

Naming the Scourge We Made

by strannikov

Our planet's climates could wind up posing over coming decades or centuries far more disruption and dislocation than anyone can now calculate or guess. Generations already born and those born over the next few decades likely are among the first to witness the widespread disruptions and dislocations, no matter what interventions are promised or threatened by our national classes of applied scientists and applied technologists to help us “cope”.

The culprit has been offered many names, “climate change” and “global warming” seem the two preferred in unclued media accounts, as deceptive and inexact as each term is. “Global warming”, we see already, cannot name a phenomenon or a range of phenomena that yield meteorological systems equally capable of raising and lowering local temperatures: the term “global warming” may well name the overarching climatological mechanism, but it confuses pedestrian humanity when one of its legitimate consequences is opportunistic lowering of temperatures or invitation to inclement snowfalls and ice storms. Likewise, “climate change” fails to specify and distinguish a climatic and meteorological system already prone to “natural” contributions with or without direct human participation (however natural humans may have remained).

No matter what injuries we humans sustain individually and collectively from what looks to be on our immediate horizons, we will not be injured by at least attempting to indulge in a fit of requisite specificity from the relative outset. What locution begins to name this global climatic phenomenon with its contributing meteorological phenomena?

We can recognize and identify those natural mechanisms known to earth scientists: solar activity, geothermal activity including vulcanism, tectonic plate activity which can be associated with the

former and vice versa, earthquakes/seaquakes/tsunamis, the specific conditions that result in or exacerbate drought, those that result in or exacerbate severe rains and floods, those that lead to de-iced polar regions, thawing permafrost zones, and melting glaciers, et cetera. What is coming to us, for us, or at us has definite natural components, “purely natural” in the sense that their mechanisms operate regardless of human observations, measurements, or interventions.

It is the case, too, that human beings—each one of us and all of us together—have helped foment the problems. We are the ones who mindlessly assumed that our scant contributions in any local circumstance hardly possessed the force to help disrupt or accelerate or aggravate “purely natural” changes to climate or meteorological process. We are the ones who drove cars and trucks mindlessly, letting the carbon spew without regard for the cumulative effects. We are the ones who helped litter the planet and its oceans with tons of discarded plastic. We are the ones who have uncritically plugged into every single solitary proffered device that caring manufacturers have thrown at us so that we can entertain ourselves and each other without counting costs: radios and television sets, electric lights and air conditioners, stereos and computers, mobile phones and their many helpful apps.

The foregoing examples constitute proximate causes or contributions to changing climate. But contemporary scientists are hardly able to claim that any of these can justly be said to have uniquely “caused” changing climate: the exact mechanisms permitting human beings to contribute to climate change, the exact mechanisms for humans’ aggravation of natural climate-changing climatic and meteorological processes, came from elsewhere.

“Climate change” fails as a nominative because of its bland self-evidence: our planet’s climate patterns change regardless. “Global warming” is flatly inaccurate or misleading, since the climatic patterns now forming give us intensely hot summers (northern and southern hemispheres now appear equally affected) but just as likely can continue to yield (seasonally) local meteorological conditions of

intense cold, ice storms, snowfalls, et cetera. “Global warming” can also fail to remind us properly of the dynamics distinguishing warming oceans from warming atmospheres and climates.

To give proper credit where due, one name suffices for what humanity likely will be dealing with for decades or centuries to come, and that name is “Technogenic Climate Change”.

The term “anthropogenic” has been modeled in some media accounts, but while suggesting accuracy and accountability, it fails because this term would misapply or misallocate the agency that created the conditions for the advent of climate change, no matter the additional, specifically human contributions. The conditions for the advent of Technogenic Climate Change were not mindless natural processes suddenly running amok nor did they result from the spontaneous pining of humanity for vast disruptions and dislocations to global climates—the conditions resulted from the advent of applied science and applied technology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: and because generations of empirical and “rational” scientists in the interim failed to anticipate the outcomes that they and their processes were generating, our entire globe now faces the daunting prospect of having to deal with the effects of Technogenic Climate Change.

Technogenic Climate Change was “invented” (however intentionally or inadvertently) by our applied scientists and applied technologists beginning at least in the eighteenth century. It was unleashed with the advent of early modern industrial production, the development of engineering methods and processes for fabrication, and the growth of industrial production capacity. It belched plumes and clouds of harmless black smoke as it roared down rivers clogging with more and more steamships for hauling passengers and goods. It roared down the tracks upon which raced locomotives and coal-fired steam engines. It vomited untold tons of carbonized residue through multiple nineteenth century military conflicts and vomited untold more tons with the advent of motorized transport. (Oh yes, let's not neglect bovine methane contributions, or those emitted by cattle whether bovine or bipedal.) To say nothing of the

dynamics posed by the atmospheric testing of atomic and nuclear weapons across almost two decades, to say nothing of 24/7/365 (366) media production, broadcast, and distribution schedules, to say nothing of ozone degradation resulting from the ceaseless novelty of commercial flight, the glamour of international travel, and the glories of military aviation.

Faulting the planet for inherent climate dynamism is no path to naming the actual culprit here. Blaming poor human beings for our guilty parts collectively only begins to account (partially) for human contributions. We have only dutifully worked with and aggravated atmospheric conditions with the tools and processes gifted to us by our scientific and technological elites: it is applied science and applied technology that have brought to Planet Earth the scourge of Technogenic Climate Change. It remains important to recall just who to thank for this mess because the same classes of applied scientists and applied technologists no doubt will claim passionately and earnestly to be in a good position to help combat Technogenic Climate Change, to repair the ravages it wreaks across our globe. Perhaps we poor afflicted human beings can greet our philanthropists' and benefactors' claims with the due skepticism with which we might properly have greeted their initial promises entire centuries ago. The proper appellation "Technogenic Climate Change" can therefore remind us (and them) of how irrational our ambitions to impose rational solutions on inert matter can be.

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