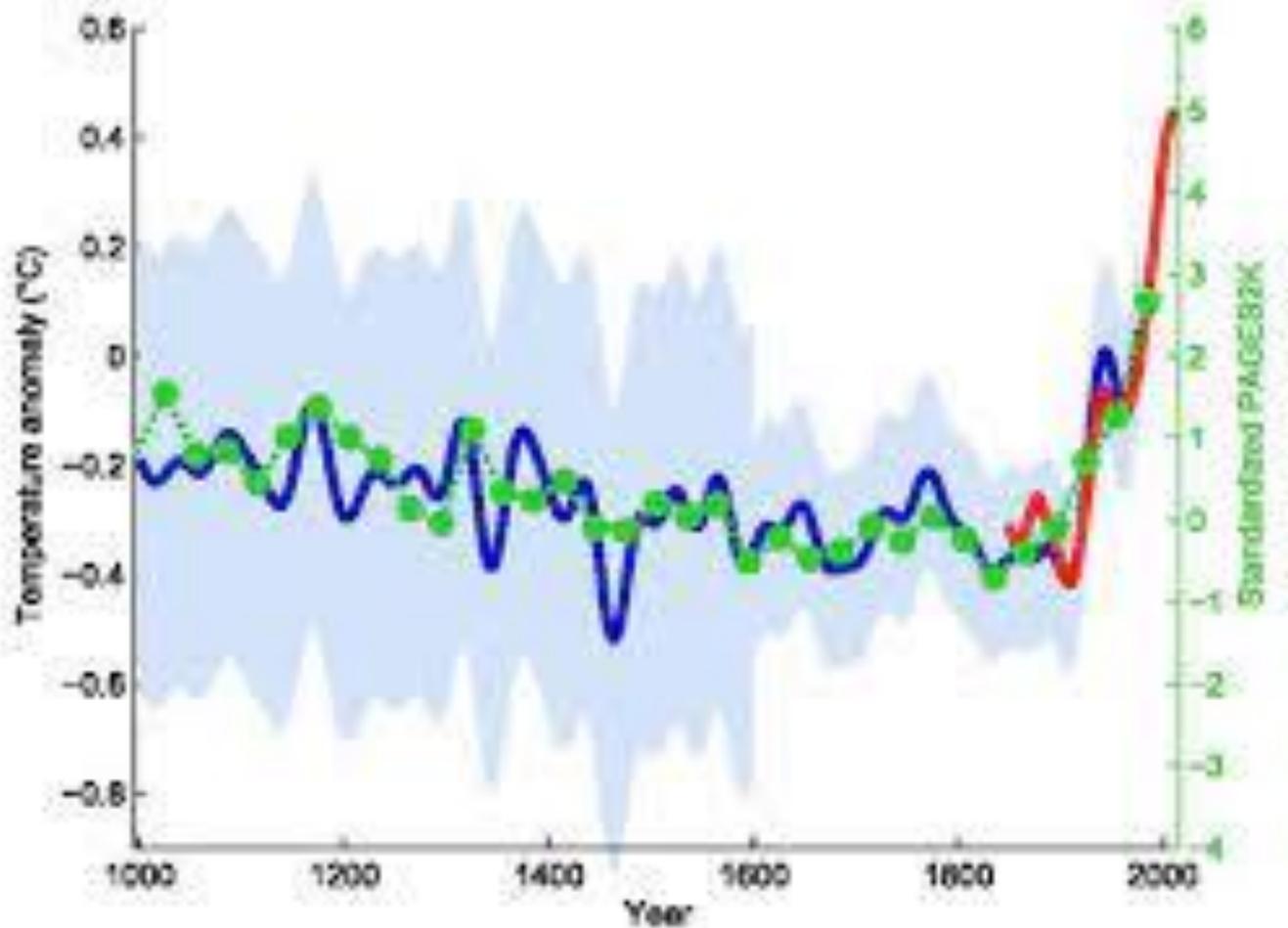


Will *Homo Sapiens* Be Able to Take Measures to Stop Global Warming and Save Themselves?

A review by John M. Repp of Michael E. Mann's [The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet](#) (New York: Public Affairs, Hachette Book Group, 2021)

Michael E. Mann is a climate scientist who, with colleagues, published the so-called “hockey stick” graph in 1998. It was a graph of the steep rise of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere since the industrial revolution, as seen below. There the red trend line on the right is going up and shows carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and is correlated with the rise of temperature anomalies, as shown on the left side scale in fractions of centigrade degrees. This graph became the center of a huge controversy, but Mann survived the battles. The “hockey stick” has been confirmed by science. Carbon dioxide traps heat in our atmosphere; the more carbon dioxide, the more heat is trapped.



Most people have heard that the fossil fuel companies ran decades long public relations campaigns (PR) to deny **any** climate change due to the burning of fossil fuel, which releases large amounts of carbon dioxide. But by 2021, most people agree that there is climate change. All over the world people have experienced super storms, wildfires, droughts, floods, and heat waves. This has caused people to agree with scientists that something is wrong. In the wake of that change, the fossil fuel companies have had to change their PR. What the fossil fuel companies are now saying to delay action, Mann calls “the new climate war”.

One method of the new PR strategy is “deflection” as seen in focusing on an individual’s **climate footprint**. The individual is told to look at her lifestyle, the car she drives, how much she flies, and how much energy she uses. The idea then is for the individual to change her lifestyle, use less stuff, so her carbon footprint is smaller. Mann points out that **the energy and environmental policy of the government is ignored** in this approach. The idea of the individual’s carbon footprint was invented by a PR firm to change the subject. We need both individual lifestyle changes and smart governmental policy to solve this problem.

What policies? Mann discusses a carbon tax as well as the cap-and-trade of emissions permits. We need to understand that the use of fossil fuels is currently subsidized because the waste products, the CO₂ and other gases, are dumped into the atmosphere without the companies who sell the product or people who use the product having to pay a fee. When we must go to the local dump with garbage or construction waste, we must pay for what we dump. Who is going to pay those costs? Not the oil companies, if they can help it. And they get their subsidies through the tax system as well.

In another form of “deflection”, some of the companies are saying they will be carbon neutral by a certain date in the future. But look at the fine print, Mann writes. The companies are only counting what the companies produce in their operations, not what is spewed into the air when their product is burned.

Mann uses the term “inactivists” throughout the book. These are the people that understand there is climate change, but don’t think it will be much of a problem, or don’t think there is anything we could do. This is horrendous problem. This position he calls “[doomism](#).” Doomists like to point to the positive feedback loops, like the melting of permafrost. As the temperature rises, permafrost melts and releases more methane which is a strong greenhouse gas.

But Mann says over and over that we can still stop global warming from becoming an existential crisis. We can put a price on carbon. Specifically, we can withdraw the subsidies to the fossil fuel companies, private and national in the tax system. In turn, we can subsidize renewables. He does not think we must get rid of market economics to solve the problem.

What are the fossil fuel companies doing now these days? According to the [20 May 2022, North American edition of The Guardian Weekly](#), “Oil and gas majors are planning scores of vast projects that threaten to shatter the 1.5 C climate goal.” The story is the result of a special investigation by *The Guardian Weekly*. A dozen fossil fuel companies are planning on spending \$387 million daily to drill and pump oil and gas through 2030. These are huge projects called **carbon bombs**: it is “an oil or gas project that will result in at least a billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions over its lifetime.”

It appears the fossil fuel companies are counting on future implementation of geoengineering projects like shooting sulfur dioxide particles into the stratosphere which would block out some sunlight and cause cooling or dumping iron filings into the ocean which would cause more seaweed to grow which will in turn absorb more carbon dioxide. Also touted are new technologies like direct carbon capture and new nuclear power plants that have not

been tested and developed at scale. Or the executives and investors just don't care about the rest of us and are doing only what the law and their investors ask of them: that they maximize the profits of their companies.

For the fossil fuel companies, the oil and gas reserves that they have located but not gotten out of the ground and refined are assets that increase the value of their companies. The current size of the fossil fuel sector's reserves is so large that if just 60% of these assets are extracted, we would pass the agreed upon the 1.5-degree centigrade limit. And they want to find more reserves!

Even [The Seattle Times](#) of June 3, 2022, printed an article on the front page explaining that the greenhouse gases are at a record high. I quote: *"The amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has shot past a key milestone — more than 50% higher than pre-industrial times — and is at levels not seen since millions of years ago when Earth was a hothouse ocean-inundated planet, federal scientists announced Friday."*

And now for a bit of good news: Mann writes that as soon as we humans stop the increase in greenhouse gases and achieve **net zero** (the amount of carbon dioxide humans cause to be emitted balanced by the amount absorbed by natural processes like photosynthesis and rock decay), the atmosphere and weather will stabilize within a few years. Likewise, in the new book [Regeneration: Ending the climate crisis in one generation](#). (New York: Penguin Books, 2021) by Paul Hawken, Hawken quotes the International Panel on Climate Change report of 2020: "if we bring carbon dioxide [emissions] down to net zero, the warming will level off...within a decade or two.... This is a remarkable change in the scientific consensus." (p.9).

We know what to do. [We have over 80 proven methods of drawing down carbon dioxide](#). And with Mann, we can subsidize renewable power and withdraw the subsidies from fossil fuels. And with Hawken, we can pass a farm bill subsidizing the best regenerative agricultural practices and plant billions of trees, plant millions of acres of hemp, and farm kelp like the Chinese are doing.

We need the political will and to get that will, in my opinion, require that our current political system be reformed. When several Supreme Court decisions, the best known is [Citizen's United](#), declared money in political campaigns to be like "free speech", [bribery for politicians became legal](#). Mann does not get into these aspects of climate change policy.

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