

It is Time to Get Climate Change Right.  
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The Tower of Babel is a Bible story about God's punishment for human arrogance in building a skyscraper. In the story, God confounded human language and we have failed to understand each other ever since. But today, some issues, such as Climate Change or Global Warming suffer from the Tower of Babel syndrome. Even when speaking the same language, we don't understand each other.

Climate change is different from weather. Reports about cold winters and snow do not contradict global warming. Weather is a local or at best regional phenomenon and is not the basis for scientists defining global warming. The process of warming (cycles of warming and chilling have happened many times in the past) has origins not fully understood. Could solar variations and oceanic currents play the largest role? Even volcanic action can create temporary global chilling, as it has more than once.

During warming cycles, there are far more extremes in storms and temperatures, colder and stormier winters and hotter, drier summers. The warming phases melt polar ice, cause ocean levels to rise, creating more evaporation so that rains are torrential in some places but absent in others. Pictures taken over many years can demonstrate this today. Glaciers in the Andes, Africa, and Iceland are melting. Warming has done this. Denial of this fact is just being contrary.

History validates that human activity can also accelerate climate change. The ancient Mediterranean world's population explosion accelerated the gradual warming, turning the Greek and Persian forests into dry scrublands. The process was made worse by denuding forests and grazing goats and sheep, replacing cattle. Even bone-dry Arabia was once grasslands and lakes. Did humans play a role in the process?

The early Muslim invaders (7th century) almost completely denuded North Africa, which had been a Roman-created wine and grain region for a millennium. The Arab hordes destroyed the hydraulic systems watering vineyards (wine was forbidden) and deliberately set their goats to grazing in the farmlands. The result was transformation from fertile to desert. Humans do play a role.

There is a political divide between believers in the scientists who show that the earth is rapidly warming and those who believe the "know-nothings" on this issue. The 19th century gave rise to the "Know-Nothing Party" that took pride in its ignorance. Like their predecessors, today's know-nothings don't like Darwin either. (See Bible theme parks for an imaginary world only 6,000 years old, with dinosaurs walking among humans. Silly stuff.)

But even scientists who agree that warming is accelerating dispute ultimate causation. Is this more a natural cycle reaching a tipping point or is it a natural cycle accelerated by human industrialization? There is also disagreement on what we should do about it.

Political conservatives fear legislation against hydrocarbons that could damage the economy by destabilizing the coal industry and the new shale oil and gas industries. Also, miners and other energy workers fear for their livelihoods. Some politicians don't want to bite the hand that funds them.

On the Liberal side, the notion that we can ban hydrocarbons overnight is equally uncertain. Science cannot tell us for sure that these actions can reverse or slow down this warming process. Might we even warm faster without industrial pollution?

We should be focusing on protecting ourselves from the consequences of climate change. We are already beginning to gradually replace our energy resources with much cleaner renewables. This will at least clean up our air and water, if not reverse the warming. The more urgent effort, however, should be to use good science and engineering to save coastal cities threatened by rising sea levels. For countries such as Bangladesh or low lying Pacific islands, now increasingly inundated, we need to relocate populations. This will call for brainpower and money.

Climate change is real. History already shows us that we can go from warming to chilling in less than a decade, as we did in 1300. Let's know our limits and emulate the Dutch, who built seawalls, not King Canute, who couldn't hold back the sea.

673 words

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