

GLOBAL WARMING

IS NOT AN ACUTE PROBLEM

AS FAR AS THE FUTURE WEATHER IS CONCERNED, WE OFTEN ACCEPT HORRIFIC DISASTER STORIES THAT ALMOST SEEM MORE APPROPRIATE IN A HOLLYWOOD FILM.

Marek Loužek

According to some, parts of Antarctica are sinking into the sea, ocean water levels are rising dramatically, devastating hurricanes will bear down on us, the Gulf Stream will stop flowing, and Europe will freeze over. Will such end-of-the-world scenarios actually happen, or are these fears unfounded?

Temperature Discussion

The climate has changed in the past, and it will change in the future. We forget that up until three million years ago, the Earth was permanently warmer than today. And, from a geological perspective, the contemporary climate is relatively cool.

Global warming does not mean that temperatures around the globe will universally rise. In his book *Cool It* (2007), Bjørn Lomborg points out that low temperatures increase much more than high temperatures, and temperatures rise more during night and in winter than during the day and in summer. He also states that temperatures in mild climates and arctic regions climb more dramatically than in the tropics: in Siberia, temperatures rise 5° Celsius, compared with 2–3° in Africa. Furthermore, while the frequency of heat waves will increase, cold waves will decrease. As Lomborg conveys, speaking of a “global” or universal temperature rise is ineffective and misleading.

Humans are very adaptable creatures. They do well in climates which vary from 15° to 25° Celsius. While we’ll need to adapt to a new climate, adaptation is not unfeasible. In fact, global warming may even benefit humans; statistically, cold is a greater killer than heat.

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The decrease in the number of heat-related deaths in the past few decades proves that our susceptibility to heat has substantially diminished. Improvement in health care services and access to medical treatment is probably the main reason for the decrease. The availability of air-conditioning has also increased our tolerance to heat. In time and with enough resources, we will be able to adapt to higher temperatures, and fewer deaths will result from overheating.

Hunger, Water and Poverty

Al Gore claims that unless the world adopts strict measures in the next fifty years, two fifths of the world’s population

will suffer from a serious lack of drinking water. The melting of icebergs, however, will increase river water levels, especially in summer. Thus, many of the poorest people in the world will in fact have more water at their disposal. Increased prosperity and technological advances for better flood protection will also offset any problems which could result from a rise.

Fearing disease outbreaks such as malaria is also unfounded. In Europe and the United States, malaria was eradicated when the world’s temperatures were increasing. Even though temperature has a certain effect on malaria, it is negligible when compared with a wide range of other dependent factors like nutrition and health care, income, as well as the drying out of swamps and elimination of mosquitoes.

The prediction that world hunger will escalate is equally unfounded. While the world population has doubled since 1961, food production has tripled. The percentage of starving people has decreased from 50 percent in 1950 to 20 percent in 2000. This percentage is projected to fall to 2.9 percent by 2050.

Global warming will also only insignificantly influence economic development and living standards. The climate’s impact on agriculture has almost no influence on the global economy. By 2100, people in developing countries will have

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more money than they have today. In this century alone, the world population will increase by three billion, but those starving will decrease to 136 million.

In regards to water, global warming will increase precipitation and therefore increase the accessibility to water. The challenge of the future is not global warming regulation, but utilizing hygienic equipment to give three billion people secure access to clean drinking water. Our future requires that we focus primarily on economic development.

Emission Regulation

While everyone mainly focuses on market regulation to combat climate change, we can solve several other environmental issues in a much more cost-effective manner. Attempting to reduce and control climate change is one of the least useful ways in which we can help mankind and the environment. In short, we need to prioritize. Global warming is by no means the most urgent problem.

The supposed need to decrease carbon emissions is an artificial demand. If the Kyoto Protocol remained in force until the end of the century, the average global temperature would rise by 2.42° Celsius instead of 2.6°. The difference is only 0.18°. Furthermore, Kyoto only shaves five years off of rising temperatures; the temperature we would see in 2100 without Kyoto will occur in 2095 with Kyoto in place. The Kyoto Protocol is by and large a symbolic treaty.

Emissions from the developed world increasingly depend on how dramatically economies like China, India, and other developing nations will grow. China has surpassed the United States in emissions, and it is now the largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world. Neither China nor India will be willing to accept further emission reductions because economic and social growth is

more important than climate control. We cannot dictate to people who can barely make a living to cut down on emissions.

Lomborg estimates that while the general cost of compliance with the Kyoto Protocol (with US involvement) would exceed five billion dollars in the next century, the economic benefit would only amount to two billion. Even though the treaty is incredibly expensive, many have surprisingly suggested that more is needed. The leaders of the G8 have agreed to decrease emissions by 50 percent by 2050. Such a demand is agonizingly ineffective.

Environmentally oriented scientists and media outlets have created a prejudiced and biased awareness of global warming. An acute need for global climate policy does not exist. From a long-term perspective, we are not ready for increasingly expensive sacrifices that will benefit more prosperous future generations in a few hundred years. The cost of extensive and long-term CO₂ reductions will, without exception, exceed the benefits.

Our Only Hope is Development

According to the United Nations, people in both the developed and developing world will prosper in the coming years. In the industrialized world, the average income will rise six-fold; in developing countries it will rise twenty-fold. These increases play a fundamental role in the climate change dialogue. In 2100, when problems related to global warming are expected to occur, an average person in the developing world will earn about 100,000 USD (current value) per year. As a result, the world's population will be able to adapt to new circumstances much better than today.

Even the worst-case scenario estimates an income increase of 20,000 USD per person. In this highly unlikely event, people in the developing world will earn on average the same as Portuguese or Czech citizens earn today. Attempts to help the developing world now by reducing carbon emissions is well-intentioned but shortsighted. One hundred years from now, inhabitants of the developing world will be wealthier and more able to adapt.

When we are faced with the need to prioritize and choose between develop-

ing climate policy, ensuring free trade, or fighting malaria and malnourishment, many try to skirt responsibility by advocating change on all fronts. While this sentiment may feel gratifying and appear noble, it is erroneous due to budgetary limitations. We must focus on economic development and not embark on a long and costly struggle with climate change.

Our range of global problems is vast but we must judiciously choose where to direct our efforts; we cannot solve everything. Many global problems are more significant and pressing than climate change. Let us regain our perspective and recognize our folly in focusing on climate change. ■

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Suggested Reading

Leroux, Marcel. *Global Warming: Myth or Reality? The Erring Ways of Climatology*. (Springer, 2005).

Lomborg, Bjorn. *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*. (Random House, 2007).

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Philander, S. George. *Is the Temperature Rising?: The Uncertain Science of Global Warming*. (Princeton University Press, 2000).

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