



Skeptics, Contrarians, or Deniers?

September 15, 2008 by [greenfyre](#)

One of the bones of contention in political discussions of climate change is how to refer to those who reject climate science. Three terms offer themselves: Skeptics, Contrarians, and Deniers, but which to use?

‘[Contrarian](#)’ is easily rejected as it seems to be a term used mostly within the investment community for a specific investment behaviour, and hence to broaden the definition just confuses things.

‘Denier’ is deeply resented as it is claimed that it is meant to suggest ‘Holocaust Denier’, although that is not true. ‘Denier’ simply means ‘Denier’, hence the necessity of a qualifier such as “Holocaust” or “Climate Change”.

Differentiating between ‘Denier’, [“a person who denies”](#) and ‘Skeptic’ [“a person who questions the validity or authenticity of something purporting to be factual”](#) hinges on their behaviour. Do they simply deny the science of climate change? or do they seriously question it? citing specifics and arguing logically that there is a rational basis for doubt. The only way to know is to check. In the interim I will use the term NCCP (No Climate Change Proponents) as a neutral term.

A survey of the standard NCCP websites, of which these are a good sample:

<http://www.junkscience.com/>

<http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/>

<http://newsbusters.org/>

<http://eteam.ncpa.org/issues/?c=global-warming>

<http://www.icecap.us/>

http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2008/09/new_scientist_sea_ice_increase.html

<http://www.onecitizenspeaking.com>

<http://www.climatescienceinternational.org/>

gives us a host of arguments that range from facile to fraudulent. They rely on distortions, misrepresentations, straw man arguments, cherry picking data, and in some cases, blatant lies.

In almost no case is there actual acknowledgement of the real climate science, much less questioning of it based on fair and accurate presentation of the science. Pretty much everything on these sites is easily debunked and has been repeatedly (see “Debunking Denier Nonsense” links on right sidebar), as the site authors are well aware.

Indeed only a couple of sites even approach legitimate skepticism in the sense that they attempt to deal with the reality of the science as it is. Both <http://climatesci.org/> and <http://www.climateaudit.org> will advance arguments that require rather a more sophisticated and educated response, which they do get from sites like <http://gristmill.grist.org/skeptics> and <http://www.realclimate.org>.

If we survey the average NCCPers such as I have been doing at the news sharing site Digg.com or youtube.com we find the situation is even worse. Simply search for articles or videos dealing with “global warming” or “climate change” and have a look at the comments.

The NCCPers overwhelmingly offer no specifics, argument or rationality, instead seeming satisfied that declarative statements denying climate change or any scientific basis should suffice. In some cases they merely parrot the aforementioned debunked arguments and often refuse to even look at the actual science.

What is particularly ironic is that they accuse those who offer evidence and facts of “having a religion” while their own evidence-free beliefs are ‘science’. They claim to be skeptical of the mountains of evidence while embracing the most absurd [conspiracy theories](#) without any evidence whatsoever. They reject the plethora of climate models out of hand as “just models”, yet wildly embrace any new model that claims to cast doubt on the specifics of climate science. The flagrant contradictions and hypocrisy is breath taking.

In a matter of only a few weeks over this past summer we saw the appearance of three particularly outrageous hoaxes: “[Global Warming Has Officially Ended](#)”, “[NASA Backtracks on 1998 Warmest Year](#)“, and [Myth of Consensus Explodes: APS Opens Global Warming Debate](#).”

Frauds so transparent that a lobotomized squirrel would feel an inkling of suspicion about their validity and feel some inclination to fact check. In all three cases fact checking was easily done, and in the case of NASA and APS required no more than a visit to the appropriate home page, easily found with a search engine.

And how did the NCCPers respond? They fell all over themselves blogging and digging and spreading the hoaxes. They damn near peed their pants in excitement to post the fraud de jour “coffin nail for global warming”. In fact, it seems that if a story sports any claim of climate denial they will believe it no matter how absurd or idiotic. Their politically motivated credulity and gullibility seem bottomless.

And we should call them skeptics? That would completely debase the word. I reserve ‘skeptic’ for those who acknowledge the scientific evidence, but thoughtfully maintain doubt based on some small evidence or logic that, though meagre, is nonetheless reality based. They are honourable people who push science forward through their constant, reasoned questioning and thoughtful critiques of the dominant paradigm.

The hysteric paranoids who rant, distort, and lie, who have no evidence or rational logic for their position but persist in **denying** the very existence of the overwhelming scientific evidence, who dismiss the mountain of evidence for climate change while embracing the most pathetic conspiracy theories and lame hoaxes based on no evidence whatsoever, can be called only one thing: **Deniers**.

Through their behaviour they have earned it, they deserve it, let us not deny them that.

And for those who resent the term ‘Denier’ and would prefer to be called ‘Skeptics’ – it’s very simple ... start behaving like a skeptic.

Possibly related posts: (automatically generated)

- [Skepticism & Denial](#)

Posted in [Climate Change](#), [Denier Culture](#) | Tagged [Climate Change](#) | 10 Comments

10 Responses

1. on [September 16, 2008 at 11:28 am](#) / [Reply](#)  *Brian D*

Just discovered you through a traceback from Frank Bi; I’ll be sure to look around.

I felt I should point out that another great example of the misdemeanors of the deniers would be [the ‘benthic bacteria’ hoax many uncritically accepted](#). (Look up what Rush Limbaugh had to say on the subject. It’s pretty par for the course.)

2. on [September 16, 2008 at 11:56 am](#) / [Reply](#)  [greenfyre](#)

Good link. Yet another proof of Poe's Law

“Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humor, it is impossible to create a parody of Fundamentalism that someone won't mistake for the real thing.” Nathan Poe

For another smile check this discussion of [conservapedia's struggle with the same problem](#)

3. on [September 16, 2008 at 4:46 pm](#) / [Reply](#)  [Brian D](#)

Actually, that's more of an example than a proof. (I'm intimately familiar with Poe's Law; climate change isn't the only science-based argument I follow/participate in. Although that Conservapedia article is new to me and a riot to read through!) Sadly, with the clock ticking down, it's harder to justify truly amusing climate parodies as it is to parody, say, [creationism](#). Especially because the arguments are rather technical — the distinction between “sound science” (the intention, not what the term's used for) and “sounds like science” gets rather blurred to the lay person.

By the way, I'd like to submit three other links to your sidebar on explaining denialist tactics. The first is [denialism blog](#) — while not focused on climate, they have perhaps the clearest explanation of crank/denialist behaviour I've seen. The second is the spectacular video [The American Denial of Global Warming](#), by Naomi Oreskes. You should recognize her name; this video explains the history of the scientific consensus and does a case study on the tactics of the George C. Marshall Institute — a must see, really. The third, and final, is [The Denial Machine](#), which covers a who's who of the denial industry along with its roots in tobacco denial and a showcase of its actions in Canada. (It's not quite as academic as the others, but still...).

Hope that helps somewhat.

4. on [September 16, 2008 at 8:26 pm](#) / [Reply](#)  [greenfyre](#)

Brian

Sorry, I could not resist slipping that into a reference to Poe's Law as a perhaps too obscure joke; I know about Popper and the problem of Induction etc. I also have and still do engage the Creationists since evolutionary biology was my field.

I visit Denialism pretty much daily, but it is often off topic for my focus (as you say). The other two I am saving for future posts before inserting into the roll, but all good references and I thank you.

5. on [September 25, 2008 at 2:43 pm](#) / [Reply Interesting Insight On Evolution and Climate Change Deniers](#) / [truecarbon.org](#)

[...] past summer we saw yet another hot story reverberate around the Denialosphere [1]. Supposedly the ships logs of Lord Nelson and Captain Cook cast doubt upon the truth of [...]

6. on [November 8, 2008 at 10:31 am](#) / [Reply An open letter to Mike Kaulbars « The Guerrilla Capitalist](#)

[...] Yeah sure, it's appropriate to use in certain debates and while I know you have your reasons for using it, it's overkill. It's the same as if I used the words, "fascist," and, [...]

—
Royce

OK, Your post touches on some fundamental issues and I'm not going to just toss off an answer ... will think about it and probably blog it, hopefully relatively soon. Until then.

Mike



7. on [April 9, 2009 at 1:12 am](#) / [Reply](#)  *bl8ant*

This is such a refreshing site!!!! i will visit often and send the link to all my friends ...thank you so much!



8. on [November 13, 2009 at 12:50 pm](#) / [Reply](#)  born again denier

As you talked about unfounded opinions and lack of scientific proof, I could have sworn you were referring to the global cooling deniers or skeptics. CO2 is still increasing, temperature is dropping. Temperature leads CO2 to start with, so it's impossible that CO2 causes global temperature rise. That's simple logic for anyone who's familiar with chart recorders. Most of Antarctica is gaining ice, ITT towers there are almost under ice and will have to be replaced by new power towers. The whole global warming scam is ridiculous and only Gore's groupies believe that globaloney.

Thank you for sharing your ignorance of the basic science
[Mind prisons and prisms: CO2 lag and Global Warming](#)

In future please have the simple courtesy to take 5 min to check whether your point is completely false like what you say here, and then spare yourself the humiliation of posting nonsense.



9. on [November 14, 2009 at 3:40 pm](#) / [Reply](#)  born again denier

Deleted for violation of the **Comment Policy**

The "Challenging the Core Science" Comment Thread is for comments that purport to challenge the core science of anthropogenic climate change.

Thank you for reiterating your inability to address the facts honestly or rationally, or to have the simple courtesy to post in the appropriate thread, but as you had made these points more than adequately above a repetition was deemed unnecessary.

10. on [March 7, 2010 at 9:53 pm](#) / [Reply](#) [Global Warming - Page 127 - Volconvo Debate Forums](#)

[...] AGW denier cultists make it obvious with your every post just where you stand on this spectrum. Skeptics, Contrarians, or Deniers? September 15, 2008 by greenfyre One of the bones of contention in political discussions of [...]

