

Dr Stephen Schneider took me to task in another Ockham's Razor talk. This was my response to him. I received no reply.

Dear Dr Schneider,

My Ockham's razor talks were not addressed to you, nor yours to me. We were both trying to reach an educated, interested audience. But I thought it might be worth my commenting on some of the things you said. I am increasingly struck by the similarity of the AGW debate to the struggle between the Church of Rome and the Protestant dissenters in the 16th century and afterwards. The Church claimed the right to mediate between the believer and God, while the Protestants argued that each of us could establish a personal communication with God. Throughout your talk I could hear someone talking in the tones of 'received wisdom'. My sceptical, protestant mind begins to object as soon as I hear anyone talk like this, no matter how many years they have worked in a field, no matter how many peer-reviewed papers they have published, no matter what their title. They are claiming authority. I don't accept it.

And as soon as I began to read I started to shake my head. You must know that the way you describe the IPCC process is a form of 'wall-papering'. The numbers you quote are not accurate measures of what actually happens. For me the notion of 'consensus' in this debate is intellectual bunk, and you know why. Phrases like 'the vast bulk of knowledgeable climate scientists' (you like 'vast') cut no ice with me at all. I think I have spent as long as you in the world of peer review, and as I have written elsewhere, it gets only two cheers from me. The defence of 'peer review' in this domain is a poor one, and again, you know why. The notion that the IPCC's use of numbers to describe its sense of the probability that statements are true is again a form of wall-papering. These numbers have no basis in measurement at all, and you know that.

You spend some time in showing that the earth has been warming, and there we have no real argument, for I said so too. But you still use 1998 as the hottest year, though GISS has now conceded that it was not. You don't mention the problem of argument — that if natural variations like El Nino can cause higher temperatures than expected, what is then the contribution of AGW? Like many others, who have written to me about what they think I have said or written, you jump too quickly to what you think I said, rather than to what I did say. I did not, as you say, 'claim that the few years from 1998 until now falsifies global warming...' I mentioned that period twice — from the first talk: 'If we look at the last century, then it warmed from about 1910 to 1940, when it stopped warming, It warmed again from 1975 to 1998, and then it stopped warming again.' From the second talk: 'After a peak in 1998, the result apparently of an El Nino episode, temperature has not increased, though carbon dioxide has gone on doing so.' Where is the 'false contrarian science' in that? You say that thermometers don't lie, but you don't say that there are many thermometers, and they don't all show the same things. The central England thermometers, perhaps the longest continuous and supposedly accurate set in the world, don't show any particular trend since the middle 17th century. HadCRUT3v shows a clear decline from 1998. Most of the warming seems to have occurred in the northern hemisphere, where most of the people are. And so on. I think you have an obligation to

deal with these inconvenient data, and I'll go on being someone who thinks Popper got it right, and that Feyerabend had some insight too.

My approach is to ask what I think are central, sensible questions, and go on doing so until I get good answers, or discover that there aren't any. I haven't published any peer-reviewed papers in climate science (which doesn't make me at all unusual, since neither has Al Gore) but I have spent a long time in science policy and in helping to reach decisions about the spending of large amount of money on scientific research proposals, both in Australia and Canada.

At the end you dismiss people who ask questions, like me, as someone who belongs to 'a small band of people who represent only themselves'. Whom do you represent? As an academic I have been a 'public intellectual' for forty years, and in that time I have tried to explain to readers of newspapers what I think the important issues of the day are and how they might engage with them. In doing so I am always trespassing on other people's patches, and I make no apology for doing so. My interest is in a better democracy, whose citizens are concerned about problems and their solution. But I try not to engage in polemics, or to get into the ad hominem style, which is so much part of any political debate. I believe that my position is an honourable and essential one, and when I read a transcript like yours, I feel even more positive about the virtue of what I am doing. To return to where I began, your talk sounds like the high priest in action. I'm not much into high priests, especially when they preach global salvation. If you want to be taken seriously as a scientist in this debate, it seems to me, you have to deal with the problems of measurements and argument, not to brush them aside because you think you have a 'vast consensus' on your side. You haven't, and you know it.

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