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Ideas — IPCC Report: Time for Global Cooling?

BY [WES DODSON](#) on [OCTOBER 18, 2018](#) • [\(3 \)](#)

If you are surprised at how much you have been hearing about climate change this week relative to others, look no further than the recent [report](#) released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report analyzes the difference between global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius relative to pre-industrial times and 2 degrees warming. Unsurprisingly, the [differences are drastic](#) and sobering.

The report stresses that we might have as few as 12 years to enact strict emissions regulation in order to keep warming at 1.5 C. Emissions must drop 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, and the IPCC suggests 2050 as a target for “zero emissions.”

However, as large western countries such as Australia, a signatory of the Paris climate agreement, [balk](#) at these suggestions, few are asking the critical question: are these types of policies even politically feasible?

An economist who has also recently been in the headlines for winning the [Nobel Prize in Economics](#) suggests they are not. Richard Nordhaus pioneered the field of climate change economics and designed the Dynamic Integrated Climate-Economy model (DICE), one of the primary models for predicting the economic impact of climate change policies.

In a 2016 [paper](#) for Yale University, Nordhaus states that though a limit “of 2.5 C is technically feasible” nations would have to enact “extreme policy measures.” As for the IPCC’s cataclysmic number of 2 C, Nordhaus says such a limit is “infeasible.”

If one of the leading climate economists is suggesting that popular solutions to climate change are unworkable, might it be time to turn to an economist with some less popular solutions?

In his popular book, “SuperFreakonomics,” Steven Levitt explores scientific research in a field that offers some potential solutions to climate change: geoengineering. Geoengineering solutions seek to use human ingenuity to change the environment to be more hospitable. If it sounds foreign and scary, it shouldn’t; every dam ever built is a feat of geoengineering.

In the book, Levitt discusses some potential solutions: pumping sulfur into the atmosphere with a long hose, sailing boats specially designed to create salt spray to increase cloud coverage, or using large plastic tubes to help cool water temperatures.

Levitt’s discussion of the dangers of global warming, and particularly the role that carbon dioxide plays in rising temperatures, has been widely [panned](#) by the scientific community. The critiques are legitimate and there is some genuine bathwater in this chapter. The baby, however, is critically important: if we can’t solve the climate change problem through regulation, maybe we can solve it with human ingenuity.

According to [Robert Murphy](#), an economist who researches climate change, Nordhaus estimated that



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limiting temperature rise to 1.5 C would make “humanity \$14 trillion poorer than doing nothing at all about climate change.” If the IPCC’s target for limiting global warming is going to cost an arm and a leg, shouldn’t we give the “crazy” ideas their time in court before reaching for the bone saw?

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Abhi

October 18, 2018 • 5:31 am

terrible take. universally agreed that geoengineering is not at all feasible. and why should we listen to evolution denying quacks like bob murphy? have someone who knows some science write about this issue.

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Wes Dodson

October 18, 2018 • 2:44 pm

Howdy Abhi,

The Orator is all about response and engagement so I will quickly respond to your points. I would say that generally, scientists don’t disagree about the feasibility of a field unless you are talking about phrenology or astrology etc. So I am not entirely sure how one could say that there is “universal agreement that geoengineering is not at all feasible.” There are certainly disagreements about the feasibility of some geoengineering solutions, but that does not discount geoengineering as a field which can produce feasible solutions. As for universal agreement, we know that this is not true because at least the scientists that are proposing the

solutions would disagree. I take your point that there might be widespread agreement that any geoengineering solutions to climate change are infeasible, but it is hardly universal. However, if you can find sourcing on this, I would love to see it!

Secondly, I only cite Robert Murphy because his paper refers to the figure of \$14 trillion which Nordhaus came up with in his calculations. I did not find that figure by independently discovering Nordhaus' research, so to not cite Murphy would be source plagiarism, but the actual piece of supporting evidence comes from Nordhaus. The argument is not strengthened or weakened by the inclusion of Robert Murphy as the source of a source so his intellectual background isn't really relevant in addressing the argument. Additionally, I actually can't find any evidence that he denies evolution. The strongest statement I have seen is that he believes that the falsifiable claims of the theory of evolution have less supporting evidence than its most vociferous proponents generally claim.

I am happy to see you engaging with this piece and I would love to elicit an article from you on this issue! You can email me at wesdodson2731@gmail.com to further discuss this piece or any piece that you would like to write. May the road rise to meet you and have a good one!

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