Seduced by Numbers

“Science cannot tell us how to value things,” Ms. Thompson says. “The idea of ‘following the science’ is meaningless.”

Framing Speculation as Proof

“One motivation: Pessimism sells. “You don’t get blamed for being too pessimistic, but you do get attention. It’s like climate science. Modeled forecasts of a future that is scary is much more likely to get you on television.”

The 97% Fraud

from National Review and Ian Tuttle, The 97% Solution

> *Surely the most suspicious “97 percent” study was conducted in 2013 by Australian scientist John Cook — author of the 2011 book Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand and creator of the blog Skeptical Science (subtitle: “Getting skeptical about global warming skepticism.”). In an analysis of 12,000 abstracts, he found “a 97% consensus among papers taking a position on the cause of global warming in the peer-reviewed literature that humans are responsible.” “Among papers taking a position” is a significant qualifier: Only 34 percent of the papers Cook examined expressed any opinion about anthropogenic climate change at all. Since 33 percent appeared to endorse anthropogenic climate change, he divided 33 by 34 and — voilà — 97 percent! When David Legates, a University of Delaware professor who formerly headed the*

university's Center for Climatic Research, recreated Cook's study, he found that "only 41 papers – 0.3 percent of all 11,944 abstracts or 1.0 percent of the 4,014 expressing an opinion, and not 97.1 percent," endorsed what Cook claimed. Several scientists whose papers were included in Cook's initial sample also protested that they had been misinterpreted. "Significant questions about anthropogenic influences on climate remain," Legates concluded.

Facts Without Context

from The Wall Street Journal, A Deceptive New Report on Climate by Steven Koonin

This isn't the only example of highlighting a recent trend but failing to place it in complete historical context. The report's executive summary declares that U.S. heat waves have become more common since the mid-1960s, although acknowledging the 1930s Dust Bowl as the peak period for extreme heat. Yet buried deep in the report is a figure showing that heat waves are no more frequent today than in 1900. This artifice also appeared in the government's 2014 National Climate Assessment, which emphasized a post-1980 increase in hurricane power without discussing the longer-term record. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently stated that it has been unable to detect any human impact on hurricanes.

These deficiencies in the new climate report are typical of many others that set the report's tone. Consider the different perception that results from "sea level is rising

> *no more rapidly than it did in 1940" instead of "sea level rise has accelerated in recent decades," or from "heat waves are no more common now than they were in 1900" versus "heat waves have become more frequent since 1960." Both statements in each pair are true, but each alone fails to tell the full story.*
>
> *Finally, the institutions involved in the report should figure out how and why such shortcomings survived multiple rounds of review. How, for example, did the National Academies' review committee conclude that the chapter on sea level rise "accurately reflects the current scientific literature on this topic"? The Academies building prominently displays Einstein's dictum "one must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true."*

HKO

This is a grand illustration of the axiom that part of the truth can be more misleading than all of a lie. We have become obsessed with the truth because some have become so reckless with it. Facts without context can be intentionally misleading and dangerous.

The Unreliable Consensus

Rupert Darwall in the Wall Street Journal, [Climate Alarmists Use the Acid-Rain Playbook]

> *A majority of scientists might say a scientific theory is true, but that doesn't mean the consensus is reliable. The science underpinning environmental claims can be fundamentally wrong—as it was in one of the biggest*

environmental scares in recent decades.

The acid-rain alarm of the 1970s and ’80s was a dry run for the current panic about climate change. Both began in Sweden as part of a war on coal meant to bolster support for nuclear power. In 1971 meteorologist Bert Bolin wrote the Swedish government’s report on acid rain to the United Nations. Seventeen years later he became the first chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

There are many parallels between acid rain and global warming.

But as acid-rain cap-and-trade legislation was making its way through Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency encountered a major problem. Napap’s draft report concluded that the science was wrong. Yes, power-station emissions make rain more acidic—rain is naturally acidic, and more so during thunderstorms—but changes to ecosystems, the report said, were mainly caused by changes in land use. The felling of trees and the burning of stumps in the Adirondacks had reduced the acidity of the forest floor. After conservationists put a stop to it, the soil gradually returned to its previous acidity.

Rather than admit it had the science wrong, the EPA set about suppressing the inconvenient findings. The Napap report was delayed until after key provisions of cap-and-trade legislation had been agreed to in Congress. As outlined in a 1992 article in Reason, the EPA then waged a dirty-tricks campaign to discredit Edward C. Krug, a soil expert and the leading dissident Napap scientist. It assembled a group of compliant scientists to conduct a sham peer review and conclude that Mr. Krug was a bad scientist. The episode ended with an assistant administrator of the EPA, William Rosenberg, apologizing to Mr. Krug to avoid a threatened libel action.

HKO

I am completing The Art of Thinking Clearly by Rolf Dobelli. It is an excellent collection of the mental traps, biases and processes that lead to poor conclusions even from the brightest minds. Many of the examples are evident in what passes for the climate arguments.

The more hyperbolic the response, the more intolerant of dissent, the more certain of your position, the more extreme your predicted outcome, and the more you use moral instead of scientific reasoning, the greater the likelihood you may be wrong.

Global Greening

from National Review, Matt Ridley: Climate Change's Rational Optimist

> *"This is a huge global phenomenon, which is bringing enormous financial benefits to agriculture," Ridley told me. "That means we have a genuine benefit to carbon dioxide that surely must be taken into account if you are calculating the social cost of carbon. Given that we are not seeing any clear impact on droughts, floods, or storms, it is very hard to argue that there have been net negatives to carbon from climate change so far. In fact, there have clearly been net benefits." Grain production worldwide hit an all-time high in 2016, with global cereal production 5.5 million tons higher than the peak year of 2014, according to the United Nations.*
>
> *Climate scientists, environmentalists, and politicians here and abroad could use a healthy dose of that kind of rational optimism. Instead, they will no doubt continue their scare*

> *tactics, push their unattainable and punitive zero-emissions goal, and bully any “denier” who doesn’t capitulate to their political agenda.*

HKO

Somewhere between deniers and rapidly impending doom is probably a reasonable “lukewarming” reality. Most of the models have predicted far more warming than we have witnessed, but that does not mean that AGW in nonexistent.

What bothers me most is the illiberal intellectual McCarthyism in the debate that demonizes any and all legitimate scientifically rational skepticism in a way that resembles religious fanaticism.

I Recommend Matt Ridley’s blog- The RATIONAL Optimist and his book by the same name. Also The Evolution of Everything.