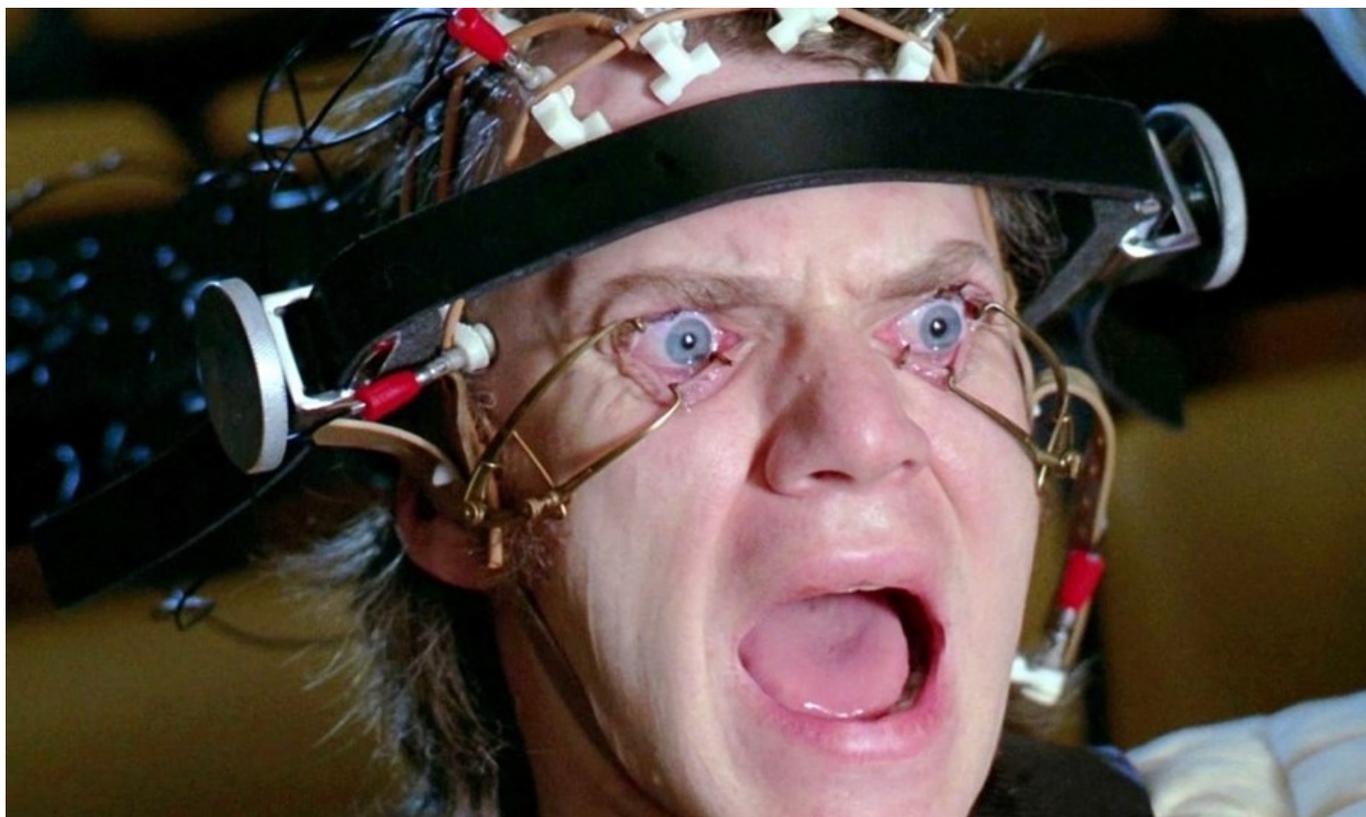


Regime Pseudoscientists Enforce Climate Change Narrative



by Michael Rectenwald

Although the field of experimental psychology has a very dubious track record in meeting [scientific standards](#), it is nevertheless continually used to discredit the views of select subjects under study. It does this by pathologizing said subjects and their views. For example, the field has been mobilized to discredit so-called conspiracy theorists by attempting to identify the mistaken mental processes that conspiracy theorists exhibit. The methods and results of such studies have proven to be [less than stellar](#), to say the least.

Now, the field is also being wielded to discredit "[climate change](#) deniers." [1] By pathologizing the thinking processes of these stubbornly mistaken subjects, the views of said subjects

can be safely dismissed. After all, the theory of anthropogenic climate change (ACC) is obviously true, or so says the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the planetary authority on the matter. Likewise, those who doubt or deny ACC must be crazy. The point of psychological studies is to discover just what is wrong with these people and how, if possible, to change their minds.

Of course, such studies focus exclusively on the “deniers,” without ever considering climate change believers and whether something is wrong with *them*. The field lacks even a semblance of symmetry. Never mind that [“the science” is dubious](#) or that climate change is ludicrously being blamed for [heart attacks](#), [obesity in children](#), [increased violence](#), and [terrorism](#), among other medical and social maladies. Believing in a causal connection between a questionable climate change theory and these phenomena must be perfectly rational, according to this kind of research.

Such is the thrust of a [recent study](#) of Australian climate change skeptics conducted by a lecturer in psychology and a professor of geology at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Entitled “Associations of Locus of Control, Information Processing Style and Anti-reflexivity with Climate Change Scepticism in an Australian Sample,” the study examines climate change skeptics in terms of thinking styles rather than “values” and “sociodemographic” factors. Since past research has found values and sociodemographic factors to be intractable, the researchers in this study seek to identify factors that presumably can be changed and that should likewise prove useful for study. They deem “locus of control,” “information processing style,” and “anti-reflexivity” to be mental factors worthy of examination.

“Locus of control” (LoC) is a psychological concept that refers to whether and to what degree a subject considers events to be externally or internally controlled. That is, does the subject believe that he or she has control over

events, or that “powerful others” do? The authors hypothesize that those who are prone to believing that they have control of events are less likely to be climate change deniers and vice versa. “Previous studies have shown that having an internal LoC in regard to the environment increases environmental concern as well as pro-environmental intentions and behaviour.”

“Information processing style” refers to the degree to which subjects display “rational-analytical” or “experiential-intuitive” mental processing. The prior is conscious, deliberate, and analytical thinking based on established rules. It is considered superior to the latter, which is preconscious, intuitive, automatic, and rapid:

“Research demonstrates that analytical processing is negatively associated with unfounded beliefs above and beyond variables such as cognitive ability and socio-demographics Research also shows that intentionally eliciting analytical thinking through experimental manipulations is effective in reducing conspiracy beliefs.”

That is, rational-analytical thinkers are less likely to hold unfounded beliefs, while experiential-intuitive thinkers are more likely to hold unfounded beliefs and are more likely to be “conspiracy theorists.”

“Anti-reflexivity” theory (ART) is a recent “paradigm” developed specifically to explain climate change skepticism. This theory is based on “the concept of reflexive modernisation which refers to the process by which an individual acknowledges and challenges the problems associated with our modern industrial capitalist system.” Previous literature has shown that “public trust in groups representing the industrial capitalist system [antireflexive groups] increased the likelihood of scepticism regarding the actuality and cause of climate change. Conversely, increased trust in environmental groups and the scientific community [reflexive

groups] decreased the likelihood of scepticism.” The presumption here is that reflexive thinkers “acknowledge” that something is undeniably wrong with “our modern industrial capitalist system” and that “anti-reflexivity,” or supporting that system, is based on a lack of acknowledgement of this system’s obvious flaws. Since most ART research has been conducted in the United States, where the highest levels of climate change skepticism persist, studying this factor in the Australian context is supposed to be of value.

The researchers aimed to study the impact of these factors on four kinds of climate change denialism: 1) denying the reality of climate change, 2) denying the human cause of climate change, 3) denying the consequences of climate change, and 4) denying the types of responses necessary to mitigate climate change.

I will not detail all the results but rather generally characterize the findings, some of which the researchers expected and some of which they found surprising, even disappointing.

Contradicting their hypothesis that locus of control would be a significant variable for most of kinds of climate change denialism, the researchers found no meaningful connection between climate change skepticism and the LoC variable. “Accordingly, individuals who perceived ‘powerful others’ as having little control over events in their life were more likely to be sceptical about the impacts of climate change.” One interpretation of this finding is that the climate change deniers the authors studied were not particularly prone to conspiracy theorizing. But the authors failed to come to that conclusion.

The most surprising result (for the researchers) was that climate change skepticism was *positively* associated with high levels of analytical thinking. “Contradicting Hypothesis 2 and the propositions of the CEST [cognitive-experiential self-

theory, which measures processing styles along this axis], individuals high in analytical processing were found to be more likely to be sceptical about the human causality of climate change.” This finding surely throws a major wrench into the works and makes discrediting climate change deniers more difficult. However, the authors rationalize the finding by suggesting that “individuals with an increased cognitive ability were more likely to misinterpret information that was inconsistent with their political views.” We are told that analytical thinkers are more capable of complex reasoning, which enables them “to generate alternative interpretations of the data” ad hoc.

In terms of antireflexivity, the findings were mixed, with ART predicting some types of climate change skepticism while failing to predict others. Generally, the study found that ART predicted low trust in reflexivity forces like environmentalist groups and higher trust in antireflexive groups like those in support of industrial capitalism. In other words, in terms of the authors’ four hypotheses, ART merely affirmed the definition of the feature being examined. The study of this feature is itself circular and reflexive.

In [an article](#) about the study for lay readers entitled “Inside The Mind of a Sceptic: The ‘Mental Gymnastics’ of Climate Change Denial,” the researchers offer a harsher and more revealing interpretation of the data. Where the most significant blow was dealt to their hypotheses—regarding the analytical abilities of climate change skeptics—they dismissed the fact that climate change skeptics showed high analytical capabilities by writing off said abilities as mistrust of mainstream climate change science and an unwarranted trust in “alternative science.” This maneuver virtually turns one of the main features under study, analytical ability, which the researchers had figured as a positive attribute, into a liability. The researchers assumed that the climate change skeptics they studied would be less analytical than they found

them to be. But never do they consider the possibility that their subjects may have put their high analytical capabilities to good use and that they may be right. Instead, their subjects' use of analytical thinking is deemed "mental gymnastics." Their intelligence merely enabled these analytical thinkers "to reject consensus science and generate other explanations." Never mind that real science, as Michael Crichton so eloquently [pointed out](#), has nothing to do with "consensus" and everything to do with the reproducibility of results—something that the "consensus science" has failed miserably to provide.

Never mind also that this "research" is merely environmental activism dressed up in pseudoscientific jargon and make-believe methodologies. It ends precisely where it begins—assuming that climate change skeptics must be cranks and crackpots, no matter how analytical they are, and even because of it.

Finally, while heaping scorn on climate change skeptics, it is the researchers themselves who exhibit the "mental gymnastics" that they ascribe to their subjects. They will get away with such tactics in academia, because academia is an echo chamber where questioning climate change orthodoxy is verboten. But those who know that skepticism is a necessary virtue for undertaking scientific inquiry will call them out for the charlatans that they are.

Note

[1] As Jeff Deist noted in a talk for the Federalist Society in Pittsburgh, the term "deniers" is used to associate climate change skeptics with Holocaust deniers (Sept. 22, 2022).

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