

The morality of climate change

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Mr. Al Gore's film on climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*, has received a lot of publicity lately. In the film, Mr. Gore makes the assertion that climate change has become one of the moral issues of our time. Is he right?

Nature does not recognize morality, and the lion certainly feels no remorse for the gazelle. Yet in that uniquely human way, a human onlooker of a lion pack killing a gazelle intuitively hopes for a speedy, and hence merciful, end for the antelope. Many books and great thinkers have examined why, but in the present context the issue is that Nature herself is morally neutral. In that sense, climate change is not a moral issue, any more than the occurrence of the recent Indian Ocean tsunami was. Rather, the moral issues lie with us humans, and the ways in which we prepare for and cope with such disasters; especially, perhaps, on how we help the victims.

So did Mr. Gore mean to say that it is our moral duty to care for the victims of climate change, and help them reconstitute their livelihoods? Not really, though he would probably agree with you and I that we should do that. No, the moral issue that Mr. Gore perceives is that of humans having a duty to help *prevent* what he perceives as dangerous climate change.

The key issue then becomes what does Mr. Gore actually mean by the term "climate change". To most scientists, and expressly so for those working for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "climate change" means exactly what it says, and carries no implications of causation. But to millions of educated citizens who make up the electorates of modern western nations, the phrase has come to have a much more restrictive meaning; citizens, environmental lobby groups and the media all remorselessly use the phrase "climate change" to mean "*human-caused* climate change". And an exactly parallel ambiguity exists for use of the phrase "global warming", which is read by the public to mean "*human-caused* global warming".

But in fact both global warming and climate change are natural phenomena. We live on a dynamic planet, and the average global temperature is always getting either hotter or colder; stasis for long periods being very unusual. As well, though, humans have a manifest effect on local climate through building cities and clearing native vegetation. Therefore most scientists believe that, summed all over globe, these local impacts must add up to a human global effect on climate. As a logical proposition that is pretty unassailable. But if the question is rephrased somewhat. as "*do man's activities have a measurable effect on global climate?*" then matters are not so simple, for the answer is "no".

It is a remarkable fact that despite the worldwide expenditure of perhaps US\$50 billion since 1990, and the efforts of tens of thousands of scientists worldwide, no human climate signal has yet been detected that is distinct from natural variation. Accordingly, the IPCC's alarmist case regarding dangerous human climate change rests not on empirical data, but on unvalidated computer models, failed greenhouse theory and anecdotal accounts of climate changes, such as glaciers melting, that may well be of wholly or largely natural origin.

Which leads us right back to morality. For if it cannot be established that there is a measurable human global effect on climate, let alone a dangerous one, then why should humans feel any moral imperative to try to “stop climate change”? One might as well try to stop the clouds scudding across the sky.

Yet Mr. Gore did get hold of the right word, it’s just that he then unerringly grasped the wrong end of the stick that it describes. For the real morality of climate change is not concerned with trying to prevent it - which is unnecessary, futile and expensive in roughly equal proportions - but rather lies with dealing with the all too human failings that alarmist global warming hysteria has brought out into the open.

The moral issues concerned with climate change alarmism are numerous. They include the role of the individual scientist who deliberately puts an alarmist spin on his or her results, in order to maximize the change of receiving further funding; or the parallel behaviour by the managers of research centres or groups whose funding depends upon there *being* a global warming problem. They include the spectacle of high-sounding environmental NGOs - in pursuit of membership subscriptions and political power - ignoring and distorting science results that do not suit their marketing agenda. They include the behaviour of prestigious science academies that have, unbelievably, tried to suppress rather than foster scientific debate on climate change. They include the bureaucrats in government greenhouse agencies who are more interested in career advancement than with making known the fact that greenhouse theory has been tested, and failed. They include the alternative energy companies who shamelessly tout their solar, windpower or other wares as a moral good, whereas in fact these means of generating power are expensive and (for windpower) environmentally damaging, and entirely unable to compete in an open market without government regulation that imposes added costs on defenceless citizens. They include the tactic of vicious and libellous personal attacks made on independent scientists who try to present a balanced view on the climate change issue - the so-called climate sceptics. They include the remorseless and shameless promulgation of environmental alarm stories by the press, in pursuit of greater daily sales success. And, finally, they include the actions of politicians who seek political advantage from cynical exploitation of the public’s fear of global warming, such as Christine Stewart, a former Canadian Environment Minister, who was quoted in 1998 in the Calgary Herald as saying that: *“No matter if the science is all phony, there are collateral environmental benefits ... climate change (provides) the greatest chance to bring about justice and equality in the world”*.

To step - as many climate alarmists thus do - onto the slippery slope of “the ends justifies the means” is to embark upon the moral decline now represented in the global warming debate. Mr. Gore, it seems, was right - global warming has become a moral issue.

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