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## More on Climategate

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The Atlantic 17 August 2010

by Clive Crook

Joe Romm tells me to "[retract \[my\] libelous misinformation and apologize to Michael Mann](#)" <sup>[1]</sup>. He is complaining about my suggestion that the various inquiries supposedly vindicating the Climategate emailers have [further diminished the credibility of climate science](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, rather than restoring it.

I think the only issue of substance in his complaint is the charge that I failed to notice that there were two Penn State investigations of Mann, not one, and that both had cleared the accused. Of course I was aware of the form of the inquiry, though I concede that the post was not as clear about the two phases as it should have been.

There was one inquiry with two stages. (Read the Penn state reports [here](#) <sup>[3]</sup> and [here](#) <sup>[4]</sup>.) In my opinion, the first stage does not deserve to be called an investigation. It consisted of little more than a review of the emails and interviews with Mann. I would characterize the result as a cursory dismissal of the charges. The second phase, which looked more carefully at one of the allegations, has a better claim to be called an investigation, but still, I think, falls way short of what would be required to convince a fair-minded reader that the reports were adequate.

I wrote: "Three of four allegations are dismissed out of hand at the outset: the inquiry announces that, for 'lack of credible evidence', it will not even investigate them." I should have written: "Three of four allegations are cursorily dismissed; concerning these, no proper investigation was even attempted." I also wrote: "Mann is asked if the allegations (well, one of them) are true, and says no." The words in parentheses were wrong, since Mann was indeed asked to explain himself in relation to the first three allegations. I should have written: "Mann is asked if the allegations are true, and says no."

You be the judge. Read the reports and see if you find the inquiry convincing. I'd draw your attention especially to the finding that deals with "the trick to hide the decline". On this, the first report says:

While a perception has been created in the weeks after the CRU emails were made public that Dr. Mann has engaged in the suppression or falsification of data, there is no credible evidence that he ever did so, and certainly not while at Penn State. In fact to the contrary, in instances that have been focused upon by some as indicating falsification of data, for example in the use of a "trick" to manipulate

the data, this is explained as a discussion among Dr. Jones and others including Dr. Mann about how best to put together a graph for a World Meteorological Organization (WMO) report. They were not falsifying data; they were trying to construct an understandable graph for those who were not experts in the field. The so-called "trick" was nothing more than a statistical method used to bring two or more different kinds of data sets together in a legitimate fashion by a technique that has been reviewed by a broad array of peers in the field.

Well. It seems to me, and I dare say to other open-minded readers, that the talk in the emails of a "trick to hide the decline" raised the reasonable suspicion that a trick had been used to hide the decline. "[T]o the contrary," says the report. The "trick" has no connotation of trickery, but merely denotes a "statistical method". Striving to keep a straight face, let us accept this. What about "hide"? Is it all right to employ a "statistical method to hide the decline"? Why was anybody trying to "hide the decline"? (One response might be: because the data which showed the decline were unreliable. Fair enough, but then this rather casts doubt on the whole series, doesn't it, not just on the part that shows a decline?)

I am not competent to discuss the science, and do not pretend to be. But here is what I see when I read the "trick" email and then the report. An explanation is required. Mann's account strains credulity, yet is readily accepted. No contrary opinions are sought or heard. On this basis the report finds "no substance" in the criticism.

Romm is entirely satisfied by this rigorous "investigation". Fine. I disagree with him.

Two other points. First, as it happens I do not suspect Mann or the others of outright scientific fraud -- by which I mean the destruction or falsification of data. According to what I read, for sensible critics of Mann and "The Team", that is not the issue. The argument is about the dangers of groupthink, a preference for data that point in the right direction, efforts to deflect or neutralize opposing points of view, and the selective packaging of findings for public consumption (which is where "the trick to hide the decline" comes in). It seems to me the Climategate emails give ample grounds for concern on all those points, and none of the inquiries into the matter have dealt with these issues adequately.

Second, the evident fondness of climate-change activists for delegitimizing dissent and spinning the facts to make them more "understandable" is simply not working. Cap and trade just died for lack of public support. I think climate-change activists are partly to blame, as I argue in [this recent FT column](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. They are harming their own cause.

Romm exemplifies the tendency to the point of caricature. He delights in splenetic hyperventilation. This is his brand, so to speak. It goes down well with the faithful -- but persuading the faithful is not the challenge. He needs to convince the unconvinced. Operatic ranting is not, I would submit, likely to succeed.

Note how he responds when I say, "I think climate science points to a risk that the world needs to take seriously. I think energy policy should be intelligently directed towards mitigating this risk. I am for a carbon tax."

Uhh, Memo 1 to Crook: Those exact same words could have been written by Bjorn Lomborg (or even the CEO of ExxonMobil). They tell us absolutely nothing about where you stand on climate change.

Memo 2 to Crook: In case you and your magazine missed it, the big climate change policy Congress has been wrangling over for the last year and a half are cap-and-trade bills, not a carbon tax. Who cares whether you are for some unspecified and hence possibly meaningless carbon tax?

Supporting a carbon tax tells "us absolutely nothing about where you stand on climate change"? I'd say that borders on the unhinged. In any case, there is no capacity here to seek allies in the interests of better policy. Romm's absurd ferocity shuns that very segment of moderate opinion that needs to be brought round to the case for...a carbon tax. He and people like him are their own worst enemies.

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**Links**

[1] <http://climateprogress.org/2010/07/21/clive-crook-the-atlantic-michael-mann/>

[2] <http://blogs.ft.com/crookblog/2010/07/climategate-and-the-big-green-lie/>

[3] [http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/Findings\\_Mann\\_Inquiry.pdf](http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/Findings_Mann_Inquiry.pdf)

[4] [http://live.psu.edu/fullimg/userpics/10026/Final\\_Investigation\\_Report.pdf](http://live.psu.edu/fullimg/userpics/10026/Final_Investigation_Report.pdf)

[5] <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/19abeff6-981c-11df-b218-00144feab49a.html>

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