

If the Science Is Solid, Why Stoop? An Environmental Scientist Parses Climategate

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I must preface my remarks by saying that I believe that there has indeed been climate warming over the past few decades and I believe that human action may be one of the causes. While Climategate may bring into greater question some of the work underlying climate warming, it decidedly does not disprove it.

Having said that, I must add that Climategate is, in my view, the greatest science scandal in my lifetime. Beyond any scientific implications are the implications of the behavior of the East Anglia scientists and their correspondents—suppressing information, denigrating those who don't agree with them, trying to deny others access to scientific journals, questioning motives, and conniving to disfellow skeptical colleagues. These are the earmarks of zealotry. While maybe not illegal, they are most certainly unethical. Civilized people, much less scientists, just don't do those things—but then, apparently they do.

Some time ago, I published a piece about the double standard in environmental science.¹ Springing from experiences in my own specialty (soil erosion) the main message was that it was much more difficult to publish a skeptical piece or “good news” than a jeremiad. I said that I suspected that environmental zealots, acting in the usual arrogant politically correct guise, tried to suppress skeptics and even viciously discredit them when possible. But my proof was limited to mainly circumstantial evidence and the actions

¹Stanley W. Trimble, “The Double Standard in Environmental Science: Can Science Abide Political Causes?” *Regulation* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 16–22, <http://www.cato.org/pubs/regulation/regv30n2/v30n2-1.pdf>.

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of a few environmental extremists; and there was no smoking gun to expose a general conspiracy to do these unethical deeds. But with Climategate, there is.

Indeed, Climategate seems to prove most of the points I made in that essay. I wish to make only five points here:

1. The rush by some climate warmers to dismiss this scandal, claiming it's just vernacular conversation ("boys will be boys!"), is bankrupt. These apologists need to get a grip on reality. This stuff was not taken out of context: indeed, the context is quite clear. They were wrong and the climate warming establishment should acknowledge this. And if they don't, we have every right to suspect they are in on it too.
2. Was East Anglia targeted by the hackers because they knew this skullduggery was going on—or did the hackers simply tap into a random sample of widespread skullduggery? If the latter, we truly have something to worry about and it raises the stakes by perhaps orders of magnitude. Is this merely the tip of a dark and dangerous iceberg?
3. Climategate leaves no doubt that at least some zealots connive to exclude skeptical environmental science from refereed scientific journals. Then, the ploy is to invoke democracy ("The overwhelming majority of papers in peer-reviewed journals support..."). Where would this have left Darwin or Einstein?
4. The environmental zealots like to paint skeptics or "deniers" (or "denialists") as on the make for money—money generally characterized as coming from, you guessed it, "big corporations." But even if that's so, it's the science that should be on trial, not the funding. What we do know, and what many Greens don't want the public to know, is that some of them are riding their own gravy train. Neither funding agencies nor scientific journals want to hear about environmental successes. They want environmental problems, the bigger, the better.

Of course, this means more money for research, more likely publication of one's papers in scientific journals (bad news is good news), and the approbation of like-minded academic colleagues. And with that, one's career accelerates with lucrative promotions, speaking tours, and prestigious awards. As I noted in my aforementioned article, it's no accident that prestigious journals keep picking the same people to review papers and books and especially to write op-ed

pieces. They know what they want and the revelations from Climategate show us why. To summarize, any academic careerist is well advised to be an environmental zealot. That's where the rewards are. Skeptics are sidelined as soon as possible. It's the Greens who are getting the largesse, academic and otherwise, not the skeptics.

5. As we can see from Climategate, climate warmers can do some dastardly things to the scientific process and to scientific colleagues. But the most despicable thing they do is to call skeptics "deniers." What they are doing, of course, is trying to connect environmental skeptics with Holocaust deniers. If their science is so solid, why must they stoop to such measures? And why hasn't the rest of the climate warming establishment condemned this and other vilification tactics?

I'm proud to be a skeptic. Skepticism, in my view, is the watchword of good science. It is the process of challenging, perhaps even if Hegelian, that keeps the scientific enterprise honest and moving forward. The recent editorial by Donald Kennedy, then editor-in-chief of *Science*, proclaiming that the climate war was over, that the "warmers" had won and no one else need apply, is in my view a travesty—and Orwellian.² Any idea in applied science is *always* open to question. Period.

²Donald Kennedy, editorial, "Climate: Game Over," *Science* 317, issue 5387, July 27, 2007, 425–27.