**Beating the Heat**

*by*[*Gary Jason*](http://www.libertyunbound.com/node/382)  |  Posted November 22, 2010

Intellectual honesty is a very rare commodity, especially in areas where there is great political pressure to conform to some Received View.

Such is the case with the theory of anthropogenic global warming (AGW). The majority of climate scientists think that AGW, as represented in theory, is a well-established phenomenon; but a fairly large minority apparently doesn’t. Enter the activists, who react to the theory of AGW in one of two ways. The True Believers take the theory of AGW as proven beyond all doubt and use it to argue for massively costly and disruptive policies, such as cap-and-trade laws and Green energy schemes. The True Deniers deny AGW altogether, dismissing the ever-increasing amounts of burned fossil fuel as having no effect whatsoever on the planet, and viewing the scientists who believe in AGW as deluded fools, or part of some pseudo-scientific cult.

Rare are moderate voices. Perhaps the best known voice of this kind is Bjorn Lomborg, the author of a number of books, including *The Skeptical Environmentalist* and *Smart Solutions to Climate Change,* and the subject of a great little documentary, *Cool It,* playing now in limited release.

Lomborg is a Danish economist and director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, a policy think-tank based in Denmark that specializes in formulating economically sound policies for private and governmental aid programs. He grew up as a devout Green and a member of Greenpeace but was awakened from his dogmatic environmentalist slumbers when he read the work of economist Julian Simon. Simon was an iconoclast who argued that the world’s environment is getting better and that human beings are the planet’s greatest resource. Lomborg set out to refute Simon but after doing the research was forced to admit that he was largely correct. It dawned on Lomborg that much of the environmentalist agenda was counterproductive and driven by inaccurate propaganda.

***This fanatical, venomous creature stands in stark contrast with the optimistic, sincere, and decent Lomborg.***

*Cool It,* co-written by Lomborg and directed by well-known documentary film maker Ondi Timoner, surveys Lomborg’s works and thoughts, but focuses on refuting Al Gore’s classic of environmentalist propaganda, “An Inconvenient Truth.” Lomborg believes that AGW is real, but that it doesn’t pose the profound and immediate threat to the ecosystem that Gore and his ilk claim it does. Lomborg also holds that the vast amount of money being spent to combat AGW would be better spent on more immediate human needs, while we develop better solutions.

For this, Lomborg is reviled. For example: in one scene of the movie we see Stephen Schneider, long-time proponent of the theory of AGW, waxing furious as he discusses Lomborg’s perspective. This fanatical, venomous creature stands in stark contrast with the optimistic, sincere, and decent Lomborg — as does the ever-pompous Al Gore. In another scene, we listen to Lomborg recount how he was hauled before the Danish Committee on Scientific Discovery, where his political enemies tried to destroy his career for his outrageous view that the world is not headed for an ecological Armageddon. He survived that Kafkaesque Star Chamber, but it took its toll on the poor fellow.

Besides being an introduction to Lomborg and his work, *Cool It* is meant to be a counter to Al Gore’s undeservedly famous movie. In one powerful sequence, Lomborg interacts with some British schoolchildren who have obviously been indoctrinated, very thoroughly, with the theory of AGW in its most extreme, apocalyptic version.

These pathetic kids are convinced that they are all but doomed, by Evil Man’s Hideous Works, to melt beneath an unrelenting, merciless sun. It turns your stomach to watch this. In my view, the people who manipulate children to further their policy agenda deserve to melt in an unrelenting, merciless Hell.

*Cool It* specifically refutes four major contentions of Gore’s movie: that the seas are going to rise over 20 feet and inundate vast portions of land, that AGW has increased the amount of malaria (because of increased mosquito populations), that AGW is threatening the polar bear population, and that AGW is causing increasingly severe hurricanes.

***These pathetic kids are convinced that they are all but doomed, by Evil Man’s Hideous Works, to melt beneath an unrelenting, merciless sun.***

The essence of Lomborg’s thinking is neatly summarized by one of his lines: “If we only listen to worst-case scenarios, that’s unlikely to make good public priorities.” I would add that it is even less likely to make good public priorities if those worst-case scenarios are based on highly politicized, agenda driven science.

To give a flavor of Lomborg’s views, consider his analysis of the EU’s proposed carbon-cutting eco-regimen, projected to cost the citizens of Europe about $250 billion a year, while producing only slight effects in terms of slowing AGW. Lomborg would rather the EU spend $100 billion on R&D on non-fossil-fuel power (including — gasp! — nuclear power, something that Gore abhors), about a billion dollars on geoengineering solutions to AGW (such as putting more white clouds in the sky to reflect the solar rays), and $48 billion on projects to mitigate flooding (such as building decent levees to protect New Orleans) and reduce the “heat-island” effects of cities, and the remaining money (on the order of a $100 billion) to lessen malnourishment, broaden access to healthcare, and ameliorate under-education among the world’s poor.

The scene in which we see him talking to kids in Africa about what they fear — fears quite different from those that afflict the upper-middle class British kids — brings home his honest desire to see those poor kids helped.

I have two areas of disagreement with Lomborg, whom I esteem highly as a paragon of Enlightenment thinking in our postmodern era. Both are areas in which I fear that he is rather too naïve, sincere as he surely is.

The first area has to do with his idea that if we (as we should) eschew harsh measures to stop AGW, we could effectively spend the money saved to alleviate the underdeveloped world’s problems — lack of food, potable water, and education. In reality, international aid money gets channeled through either third-world governments or various NGOs (supposedly neutral aid organizations); the former are notoriously corrupt and incompetent — which is why their citizens languish in poverty to begin with — and the latter are notoriously inefficient and contaminated by political agendas.

***A large faction of the environmentalist community wants to see the world’s population decline dramatically, from 7 billion to perhaps 400,000.***

Would it not be better economics just to let taxpayers *keep* the money saved by killing the more outré environmentalist schemes, money that the taxpayers would spend more productively, and push for free trade agreements with all the underdeveloped countries so that they could, well, you know, *develop?*

Proceeding to the second area of disagreement: Lomborg doesn’t seem to understand that a large faction of the environmentalist community views *Homo sapiens*as the plague of the planet, and wants to see the world’s population decline dramatically, from the present 7 billion to perhaps 400,000 in the dreams of some of the**“**environmentalists.” The most zealous crusaders, whose thinking drives the movement, despise the very idea of using natural resources to make people better off materially. They want monstrously costly “solutions” to environmental “catastrophes” (both real and imagined) *precisely because* those “solutions” will impoverish Evil Humankind.

Put in another way: in the environmentalist eschatology, human flourishing is cardinally sinful *per se*, and deserves the most lethal punishment. Instead of the old Christian idea, “in Adam’s fall, we sinned all,” these theologians of the environmentalist faith believe that “in Adam’s exaltation, the world suffered degradation.”

But naiveté aside, Bjorn Lomborg is an admirable man, and *Cool It* is a jewel not to be missed.

**Editor's Note:***Review of "Cool It," directed by Ondi Timoner. Roadside Attractions, 2010, 89 minutes.*

**About this Author**

Gary Jason is an academic philosopher and a senior editor of *Liberty*. His recent books, *Disturbing Thoughts: Unorthodox Writings on Timely Issues*and *Philosophic Thoughts: Essays on Logic and Philosophy*are both available through Amazon.