

“Global Warming and Fossil Fuels” Reviewed

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Received: May 12, 2020;

Published: May 22, 2020

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We live in an age of global warming, of that there is no doubt. However, the primary cause of this phenomenon is very much in doubt, as this well researched and reasoned article points out. The common misperception is that increasing temperatures is due primarily to the burning of fossil fuels in industrialized nations. However, the little known fact is that only 6% of global warming is actually due to such activity. The simple fact is that temperatures fluctuate up and down and always have and always will. This is more a background process we have to accept and live with. It is no doubt unfortunate that our industrialized societies are adding to this problem, but their contribution is minimal.

As the article points out, much of the current, popular hysteria is based on misunderstanding which is hyped by uninformed but well-intentioned citizens who are justly concerned about our common future. Would that they were as well informed as they are active. In spreading their disinformation, they unwittingly perform a major disservice to the cultures they legitimately wish to help. As the article makes clear, our embracing of fossil fuels is limited. We will run out of affordable oil in a generation. We have enough dirty coal to carry us for a couple centuries beyond that, but as carbon dioxide accumulates in the atmosphere, it will form a shield which will prevent solar energy from reaching the earth's surface, so it will actually induce a period of global cooling. Alternate fuel systems are discussed and embraced. Nuclear fission is a possibility but is fraught with its own dangers. Disastrous meltdown a la Chernobyl are always possible and, given the universal propensity for human error, always a lurking possibility. Fusion is a Faustian bargain because it produces toxic Uranium 238 by the ton while lethal doses of this by-product are measured in nanograms. Complicating the issue of storage of such poisonous material is that fact that it has a half-life of 25,000 years.

Other sources of energy are given their due in this balanced presentation of considerations of the issue but consistently found wanting. Clean systems harvesting wind and solar hold out some promise but are currently (pun) resisted by the dominant fossil fuel industries.

The trenchant ending of the article points out that global warming will continue despite rather than because of what we do.

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