

Seeing Red over Green Evangelicals

The Crusade against Environmentalism

For more than two decades, E. Calvin Beisner has been a leading evangelical critic of the environmental movement. A former professor at evangelical colleges and a longtime fellow at the pro-free market Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, Beisner used to engage his opponents in the evangelical world with debate and dialogue.¹ He described himself as a “friendly critic” of those evangelicals who embraced environmentalism.² In his 1997 book *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate*, he claimed to have had only limited criticisms of the theological, biblical, and ethical views of evangelical environmentalists: “On the majority of theological issues—especially those at the defining center of the Christian Faith—evangelical environmentalists have maintained orthodoxy while addressing environmental concerns that have, for the most part, been brought to public attention from outside the evangelical or even the broadly Christian camp. They are to be commended for this.” He claimed to be especially appreciative of the ways evangelical environmentalists pushed back against “New Age” criticisms of Christianity.

In 2010 any semblance of respect for evangelical environmentalists vanished, replaced by a new hardball approach. Five years earlier, Beisner had been instrumental in the formation of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation (originally called the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance), the de facto leader of the evangelical opposition to environmentalism and featuring many prominent figures from the evangelical right. The Cornwall Alliance was now ready to unveil its new initiative: Resisting the Green Dragon. Accompanying the launch of the website (www.ResistingTheGreenDragon.com) was a twelve-part DVD series and discussion guide targeting evangelical churches, schools, and small groups, plus a companion book. The DVD case featured the picture of

a menacing, metallic dragon with a gaping mouth and a globe for an eyeball. The DVD trailer showed rapidly moving images associated with environmentalism (a tree hugger, a Greenpeace banner) and the political world (the White House, a European Communist Party banner) accompanied by an ominous beat while the evangelical radio personality Janet Parshall summarized the case against environmentalism:

In what has become one of the greatest deceptions of our day, radical environmentalism is striving to put America and the world under its destructive control. This so-called Green Dragon is seducing your children in our classrooms and popular culture. Its lust for political power now extends to the highest global levels and its twisted view of the world elevates nature above the needs of people, of even the poorest and the most helpless. With millions falling prey [sound of a clock ticking begins] to its spiritual deception, the time is now to stand and resist.

No longer was evangelical environmentalism, frequently known as the creation care movement, a theologically sound movement in need of some minor corrections. As various speakers testified, it was a movement that “totally neglects spiritual welfare of men and women and looks at creation as though it were an end in itself.” It was guilty of defining the gospel as “just social justice,” and evangelicals should reject its example lest they “sell the gospel down the river.” The series creators were clear: environmentalism was a tool of Satan and completely incompatible with authentic Christianity.

Resisting the Green Dragon is the paranoid style *par excellence*. All three of the Christian Right movements we’ve examined so far clearly fit within the paranoid style, but none can match the extreme rhetoric of the contemporary evangelical anti-environmental movement. Just how did it come to be the “champion” of paranoia among Christian Right movements challenging science? This chapter will tell the story.

American Evangelicals and the Environment in the Twentieth Century

Unlike human origins and sexual morality, the environment doesn’t have a long history as a significant concern for American evangelicals.

Interest in the environment as a theological issue began to build slowly among evangelical leaders during the 1970s and 1980s, mostly in the evangelical left. By the 1990s a sufficient number of American evangelical leaders had embraced environmentalism that they began to form organizations related to this concern. The most prominent of these was the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), founded in 1993. Among the EEN's principal early leaders was Ron Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action. Sider was considered a "center-left" figure combining centrist evangelical views on abortion and homosexuality with typical evangelical left views on economic justice. Still, early supporters of the EEN came mostly from the evangelical left. As the 1990s progressed and the issue of climate change drew increasing attention from secular environmentalists and scientists, creation care remained primarily an evangelical left priority.

Meanwhile, the 1990s witnessed a growing movement to deny the existence of anthropogenic (human-induced) climate change.³ Several books detail the features of this movement, including James Hoggan's *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming*, Chris Mooney's *The Republican War on Science*, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway's *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, and Michael Mann's *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines*.⁴ Funding for the climate change denial movement comes from corporations that might see reduced profits if there are efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, especially those in the fossil fuel and automotive industries. These corporations work with pro-free market think tanks whose members fear that efforts to curb climate change will bring increased government regulation of markets. Their strategy is not to provide proof that anthropogenic climate change isn't occurring, but simply to cast doubt on its existence. This has often involved conspiracy theories that portray climate scientists as overstating the certainty of their climate predictions either for financial gain (in the form of increased grant money) or out of arrogance. Leaders of this movement understand that if Americans can be convinced that the science behind climate change is unsettled, then they will object to government policies designed to curb greenhouse gases. These efforts have been highly successful, fueled by the

same suspicion of scientific elites that makes creationism an enduring phenomenon in the United States.

As the climate change denial movement gained traction during the 1990s, the evangelical right became increasingly vocal in its support, essentially becoming the religious wing of a previously secular movement. Beisner and others from the evangelical right echoed the arguments of those in the secular world denying climate change, questioning both mainstream climate scientists and the wisdom of interfering in markets, and then added distinctly religious arguments. These centered on a particular reading of Genesis, according to which the Earth was created for the benefit of humans, who are to exercise “dominion.” Inherent in this institutional arrangement was a division of labor. Since the secular wing of the denial movement adhered to scientific and economic arguments, the evangelical right was freed from having to employ a “pure science” frame. Beisner and his colleagues could employ the language of religious crusade without qualification.

At the end of the 1990s Beisner and his colleagues in the Acton Institute organized a major effort to counter the Evangelical Environmental Network. Acton’s president, Father Robert Sirico, described the effort this way:

In light of these contemporary confusions about the true nature of stewardship, and because this concept is so central to the concerns of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition and of the free society, the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty has committed herself to articulating a vision of environmental stewardship informed by sound theological reflection, honest scientific inquiry, and rigorous economic thinking. To this end, the Institute brought together twenty-five clergy, theologians, economists, environmental scientists, and policy experts in West Cornwall, Connecticut, October 1999, to discuss the aspects of this problem and to lay the intellectual groundwork for further inquiry.⁵

Out of this meeting emerged the Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship, which was finalized in 2000. Those involved also formed a new organization called the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (ICES), which Sirico described as “a broad-based coalition of individuals and organizations committed to the principles

espoused in the Cornwall Declaration.”⁶ Framing the effort as interfaith was significant because the Evangelical Environmental Network worked with a larger organization known as the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which included Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Jewish participants. However, like other enterprises involving the Christian Right, the ICES was dominated by evangelicals, with politically conservative Catholics and Jews playing a secondary role. An indication of this evangelical (or at least Christian) dominance appeared in the “Our Beliefs” section of the Cornwall Declaration, where each item in the list of beliefs was preceded by a cross shape instead of the usual bullet. The Cornwall Declaration echoed many of the claims that Beisner had been making for several years. It contested the science supporting the existence of anthropogenic climate change, affirmed humans as God-appointed stewards of the Earth, and hailed the virtues of free markets.

The Battle for the Evangelical Center

At the start of the twenty-first century the evangelical left was committed to fighting climate change, the evangelical right strongly denied that climate change was a problem, and the evangelical center had yet to choose sides. This quickly changed as several high-profile centrist evangelical leaders were persuaded to take up the cause of climate care. The first of these was Richard Cizik, then vice president for governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Katharine Wilkinson describes Cizik’s “conversion” in her book *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*. According to Wilkinson, Cizik had a conversation at Oxford University in 2002 with Sir John Houghton, the recently retired chairman of the scientific arm of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a British evangelical. Houghton made the biblical case for Cizik and other American evangelicals to take action against climate change. Cizik’s experience paralleled that of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who reported his heart being “strangely warmed” while attending a Moravian meeting on Aldersgate Street in London.

Like John Wesley’s famous Aldersgate experience in 1738, in the course of their exchange, Cizik suddenly felt his heart “strangely warmed” and

experienced a conversion to climate change that echoed his conversion to Christ two decades earlier. . . . Sensing that God had intervened in his life at this crucial moment, Cizik departed Oxford with a passionate commitment to climate care, soon to become a leading advocate for the cause across the Atlantic.⁷

David Neff, editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*, also joined the cause of fighting climate change and worked with Cizik to support the efforts of the Evangelical Environmental Network. EEN leader Jim Ball worked hard to persuade still more centrist leaders to lend their support.⁸

Meanwhile, opponents of creation care on the evangelical right were honing their own efforts. In 2005 Beisner and his colleagues formed a new organization called the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance alongside the existing Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship. Why two organizations with similar names? It appears that the older organization was not very active, requiring a new organization to take aggressive action against creation care. This became clearer in 2007 when the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship was renamed the Cornwall Alliance for Environmental Stewardship, while the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance was renamed the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation.⁹ The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, the newer organization, was given the www.cornwallalliance.org website. The older organization seems to have had only a token existence by that point. Moreover, Beisner revealed in a 2013 lecture that the “interfaith” label was either inauthentic or short-lived for the newer organization: “The Cornwall Alliance [for the Stewardship of Creation] is a network of evangelical theologians, scientists, and economists.”¹⁰ By 2015 the Cornwall Alliance website described the organization as “an evangelical voice promoting environmental stewardship and economic development built on Biblical principles.”¹¹

In 2006 members of the growing coalition supporting creation care launched a new campaign known as the Evangelical Climate Initiative, along with a statement titled “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”¹² Several claims in the statement are worth noting. First, evangelicals are called to address a wide variety of social issues. Although the authors were “proud of the evangelical community’s long-standing commitment to the sanctity of human life,” they didn’t want evangeli-

calism to be “a single-issue movement.” Second, there is solid scientific evidence that anthropogenic climate change is real. Third, the consequences of climate change will hit the world’s poor the hardest. Fourth, efforts to combat climate change are part of the proper stewardship of the Earth mandated by the Bible.

A significant feature of the statement was its recommendations for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. It acknowledged the positive actions being taken at all levels of society, including “state and local governments, churches, smaller businesses, and individuals.” Additionally, there were clear efforts to attract the evangelical center, which tends to be suspicious of government regulation of the economy. The first of these was a nod to market-based solutions: “In the United States, the most important immediate step that can be taken at the federal level is to pass and implement national legislation requiring sufficient economy-wide reductions in carbon dioxide emissions through cost-effective, market-based mechanisms such as a cap-and-trade program.” The second was the framing of large corporations, including fossil fuel companies, as partners rather than adversaries in this effort: “We also applaud the steps taken by such companies as BP, Shell, General Electric, Cinergergy, Duke Energy, and DuPont, all of which have moved ahead of the pace of government action through innovative measures implemented within their companies in the U.S. and around the world.” The authors of the statement seem to have strategically ignored the role of fossil fuel companies in funding the climate change denial movement.

These efforts to attract more centrist evangelical leaders bore fruit. Among those who eventually endorsed “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action” were prominent megachurch pastors Rick Warren of Saddleback Church and Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church. NAE president Leith Anderson also endorsed the statement, an important display of support for Cizik.

Leaders in the evangelical right would not let this play for the evangelical center go unchallenged. In March 2007, twenty-five leaders sent a letter to the NAE board asking them to either restrain Cizik or encourage him to resign.¹³ Among those signing the letter were James Dobson, chairman of Focus on the Family, Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, and Alan Chambers, president of Exodus International.¹⁴ None of the twenty-five signers were members of the NAE; they

justified their concern by insisting that “our organizations interface with [the NAE] regularly and consider it to be an important Christian institution in today’s culture.” The letter made several key arguments. First, it contended that the existence of anthropogenic global warming was “a subject of heated controversy” and that the NAE “lacks the expertise to settle the controversy.” It cited the work of Beisner’s Interfaith Stewardship Alliance as presenting a credible case for skepticism of global warming. Second, it accused Cizik and others of using the issue of global warming to shift emphasis away from “the great moral issues of our time, notably the sanctity of human life, the integrity of marriage and the teaching of sexual abstinence and morality to our children.” Third, it accused Cizik of speaking in a way that was “divisive and dangerous,” especially when he labeled his opponents “the old guard.” Fourth, it took issue with Cizik’s willingness to discuss population control as a means of combating global warming: “We ask, how is population control going to be achieved if not by promoting abortion, the distribution of condoms to the young, and even by infanticide in China and elsewhere?” Finally, the letter insisted that Cizik’s actions were endangering the very definition of “evangelical,” moving it away from its previous association with “conservative views on politics, economics and biblical morality.”

According to David P. Gushee, the NAE responded at its March 2007 board meeting by ignoring the evangelical right letter and affirming its existing broad policy agenda. “This polite but firm response to Dobson helped to establish, perhaps once and for all, that there is an independent evangelical center with its own vision that cannot be bullied or dictated to by the evangelical right.”¹⁵ However, Cizik’s personal victory would prove to be short-lived. During an interview on National Public Radio’s *Fresh Air* in December 2008, he stated that he was “shifting” and now supported same-sex civil unions.¹⁶ This stance is not out of place in the evangelical left, but it’s sharply at odds with the evangelical center’s views on homosexuality. Cizik was quickly forced to resign from his NAE position. However, by then creation care had become firmly entrenched among centrist evangelical leaders. The NAE couldn’t tolerate any softening of its condemnation of homosexuality, but it continued to support efforts to fight climate change.

Explaining the Evangelical Climate Change Fault Line

As we've seen, the intelligent design, ex-gay, and conservative bioethics movements all involve a coalition of center and right evangelical leaders, with leaders from the evangelical left uninvolved or even opposed. Climate change is the one issue related to science where a left and center coalition contends against the evangelical right.¹⁷ What explains this unique situation? Based on his encounters with the evangelical right, Gushee concludes that its rejection of climate science stems from more than its alliance with the Republican Party:

I am convinced that these forces [contributing to climate change skepticism] are fundamentally theological, not economic or political, though these latter factors do play a major part. Beisner, at least, expresses considerable distrust of mainstream science, trusts the free market implicitly and distrusts government regulation entirely, adheres to an archaic version of dominionist theology of creation, and holds fast to a hyper-Calvinist theology related to God's sovereignty (over against human responsibility) for what happens in human affairs.¹⁸

There are two main problems with Gushee's explanation. First, distrust of mainstream science (also known as real science) is hardly limited to the evangelical right. The intelligent design, ex-gay, and conservative bioethics movements, all of which have the support of the evangelical center, are based on paranoid-style distrust of mainstream science. Gushee, an advocate of the evangelical center and sometime critic of the evangelical right, is clearly unwilling to acknowledge how much the center and right have in common in relation to science. Second, while Beisner can be described as having a "hyper-Calvinist" theology, the same can't be said of the entire evangelical right, and certainly not of its Catholic, Jewish, and secular supporters in the fight against climate science.

The sociologist Laurel Kearns offers an alternative explanation: that the most significant factor for the climate science opposition is "economics and the support of free enterprise and capitalism."¹⁹ This appears to be a more credible explanation, given that a shared economic ideology is the main factor uniting the religious and secular branches of

the climate change denial movement. Centrist evangelical leaders also tend to support free markets, but their support is less fervent than that of evangelical right leaders. Centrist leaders were consequently open to accepting creation care as long as its proponents framed it in fairly market-friendly terms, which is exactly what the authors of the Evangelical Climate Initiative chose to do. For the diehard supporters of free markets in the evangelical right, creation care involved too many unacceptable compromises.

The Cornwall Alliance's support for free market capitalism appears to be more than just theoretical. Some liberal advocacy groups have sought to expose the financial ties between the Cornwall Alliance and the business interests funding the secular climate change denial movement. A 2010 report by ThinkProgress highlighted ties between the Cornwall Alliance and an anti-environmental group called the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT) and found that the latter group "is funded by at least \$542,000 from ExxonMobil, \$60,500 from Chevron, and \$1,280,000 from the Scaife family foundations, which are rooted in wealth from Gulf Oil and steel interests."²⁰ A report released the same year by the People for the American Way's Right Wing Watch cited the ThinkProgress report and added further details: "Beisner is a CFACT board member and an 'adjunct fellow' of the Acton Institute, which is primarily funded by groups like ExxonMobil, the Scaife foundations and the Koch brothers. Beisner is also an adviser to the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, which is financed by the oil-backed Earthart Foundation, the Koch brothers, and ExxonMobil."²¹ Whatever the exact amounts of money flowing into the Cornwall Alliance, such ties are hardly surprising. There is a long history of Christian Right leaders working with corporate backers. And since the Cornwall Alliance clearly operates as the religious wing of the broader climate change denial movement, we should expect it to share funding sources with its secular counterparts.

The Cornwall Alliance: Core Beliefs before the Green Dragon

In this section we'll look at the theological, economic, and scientific beliefs expressed by Cornwall Alliance leaders prior to the launch of the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign. Even though these leaders spun

conspiratorial theories about climate scientists and claimed that environmentalism was having a negative impact on the world, they had yet to embrace the paranoid style (according to Hofstadter's definition) by subscribing to a grand conspiracy that threatened the foundation of society.

Dominion Theology

The theological foundation of the Cornwall Alliance's fight against environmentalism is the belief that men and women were created in God's image, were given a privileged place among creatures, and were commanded by God to exercise stewardship (or dominion) over the Earth. Beisner and other leaders emphasize that this stewardship involves following God's wishes rather than our own and is therefore not "anthropocentric" or "speciesist" (the ethicist Peter Singer's derogatory term for privileging humans over other animals). As one Cornwall Alliance essay insists,

People, alone among the creatures on earth, have both the rationality and the moral capacity to exercise stewardship, to be accountable for their choices, to take responsibility for caring not only for themselves but also for other creatures. To reject human stewardship is to embrace, by default, no stewardship. The only proper alternative to selfish anthropocentrism is not biocentrism but theocentrism: a vision of earth care with God and his perfect moral law at the center and human beings acting as his accountable stewards.²²

According to this theology, humans are commanded as God's image-bearers to improve the condition of the Earth: "Earth and all in it, while 'very good' (Genesis 1:31), were not as God intended them to be. They need filling, subduing, and ruling."²³ This divine mandate predates the Fall and God's subsequent cursing of the Earth. After the Fall and Curse, the mandate became more pressing as humans were tasked with helping to redeem the Earth. According to Beisner, "It is legitimate, therefore, for Adam's race, particularly under the redeeming rule of Christ, to seek to transform cursed ground back into blessed ground."²⁴ Beisner contrasts this view with that of most environmentalists, who wrongly idealize nature untouched by humans.

The mandate to improve the Earth means that extracting resources doesn't constitute exploiting nature, as environmentalists believe. And we don't need to worry about running out of resources. Using the resources that God provided is exactly what humans are meant to do, and there will always be enough. Beisner summarizes this perspective:

For generations people have worried about the world's running out of various resources—especially energy resources. Yet, paradoxically, the long-term price trends of all extractive resources—animal, vegetable, and mineral (including energy resources)—are downward. . . . I say “paradoxically,” because falling prices indicate falling scarcity, which is precisely the opposite of what we intuitively expect as people consume finite resources. What explains this paradox? It is the combination of the Curse-reversing effects of redemption and the creative aspects of the image of God in man—the latter enhanced by the former.²⁵

Related to this, Cornwall Alliance leaders say there's no need to fear population growth, given the divine mandate to fill the Earth. Environmentalists, who see humans primarily as consumers rather than producers, wrongly believe that a growing human population will exhaust the Earth's resources. But the Bible teaches that people are a blessing, not a curse. According to Beisner, “The human race is not the population explosion but the population blossom; not the population boom but the population bloom; not people pollution but the people solution; not cancer but an answer.”²⁶ Nor should we fear that a growing population will produce excessive pollution. Human ingenuity is exactly the resource needed to produce a cleaner environment. Societies that make the transition from an industrial economy to a service and technology-oriented economy see pollution decline. Based on these beliefs, Beisner paints a bright picture of our environmental future:

People all over the world can expect a cleaner, safer, more healthful, more beautiful environment for our children's future. Not automatically. No, it will take lots of intelligent, hard work and lots of good, moral choices. But those are what God made people to do, and they are what Christ's redeeming work is enabling us to do despite our fall into sin.²⁷

God Designed and Sustains the Earth

For Cornwall Alliance leaders, those who believe in catastrophic anthropogenic climate change are failing to accept what the Bible teaches about the Earth. They make two specific claims related to this issue. First, they maintain that God designed a robust Earth that cannot be easily harmed by human activity. Those who warn about the dangers of climate change, and especially of the “runaway greenhouse gas effect,” assume a fragile climate system that is contrary to what the Bible teaches: “The Biblical worldview instead suggests that the wise Designer of Earth’s climate system, like any skillful engineer, would have equipped it with balancing positive and negative feedback mechanisms that would make the whole robust, self-regulating, and self-correcting.”²⁸

Their second claim is that God actively sustains the Earth and has promised not to allow worldwide ecological disaster:

Among [God’s] promises are two that are particularly relevant to fears of dangerous manmade global warming: (1) that natural cycles necessary for human and ecosystem thriving (summer and winter, planting and harvest, cold and heat, day and night) will continue as long as Heaven and Earth endure (Genesis 8:22), and (2) that flood waters will never again [after the time of Noah] cover the Earth (Genesis 9:11–12, 15–16; Psalm 104:9; Jeremiah 5:22).²⁹

The second promise “would seem to preclude the kind of catastrophic sea level rise envisioned by global warming alarmists.”³⁰

Cornwall Alliance leaders contend that the irrational fear of natural catastrophes is ultimately rooted in “the absence of the fear of the Lord.”³¹ Such fears will continue, despite the lack of a true scientific basis, until people repent and fear the Lord.

Fighting Climate Change Will Hurt the Poor

Recall that one of the creation care movement’s primary arguments is that climate change will cause the most harm to the world’s poor. The Cornwall Alliance directly challenges this claim, portraying itself as the one helping the poor, and environmentalists as wealthy elitists who are

trying to block the path out of poverty. The title of the Cornwall Alliance’s 2006 report, “A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor” (followed in 2009 by an expanded version called “A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor”), was clearly chosen to highlight this positive framing of its own activities and its negative “counterframing” of its opponents.

The Cornwall Alliance’s case rests on the claim that the poor need to consume fossil fuels both to improve their daily lives and to make economic development possible:

What impoverished people desperately need is abundant, affordable electricity—most easily achieved by using fossil fuels like coal, petroleum, and natural gas. However much these might emit real pollutants (not CO₂, which is essential to all plant growth and not a pollutant, but nitrous oxide, mercury, soot, and others), they are tremendously cleaner and safer than wood and dung.³²

Unfortunately, environmentalists committed to fighting “alleged man-made global warming” prevent the poor from obtaining electricity from fossil fuels, proposing the impractical alternatives of solar, wind, and biofuels.³³ Environmentalism “largely has become a preoccupation of rich Westerners” who don’t consider the impact their activism has on the poor.³⁴ In contrast, members of the Cornwall Alliance follow the Bible’s command to “remember the poor.”³⁵

Climate Change Skepticism

As we’ve seen, evangelical supporters of creation care accept the consensus view of climate scientists that anthropogenic climate change is a real phenomenon that will cause great harm to the planet if it’s not controlled. In contrast, Cornwall Alliance leaders and their allies in the evangelical right follow the lead of the secular climate change denial movement; they insist that there’s no convincing scientific evidence that human activity is affecting climate.

Beisner laid out the main features of this case in his 1997 book *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*. According to Beisner, environmentalism is grounded in emotional manipulation rather than scientific facts:

An important weakness of much environmentalism is its tendency to present false or highly debatable claims of environmental problems and their significance as if they were unquestionably true. Usually, environmentalists use such claims to frighten people into accepting a message of environmental crisis, after which they will be more likely to embrace policy recommendations environmentalists make.³⁶

Unfortunately, evangelical environmentalists uncritically accept the claims made by their secular partners and then “pass them along to their fellow believers with the added moral authority of Scripture.”³⁷ This further promotes the crisis mentality.

To illustrate this problem among evangelical environmentalists, Beisner focuses on a 1995 membership recruitment letter by the Christian Society of the Green Cross. Among the letter’s claims is that CO₂ has increased 26 percent since pre-industrial times, which will lead to higher temperatures. Beisner responds with a barrage of purported scientific facts (“purported” being the operative word) that indicate that increasing CO₂ levels pose no threat to the planet and may even be beneficial. This includes the claim that most of the increase in global average temperatures between 1880 and 1990 was attributable to natural causes and that the CO₂ increase will cause “little or no rise in sea levels, some benefit to agriculture because of longer growing seasons and increased water use efficiency . . . and less need for heating in the winter (thus reducing energy consumption).”³⁸

In a move that mirrors some postmodernist and deconstructionist writings, Beisner refers to Thomas Kuhn’s concept of “paradigm shifts” in scientific fields.³⁹ Beisner writes that the beliefs of the majority of climate scientists, who fear the effects of anthropogenic climate change, will eventually be replaced by the minority who share his skepticism:

As Thomas Kuhn argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a reigning scientific paradigm tends to dominate academia and publishing for decades while a small number of scientists nibble away, often unaware of each other, at bits and pieces of it. At some point, usually not gradually and piecemeal but suddenly and wholesale, the reigning paradigm collapses and is replaced by a new orthodoxy and the process repeats

itself. . . . Such a transition seems imminent in the environmental debate as evidence mounts against the conventional doom-and-gloom view.⁴⁰

Beisner adds his disappointment that those scientists who are Christians, “who are used to being minorities and confronting the bias of secular scientists,” ignore the lessons from Kuhn and instead trust in the objectivity of the currently dominant scientists.⁴¹

Finally, Beisner claims that the financial interests of environmental organizations and climate scientists lead both groups to support a crisis perspective. He cites the large number of environmental organizations whose sole reason for existence is to alert people to environmental crises and propose solutions: “Without news of crises, fund raising (leading environmental organizations raised over \$400 million in 1991) plummets. They have a vested interest, therefore, in supporting scholars whose work generates the ‘right’ results.”⁴² Additionally, many scientists feel a desperate need for funding, and they know that few donors will fund research on nonproblems: “[Donors] want to fund research on crises, the bigger the better. This creates a strong natural incentive for researchers to look for evidence of problems and ignore contrary evidence.”⁴³

Later documents by the Cornwall Alliance reiterate these claims and add a few updates. The alleged bias of climate scientists is not just about obtaining research funds but also about a lack of courage to dissent: “The temptation to use the ‘likely results’ criterion (which modelers use routinely to judge their models) as a cover for politically expedient results and the desire never to be an outlier are powerful human impulses to which scientists are not immune.”⁴⁴ In addition to criticizing the broad field of climate science, the Cornwall Alliance also focused on one specific group, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and charged it with political bias: “The IPCC is a loosely organized, highly politicized group of scientists, bureaucrats, and governmental representatives first assembled in 1988 with the explicit mandate to build the scientific case for anthropogenic global warming—a mandate that has heavily shaped its findings.”⁴⁵ A third new tactic is to cite the Global Warming Petition Project, also known as the Oregon Petition. This was an effort to collect names of scientists opposed to the Kyoto Accords, which were intended to address climate

change. The petition has drawn widespread ridicule from opponents, who point out that only an extremely small percentage of signers are trained in climate science, and also that the petition relies on the fraudulent inclusion of names.⁴⁶ Ignoring these criticisms, the Cornwall Alliance uses the petition as evidence that a scientific “consensus” on anthropogenic global warming doesn’t exist:⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the very reality of the consensus remains debatable, as evidenced by surveys of relevant scientific literature . . . and climate scientists . . . and the willingness of over 31,000 American scientists to sign a statement claiming, “There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth’s atmosphere and disruption of the Earth’s climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth.”⁴⁸

In several ways, the Cornwall Alliance’s campaign against mainstream climate science parallels the other Christian Right movements covered in this book. Intelligent design leaders have also cited Kuhn to bolster their claims that mainstream scientific opinions will soon be overturned. Both intelligent design and ex-gay leaders condemn “politicized” science that is suppressing the truth. And science-by-petition is a tactic that has been used by the intelligent design movement, as well as by creation scientists, to attack evolution.⁴⁹

The Cornucopian Connection

To better understand the Cornwall Alliance’s anti-environmentalism stances, we need to consider the long-standing debate within economics over the effects of population growth. The pessimistic perspective on population originated with Thomas Malthus, an economist and clergyman in the Church of England writing in the early part of the nineteenth century. Malthus believed that human population tends to grow exponentially while agricultural production tends to grow arithmetically, leading to catastrophic shortages. Malthus was also known for

harsh attitudes toward the poor; he insisted that helping the poor would only increase their population. Since Malthus viewed contraception as immoral, he favored controlling the population through late marriages and sexual restraint. Later forms of “neo-Malthusianism” abandoned some of Malthus’s harsher ideas but retained the belief that “human population growth is a key problem because it tends to dangerously exceed natural resource carrying capacity, threatening malnourishment, aggravated poverty, and environmental deterioration.”⁵⁰ Many environmental movement leaders espouse forms of neo-Malthusianism.

Other economists have been more optimistic about population growth, claiming that it’s nonproblematic or even beneficial. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argued that capitalism, not population growth, was the root cause of poverty and other problems associated with industrialization. Once the capitalist order was overthrown and replaced by socialism, the “forces of production” would be freed to create a world of plenty. Marx and Engels’s vision of the future seems to assume that some source of clean, easily attainable energy, which obviously did not exist in the nineteenth century, would emerge to enable production. Another significant critic of Malthus was the twentieth-century Danish economist Ester Boserup, who wrote that Malthus greatly underestimated the extent to which human ingenuity could be used to increase agricultural production, and that population growth drives such innovation.

In the late twentieth century a school of economic thought known as “cornucopianism” emerged, which borrowed some of Boserup’s ideas but went significantly beyond her. These economists saw positive effects from population growth, and were staunchly committed to free market capitalism (obviously rejecting the Marxist tradition). Cornucopians claimed that as long as free markets are permitted to flourish, technological innovation will lead to adequate supplies of resources and a cleaner environment. A key principle for cornucopians is *substitution*—new resources (substitutes) can be found to meet growing demand, as when fossil fuels replaced wood as the primary source of energy. Substitution prevents scarcity from emerging with population growth. The most prominent cornucopian was Julian Simon. In his 1981 book *The Ultimate Resource*, Simon praised the power of human ingenuity to improve living conditions.⁵¹ Increasing population means more human ingenuity and should be welcomed, not feared. The book’s main arguments were

stated boldly on its cover: “Natural resources and energy are getting *less* scarce. Pollution in the U.S. has been decreasing. The world’s food supply is improving. Population growth has long-term benefits.”

Like most academic debates, the economic debate over the effects of population growth includes many moderate positions, which reject both the neo-Malthusian and the cornucopian extremes. In one of his few references to this debate, Beisner implies that he embraces a moderate position:

[There is] a common problem with facts (or alleged facts) about environmental degradation: a propensity for doomsayers to pick numbers at the scary end of the spectrum while paying little attention to evidence that those numbers may be vastly exaggerated. (At the same time there is a tendency for the doomsayers’ critics—often called cornucopians—to pick numbers at the benign end of the spectrum while paying little attention to evidence that those numbers may be vastly minimized. The proper aim for both parties should be truth.)⁵²

Of course, Beisner is no moderate, and neither are his colleagues in the Cornwall Alliance. Their economic arguments draw heavily from cornucopian writings. For example, the seventy-six-page Cornwall Alliance article “A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor” cites Julian Simon ten times, always treating his claims as uncontested truth. It cites the cornucopian political scientist Bjørn Lomborg fourteen times in a similarly uncritical manner. In fact, Cornwall Alliance leaders go well beyond traditional cornucopian thought by adding divine action. Simon’s faith in humans led him to believe that it was unlikely that they would cause catastrophic climate change. Cornwall Alliance leaders’ faith in God leads them to believe that catastrophic climate change is impossible because God simply won’t allow it.

Enter the Green Dragon

Having lost the battle for the leaders of the evangelical center, in 2010 the Cornwall Alliance made an aggressive play for the evangelical rank and file. The Christian Right has a long history of using paranoid-style rhetoric in attempts to motivate evangelical laypeople. The Resisting

the Green Dragon campaign is a case study in the paranoid style, using rhetoric that is extreme even by Christian Right standards in order to scare laypeople away from creation care. The campaign's twelve-part DVD series features appearances by a who's who of the evangelical right, including Tom Minnery from Focus on the Family, Tony Perkins from the Family Research Council, Richard Land from the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and Wendy Wright from Concerned Women for America. The DVD sessions feature provocative titles such as "Rescuing People from the Cult of the Green Dragon," "The Green Face of the Pro-Death Agenda: Population Control, Abortion and Euthanasia," and "Threats to Liberty and the Move toward a Global Government." The companion book by the South African-born physicist and "lay theologian" James Wanliss was titled *Resisting the Green Dragon: Dominion Not Death*. Wanliss did not attempt to cover the breadth of topics included in the DVD series, but he compensated by using even more heated rhetoric. The campaign was engineered with the assistance of the Heritage Foundation, a think tank with close ties to the evangelical right.⁵³

The Resisting the Green Dragon campaign repeated many of the arguments found in earlier writings by Beisner and the Cornwall Alliance. For example, it continued to portray mainstream climate science as highly flawed. It still treated Julian Simon as an infallible authority on economic matters. The campaign also incorporated three claims that hadn't appeared in the Cornwall Alliance's writings, though they'd been circulating among evangelical opponents of environmentalism. These new claims relied heavily on the paranoid style. In fact, their portrayal of the environmental movement matched Hofstadter's description of the paranoid style's central image: "a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life."⁵⁴

The first new claim was that environmentalism is completely incompatible with Christianity. As the title of the campaign indicates, environmentalism is to be identified with Satan. It's a religion that worships the Earth and competes with Christianity. The proper response of Christians is therefore "resisting," not embracing. Here we see the Manichean worldview associated with the paranoid style, as well as an example of the false choice fallacy. And since Cornwall Alliance leaders accuse the

environmental movement of using Christians to hide its true (Satanic) nature, we also have paranoid-style conspiracy theorizing. This is a departure from Beisner's earlier position, which recognized and even commended a distinctly evangelical approach to environmentalism based in the Bible rather than "New Age" or "pagan" religion.

Wanliss repeats this first claim throughout his book, always with the same sneering tone. In a section titled "Green Religion," he writes that environmentalism provides an alternative religion for those who reject the Christian heritage of Western civilization: "It is a religion with a vision of sin and repentance, heaven and hell. It even has a special vocabulary, with words like 'sustainability' and 'carbon neural.' Its communion is organic food. Its sacraments are sex, abortion, and when all else fails, sterilization. Its saints are Al Gore and the IPCC."⁵⁵ Christians should remain hopeful that God will expose and defeat his foe:

When the light exposes the unholy religious foundations of environmentalism, like the bones of a rotting carcass, no more disguise will be possible. No painted face, no fluffy illusions, no amount of bright semantic gymnastics, will morph the Green Dragon into anything other than what it is—an avowed enemy of humanity and of the greatest lover of humanity [God]. No semi-naked Hollywood celebrity bunnies draped over its foul form can deny its native evil. No precious perfumes can mask its vile vapors, its dark cloud of pantheistic pollution. We will not mourn its passing.⁵⁶

The Green Dragon of environmentalism will face defeat in the long term, the argument goes, but in the short term it has successfully "penetrated the church with anti-human and anti-Christian ideas."⁵⁷ Environmentalism is strongest among the mainline churches, which Wanliss condemns for "having steadily pared every Biblical doctrine to the point that they whittle down Christianity to mere feelings."⁵⁸ Having traded authentic Christian belief for conformity to the world, these Christians are naïve about the dangers of environmentalism. But Wanliss expresses concern that environmentalism has even lured evangelicals. Not surprisingly, he singles out Richard Cizik for criticism:

Perhaps one cannot fault the motives of folks like Cizik; unlike the mainstream environmentalist for whom humans are scum, Green Evangelicals

argue that we should save the environment because unless we act collectively and immediately the end is nigh for mankind. Unfortunately, they adopt the narrative of the Green Dragon and espouse the most radical solutions to environmental changes that are not—despite the hysterics—a crisis, often not even a problem. Unfortunately, Cizik is increasingly less an ambassador of Christ than of the Green Dragon. . . . Bleeding heart evangelicals have swallowed apocalyptic nightmares of the Green Dragon hook, line, and sinker.⁵⁹

This quote also contains the second new claim introduced by the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign: that environmentalists hate humans. Cornwall Alliance leaders contrast this alleged perspective with the biblical proclamation that humans were created in God’s image and therefore have worth and dignity. Again, we see the typical paranoid-style dualism. This claim also sets up the environmental movement as a threat to society, fulfilling another key feature of the paranoid style. This argument goes well beyond earlier concerns that environmentalists value nature more than they value humans.

This second new claim was emphasized in DVD session 9, which is titled “The Green Face of the Pro-Death Agenda: Population Control, Abortion, and Euthanasia.” Charmaine Yoest, president of Americans United for Life, contrasted the environmental worldview with the Christian worldview of the pro-life movement. The former worldview sees humans as “parasites” and argues that “life is not worth living.” The latter worldview sees humans as “possibilities” and argues that “your life can make a difference.” Wanliss’s book makes the same case, but in even starker terms:

Past decades have witnessed the accelerating ascent of what one could call, in its ugliest manifestation, the environmentalist death cult. It appears environmentalists believe that smart people have fewer children, and the wisest have none at all. From the writings and public declarations of prominent environmentalists it is clear the ethos of the movement fosters deep animus and hostility toward humanity. They hate humans. They hate them for being fruitful and multiplying. They hate them for having dominion over the other creatures, and for modifying nature. They reject the idea of humanity’s special place in the world, and that God made man

in his image. They spew disapproval of modern civilization. As we will see, they worship the wild wasteland and idolize nature.⁶⁰

Significantly, Cornwall Alliance leaders place some of the blame for environmentalism's anti-human views on Darwinism, which, they claim, devalues humans by portraying them as mere animals. In Wanliss's words, "Modern environmentalism and Darwin's dangerous idea are coupled like a nest of writhing snakes."⁶¹

The third new claim from *Resisting the Green Dragon* is that environmentalists seek a totalitarian global government in order to impose their agenda on others. Again, we see the paranoid-style belief that the social order is threatened. Since Cornwall Alliance leaders believe that environmentalists are less than forthcoming about these plans, we also have paranoid-style conspiracy theorizing. Earlier writings by Cornwall Alliance leaders raised concerns that environmentalists were advocating unnecessary and harmful government regulations. This new argument took those concerns to extreme levels. Note that the fear of totalitarian global government has been a long-running theme in the evangelical right, one embraced by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (authors of the *Left Behind* series of novels) and Pat Robertson, among others.⁶² Once Cornwall Alliance leaders decided to depict environmentalists as principal enemies of Christianity and subject them to paranoid-style attacks, it was natural for these leaders to deploy this theme as well.

Cornwall Alliance leaders lay out this third claim in session 10 of the DVD series, which is titled "Threats to Liberty and the Move toward a Global Government." The introductory section includes Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention making an earnest plea to viewers:

Through this lecture you will have the opportunity to see what leading environmentalists say about their own intentions for reducing your freedoms, eroding your national sovereignty, and ushering in global governance by elitists. I urge you to study this further and to act to preserve your freedom and the limited, constitutional, national government bequeathed to you by the Founding Fathers.

In other words, environmentalism is a threat to the United States as we know it.

Beisner's lecture provides the details of why this is the case. Beisner begins by noting that one of the most common phrases among environmentalists is, "Global problems demand global solutions." This, he claims, is a hint of one of the greatest dangers of the environmental movement. He moves on to the meaning of the word "environment," which comes from a French word meaning "surroundings." "Surroundings," he muses, includes everything:

The environment is everything, so environmentalism becomes everythingism. Now, there's another word that we use for everything. It's the totality of things. If you are talking about everything that is, you mean the totality of what is. Total, right? And we have a political term that is related to that one, don't we? Totalitarianism. Environmentalism equals everythingism equals totalitarianism. And if environmentalists want to bring the whole of the environment under the care of the government, one way or another, then what they are really saying is: "We want to control everything about your life. We want total control."

Wanliss's book echoes Beisner's assertion that environmentalists seek world domination, but indulges in more heated rhetoric, as usual. Wanliss also adds the substantive point that Christians are being fooled into supporting this scheme:

All the solutions to environmental collapse offered by politicians require tough government controls on individuals. The new slogan is planetary salvation, and Green leaders think Christians will wiggle and fawn like pleasure-drunk puppies because of the God-talk. Professing Christian environmentalists are the useful idiots of the Green Dragon. They affirm "love to neighbor" or "creation stewardship," which makes it sound as if they affirm the Bible, keeping dubious Christians constantly confused. Then, while the baffling slogans flash like machine guns in the minds of their hearers, Greens hustle in the fads of the political left as they progressively rob and enslave their brothers.⁶³

To call the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign extreme would be an understatement. This is the paranoid style with remarkable attention to *style*. What could have motivated the Cornwall Alliance and its sup-

porters to go down this route? On the one hand, this campaign can be seen as a well-crafted strategic move to stem the influence of centrist evangelical leaders on the evangelical rank and file regarding the issue of climate change.⁶⁴ After all, the paranoid style has a proven track record of effectiveness in the evangelical world. The Heritage Foundation, which assisted with the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign, has long been known for sophisticated marketing of conservative Christian ideas. Once Cornwall Alliance leaders decided to go down the paranoid route, the details of the campaign were obviously planned with great care. For example, the image of the Green Dragon's eye in the DVDs is a blatant copy of the Eye of Sauron from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies. This is one of many examples of evangelical leaders co-opting pop culture. On the other hand, given the angry rhetoric aimed at centrist evangelical leaders, one gets the sense that the campaign is personal as well as strategic. Why treat centrist leaders in this manner when they're allies on nearly everything except climate change? Perhaps this is an example of the infamous "sibling rivalry" dynamic. The closeness of the two parties may be exactly what makes the disagreement on climate change so bitter. Whatever is behind the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign, one thing is certain: having jumped headlong into the abyss of the paranoid style, there is no going back for the Cornwall Alliance.

Assessing the Evangelical Rank and File

How effective was the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign in swaying ordinary evangelicals? It's impossible to know for sure, since its launch coincides with other events affecting public views on climate change. The most significant of these events was the rise of the Tea Party movement, a backlash against the Obama presidency that drew deeply from the paranoid-style tradition. A 2013 survey found that 52 percent of those who identify with the Tea Party movement also identify with the Christian Right.⁶⁵ Clearly, Tea Party politics influences a sizeable chunk of the evangelical population. Since Obama made attempts to reduce carbon emissions an early priority in his presidency (a significant shift from the George W. Bush administration's assault on climate science), it wasn't surprising that the Tea Party made denial of anthropogenic climate change one of its core principles. Following the 2010 midterm

elections, the Tea Party managed to drive out what little acceptance of anthropogenic climate change still existed among Republican elected officials, and denial of the problem became the “orthodox” position.⁶⁶

Whether influenced by the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign, Republican politics, or both, evangelicals after 2010 are consistently less likely to believe in anthropogenic climate change than other religious groups, according to surveys. For example, a September 2011 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with the Religious News Service found that strong majorities of all religious groups believed that the Earth was getting warmer. However, only 31 percent of white evangelicals believed that human activity was responsible for the trend, compared to 43 percent of white mainline Protestants, 50 percent of Catholics, and 52 percent of the unaffiliated.⁶⁷

In November 2011 the *New Republic* ran an article titled “Whatever Happened to the Evangelical-Environmental Alliance?” The article contrasted the wave of optimism around the time of the Evangelical Climate Initiative in 2006 with the pessimism that reigned a few years later. The article featured Joel Hunter, a Florida megachurch pastor who was one of the early signers of the ECI statement and who had worked hard to spread the creation care message. “A glum Hunter told me that he holds out hope for the next generation, conceding that his generation probably won’t be shaking up the climate change debate like they’d hoped. The old fault lines, which Cizik told *The New Republic* in 2006 were ‘no more,’ are still very much alive.”⁶⁸

The goal of centrist evangelical leaders to spread the creation care agenda to the rank and file has largely failed. Politics played a major role, but evangelical attitudes toward science were certainly another important factor. As we’ve seen in previous chapters, centrist evangelical leaders have encouraged skepticism of mainstream science in the areas of evolution and human sexuality. Why, then, should ordinary evangelicals heed their advice to accept mainstream climate science? By encouraging a paranoid-style mentality on other fronts, centrist leaders made ordinary evangelicals easier prey for the Cornwall Alliance’s anti-environmentalism campaign.

The Impossible Defense of Dominion Theology

As I've noted, Cornwall Alliance leaders often cite Julian Simon and other cornucopians for empirical confirmation of beliefs associated with their dominion theology, particularly the idea that economic development and population growth are parts of God's plan for humans and will therefore have positive effects. This maneuver assumes that the claims of cornucopian economics are uncontested truth. In fact, these claims are highly contested among social scientists.

Cornucopianism is part of a larger constellation of economic theory hailing the virtues of free markets. Much of this theory was developed at the University of Chicago Economics Department (the Chicago school). Chicago school icon Milton Friedman was a major advocate of Julian Simon's ideas and wrote "an appreciation" for the second edition of Simon's book *The Ultimate Resource*.⁶⁹ Although it's influential in the broader field of economics, free market economic theory has been largely dismissed by other social science fields. Psychologists have argued that its "rational choice" view of human decision making is inaccurate, while sociologists have criticized the lack of attention to the social structures in which economic activity takes place. These critics charge that free market economic theory is based on simplistic models that have little empirical support. Some have even suggested that the Chicago school has a quasi-religious quality about it.⁷⁰

In addition, a number of critiques have been aimed specifically at cornucopian economics. The sociologist Michael Bell lists three common critiques of the work of Julian Simon. The first is that Simon's picture of human progress ignores social inequality. As Bell points out,

Although the lives of many have improved, the percentage of the world's people who live in poverty, facing hunger and malnutrition throughout their lives, hasn't declined all that much in the last 50 years. The sheer number living in poverty has doubled. It is true that even the desperately poor are generally living longer, in part because of medical and other technological improvements, but life expectancy is still very uneven across the world.⁷¹

The second critique challenges Simon's claim that larger populations mean more brainpower to work out problems:

Innovativeness depends on social circumstances that encourage creative thinking, such as democratic discussion and a good educational system, not mere numbers of people. . . . Also, the kind of improvements that Simon looks to are mainly high-tech. But the bulk of population growth currently is taking place among those who do not have the educational backgrounds to contribute to high-tech solutions.⁷²

Bell's third critique is that Simon is overly optimistic about the ability of technology to solve scarcity problems by creating substitutes: "But will technology always come to the rescue in time to prevent serious problems? This question is particularly germane as we encounter limits in resources that seem less substitutable, such as fresh water, clean air, land for agriculture, and habitat for biodiversity."⁷³

The political scientist Leigh Raymond provides an empirical test and critique of the cornucopian view that economic growth will improve the environment in his article "Economic Growth as Environmental Policy? Reconsidering the Environmental Kuznets Curve." The Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) is the hypothesized relationship between economic growth and environmental damage/improvement. It is an inverted U-shaped curve that posits that while economic growth is initially damaging to the environment, further growth leads to superior environmental quality once per capita income rises beyond a specific threshold. Its name derives from the fact that it mirrors a similar relationship between income inequality and per capita income first hypothesized by the economist Simon Kuznets. To test the EKC model, Raymond made use of data collected for a project called the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI). "As a comprehensive summary of environmental quality and conditions in over 140 nations, the ESI provides a number of useful new dependent variables for a detailed discussion of the relationship between economic growth and environmental impact."⁷⁴ Raymond's analysis suggests that the EKC model is mostly inaccurate:

Thus, the preceding analysis of the ESI data confirms many of the objections to using the EKC model as a basis for public policy. Besides being a reduced-form model with uncertain mechanisms for causality, it is also apparent from these results that the relationship indeed holds only for limited types of environmental impacts. The few true EKC curves that

emerge from the data all have relatively high turning points where environmental quality begins to improve, indicating that many environmental benefits associated with economic growth may be too little, too late. . . . In short, there is little in this analysis that should make anyone confident that nations can indeed “grow” their way out of their national and international environmental dilemmas.⁷⁵

Given its dubious nature, cornucopian economics can't provide empirical proof for the claims of dominion theology. This situation isn't surprising. As we've discussed in previous chapters, using science to verify any system of theology is a dicey affair. Moreover, the Cornwall Alliance's dominion theology, like other Christian Right projects, is based on a creationist worldview that is antithetical to real science. Attempts to authenticate this theology were doomed from the start. Of course, none of this matters to Cornwall Alliance leaders. In a pattern of selective skepticism reminiscent of the ex-gay movement, they pretend that cornucopian economics is uncontested truth even as they dismiss the claims of mainstream climate science as unsubstantiated.

Still More Fair-Weather Postmodernists

We saw in chapter 1 that intelligent design proponents are committed to a typical evangelical style of modernism, one that combines Enlightenment thought with commitment to the Bible, resulting in the belief that the Bible and (good) science confirm each other and together lead to absolute truth. Yet the intelligent design movement also uses postmodernist rhetoric, which undermines the authority of science, when it's useful for attacking evolution. Complicating matters further, Phillip E. Johnson wrote at least one essay castigating postmodern theories of science. We find a similar love-hate relationship with postmodernism among Cornwall Alliance leaders.

Cornwall Alliance leaders' commitment to the evangelical style of modernism is clear in their early documents, which slide effortlessly between alleged scientific facts and biblical verses. E. Calvin Beisner makes this perspective explicit in a 2013 article posted on the Cornwall Alliance website titled “Can Faith and Science Cooperate? A Meteorologist Appeals to Scripture about Global Warming.” In this article Beisner

attempts to defend the meteorologist and Cornwall Alliance member Anthony J. Sadar's practice of citing the Bible as support for his understanding of anthropogenic global warming. Beisner claims that he'll do this by "explaining the real relationship between religious sources and scientific understanding."⁷⁶ Beisner begins by drawing on philosophical arguments to assert that religious beliefs aren't fundamentally different from assent to scientific propositions:

Notice that believing a mathematical proposition, a chemical proposition, a historical proposition, or a religious/theological proposition differs not as different mental acts but solely in the sorts of propositions believed. Consequently, belief in God and belief in global warming are the same sort of act—assent to the proposition that God exists and that the earth is getting warmer.⁷⁷

From there he cites the apologist Nancy Pearcey and the chemist Charles Thaxton, two figures from the intelligent design movement, to argue that "the biblical worldview and no other could and did give birth to science."⁷⁸

Finally, Beisner uses these two points to assert that the Bible is a valid source of data for evaluating the state of the environment:

Assent to the proposition that raising atmospheric carbon-dioxide concentration from 27 to 54 thousandths of a percent will warm the earth enough to cause grave harm to humanity and the rest of life on earth is belief, faith. Assent to the proposition that a wise, faithful, powerful God so designed the earth's climate system that it is not so fragile is also belief, faith. Neither is scientifically privileged. Neither is philosophically privileged. Each must seek its support from a variety of sources, whether divine propositional revelation (the Bible) or divine natural revelation (the creation). And no historically or philosophically informed understanding of the methods of science can exclude Biblical propositions from the evidence to be considered.⁷⁹

Beisner's aim is not to lower science to the level of mere opinion but to raise the Bible (as interpreted by conservative evangelicals) to the level of scientific evidence. It's not surprising that he uses arguments

from the intelligent design movement, as his project is reminiscent of Phillip E. Johnson's "theistic realism."

Yet, like Johnson, Beisner and other Cornwall Alliance leaders borrow from the postmodernist playbook in an effort to deconstruct their scientific opponents—in this case, mainstream climate science. As we've discussed, Cornwall Alliance leaders dismiss the scientific credibility of mainstream climate scientists, who supposedly are biased by a search for funding, a lack of courage to dissent from the majority, and pro-environmentalist politics. This mirrors the postmodern critique of the objectivity of science. They also rely on Thomas Kuhn's concept of "paradigm shift" to argue that the current pessimistic thinking about global warming will soon be replaced by the more optimistic perspective embraced by the Cornwall Alliance. Again, we see a parallel with intelligent design proponents, who see themselves as possessing the future dominant paradigm in biology.

The sociologist Laurel Kearns makes this same observation about the broad (religious and secular) climate change denial movement in her 2007 essay "Cooking the Truth: Faith, Science, the Market, and Global Warming":

Advanced not just by scholars in various fields, but also by nuclear activists, environmentalists, feminists, and postcolonial critics, [the postmodern critique of science's objectivity] takes on the inherent subjectivity and belief systems or paradigms that shape scientific research and the interpretation of its results. Frequently, as Sandra Harding, and before her, Thomas Kuhn, have noted, scientists make assumptions that reflect the dominant cultural assumptions, such that research on only white men is taken to provide a definitive picture of universal, or "human," health. [*Wall Street Journal* writer James] Schlesinger draws upon this critique of science to undermine the authority of climate change science by citing the examples of Galileo and Copernicus to prove that the dominant scientific view is not always "right."⁸⁰

There's more to the story. With the Resisting the Green Dragon campaign, the Cornwall Alliance has done something more audacious than anything attempted by intelligent design—it has accused its scientific opponents of abandoning traditional science and embracing postmod-

ern deconstruction. To understand why this claim is not even remotely believable, we need to consider one of the basic insights of sociology: social groups of all kinds attempt to increase their status. Scientific fields are no exception. But the goal of postmodern deconstruction is to *decrease* the status of science. While an individual scientist may “go rogue” and embrace postmodernism, it’s inconceivable that an entire scientific field would do so.

The University of Delaware climatologist David Legates presented the preliminary version of this claim about climate science in DVD session 6, which is titled “Putting Out the Dragon’s Fire on Global Warming.” After presenting alleged flaws in mainstream climate science, including the inaccuracy of computer models, he asks how the field got to this point.

Well, we got here because science as you and I probably learned it is changing. It’s no longer what we call “normal science.” We didn’t call it “normal science.” We called it “science.” But now it’s called “post-normal science.” And the idea of post-normal science is that things have changed. In the olden days science was looking for truth and order in the natural world. We looked for facts. Facts drove your assessment of risks. Risks drove what policy changes you were expected to apply. . . . Nowadays it’s all different.

To substantiate this claim, Legates presents a slide quoting Mike Hulme, whom he identifies as a professor of climate change at the University of East Anglia (Norwich, England). The slide contains the heading “Post-Normal Science.” Underneath this it reads, “‘Normal’ science assumes science can find truth and that truth-based policy will then follow.” Following this is an italicized quote attributed to Hulme: “What matters about climate change is not whether we can predict the future with some desired level of certainty and accuracy . . . we need to see how we can use the idea of climate change to rethink how we take forward our political, social, economic and personal projects over the decades to come.” The quote comes from Hulme’s book *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, which Legates never indicates. Legates implies but never states

that Hulme embraces the concept of “post-normal science” for climate science.

Legates then offers a second quote from Hulme, again on a slide with the heading “Post-Normal Science”: “Because the idea of climate change is so plastic, it can be deployed across many of our human projects and can even serve many of our psychological, ethical, and *spiritual* needs.”⁸¹ Legates then comments further. “Spiritual needs? Science? It wasn’t supposed to be that way. Apparently now it is. That’s the world of post-normal science. It is no longer simply advocacy science. You don’t pick the facts to serve your needs. Science is there as a means to an end.”

In sum, Legates uses quotes from Mike Hulme in an attempt to prove that climate science has shifted from “normal science” to “post-normal science” and in the process has abandoned the pursuit of facts for various other human goals. This is not fundamentally different from earlier Cornwall Alliance critiques of the alleged lack of objectivity of climate science. However, in January 2013 Beisner took Legates’s arguments to the next level in a lecture titled “Public School Science Standards: Political or Pure?” delivered to the Annual Educational Policy Conference of the Constitutional Coalition.

Beisner devotes the first half of his lecture to critiques of Darwinism, drawing from arguments developed by the intelligent design movement. In the second half he turns to climate scientists who believe in catastrophic anthropogenic global warming (CAGW), whom he labels “those who intentionally politicize science—the proponents and practitioners of post-normal science.”⁸² He then offers his definition of post-normal science:

Post-normal science is essentially postmodern deconstruction—a literary theory, developed in the humanities, that holds that language doesn’t convey meaning or truth but only projects power. . . . Post-normal science is postmodern deconstruction applied to sciences. For post-normal science, scientific procedures—observations, hypothesis, experimentation, testing, computer modeling, even peer review for publication—are undertaken not to discover truth about the world but to project power, to further an agenda. Consequently, post-normal scientists go through the motions of what we all think of as science, but only for show.⁸³

Beisner goes on to identify Mike Hulme as “one of the world’s foremost proponents of post-normal science” and argues that he is central to the “climate alarmist movement.”⁸⁴ Beisner then adds, “Much as we might disagree with Hulme’s views on CAGW and reject his post-normal science, though, we should be thankful for his candor.”⁸⁵ He then presents five quotes from Hulme’s *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* that are meant to substantiate Beisner’s claims.

To understand the flaws in Legates and Beisner’s portrayal of climate science, we need to begin by examining what Hulme’s book really says. Hulme affirms the value of traditional scientific research methodology, and he maintains that belief in anthropogenic climate change is based on empirical data. However, he also writes that in addition to the physical phenomenon of climate change, there is the “idea of climate change” that exists in the social realm:

As we have slowly, and at times reluctantly, realised that humanity has become an active agent in the reshaping of physical climates around the world, so our cultural, social, political and ethical practices are reinterpreting what climate change means. Far from simply being a change in physical climates—a change in the sequences of weather experienced in given places—climate change has become an idea that now travels well beyond its origins in the natural sciences. And as this idea meets new cultures on its travels and encounters the worlds of politics, economics, popular culture, commerce and religion—often through the interposing role of the media—climate change takes on new meanings and serves new purposes.⁸⁶

Legates and Beisner accuse Hulme of replacing the scientific with the social and religious, but in fact Hulme is advocating a both/and approach. Legates and Beisner also take Hulme’s statements about the “idea of climate change” and falsely argue that these represent Hulme’s views on the physical phenomenon of climate change.

Now let’s turn to the real post-normal science. The term comes from Silvio O. Funtowicz and Jerome R. Ravetz’s 1993 article “Science for the Post-Normal Age.” The authors focus on the social role of science, particularly the ways it informs public policy. The authors write that the challenge of policy issues related to risk and the environment has led to a new

type of science: “In this, uncertainty is not banished but is managed and values are not presupposed but made explicit. The model of scientific argument is not a formalized deduction but an interactive dialogue.”⁸⁷ This new type of science exists alongside earlier models, rather than replacing them. “One way of distinguishing among the different sorts of research is by their goals: applied science is ‘mission-oriented’; professional consultancy is ‘client-serving’; and post-normal science is ‘issue-driven.’ These three can be contrasted with core science—the traditional ‘pure’ or ‘basic’ research—which is ‘curiosity-motivated.’”⁸⁸ Significantly, the authors describe post-normal science as “an alternative to post-modernity” rather than a type of postmodern deconstruction of science.⁸⁹

Hulme cites Funtowicz and Ravetz’s essay and proposes that their concept of post-normal science is appropriate for climate change:

In cases such as climate change, then, science must take on a different form. As well as seeking to observe, theorise and model in the quest to establish “facts”—to formulate what is known—science must pay much more attention to establishing and communicating what is unknown, or at best what is uncertain. In addition to striving to eliminate bias and prejudice from the practice of science—to adhere to Merton’s norm of “disinterestedness”—scientists must also recognise and reflect upon their own values and upon the collective values of their colleagues. These values and world views continually seep into their activities as scientists and inflect the knowledge that is formed. The goal of “disinterestedness” can still be aspired to, whilst simultaneously and crucially recognising that, in failing to achieve it, scientific knowledge will inevitably take on a different character.⁹⁰

Again, we should note the both/and character of Hulme’s approach to science that involves retaining the traditional pursuit of facts. One may legitimately take issue with Hulme’s arguments in *Why We Disagree about Climate Change*, but it’s not accurate to accuse him of being a postmodern deconstructionist or of seeking to replace empirical research with politics. Legates and Beisner are resorting to the straw person fallacy, attacking an opponent that they themselves have created.

Even if Hulme were a raging postmodernist, Legates and Beisner’s characterization of climate science would still not be valid, since Hulme

is only one individual in a sizeable field. Legates and Beisner both claim that Hulme is representative of the larger field of climate science, but neither of them offers any compelling evidence for this. This closely resembles Phillip E. Johnson's attempt to make Richard Dawkins representative of evolutionary biology. Indeed, Beisner's comment that "we should be thankful for [Hulme's] candor" parallels Johnson's argument that Dawkins says publicly what other biologists say in private. Thus, in addition to the straw person fallacy, Legates and Beisner also rely on the hasty generalization fallacy, drawing conclusions about a population (climate scientists) based on a sample that's not large enough (one person).

To recap this section, the Cornwall Alliance's contradictory relationship to postmodernism initially paralleled that of the intelligent design movement. However, Legates and Beisner added a new twist by making the completely unbelievable claim that climate scientists have embraced postmodern deconstruction, offering "evidence" based on dual fallacies. Once again, Beisner and his colleagues have shown themselves to be virtuosi of the paranoid style.

Beisner's "Total" Fabrication

Beisner's straw person portrayal of climate scientists as postmodern deconstructionists is matched in absurdity only by his portrayal of environmentalists as totalitarians. Let's review the arguments behind the latter claim: (1) the word "environment" is derived from the French word for "surroundings"; (2) the surroundings include everything; (3) "everything" is a synonym for "total"; (4) totalitarianism is related to the word "total"; (5) therefore, environmentalists are totalitarians.

In any other context this would look more like an attempt at humor than a serious argument. Unfortunately, Beisner and his colleagues are serious. So let's analyze what specifically is wrong. The fundamental flaw in Beisner's reasoning is a gross oversimplification of the rules of etymology, the derivations of words. A word can relate to its source(s) in a variety of potential ways, including through the use of analogy. However, in Beisner's world a word must relate to its source through a literal equality of meaning. Environmentalists are concerned with literally everything. Being concerned with the total (in this case, the ecological

whole) makes one literally a totalitarian. To illustrate the problem with this approach, consider the word “ghostwriter.” This is a person who writes for another while their identity is hidden. The ghostwriter is invisible in a manner analogous to a ghost or spirit of a deceased person. Following Beisner’s logic, however, a ghostwriter would have to be a literal ghost who writes. Fortunately for ghostwriters everywhere, being dead is not a requirement for the job. Neither is there any reason to believe that environmentalists are totalitarians.

Or consider what happens when you go through a checkout line and the cashier declares, “Your total comes to . . .” They just *totaled* your bill. Are cashiers totalitarians? In Beisner’s world the answer would be yes. In the real world the answer would be no.

Beisner continues his wordplay-as-evidence routine later in the same DVD session while commenting on Al Gore’s 1992 book *Earth in the Balance*. The final chapter of the book outlines a “Global Marshall Plan” so save the environment. One facet of the plan is a program to increase the amount of climate data, preferably in a way that facilitates public education: “Specifically, I propose a program involving as many countries as possible that will use schoolteachers and their students to monitor the entire earth daily, or at least those portions of the land area that can be covered by participating nations.”⁹¹ As Gore makes clear, the plan involves voluntary participation—notice the reference to “participating nations,” which implies that some nations are not involved. However, in Beisner’s paranoid imagination the plan is evidence of a totalitarian conspiracy:

[Gore] said that we needed this Global Marshall Plan to prevent global warming. And he described how we would enlist all the teachers in all the schools around the world to assign their students projects to gather data that could be collected and used to help us monitor what was happening with the climate around the world. Enlist. Really? You know, those students are free people, are they? And yet, they’ve just been conscripted, haven’t they? They have just been conscripted. Their liberty has been threatened. The teachers have been conscripted into a particular agenda.

Beisner uses the word “enlist” in a way that suggests that it appears in the text of the book. In fact, it doesn’t. His purpose is to create a verbal

steppingstone to get to the word “conscript.” This is an even more problematic move, given that “enlist” and “conscript” are not synonyms but antonyms. “Enlist” means to secure voluntary service, while “conscript” means to secure service by force. He’s not simply bending the rules of language, he’s disregarding them altogether.

Beisner and his colleagues are clearly dedicated to the belief that environmentalists aim to bring about a totalitarian world government. So strong is this belief that even crude language tricks like Beisner’s are treated as convincing evidence. Such is the power of the paranoid worldview.

Conclusion

Just as the intelligent design movement insists on a false choice between Christianity and evolution, so the evangelical right’s Cornwall Alliance insists on a false choice between Christianity and environmentalism. Having lost the fight for centrist evangelical leaders, the Cornwall Alliance appealed directly to the evangelical rank and file through its Resisting the Green Dragon campaign. Alliance leaders made their case against environmentalism in the most effective way they know—by employing the paranoid style. If paranoid-style rhetoric were an Olympic sport, the Cornwall Alliance would score a 10 for creativity and a 10 for execution, handily beating its “competition” in the intelligent design, ex-gay, and conservative bioethics movements. Certainly the qualities of “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy” with which Hofstadter identified the paranoid style are here in abundance.⁹² Unfortunately, these aren’t games. They’re serious attempts to influence public opinion and ultimately government policy.

The Cornwall Alliance’s hypocrisy is staggering. Alliance members accuse climate scientists of chasing money and environmentalists of being wealthy elitists. Meanwhile, they fund their projects with money from the deep pockets of the fossil fuel industry. They accuse climate scientists of “politicized” science. Meanwhile, they enlist the evangelical right’s political machine in their crusade against environmentalism. They accuse climate scientists of lacking the empirical data to support their claims. Meanwhile, they uncritically accept the dubious claims of cornucopian economists. They accuse the designers of climate computer

models of being detached from reality. Meanwhile, they invent implausible stories of postmodernist climate scientists and totalitarian environmentalists. They accuse environmentalists of idolatrous worship of the Earth. Meanwhile, they worship at the altar of free market capitalism.

The Cornwall Alliance is a product of the evangelical right, but centrist evangelical leaders are largely responsible for its success and their own failure to convince rank-and-file evangelicals to accept the reality of anthropogenic global warming. As we saw in the previous chapters, centrist evangelical leaders have encouraged skepticism of real science, uncritical readings of the Bible, and the paranoid-style search for adversaries. Their decision to embrace the findings of climate science was too little, too late.

