

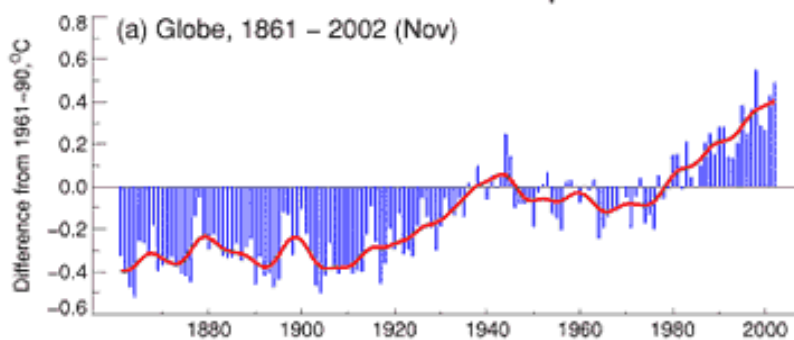
CO₂ and CH₄ are produced naturally, but the levels of both of these have been enhanced massively by human activity. That much is known and is easily measured.

Annually we produce about 25 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide. Of this about 15 billion tonnes are dissolved in the oceans and used by plants in photosynthesis, but the residual 10 billion tonnes add to the total atmospheric concentration. Methane is a natural decay product of rotting organic matter, but with intensive rearing of livestock, millions of cows gently breaking wind could yet be the end of us all!

What is quite clear is that our planet is going through a warm spell. 1998 was globally the warmest year ever recorded, and the day I write this it has been announced that 2002 came second. Indeed eight out of the ten warmest years ever recorded have occurred since 1990. There are two questions that remain. Firstly, is this a long term trend in our climate or just a short blip, and secondly is it caused by a readjustment of that thermal equilibrium resulting from increased greenhouse gas concentrations?

The answer to the first is that we just can't tell. We know the Earth's climate has gone through periods of dramatic change where man has not been involved. However the current change is so sudden and there is clear possible cause. Science will not be able to give an absolute answer to the second question but there is now a solid scientific consensus that human induced global warming is indeed taking place.

Annual land air and sea surface temperature anomalies



*This frightening graph speaks for itself.
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