

Of Climate Change, Science, Experts: A Meditation

A few months ago, a friend of mine, his son who had swung left, and a few others, debated man-made climate change (MCC) over email. Being in this group, I was copied on each installment, but did not participate. I was asked why, and have been asked on other occasions whether I had anything to say about MCC.

I tend to reply that I've not researched the topic extensively, and can't speak to it with any confidence. There's abundant information online, of course; what's missing are hours in the day sufficient to research everything out there. The topic has come up again, as MCC proponents have a field day in the wake of two destructive hurricanes, Harvey and Irma. A third, Maria, may have hit by the time this is posted. All of us (I hope) are praying for those who lost loved ones in these storms, for rebuilding efforts which may take years in some cases, and that tragedy and hardship not be turned into an opportunity to score political points (for a change).

What research I've done on climate matters was mostly to inform students in contemporary moral issues and critical thinking classes, where I isolated three perspectives: (1) Global warming is not real. For whatever reason, scientists are misreading their data, seeing something that isn't there, perhaps generalizing falsely from local events such as glaciers in retreat after a few years of unusual warmth. (2) Warming is indeed happening on a long-term, global scale, but *we're* not the cause. Earth's climate has warmed and cooled *many* times over planetary history, from various causes including fluctuations in solar energy; the climate, in any event, is far too vast for our paltry activities to affect it significantly. Volcanoes affect it more than we do.

The third perspective – (3) – holds that global warming or climate change is happening, that human activity, especially burning fossil fuels for energy and expelling the byproducts into the atmosphere for well over a century now, *is* causing the planet to heat up. (3), as I understand it, does *not* say every single year will be hotter than its predecessor, or will manifest violent hurricanes like this year has, just that over a long period of time, *average* temperatures will rise, sea levels will rise as polar ice fields melt, and *on average*, weather phenomena will increase in destructive force, be it hurricanes, severe winter storms, or droughts leading to forest fires.

So will it be door #(1), door #(2), or door #(3)?

Here is where I cannot speak with the confidence I have when speaking about, e.g., elite directedness of modern times, or philosophical critiques of secular ethics.

What I *can* say is that #(3) appears to be the one chosen by the majority of scientists and scientific organizations, something dissent alone can't negate. Unfortunately, #(3) also has immense globalist appeal, given the adage that "global problems call for global solutions."

If (3) is by some chance true, then claims like those of Naomi Klein in her [*This Changes Everything*](#) (2014) have to be considered. Whether you agree or not with Klein's view that "the free market" is at fault in creating the present situation (I don't, as I don't think we've had anything remotely resembling actual free markets in decades), the conclusion remains: we find other ways of powering our civilization or face the consequences: a hotter, more hostile world; what author James Howard Kunstler calls [*The Long Emergency*](#) (2005) highlighted by dislocations that will make the present ones look tame by comparison as millions of people abandon flooded coastal cities, others migrating *en masse* from regions turned uninhabitable.

Alarmist? Perhaps, but many scientists will tell you that MCC is an established fact. Major scientific organizations including the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#) have endorsed it. At least one [online course](#) I ran across earlier this year dispensed for free, presents information intended to debunk (1) and (2) above. The course's main architect, [John Cook](#) of the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, had earlier created [this site](#), organizing information he maintains refutes "climate change denialism."

Cook and his associates have assembled some interesting information. But they packaged it within an image of science I found rather naïve and dated. (Cook's views on the "scientific consensus" are criticized [here](#).)

Again, a brief disclaimer: I am not a scientist, climate or otherwise. I am a trained philosopher who for a number of years specialized in history and philosophy of science – especially the physical sciences – turning to moral philosophy and political economy only later.

This I can certify: what is found in most science texts is an image of a neat, disciplined, pristine method of formulating hypotheses to explain neutral data, testing them step by step whether by further observations or by experiment, then pronouncing them confirmed or disconfirmed – almost as if done by robots instead of human beings subject to all the biases and frailties human beings are subject to, including being forced to work in organizations that do not fund themselves.

So MCC aside for the moment, how well-confirmed are most scientific results, really?

One can point to "studies" in various disciplines that clearly reflect the biases of those who put up the money, because the researchers wanted or needed further grant money, and one of its conditions was obtaining "acceptable" outcomes. They

overstate what evidence validly permits, and may bury contrary findings. Does at least some science work this way?

Please allow me to digress ...

As a bored public high school student in search of real intellectual stimuli I chanced to run across a curious volume in a local library: *The Book of the Damned* (1919) by one Charles Fort (1874 – 1932). Fort had a curious hobby. Upon receiving an inheritance, it became his career. A voracious reader, he'd mastered several scientific disciplines just by reading leading texts. He combed scientific journals and periodicals, antiquarian newsletters, and newspapers. Whenever he found something that did not fit the prevailing theories, he made a note of it. Soon he had thousands of notes, organized by subject matter: astronomical curiosities, unexplained weather and aerial phenomena, out-of-place artifacts, medical mysteries, etc. "Anomalism" was born: assemblages of "facts that don't fit," with wry commentary on the "scientific" manner of dealing with them: shoving them into the cognitive equivalents of windowless museum basements and forgetting about them.

Fort used his notes as the basis for four books: the above-mentioned *The Book of the Damned*, *New Lands* (1925), *Lo!* (1931) and *Wild Talents* (1932). He commented drily on "dogmatic Science" (cap S) as surrogate for God. Fort was more a provocateur than a serious theorist. He formulated intentionally ridiculous notions which left whole ranges of obvious facts unexplained and claimed them to be as well supported as the dogmas he saw imprisoning the minds of scientists.

The history of ideas manifests *system-builders* and *system-smashers*, one might call them. Among the system-builders: Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas, Newton, Lavoisier, Adam Smith, Kant, Darwin, Einstein, who left their respective disciplines large, logically-structured edifices of thought (systems).

Among the system-smashers: the old Sophists who taunted Socrates in Plato's dialogues, modern "outsiders" such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, aggravated skeptics such as Fort, and a couple of folks we'll encounter below.

Modernity was a system-building endeavor. Postmodernity has been a system-smashing one.

It is not clear why some thinkers are drawn to one and not the other. Fort's biographers state that his father was an abusive tyrant, from whom he fled as a teenager. His hostility to the authority of Science was then a projection. How very Freudian.

System-builders are confident of human reason's capacity to grasp reality (or some part of it) as it is. System-smashers are just as convinced that the effort is delusional. They point to the smorgasbord of conflicting and competing systems in every domain, this being a problem even if we've mastered a certain instrumental rationality by manipulating objects into technology.

System-building takes itself seriously, is carefully argued, etc. Much system-smashing is literary provocation. Its purveyors use irony and rhetoric. They play mind games with their audience. Postmodernists, whatever else one says about them, are good at this.

Fort's books sold reasonably well. At the end of his life, his health and eyesight failing, he was said to have laughed aloud upon learning that his writings had a cult following, organized as the [Fortean Society](#), dedicated to continue poking holes in the pretenses of "scientific" positivism. The Society published Fort's unused notes and continued collecting anomalies that seemed to surround every major theory in every field of science. Fort's books have stayed in print, and though for obvious reasons he was roundly dismissed as a crank, his work continues to fascinate those who have followed in his footsteps compiling anthologies of "misfit" facts such

as physicist William R. Corliss (1926 – 2011), founder of [The Sourcebook Project](#) and editor of anthologies such as *Ancient Man: A Handbook of Puzzling Artifacts* (1978) and *Unknown Earth: A Handbook of Geological Enigmas* (1980); or more recent writers with substantive alternative hypotheses on ancient and unknown civilizations such as Graham Hancock (1950 –), author of *Underworld: The Mysterious Origins of Civilization* (2002), *Magicians of the Gods* (2015), and other works.

As a university student (still bored), I encountered the far more orthodox [The Structure of Scientific Revolutions](#) (1962, 1970, 2012) by Thomas S. Kuhn (1922 – 1996). My first exposure to Kuhn's ideas was in a world history class. The professor discussed them with all the calm and neutrality of a leftist professor going off on conservatism. My curiosity was piqued, and I tracked the book down.

Kuhn's thesis was that a mature "normal" science is always governed by a conceptual system embodied in concrete problem solutions he called a *paradigm*. Paradigms – exemplified in works such as Newton's *Principia* or Lavoisier's *Chemistry* or Darwin's *Origin* – guided research in the science, its first premises not tested or challenged. Paradigms dictated use of the language of the discipline, as well as guiding authors of textbooks used to train the next generation who "stood on the shoulders of giants" as it were. Invariably a paradigm could not solve every problem it faced, however. These became anomalies – defined more precisely as violations of expectation. Eventually enough would accumulate to jeopardize allegiance to the paradigm (particularly among the young!). The science would enter a "revolutionary" crisis that ended with its embrace of a new paradigm able to solve the problems, often with new terms or old ones used in new ways. A new period of "normal" science would begin.

Physicist and early quantum theorist Max Planck (1858 – 1947) observed: "A scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather

because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." That's the basic idea.

Kuhn denied that scientific practice could be shoehorned into the formal-logical methods positivists taught. He experienced the wrath of colleagues who had Science on a pedestal, was accused of "irrationalism" for saying the decision to embrace a new paradigm was a matter of "faith." Despite a couple of careless uses of that word his overall message was nothing of the sort, and he spent the rest of his life trying to clarify the complex rationality of an enterprise conducted by fallible humans working in organizations.

More extreme was the unabashed system-smashing of Paul Feyerabend (1924 – 1994), who authored the controversial *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (1975, 1988, 1993, 2010). Although Kuhn's and Feyerabend's names are often linked, both classified as "historicists" (i.e., those who see science as a historical phenomenon operating within institutions, and not a formulaic, frozen-in-time abstraction), Feyerabend's views differed from Kuhn's. For one thing, he rejected the idea that "mature" scientists should embrace a single paradigm. He advocated pluralism: multiple paradigms. Conformity of thought, he argued, might fit the needs of a *church* but is totally inappropriate for *science*.

He argued extensively that the most important scientific advances had not proceeded according to a single, identifiably rational method. Scientists had opportunistically used a variety of sometimes incompatible ideas and methods at hand, so that early modern physics and astronomy incorporated ideas from Christianity, Platonism, astrology (Newtonian "action at a distance"), mysticism, and so on. Some of their claims seemed contrary to "plain fact," as when Copernicus removed the Earth from the center of the universe in the absence of a physics able to make sense of such an idea (he was dead well over a century before Newton came along).

Positivism's naïve just-the-facts-ma'am view of science would have stopped physics and astronomy 1543 – 1686 in its tracks! With "plain fact" not on their side, early physicists advanced their main claims not just through argument but with storytelling and propaganda (Galileo wrote dialogues; some of his "experiments" as with dropping objects from the leaning tower of Pisa probably never took place).

Feyerabend's point was that if science was more "anarchic" than "rational," "anarchism" might help us in the present! It might free us from the "tyranny" of a "dogmatic Science" that was stifling our creativity within the cubicles of industrial civilization and robbing us of the potential richness life might have. According to him, the only abstract "rule" that could be guaranteed to work independent of situation was "anything goes": not a rule but a jocular, system-smashing *rejection* of abstractions. The idea: "*proper scientific method*" is always situation-specific. Feyerabend (unlike Kuhn) did not suffer fools gladly. He ridiculed critics who misread "anything goes" as an abstract rule. He mocked them by openly defending "relativism": resulting from comparing the richness supplied by history and anthropology to the desiccated requirements of positivist abstraction. (One of his favorite targets was George Soros's hero Karl Popper.) He has since been called "the worst enemy of science" by those who haven't read him, but believe "scientific" minds should get the last word on all things human, including designing (or redesigning) societies.

Arguably, Feyerabend put an end to a certain way of viewing science – at least, if we look at the enterprise as it is, a human-all-too-human endeavor, instead of accepting the mythology that has surrounded it (touted by positivists, atheistic materialists, and technocrats).

End of long digression. Why this dissertation? Because there are abundant reasons for rejecting the presumptions of those who believe MCC on the mere authority of a naïve empiricism:

who see science as mere data aggregation and integration, using a “method” frozen in time; and have occasionally been caught seeming to “cheat”: fudging data so that MCC seems better supported than it really is (e.g., “Climategate”: for contrasting views see [here](#) and [here](#)). As critics of MCC have pointed it, the scientists behind it receive government grants as well as lavish funding from elite foundations. In fairness, MCC “deniers” also receive substantial support from private sources (e.g., the Koch Brothers and Exxon).

Scientists are supposed to be the experts. But can we trust the objectivity and neutrality of the experts? Among the phenomena of the Trump era is a profound skepticism towards “expertism” as a repository of biases (most of them left-liberal, or globalist, these two often going hand-in-hand). The experts predicted Trump would lose in a landslide. Their major pronouncements about the economy going back well over two decades were wrong. They did not see the end of the tech bubble in 2000. In 2008, Federal Reserve Chair [Ben Bernanke](#) failed to anticipate the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, embarrassing himself in January of that year saying that the Fed “is not currently forecasting a recession.” The experts fail to see [the role of top-down financialization](#) in consolidating wealth and power at the (globalist) top via a system that removes labor’s share of national income. Their “paradigm” blocks their view of the forest so that they see only the trees.

Skepticism about experts isn’t limited to political economy, obviously. These days it crosses over a wide range of topics: so-called scientific medicine based on invasive procedures and the use of (expensive!) pharmaceuticals, which rejects alternative practices such as nutrition-based “holistic” or “integrative” healing, the use of dietary supplements, acupuncture, chiropractic, etc.; whether GMO foods pioneered by powerful global corporations such as Monsanto are proven safe for human consumption and for the ecosystem; whether

there is a causal relationship between vaccines (e.g., the MMR vaccine) and autism; whether the theory of evolution is as well-established as the scientific community maintains, well enough established to exclude intelligent design, and whether it is truly empirical or the product of a ([materialist](#)) worldview; whether there is a correlation between race/ethnicity and measurable average intelligence; and whether it is true that men and women have the same innate cognitive predispositions, so that workplace “imbalances” can be attributed to sexism/misogyny. There are doubtless others I haven’t thought of.

Again, a few of these I’ve looked at. Most I have not, at least not at length. But there is a discernable pattern running through nearly all of them, which is the same as the pattern often employed to circumvent careful consideration of the idea of history being [directed](#) by a globalist superelite or super-oligarchy. The pattern includes dogmatism and just-the-facts-ma’am appeals: “It’s true (or false) because we say so or because our studies say so” (the right rejoinder to any such study is to ask, “Who funded it?”), followed by ridicule (“that’s a conspiracy theory!”), or a similar device to avoid dealing with specifics offered, ending with an authoritarian gesture and a return to the [official narrative](#).

In the case of MCC, this progression now sometimes ends with a threat: that “climate change denial” be criminalized, “denialists” prosecuted and jailed, just as those who deny that Hitler and his minions killed 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, as opposed to some smaller number, are jailed for the thought crime in some countries. This, in fact, is the origin of the term *denialism* in the context of MCC: a propagandistic term intended to invoke Holocaust denial in the reader’s subconscious.

When ideas, questioning authority, and independent thought generally are criminalized, watch out! Just recall the line *attributed* to Voltaire (1694 – 1778) (he probably didn’t say

it, but it's true nevertheless): "To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize."

Applying: if you want to know if specific ideas or theories or policies have been afforded a special, unmerited status in institutions (academic, governmental, or corporate), find out if you can question them without the roof caving in – without, that is, being [fired from your job](#), having your reputation trashed by social media trolls, etc.

Skepticism toward expertise has caused sufficient alarm that there is now pushback. Authors speak, often at great length, of "how we lost our minds" and of "American stupidity," not just in articles ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) but books (e.g., [this one](#) and [this one](#)). What these authors are *dead set against* is the possibility of *epistemic equivalence* suggested by the idea that what we have is a *clash of worldviews*, not just a resentful rebellion of "the stupid" against "the informed," or "uneducated bigots" versus "educated cosmopolitans," etc. Very similar is the authoritarianism of those who reject *moral equivalence* between conservatives and historical preservationists currently demonized as white supremacists and neo-Nazis versus leftists who self-identify with "progress" (which Trumpism has so rudely interrupted!).

You're probably wondering: where does all these leave MCC? What should we conclude about it??? Especially given that if we conclude wrongly, either way, we could end up paying a steep price!

I will say – reminding readers of my disclaimers! – I don't see MCC as crazy, or crackbrained, or false just because globalists like it and can make use of it! Another topic I studied was systems thinking, and one of the things I noticed is how sensitive complex systems are to what can perturb them. It also became clear: complex systems *adjust* themselves to perturbations. The largest complex system in our civilization's proximate environment, the ecosphere, *could*

adjust our civilization out of the picture! I therefore dissent from many of my fellow alternative writers, including a few on this site. No need to take *my* word for anything. I recommend readers go to the sites linked to above and see if they have refutations for what they find there. Was “Climategate” real, or blown out of proportion?

I cannot decide for you! I don't have that kind of authority!

What I believe we *do* have is a *new knowledge problem* of some magnitude. What was the “old” problem? Just the philosophical question of how we acquire knowledge (through the senses, pure reason, or some other means including revelation). Its presumptions are problematic. I will not dwell on them here, as this discourse is already too long. The “new” problem: our own institutions and their hierarchical structures, enabling epistemic authoritarianism to pass for truth, *are in the truth-seeker's way*, made worse by the fact that the circumstances necessary to decide complicated problems like MCC cannot pay for themselves in a fast-paced society devoted to instant gratification and mass entertainment. Nuanced debate and discussion, based on a careful but slow weighing of many opinions and considerations, is not “marketable” in a culture of WhatsAppers and Twitter addicts.

This is a problem because few have the time, skills, or inclination to do their own research. *We need institutions we can trust*. I have extensive notes on this problem, in the context of the general breakdown of academia in our time, which I hope to incorporate into a future slim book – a story in itself! Suffice it for now, I am *not* a postmodernist, like Fort or Feyerabend, however much I sympathize with their crusades against epistemic authoritarianism. Truth exists; and we must not do what the postmodernists do in face of the difficulty of finding it, which is to conflate institution-bound authority with what is true and proven, cry foul when it turns out we were bamboozled, and then throw up our hands in gestures of despair.

What we could use is support for smaller, *parallel* institutions that have been growing for years in the face of the insufferable political correctness that has ruined academia and is now trying to erase everything that might offend some minority. In every *dominant* institution, *feelings* have trumped *truth*. If we had institutions of knowledge-seekers free from the need for money, and therefore from outside control, who did not answer to corporate donors, etc., there might be hope for (among other things) a trustworthy answer to the MCC question before it's too late, before our so-called leaders, whoever they might be, make decisions we will live to regret. Since we do not *have* such institutions on a scale large enough to matter, I am not all that optimistic.

Author's Note: if you believe this article and others like it were worth your time, please consider making a \$5/mo. pledge on [my Patreon site](#). If the first 100 people who read this all donate, my goal of just \$500/mo. would be reached in no time! And if we're honest about it, we all waste that much money every day.

Telling the truth can have negative consequences. Last year my computer was hacked – it wasn't the Russians, either! Repeated attempted repairs of the OS failed, the device became unusable, and I had to replace it off-budget.

This is also an attempt to raise money to publish and promote a novel, Reality 101, 98% finished as of this writing. In it, a globalist technocrat speaks in a voice filled with irony and dripping with cynicism – contrasted with the possibility of freedom outside the world as he sees it.

Promoting a book means, in my case, the necessity of international travel which is not cheap.

I do not write for an audience of one. I write for you, readers of this site. If you believe this work makes a worthwhile contribution to the world of political-economic

ideas, please consider supporting it financially. I am not a wealthy person, and unlike the leftist groups I criticize, I do not have a George Soros funneling a bottomless well of cash my way.

If I reach the above goal of \$500/mo., I may be able to speak at an event in your area (contact info below). On the other hand, if this effort fails, I am considering taking an indefinite "leave of absence" beginning later this year to pursue other goals. EDIT: thus far this effort has garnered just \$62/mo. If it does not reach \$250/mo. by the end of September, it will be time to write my farewell-and-good-luck piece.

To sum up, these are your articles (and books). I don't write to please myself. No one is forcing me to do it, as sometimes it brings me grief instead of satisfaction. So if others do not value the results enough to support them, I might as well go into retirement while I am still able to enjoy it.

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