

Last Sunday's New York Times Magazine [story](#) about climate skeptic Freeman Dyson has me worried. For those readers who missed it, the profile is a largely favorable piece about Institute for Advanced Study scholar Dyson, best known for helping unite quantum and electrodynamic theory and for his belief that nuclear weapons are the world's greatest evil. Dyson has more recently turned his formidable intellectual powers to global warming and concluded that carbon dioxide accumulating in the atmosphere might be a good thing because it will help plants grow. He's also, according to the article, highly skeptical of modelling (he says that "the climate-studies people who work with models always tend to overestimate their models.")

Dyson is hardly the world's only climate skeptic but the Times article is particularly worrisome for several reasons. First, Dyson is "an Obama-loving, Bush-loathing liberal who has spent his life opposing American wars and fighting for the protection of natural resources." Second, Dyson is portrayed as wickedly smart and intellectually wide-ranging, making him "far more formidable than just the latest peevish right-wing climate change denier." And third, author Nicholas Dawidoff did an absolutely terrible job pressing back on Dyson's beliefs, instead portraying the debate as one where both sides "have the timbre of truth and the ring of potential plausibility."

Let's take just one of Dyson's claims, that climate scientists tend to overestimate their models. Nice claim except that to date climate scientists seem to have *underestimated* their models. Emissions are rising [more rapidly than predicted](#). [Sea levels](#) are rising faster than estimated. [Arctic ice](#), [permafrost](#) and [polar ice caps](#) are all melting more quickly than previously believed. There's no evidence that author Dawidoff knows any of this or that he pressed Dyson to square his claim about model overestimates with the facts on the ground.

Perhaps the favorable slant of the Dyson profile is all we can expect from a writer who specializes in baseball, [as Dawidoff does](#). But NY Times DotEarth blogger [Andrew Revkin](#) is now also praising Dyson as "one of a handful of scientists for whom ideological predispositions have no bearing on how they approach a technical question." Ironically, the Dyson profile ran on the same day as [Thomas Friedman's handwringing column](#) about how science shows that "climate change is happening faster and will bring bigger changes quicker than we anticipated just a few years ago." Maybe the Times thinks that Friedman somehow cancels out its irresponsible Dyson profile. I fear not, however.