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Climate Skepticism: Europe vs. America

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In the light of Harold Lewis's resignation from the American Physical Society after nearly 70 years of membership and service, I began to ponder why Americans were generally more skeptical of climate-change-disaster claims than Europeans were. By climate skepticism I mean an unwillingness to accept as true one or more of four different but related ideas that make up climate orthodoxy: that the earth is unequivocally warming; that this warming is due primarily or wholly due to human activities; that such warming will cause apocalyptic disasters; and that we should take drastic action to prevent warming from continuing (even if it hurts the economy). While polls show climate skepticism growing among the general public in both Europe and America, in general, Europeans are more accepting of the anthropogenic-global-warming orthodoxy than Americans.

Could religious affiliation or belief be one part of the answer? In general, polls show more Americans than Europeans are religious — by which I mean that they still subscribe to one of the major world religions and attend services in Churches, synagogues, temples or mosques of one of those religions' denominations. While Church attendance has fallen in America in recent years, it has not fallen nearly so far or so fast as it has in Europe. Of the world's major "mainstream" religions, only Islam seems to be growing in Europe and that is largely due to immigration (and fecundity), not conversion.

Could it be that as Europeans increasingly reject (or let die through apathy or inattention) their historic religious denominations and the belief systems they instill and promote, they have become more open to answers to the important questions of life that they used to find in traditional religions in more exotic or secular belief systems. Green religions (and political parties) of all stripes — including Wicca and Gaia worship — are stronger in Europe than in the U.S. For those not of a supernatural religious bent, the secular religion of environmentalism has replaced Marxism in many minds (including the minds of many former Marxists). In both secular and supernatural environmental religions, the problems we face are due to the original sin of humanity's intervention in nature — whether you trace the problem back to the rise of agriculture or only so far as the industrial revolution. They both believe that humans don't live within the boundaries that "nature" has set for us.

I have written before that belief in anthropogenic global warming is more akin to a religion than to sound scientific practice. Maybe I was closer to the truth than I thought.

As a sidebar, I should note that many of my friends believe that environmentalism is, in fact, just warmed over Marxism. Some call environmentalists watermelons, "green on the outside, red on the inside." I don't think, however, that this is fair to Marx. Whatever Marx's other failings (and

I would argue that there were many), Karl Marx was not, and could never be construed as, an environmentalist. For him there were two types of entities in the world, people and resources — and resources were meant for exploitation by people for their betterment. For Marx, there could have been no independent moral standing for ecosystems, species, individual birds, trees or landscapes. Rather, matter was ripe for human exploitation to bring plenty to the proletariat.