

Exploring the art of science **FREE**

Fred Shair



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and a host of other long-predicted side effects. Given the stochastic behavior of the system, one cannot ask for much more without waiting several more decades for the warming signal to grow bigger. Albert Einstein's prediction of light bending may have been a lot more precise, but neither prediction put skepticism to rest at the time, no matter how conclusive it may look in hindsight.

I agree with Adair that if no warming were to occur over a 20-year period, experts would have some explaining to do, but currently there is no sign of that happening. He questions the statistical significance of warming since 1998, but that is a red herring; trends over a mere decade are seldom significant no matter what climate is doing. One must look over longer periods.

To Nicholas Van Buer I say that I meant no slight against geologists—or geoscientists, a category he mentions that also includes geophysicists. I spent many years working alongside geologists and am greatly impressed by how they approach and solve such complex puzzles. But those problems do tend to engender in geology a different approach from that favored in physics, where the systems studied are simpler. Each approach has its advantages and its blind spots. In a way I was defending the physics approach, which I suspect is the less intuitive for most people and easy to belittle if not understood.

## References

1. N. Klein, *Nation*, Nov. 2011, available at <http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate>.
2. J. T. Houghton, G. J. Jenkins, J. J. Ephraums, eds., *Climate Change: The IPCC Scientific Assessment*, Cambridge U. Press, NY (1990).

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■ **Somerville and Hassol reply:** We appreciate the comments by all the writers but must take exception to several statements by Robert Adair, whose expertise famously ranges from particle physics to baseball but clearly does not include climate science. In examining the hoary claim by climate contrarians that global warming stopped in 1998, he may indeed have “looked at the data.” However, he obviously did not learn the research literature. The global mean surface temperature record displays both strong natural variability and a long-term warming trend, and decadal

periods are demonstrably inadequate for evaluating long-term trends. Nineteen ninety-eight was a strong El Niño year, hence it was unusually warm, and using that year as a starting point for computing a meaningful trend is cherry picking.

Recent data are fully consistent with the expected warming trend of about 0.2 °C per decade. Every year since 2000 has been warmer than the 1990s average, every year of the 1990s was warmer than the 1980s average, and the 1980s were the warmest decade on record until then.<sup>1</sup>

Adair also inappropriately dismisses a warming of 0.8 °C as equivalent to moving 50 miles southward in the central US. Confusing local and global temperatures is nonsensical, and a global warming of about 8 °C is not at all like moving 500 miles. It is like the difference between an ice age and an interglacial period.

In another bizarre misrepresentation, Adair compares our list of terms to “sales jargon” that is “supposed to incite the populace.” In fact, our list of terms that mean different things to the public than they do to scientists has been widely cited and praised, because so many people have encountered the failure to communicate that can result from the different meanings. The only thing we're selling is improved clarity of communication that can help bring science to its rightful place in decision making.

Adair consistently misrepresents our positions and those of the broader climate science community. The science we outline is entirely consistent with the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Adair says that “some very good scientists do not find the necessary feedbacks plausible and conclude that the increased [carbon dioxide] cannot be responsible for most of the perceived warming.” He fails to say that almost all those dissenting scientists are, like himself, neither credentialed experts nor active researchers in climate science. The IPCC report concludes that most of the warming is very likely (greater than 90% probability) due to human-caused increases in greenhouse gas concentrations. The evidence for carbon dioxide-induced warming amplified by feedbacks in the climate system, such as increased water vapor, is abundant and strong.

Adair also appears to misunderstand the physics of climate models when he claims that their projections of the future are based on the past

150 years of observational data. He also misreads the projections to suggest that atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations can climb to 1250 ppmv by 2100 and still result in temperature increases that would be “innocuous or even beneficial.” As the IPCC report on impacts<sup>2</sup> and many other assessments<sup>3</sup> have shown, the 0.8 °C rise we've experienced to date is already causing impacts, most of which are not beneficial. Future impacts are projected to be more severe.

We do not, as Adair says, “argue” for a “radical” view. Rather, we simply explain that if governments decide on a certain limit for future temperature rise, as they have with the 2 °C target, then science can inform us of the emissions limits required to meet that goal. As we demonstrate in our article, Mother Nature herself thus imposes a time scale on when emissions need to peak and then begin to decline rapidly. The urgency is not ideological at all, but rather is due to the physics and biogeochemistry of the climate system. Advances in climate science have led to a profoundly deeper understanding of human-caused climate change. The impressive scientific story is certainly worth communicating well.

## References

1. For a summary suitable for nonspecialists, see <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2009/10/a-warming-pause>. See also S. A. Rahmstorf et al., *Science* **316**, 709 (2007), doi:10.1126/science.1136843, available online at [http://www.pik-potsdam.de/~stefan/update\\_science2007.html](http://www.pik-potsdam.de/~stefan/update_science2007.html) (updated figures with link to *Science* article).
2. M. L. Parry et al., eds., *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability—Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge U. Press, New York (2007), available at <http://www.ipcc.ch>.
3. See, for example, US Global Change Research Program, *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*, Cambridge U. Press, New York (2009).

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## Exploring the art of science

Tom Crouch's article, “NASA art: 50 years of exploration” (PHYSICS TODAY, August 2011, page 42), was very enjoyable. Though I'm now retired,

I worked for more than 30 years in engineering and science—as a Caltech professor, as a university dean of natural sciences and mathematics at California State University, Long Beach, and most recently as manager of the Educational Affairs Office at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. From my perspective, it is wonderful to see how artists are helping to communicate the mystery and beauty arising from our national space program.

The art showcased in Crouch's article is wonderful, but I submit that in addition to inspiring artists, NASA's photographs have truly expanded humankind's perception of the universe and of ourselves. Here are some examples:

► *Earthrise* (1968) is a fascinating image taken by astronaut William Anders from *Apollo 8*, the first manned spacecraft to orbit the Moon.

► Photos sent back from various probes, from *Pioneer 10* (1973) to Cassini–Huygens (2004– ), are remarkable images of the strangeness and beauty of the outer solar system.

► Close-up pictures of Mars have been captured by several spacecraft.

► The images sent back from the dozens of space telescopes, in many wavebands, have increased our vision beyond anything we could have imagined.

In addition to inherently beautiful images, the information collected by the various spacecraft has led to a much deeper understanding of the universe and has been communicated through thousands of journal articles.

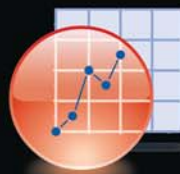
When it comes to communicating the beauty of some of the abstract concepts of science, one should be aware of Paul Bartlett Ré. He has a deep and broad understanding of science and has been producing remarkable art for the past 40 years.

Several of his works can be found at <http://www.paulre.org/index.html> and in his book, *The Dance of the Pencil* (1992).

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## Correction

January 2012, pages 24 and 25—Congressional Fellow Makenzie Lystrup was sponsored by the American Institute of Physics and the Acoustical Society of America. Sarah Case, State Department Fellow, was sponsored by AIP and the American Astronomical Society. ■



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*Journal of American Chemical Society, March 2011*

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*Desktop Engineering, July 2011*

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