



American Thinker

December 3, 2016

Columbia University's Climate: A Visit to an Alternate Universe

By Norman Rogers

The subway stop at 116th street in Manhattan is for Columbia University. Is this subway stop a worm hole to an alternate universe where people look like everyone else, but are possessed by strange ideas and incomprehensible ways of thinking?

My journey to 116th street was to attend a lecture titled “What Would it Mean to Understand Climate Change?” It is hard to understand the title of this lecture and the official description of the lecture increases the confusion:

“Efforts abound to “understand” climate change. But what kind of understanding is needed? Does “understanding” mean the same thing to concerned citizens as it does to scientists, humanities scholars, or policy makers? At this public event climate scientist Isaac Held, philosopher of science Philip Kitcher, and science journalist Jonathan Weiner will compare the work of understanding undertaken by different communities engaged with climate change, and address the question what remains to be understood.”

The first speaker, Isaac Held, was the only scientist. Held is deeply involved with the computer climate models that are the foundation for the predictions of climate doom. Apparently nearly everyone at



Columbia University, judging from the speakers and the audience, have accepted the message from the computers as absolute truth.

Held's talk was meandering and difficult to understand. His thesis is that there are a hierarchy of stories explaining climate change. At the most complicated level are the computer climate models. A simple story could be a prediction, say doubling CO2 in the atmosphere will increase global average temperature by X degrees. Held avoids making any judgements. He never tells us how much confidence we should have in the climate models, even though one would think as someone deeply involved with climate models he should be in a good position to make judgements. After all, if the climate models are unreliable, why are Held and hundreds of other scientists spending their time working on climate models? Perhaps because they are being paid to work on climate models.

I asked Held what conclusion he draws from the lack of warming of the Earth during the last 18 years in the face of increasing CO2 in the atmosphere. He acknowledged the problem but seemed to suggest that the warming hiatus was created by chaotic variations in the climate. He also became duplicitous when he suggested that the recent El Nino was breaking the warming hiatus. As an expert on climate he surely knows that El Nino's are temporary and not connected to long term climate change. (El Nino is the name for a disturbance in the tropical Pacific Ocean that causes a temporary variation in global temperature.)

In the present oppressive intellectual environment, no climate scientist can risk being critical of the climate doom story unless he wants to be viciously attacked as a climate denier. So, we are never going to hear what Isaac Held really thinks, assuming that he has the critical opinions that he sometimes hints at. Held wrote an [article](#) in Science that discusses his ideas in more detail.

Johnathan Weiner is a professor at the Columbia journalism school. He has written a number of books on science related subjects, but not climate. He has won many awards and honors. Given his position and background it is disappointing that, although he makes public pronouncements on climate change, he is a sucker for the crudest global warming propaganda and the silliest conspiracy theories. He touts Naomi Oreskes' book, *The Merchants of Doubt* as being an "excellent book." Naomi Oreskes is a bizarre conspiracy theorist as I have documented [here](#) and [here](#). According to Oreskes, the oil companies are running a scam to confuse everyone about global warming by spreading misinformation. If they are doing this, their methods are strange. If



you look at oil company websites, most oil companies show themselves to be believers in global warming and assert that they are trying hard to reduce CO2 emissions.

The third speaker, the philosopher of science, Philip Kitcher, is apparently writing a book on climate that, according to [Amazon](#), will be released in April, 2017. It should be a doozy judging from what he had to say at the lecture. According to Kitcher it is a real worry that there will be “billions and billions” of human deaths due to global warming. This is an extreme position not shared by most global warming alarmists. He also suggests that the rich countries must reduce their standard of living in order to help the poor countries develop green energy economies. Perhaps as a philosopher he doesn't feel that political reality should intrude on his musings.



When Philip Kitcher said that some real pessimists think that human extinction may be the result of failing to prevent global warming, a lady in the audience piped up with “they deserve it.” One wonders why she didn't say “we deserve it.” Perhaps she views the Columbia community as separate from the human race.

During the question and answer period a woman in the audience from the English department, after saying she would try to be brief, spoke for more than 3 minutes about “narrative.” Here some bits from her exposition on narrative:

“When you start thinking about narrative, you very quickly get into the terrain of the subjective, or of the social, political, ethical, or of the experiential, the tactile... I think of narrative as much less inert, neutral, and predictable than I think people who aren't specialists in narrative think of it...”

There is an entire academic specialty of narrative theory.

The lesson I came away with is that there are many university types that firmly believe in global warming and are convinced that sinister forces are holding up action on preventing global warming. I don't think it occurs to them that the scientists making the predictions are exaggerating the ability of computer models to predict the future climate, or that those scientists have greatly benefited from the global warming scare. Professors in non-science areas, like journalism or philosophy, are easy to fool with scientific sounding predictions invoking computers.

I am reminded of a Columbia professor, Jeffery Sachs, and a Yale professor, William Nordhaus. Those professors are economists. As economists one would think that they would not be so easily fooled by talk of computer models. After all, economists use computer models all the time and should be familiar with the pitfalls. But, both of those distinguished professors made foolish claims regarding climate. See my articles [here](#) and [here](#).

