

# More Carbon Dioxide, Please

Raising a scientific question.

By Roy Spencer  
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**T**here seems to be an unwritten assumption among environmentalists — and among the media — that any influence humans have on nature is, by definition, bad. I even see it in scientific papers written by climate researchers. For instance, if we can measure some minute amount of a trace gas in the atmosphere at the South Pole, well removed from its human source, we are astonished at the far-reaching effects of mankind's "pollution."

But if nature was left undisturbed, would it be any happier and more peaceful? Would the carnivores stop eating those poor, defenseless herbivores, as well as each other? Would fish and other kinds of sea life stop infringing on the rights of others by feasting on them? Would there be no more droughts, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, tornadoes, or glaciers flowing toward the sea?

In the case of global warming, the alleged culprit — carbon dioxide — just happens to be necessary for life on Earth. How can Al Gore say with a straight face that we are treating the atmosphere like an "open sewer" by dumping carbon dioxide into it? Would he say the same thing if we were dumping more oxygen into the atmosphere? Or more nitrogen?

As a climate researcher, I am increasingly convinced that most of our recent global warming has been natural, not manmade. If true, this would mean that global temperatures can be expected to peak in the coming years (if they haven't already), and global cooling will eventually ensue.

Just for the sake of argument, let us assume that manmade global warming really is a false alarm. In that case, we would still need to ask: What are the other negative effects of pumping more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere?

Well, plant physiologists have known for a long time that most vegetation loves more carbon dioxide. It grows faster, is more drought-tolerant, and is more efficient in its water use. While the pre-industrial CO<sub>2</sub> concentration of the atmosphere was only about 280 parts per million (ppm) by volume, and now it is around 380 ppm, some greenhouses pump it all the way up to around 1,000 ppm. How can environmentalists claim that helping vegetation to grow is a bad thing?

The bigger concern has been the possible effect of the extra CO<sub>2</sub> on the world's oceans, because more CO<sub>2</sub> lowers the pH of seawater. While it is claimed that this makes the water more acidic, this is misleading. Since seawater has a pH

around 8.1, it will take an awful lot of CO<sub>2</sub> to even make the water neutral (pH=7), let alone acidic (pH less than 7).

Still, the main worry has been that the extra CO<sub>2</sub> could hurt the growth of plankton, which represents the start of the oceanic food chain. But recent research (published on April 18 in Science Express) has now shown, contrary to expectations, that one of the most common forms of plankton actually grows faster and bigger when more CO<sub>2</sub> is pumped into the water. Like vegetation on land, it loves the extra CO<sub>2</sub>, too!

It is quite possible that the biosphere (vegetation, sea life, etc.) has been starved for atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. Before humans started burning fossil fuels, vegetation and ocean plankton had been gobbling up as much CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere as they could, but it was like a vacuum cleaner trying to suck through a stopped-up hose.

Now, no matter how much CO<sub>2</sub> we pump into the atmosphere each year, the biosphere takes out an average of 50 percent of that extra amount. Even after we triple the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> we produce, nature still takes out 50 percent of the extra amount.

I think it is time for scientists to consider the possibility that more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere might, on the whole, be good for life on Earth. Oh, I'm sure there will be some species which are hurt more than helped, but this is true of any change in nature. There are always winners and losers.

For instance, during a strong El Niño event, trillions of animals in the ocean die as the usual patterns of ocean temperature are disrupted. When Mother Nature does something like this it is considered natural. Yet, if humans were to do such a thing, it would be considered an environmental catastrophe. Does anyone else see something wrong with this picture?

The view that nature was in some sort of preferred, yet fragile, state of balance before humans came along is arbitrary and philosophical — even religious. It is entirely possible that there are other, more preferable states of balance in nature which are more robust and less fragile than whatever the state of nature was before we came along.

You would think that science is the last place you would find such religious opinions, yet they dominate the worldview of scientists. Natural scientists tend to worship nature, and they then teach others to worship nature, too . . . all under the guise of “science.”

And to the extent that this view is religious, then making environmental laws based upon that view could be considered a violation of the establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

The automatic assumption that mankind's production of CO<sub>2</sub> by burning of fossil fuels is bad for the environment needs to be critically examined. Unfortunately, scientists who question that point of view are immediately branded as shills for Big Oil.

But since I am already accused of this (falsely, I might add), I really don't mind being one of the first scientists to raise the issue.

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