the policies invoked in its name are grossly immoral. We have, in the UK, devised the most blatant transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich – and I am slightly surprised that it is so strongly supported by those who consider themselves to be the tribunes of the people and politically on the Left.[11] I refer to our system of heavily subsidising wealthy landlords to have wind farms on their land, so that the poor can be supplied with one of the most expensive forms of electricity known to man.

This is also, of course, inflicting increasing damage on the British economy, to no useful purpose whatever. More serious morally, because it is on a much larger scale, is

the perverse intergenerational transfer of wealth implied by orthodox climate change policies. It is not much in dispute that future generations – those yet unborn – will be far wealthier than those – ourselves, our children, and for many of us our grandchildren – alive today. This is the inevitable consequence of the projected economic growth which, on a 'business as usual' basis, drives the increased carbon emissions that in turn determine the projected future warming. It is surely perverse to abandon what is far and away the cheapest source of energy in order that future generations avoid any disadvantages that any warming might bring: this simply impoverishes those alive today in order to ensure that future generations, who will be signally better off regardless of what happens today, are better off still.

However, the greatest immorality of all concerns those in the developing world. It is excellent that, in so many parts of the developing world – the so-called emerging economies – economic growth is now firmly on the march, as they belatedly put in place the sort of economic policy framework that brought prosperity to the Western world. Inevitably, they already account for, and will increasingly account for, the lion's share of global carbon emissions. But, despite their success, there are still hundreds of millions of people in these countries in dire poverty, suffering all the ills that this brings, in terms of malnutrition, preventable disease, and premature death. Asking these countries to abandon the cheapest available sources of energy is, at the very least, asking them to delay the conquest of malnutrition, to perpetuate the incidence of preventable disease, and to increase the numbers of premature deaths.

Global warming orthodoxy is not merely irrational. It is wicked.

Notes

1. IPCC, 2013: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press. http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WG1AR5_SPM_FINAL.pdf, (Summary for Policymakers, p. 5).

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3. IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: The assessment of impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Working Group II contribution to the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report. http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/IPCC_WG2AR5_SPM_Approved.pdf, (Summary for Policymakers, p. 7).

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7. For example, the Stern Review's low discount rate has been criticised by eminent economists including Sir Partha Dasgupta at Cambridge and William Nordhaus at Yale. See Dasgupta P. Commentary: The Stern Review's economics of climate change. *National Institute Economic Review*, 2007; 199: 4–7. http://bit.ly/1g8oWeF; Nordhaus W. A Review of the Stern Review on the economics of climate change, *Journal of Economic Literature* 2007; XLV: 686–702 http://www.econ.yale.edu/~nordhaus/homepage/documents/Nordhaus_stern_jel.pdf; and discussion in Lilley P. What is Wrong with Stern? The Failings of the Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change. GWPF Report 9, Global Warming Policy Foundation, 2012. http://www.thegwpf.org/content/uploads/2012/10/Lilley-Stern_Rebuttal3.pdf.

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change: grafting gross underestimation of risk onto already narrow science models. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 2013; 51: 838–859. http://personal.lse.ac.uk/sternn/128NHS.pdf.
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11. The history of how it came about is in itself a fascinating story, and has been well told by Rupert Darwall in his book *The Age of Global Warming: A History* (Quartet, 2013). What concerns me here is not how it happened, but why.

GWPF ESSAYS

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2	Peter Lee	Ethics and Climate Change Policy
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