

Authors' Note: Bloomberg published an [essay](#) agreeing with us, but in an odd tone of disagreement and with a headline we thought didn't fit the essay (but was in fact kind of funny). We reached out to the author and the editor. The editor invited us to write a response. We did, but he declined to run it. Sadly it still happens to us a lot! So, without alteration from what we sent Bloomberg, and with the caveat that perhaps it was declined as it just stinks, here it is for you to consider.

Imagine if They Disagreed With Us!

CLIFFORD ASNESS AND AARON BROWN

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A short while ago, we wrote an [essay](#) making a simple point about global temperature data, and in particular about a ubiquitous graph showing global average temperatures from 1880 – 2014. We concluded:

“The history of global temperature, and specifically the recently famous graph, shows the opposite of what almost all articles presenting it argue. If the next 135 years repeat the experience since 1880, we are in good shape. How much we should worry about future warming, and the answer may indeed be a lot, is entirely about how much one believes in the models’ forecasts that the future will look very different from the data.”

We acknowledged temperature has risen, and that the rise seems to be accelerating. We offered our opinion that humans are likely much of the cause.

There were strong responses. Many climate change skeptics objected to the acknowledgements above. That was as expected. What we did not expect was the immediate and strong chorus of agreement, yes agreement, from climate scientists. Equally unexpected was that their agreement would be couched in unfriendly terms! We have never been agreed with so nastily. When you’re being yelled at by two warring sides, you may be saying something useful.

[Fortune](#) ran an article whose title bizarrely suggested we think there is no danger (we clearly say there may be great danger). It quoted climate scientist Gavin Schmidt agreeing with us that “looking at temperatures in a vacuum” does not suggest a dangerous rate of global warming. Schmidt explained that his prediction that the future will look very different from the past is based on models. Our point is precisely that most popular accounts treat the historical temperature data as confirming the models, or even directly confirming a massive problem without need for such models. We and Schmidt agree that this is not correct, though you would not guess it from his tone!

Environmental scientist James Hansen was much blunter, “Within less than a year, you will look like complete fools (if you buy this crap).” We are not sure what “crap” he’s referring to as we made no forecast. But, since he implicitly admits he needs future data to argue catastrophic global warming is imminent, he must agree past data alone do not. For the record, we actually wrote, “Perhaps temperatures will snap back to model predictions as feedback loops kick in? Or perhaps lower amounts of warming than 4°C will have catastrophic effects?” Maybe these are the things coming in the next year

that Hansen knows about, but isn't sharing yet (he also supposedly has a [secret plan to fight inflation](#))? But, disregarding his colorful phraseology, he echoes rather than gainsays us.

Mark Buchanan, a physicist who has studied meteorology, prediction and complex systems, praises our essay, saying we "make the very useful point that concerns over climate change don't come from simple extrapolations of past temperature trends." So what's the title of his review? "[Asness Should Manage Money, Not the Planet.](#)" We agree with both titular sentiments but they don't sound like the agreement within. Buchanan goes on to reiterate our points: If you extrapolate the past to predict the future it's not very alarming, rather you need a model to call for immediate strong action.

We have identified a point of serious public misunderstanding. Popular articles, government publications and even materials prepared by climate scientists frequently cite the amount of warming that has taken place to date as evidence, or even proof, that we should expect massive problems in the near future. This idea is often advanced with apoplectic certainty and scorn for questioners. Again, this claim is false, as the scientists we quote agree. Forecasts of imminent catastrophe come from models that predict dramatic future changes versus the relatively moderate historical climate trend to date. These models might be correct. We are quite clear that we worry about this possibility in our essay and we repeat the worry here. But you can't argue for cataclysm, as so many do, and cite the 135 year history of global mean temperature in support. As we say in the essay: "You can believe the models if you like, or you can look at the data and assume the most likely future is an extrapolation of the past. What you cannot do is both."

So why do the climate scientists who agree with our essay write attack pieces when we point out this confusion, but remain silent about the ubiquitous misinformation we highlight? Do they value advocacy over truth, presumably with good intentions, scaring the public into what they believe are the right actions? We don't know the right actions, but we value truth over advocacy, trusting that truth will then lead to the right course, and we couldn't scare anyone if we tried.