

Scientific Reaction to Velikovsky - Symptomatic of Climate Science Debacle

By Professor Timothy Ball – September 2015

Many years ago, a colleague approached the President of the University with our plan to hold a conference on the ideas of [Immanuel Velikovsky](#). He angrily rejected the plan saying he would not allow anything on campus associated with that charlatan. The President was a physicist and Velikovsky had challenged prevailing scientific views.

In some ways, it doesn't matter whether Velikovsky was right or wrong. The problem was the reprehensible actions of the scientific community. His treatment holds many lessons for today's debate over climate change.

Complexity of the corruption by the few scientists who hijacked climate science is revealed by comparison. They quickly established their views as the prevailing 'truth' through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) by deliberately misusing climate science and also misusing basic science. They isolated anyone who challenged either part of their false science in the same way Velikovsky was marginalized.

Dogma Replaces Dogma

Western science and religion battled for hundreds of years. Many conflicts involved new ideas and their final victories were considered turning points in the fight for people's beliefs. In winning, science became more dogmatic than the religion it replaced.

Gradually the focus shifted from a conflict with religion to rejection of new ideas by practitioners of the prevailing scientific views.

Historically, new scientific ideas were vigorously resisted and their proponents attacked by religion. That comment is now true within science. Usually most people don't care or don't understand the significance of the new ideas. Copernicus put the Sun at the centre of our solar system but it doesn't matter for most as long as the sun rises and sets.

A critical change in the adoption and infiltration of ideas came with extension of government-controlled education. From kindergarten through university, it became indoctrination not education.

Graduation is allowed once you've demonstrated a grasp of the current 'truths'. Questioning those truths poses a threat to your assessment and even progress. The quandary is that this contradicts advancement of knowledge and understanding, especially of science. Consider the general reaction to Gore's [comment](#) about global warming theory that "the science is settled."

Rapid spread and lack of understanding of the anthropogenic global warming (AGW) theory occurred because it quickly became part of school curricula. This was exacerbated because knowledge of science is necessary, but the subject was mostly covered in social sciences. It reflects the political nature of the subject and resulted in extensive indoctrination of ignorance. Graduates of this ignorance now control education, science and politics at all levels.

The Velikovsky Affair

Velikovsky was a Russian medical doctor with a lifelong interest in providing possible explanations for events recorded in historic records. A multi-linguist, he read original works from several middle-eastern cultures. He was on sabbatical in the US researching a book when World War II began. He stayed and began producing works on what the establishment categorized as catastrophism. Putting him in that category is part of the attack on his ideas from mainstream scientists.

Consider the pejorative nature of this quote from [Wikipedia](#). “*Velikovsky began to develop the radical catastrophist cosmology and revised chronology theories for which he would become notorious.*” Why “radical” or “notorious”; these are judgmental adjectives used because he dared to suggest there is another interpretation of the evidence.

His views became problematic when Macmillan published *Worlds in Collision* in 1950. The book immediately became a best seller. There were several problems for establishment thinking.

- Catastrophic events were contrary to the prevailing philosophy of uniformitarianism.
- He was trained in medicine not geology or astronomy.
- He was Russian, a serious problem in the McCarthy era.
- He dared to suggest that historical records were of actual events – an idea problematic in climate science even today.
- Worse, he used the Bible as a source of evidence. Wikipedia comments again show the bias. “*Even before its appearance, the book was enveloped by furious controversy, when Harper’s Magazine published a highly positive feature on it, as did Reader’s Digest with what would today be called a creationist slant.*” Ah, the dreaded anti-science word creationism.
- He was not indoctrinated by formal education in academic science – the bastions of dogmatism and intellectual tunnel vision.
- His ideas did not conform to established astronomical views on planetary motion.
- He published his ideas in popular magazines and trade books that went directly to the public who might challenge official science.
- He followed success of *World’s in Collision* with another bestseller *Ages in Chaos*.
- His work was interdisciplinary at a time of specialization. Worse, it blended science with the humanities and the social sciences.

Velikovsky's story is fascinating, but my focus is on the reactions of the establishment, especially of [Harlow Shapley](#). He had a checkered career apparently shaped by his rigid thinking and personal animosities. After graduating from Princeton, he worked at the Mount Wilson Observatory, then Harvard College Observatories. He attended the *Institute on Religion in an Age of Science*, which is at best a most pointed title. He was influential in forming government funded science institutions including the National Academy of Sciences. The latter has an ignominious part in the global warming debacle.

Macmillan was the only publisher in history who surrendered a best seller at peak sales. Shapley denied any involvement in the action. Velikovsky subsequently exposed his role in a [letter](#) to the Harvard Crimson. Macmillan was vulnerable to Shapley's threats of curtailing academic textbooks because that was their major source of income. As with all these matters, the action is blameworthy, but the cover up compounds the error. Velikovsky discusses the events in *Stargazers and Gravediggers*.

Velikovsky's major ideas built on the claim that Earth has experienced natural global disasters throughout its history. The major cause of natural catastrophes was brushes with other objects in the solar system and beyond. It's probably thanks to Velikovsky that Walter and Luis Alvarez were able to propose the claim that a collision with an asteroid 65 million years ago led to extinction of dinosaurs. The father/son connection serendipitously allowed cross-discipline discussion between physics and geology. The intellectual isolation of specialization has undermined the ability to understand.

Science is the Ability to Predict

In the end, Velikovsky succeeded because he passed the ultimate test of science: the ability to predict. More important, they were in contradiction to prevailing views.

He made many and apparently, none is incorrect to date. The interesting one was the temperature of Venus which was almost double what the textbooks said.

The same textbooks that incorrectly use Venus as an example of runaway CO₂ induced Greenhouse Effect.

Failure of the University President to approve a conference on Velikovsky was symptomatic of the dogmatic, closed minds that pervade modern science.

The few scientists involved with the AGW debacle deliberately exploited and practiced that condition.

Their actions indicate they saw this as a battle, but it was against the truth and as Aeschylus said, "*In war, truth is the first casualty.*"