

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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SCIENCE AS POLITICS; SCIENCE AS RELIGION

The matter of global warming, climate change and the other various labels currently in vogue is to say the least provocative and controversial. The entire issue has been so politicized that any careful, reasoned debate is virtually impossible. In so many ways, the issue is being framed as a debate between science and reason versus feeling and emotion. Those who support the argument of global warming are those who support science; those who raise questions about the hypothesis are depicted as narrow-minded and silly. In this *Perspective*, I am not going to argue the virtues or the science of global warming and what is causing it. Instead, I want to posit two theses: Science can be very ideological and political and that science can be framed as a set of near religious convictions.

- First, science as politics. In the end of November, stolen electronic files from servers at the Climatic Research Unit (CRU), a world famous center at the University of East Anglia in Great Britain were made public. The leaked files contain over 1,000 emails and 3,000 documents from the CRU. For example, in one of the email exchanges, Phil Jones, the CRU director, wrote a colleague that he would “hide” a problem with data from Siberian tree rings with more accurate local air temperature measurements. Further, Jones writes another colleague at Penn State University (Michael Mann) and questions whether the work of academics that question the link between human activities and global warming deserve to make it into the prestigious IPCC [the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] report, which represents the global consensus view on climate change. He writes that “I can’t see either of these papers being in the next IPCC report. Kevin and I will keep them out somehow—even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is.” In another, Jones and Mann discuss how they can pressure an academic journal not to accept the work of climate skeptics with whom they disagree. “Perhaps we should encourage our colleagues to no longer submit to or cite papers in this journal. . . I will be emailing the journal to tell them I’m having nothing more to do with it until they rid themselves of this troublesome editor.” For anyone who is intellectually honest, these kinds of emails raise profoundly disturbing questions. Can any one honestly imagine these kinds of exchanges if the subject were AIDS research or breast cancer research? The explosion would be unimaginable! These email messages and documents raise three important questions: (1) whether these scientists shielded raw data, gleaned from tree rings and other indirect indicators of climate conditions? (2) Do these emails and documents prove that data used to buttress the argument for global warming is suspect? (3) Did certain climate scientists try to prevent the publication of scientific papers by climate skeptics? The answer to the first and third questions is yes. Question number two is no. What these emails and documents reveal is a group of scientists engaging in hard politics and abandoning their professional, scientific objectivity for a cause! The dominant themes of these documents reveal, what columnist Michael Gerson suggests, is

an attitude that “insiders can question, if they don’t go too far. Outsiders who threaten the movement are ‘idiots.’” The professional scientists involved in this scandal (and that is what it is) demonstrate a lack of professional objectivity, so necessary for the pursuit of science. Gerson writes: “This professional objectivity is precisely what the hacked emails call into question. Some of these scientists are merely activists, deeply invested in a predetermined outcome. They assume that political change is the goal; the scientific enterprise is the means—like a political ad or campaign speech. But without trust in disinterested, scientific judgments on climate, most non-scientists will resist costly, speculative, legislative actions. When the experts become advocates, no one believes the experts or listens to the advocates.” As Daniel Henninger argues, “For years, global warming and its advocates have been the public face of hard science. Global warming enlisted the collective reputation of science.” That is at least now called into question. Furthermore, the East Anglia scandal demonstrates the predisposition toward Postmodernism in certain dimensions of science. The formal structures of the scientific method are now replaced with raw subjectivity. Ideology is driving the conclusion of a scientific theory, not the data. A new scientific ethos of “close enough” to the truth is now satisfactory. “Close enough” science is hardly adequate in the pursuit of political goals and public policy. The East Anglia scandal is dangerous and must be confronted honestly and openly. We cannot be pursuing public policy that is supposed to be rooted in objective science, when the facts illustrate that, at least for some in science, ideology is driving the conclusion, not the data. One of the most revealing emails states that “the fact is that we can’t account for the lack of warming at the moment [the current the ‘moment’ is over 10 years in length] and it is a travesty that we can’t.” That is not a scientific judgment; that is an ideological one.

- The second thesis of this *Perspective* is that science can in fact be a religion for some. Their convictions and beliefs are so consuming that they defend them and articulate them with a “religious” fervor. Quite unbelievably, this fervor has received the sanction of the court system of England. In July 2008, Tim Nicholson was dismissed from his job at a property management firm because of his deeply held convictions about global warming. He argued that global warming is “the most important issue of our time” and that “nothing should stand in the way of diverting this catastrophe.” For him, “Belief in man-made climate change is . . . a philosophical belief that reflects my moral and ethical values.” He therefore sued his former employer and won. The judge in the case wrote that “a belief in man-made climate change . . . is capable, if genuinely held, of being a philosophical belief for the purpose” of laws covering discrimination in employment. The deep-seated convictions of someone who believes in climate change now have legal protection and can sue for discrimination in Great Britain. It is quite probable that a similar ruling will come in an American court. In 1941 the US Supreme Court altered the definition of freedom of religion. It broadened the definition in a now famous case, the Kauten case on conscientious objection to war, when it argued that “Conscientious objection may justly be regarded as a response of the individual to an inward mentor, call it conscience or God, that is for many persons at the present time the equivalent of what has always been thought a religious impulse.” Freedom of religion was significantly altered from a substantive reference point (what you belief about God, morality and worship) to a psychological function of belief. James Davison Hunter argues that this 1941 case formally embraced “nontheistic, in particular, secularist ideologies within the shelter of protection provided by the First Amendment.” It is not difficult to imagine the US courts agreeing with the British court on global warming as a “religious” belief that needs legal protection against discrimination.

See Juliet Eilperin in the *Washington Post* (22 November 2009); David Fahrenthold and Juliet Eilperin in the *Washington Post* (5 December 2009); Andrew Revkin in the *New York Times* (28 November 2009); Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (11 December 2009); Daniel Henninger in the *Wall Street Journal* (3 December 2009); George Will in the *Washington Post* (6 December 2009); “Breakpoint” (2 December 2009); James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, pp. 257-259.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

PRESIDENT OBAMA AND THE JUST WAR

During President Obama’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he made reference to the just war idea. It was truly an amazing speech, focusing on the reality that he was accepting this prize only a few days after announcing his surge in Afghanistan. It was at best ironic, but he seized this opportunity and made one of the best speeches of his presidency. A few excerpts:

“For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies. Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is recognition of history, the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.” He went on to argue that “war is sometimes necessary, and war at some level is an expression of human folly.” He also stated: “Of course, we know that from most of history, this concept of ‘just war’ was rarely observed. The capacity of human beings to think up new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible, as did our capacity to exempt from mercy those who look different or pray to a different God.”

What did he mean by the just war? A few thoughts. Pacifism and activism are the two extremes on the war issue. Pacifism says it is never right to participate in war; activism says it is always right. Through the history of the church, a mediating view has developed called the just war tradition. This tradition sees some wars as unjust and some as just. The challenge lies in discerning which wars are just. Since the time of the fifth century theologian Augustine, the majority of Christians have accepted the proposition that there exists a set of criteria whereby a war and its methods are deemed “just.” What follows is a summary of the most widely accepted criteria for the just war tradition:

1. **A Just Cause.** A just cause for the use of force exists whenever it is necessary either to repel an unjust attack, to retake something wrongly taken, or to punish evil. An example of this criterion is Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Ethically speaking, just war theorists argue, Saddam’s action was a flagrant case of aggression and therefore it was justifiable for the world community to repel his unjust aggression.
2. **Right Authority.** This criterion focuses on established, legitimate, and properly constituted authority using force for a “just cause.” In the United States this “right authority” consists in the powers granted to the President of the United States, by the War Powers Act or by a congressional declaration of war. In international affairs today, “right authority” might involve action by the UN Security Council authorizing the use of force. The point of this criterion focuses on legitimate authority, not private individuals who wage war.

3. **Right Intention.** This criterion stresses the end goal for the use of force. The aim must be, for example, to turn back or undo aggression and then to deter such aggression in the future. The end for the use of force must be peace, not aggression or continued war. Again, the Gulf War of 1991 offers an example of this just war criterion. The world community had no aggressive aims against the territory or people of Iraq. “Right intention” in this conflict meant rolling back Saddam’s aggression, establishing the peace of the Middle East and assuring that safeguards would protect that peace in the future.

4. **Proportionate Means.** As a criterion, this point centers on just means in the use of force; it must be appropriate to the goal. Allowing aggression, for example, to stand, this view argues, is condoning an evil in itself and opening the door to yet further evil. Therefore, military force, whether land, air or sea forces are involved, must be proportionate to the goal. Using nuclear weapons, for example, would be disproportionate in rolling back aggression of a third-rate nation with no air force or navy. Using chemical and biological weapons is another example of disproportionate means.

5. **Last Resort.** This criterion involves the legitimate government using all diplomatic and foreign policy resources, including economic sanctions, to force the aggressive nation to pull back. If the aggressor responds with intransigence and continued belligerence, the legitimate government has no choice but use of military force. Again, the Iraq crisis of the 1990-1991 offers a classic example of this criterion: The allies used economic sanctions, diplomatic activity and personal diplomacy to change Saddam Hussein’s aggressive actions against Kuwait. He refused. Therefore, just war advocates argue, the world community was just in rolling back his aggressive actions.

6. **Noncombatant Immunity.** This is the most difficult criterion for the just war position. The military force used must be discriminate--the moral principle that seeks to protect noncombatants in war by prohibiting their being used directly or intentionally targeted by military force. Of course this means going to all ends not to attack intentionally civilians, not to bomb civilian neighborhoods and not to kill intentionally and indiscriminately the civilian population of an enemy. With the advent of weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear or chemical or biological, one sees how difficult this criterion becomes for modern warfare. Non-combatant immunity does not exist. Because entire populations are decimated, neither does proportionate means. This is why many Christians argue that nuclear warfare does not meet this just war criterion and is therefore immoral and a sin.

In summary, the just war position argues that war must be fought only for a just cause and not to pursue aggrandizement, glory or vengeance. War must be declared by a legitimate authority and have a reasonable chance of success. The good likely to result must outweigh the evil of warfare and of allowing the wrongdoing provoking the war to continue. War must be a last resort after less violent approaches have failed. Civilian populations must not be deliberately attacked, every effort must be made to minimize casualties among them and no unnecessary force must be wielded against either troops or civilians.

See Kathleen Parker in the *Washington Post* (11 December 2009); ChristianityToday.com (11 December 2009); and James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 61-69.