

1. The Shared Vision of Hell

Pieter Brueghel could not have painted a more lurid scene than what appeared on the evening news of April 13, 1997, as raging floodwaters rampaged through downtown Grand Forks, North Dakota. Entire blocks were aflame as rupturing gas lines collided with inevitable sparks. Not a fire truck was to be seen; none could ford the Red River of the North, normally a modest stream with little depth, now swollen to a mile wide and stories high.

Never had Grand Forks seen such a flood, and never would the city be the same. The vibrant town that served the fertile wheat-growing region of eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota became a shell of burned-out buildings and homes. Levels of unemployment and family misery grew to rival those of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

President Clinton blamed global warming. Prior to his April 22 flight to Grand Forks, Clinton spoke to reporters from the Rose Garden: "We do not know for sure that the warming of the earth is responsible for what seems to be a substantial increase in highly disruptive weather events, but I believe that it is."

Five months later, Vice President Gore dragged a quailing covey of reporters up to Grinnell Glacier in Glacier National Park. Speaking slowly, just to make sure everyone understood, he intoned, "This glacier is melting." As are many of the world's glaciers, he added, because of human-caused global warming.

A month later Gore was in California to lead the oxymoronic "El Niño Summit," where he was happy to conflate that natural oscillation in tropical Pacific sea-surface temperatures with global warming.

A few years earlier, in March 1995, Gore gave his annual Earth Day address at George Washington University. "Torrential rains have increased in the summer in agricultural regions," he said, referring to a yet-to-be published paper by federal climatologist Tom Karl. In fact, Karl had found no change in the frequency of daily

rainfall in excess of three inches. What he did find was a tiny change in the amount of rain coming from summer storms of between two and three inches in 24 hours, but these are hardly “torrential” and are most often welcomed by farmers everywhere, who pray for such rains. America’s breadbasket is usually in great need of moisture come August.

In July 1998, Gore visited northeast Florida, which had experienced a series of substantial range and forest fires. He said the conflagrations “offer a glimpse of what global warming may mean for families.” The reason Florida went up in smoke during this normally hot season was the overabundance of vegetation that resulted from excessive rains in the previous winter. While it might be convenient to finger the 1997–98 El Niño as the cause, statistical studies show El Niño is in fact associated with less-than-average burned acreage in Florida.

Gore’s history of exaggeration—climatic and otherwise—is long and deep and repetitive. It begins long before his 1992 bestseller *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, in which he says that fighting global warming is the “central organizing principle for civilization.” He believes global warming is a battle between good and evil—which, judging from his past actions, includes anyone who disagrees with him about global warming. Referring to global warming in a 1989 article in the *New Republic*, Gore wrote, “‘Evil’ and ‘good’ are terms not frequently used by politicians. But I do not see how this problem can be solved without reference to spiritual values.” This level of bombast and exaggeration (politicians use the words “good” and “evil” about as often as they say “children”) has become a Gore pattern that now imperils his political future.

According to the Clinton-Gore administration, hot air even causes cold air. On February 5, 1996, many locations in the upper Midwest of the United States set their all-time records for low temperature (note that records in this region do not generally exceed 100 years in length). Two days later, while visiting the also-shivering schoolchildren of New Hampshire, President Clinton remarked that cold was the kind of thing caused by global warming. (Physically speaking, the administration here is apparently trying to repeal the first law of thermodynamics, which states that heat causes warmth and lack of heat causes cold.) Nine days later, speaking into a howling storm in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Clinton blamed the snow on—what else?—global warming.

The list of these assertions is long. Taken together, they form a vision of hellish climatic catastrophe, a vision that has started to take hold. Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho) polled his constituents and found that 73 percent believe global warming is a real problem requiring real action.

Clinton's fallen political guru Dick Morris agrees. Appearing at one of Rep. Jack Kingston's (R-N.C.) regularly scheduled "Theme Team" meetings in fall 1998, Morris bragged that he had done some polling on global warming and said that if he were advising Gore in his presidential campaign, he would make that issue the centerpiece. In a departure from his normal mode of dispassionate analysis, Morris also stated that he truly believed global warming was a terrible problem. Morris thinks the American people share Gore's vision of climate hell, and that they believe it enough to elect him president.

How did this vision come about? And more important, is it true? *The Satanic Gases* holds the answer.

The science of global warming cannot be viewed outside the context of the "way science works," which Thomas Kuhn described in his 1962 classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Almost all scientists, Kuhn says, spend their lives doing "normal science," which includes the performance of simple experiments that verify that the current "paradigm" for a field is indeed correct.

Kuhn writes,

Normal science, the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost. Normal science, for example, often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments (p. 5).

In Kuhn's world, scientists toil under overarching structures, or "paradigms," and "normal science" consists of shoring up any little problems or inconsistencies within that structure:

Mopping-up operations are what engage most scientists throughout their careers. . . . Closely examined, whether historically or in the contemporary laboratory, that enterprise seems an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies (p. 24).

A “paradigm” is, for example, the earth-centered universe, defended in its day by academic scholars everywhere. When Galileo looked at the moons of Jupiter, it could have been but a few minutes before he realized they were more analogous to the relationship of the earth to the sun than the existing paradigm. But that irritated most official (i.e., church sponsored) scientists at the time, so Galileo found himself being hauled before the Inquisition, which threatened him with death. When Gore was in the Senate, he merely hauled paradigm-smashers before his “Science Roundtables” and threatened them with discredit.

Kuhn notes that when a paradigm is threatened by inconvenient data, the first response is to ignore reality:

In science . . . novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. Initially, only the anticipated and usual are experienced even under circumstances where the anomaly is later to be observed. Further acquaintance, however, does result in an awareness of something wrong or does relate the effect to something that has gone wrong before (p. 64).

“Normal science” in the greenhouse issue is the notion that computerized climate models are producing a largely realistic picture of the atmosphere warmed by carbon dioxide, if twiddled a bit here and there (“mopped up,” in Kuhn’s view), and that this warming will be rapid and disastrous. In the longest run, though, Kuhn is predicting that something will eventually be found to be gravely wrong with the current paradigm—a proposition we detail in succeeding chapters.

Scientists also function within a larger society and respond not only to their Kuhnian dictates. They also have personal, ethical, and financial interests, just like everyone else. James Buchanan has described the interaction of these interests in the public sphere under the rubric of “Public Choice Theory,” and the combination of Buchanan’s theory and Kuhn’s theory goes a long way toward explaining the history of global warming science, a discussion we save for chapter 11. It is first necessary to talk about global warming itself and the scientific basis for projections of future change.