The Carbon Cycle: Mineral Weathering

EES 3310/5310

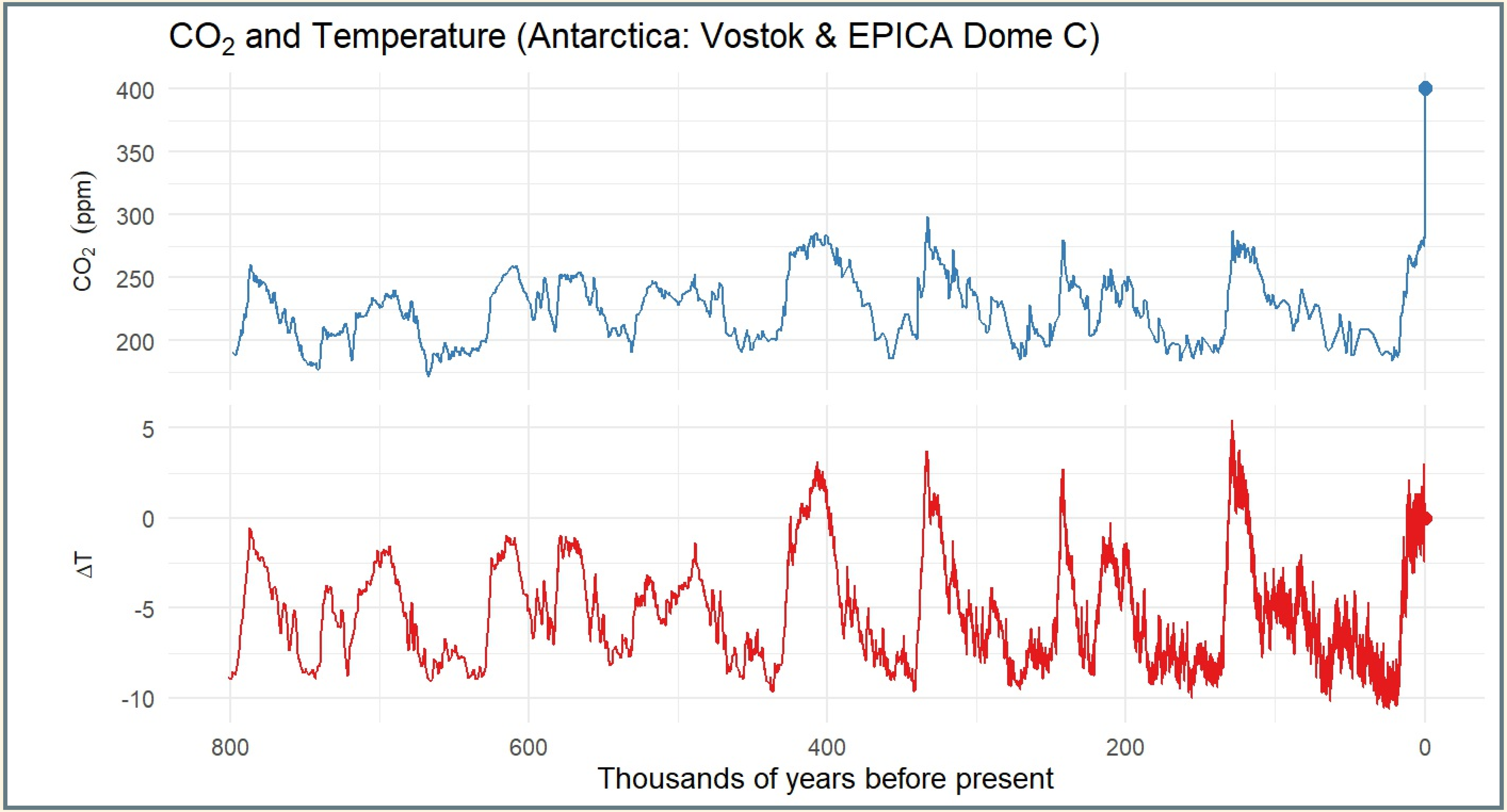
Global Climate Change

Jonathan Gilligan

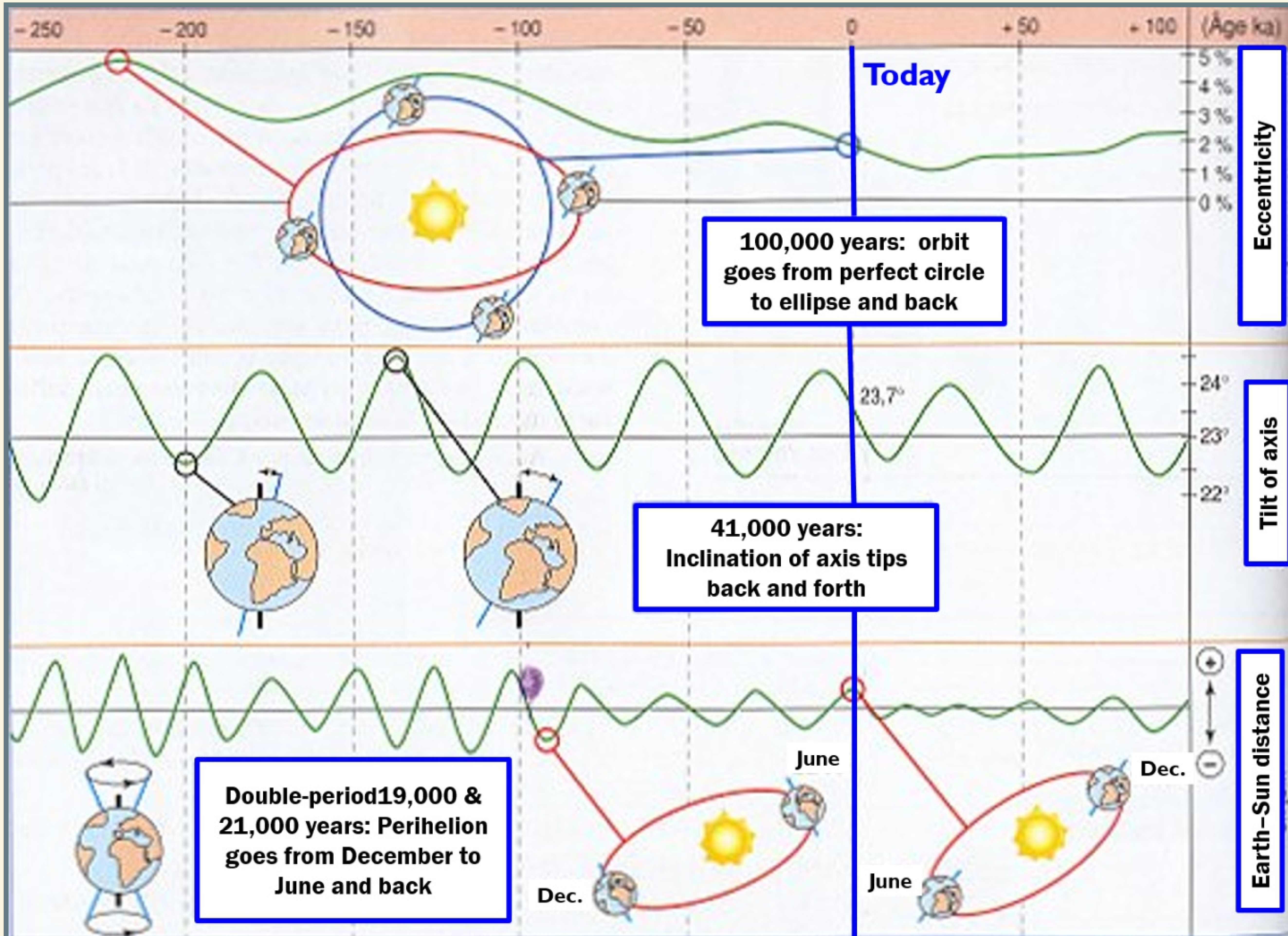
Class #11: Friday Sept. 14 2018

The Oceans Breathe: Ice Ages

The Oceans Breathe

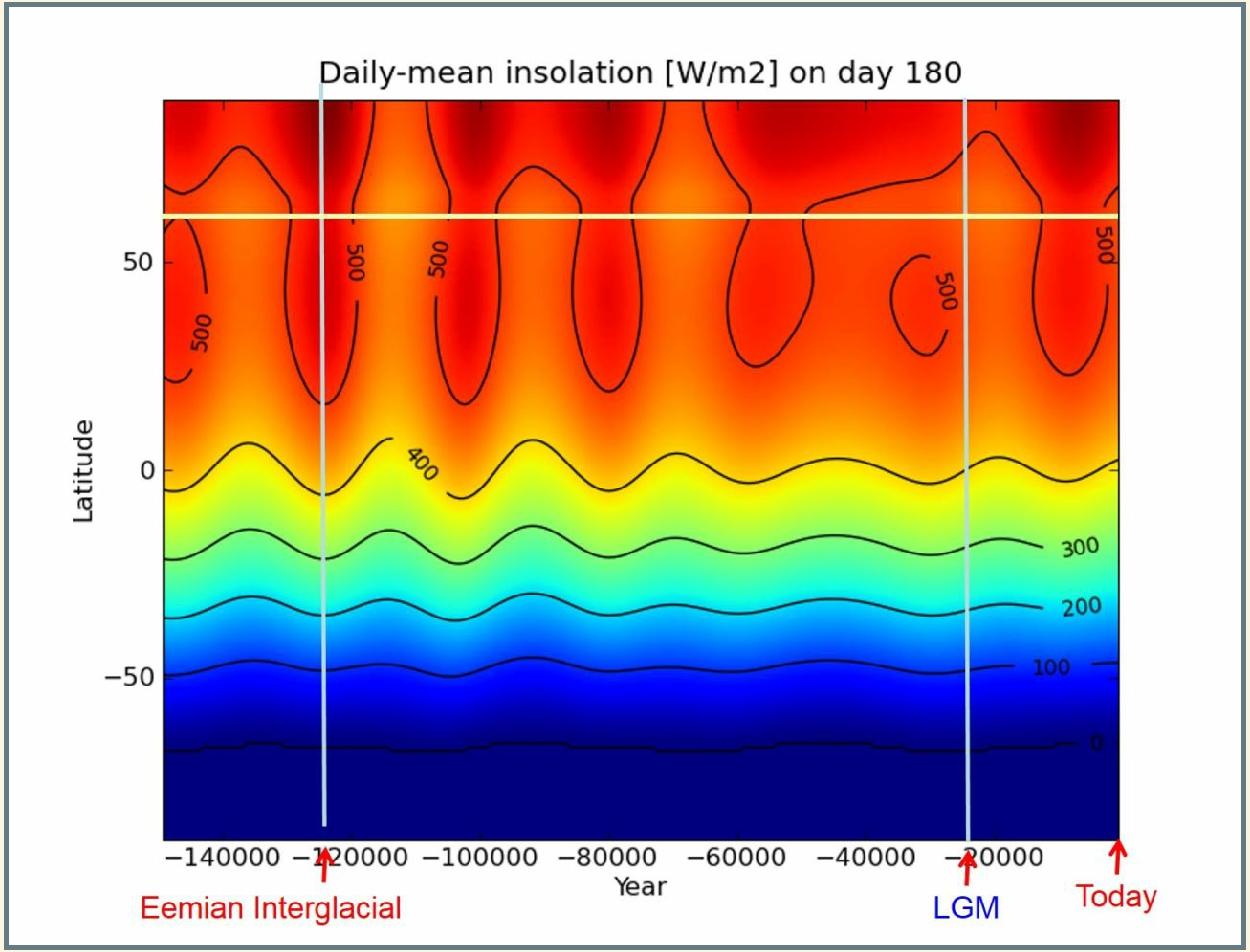


Causes



– 250
– 200
– 150
– 100
– 50
0
+ 50
+ 100
(Âge ka)
Today
5 %
4 %
3 %
2 %
1 %
0 %
Eccentricity
100,000 years: orbit goes from perfect circle to ellipse and back
23,7°
24°
23°
22°
Tilt of axis
41,000 years: Inclination of axis tips back and forth
Earth–Sun distance
Double-period19,000 & 21,000 years: Perihelion goes from December to June and back
June
Dec.
June
Dec.

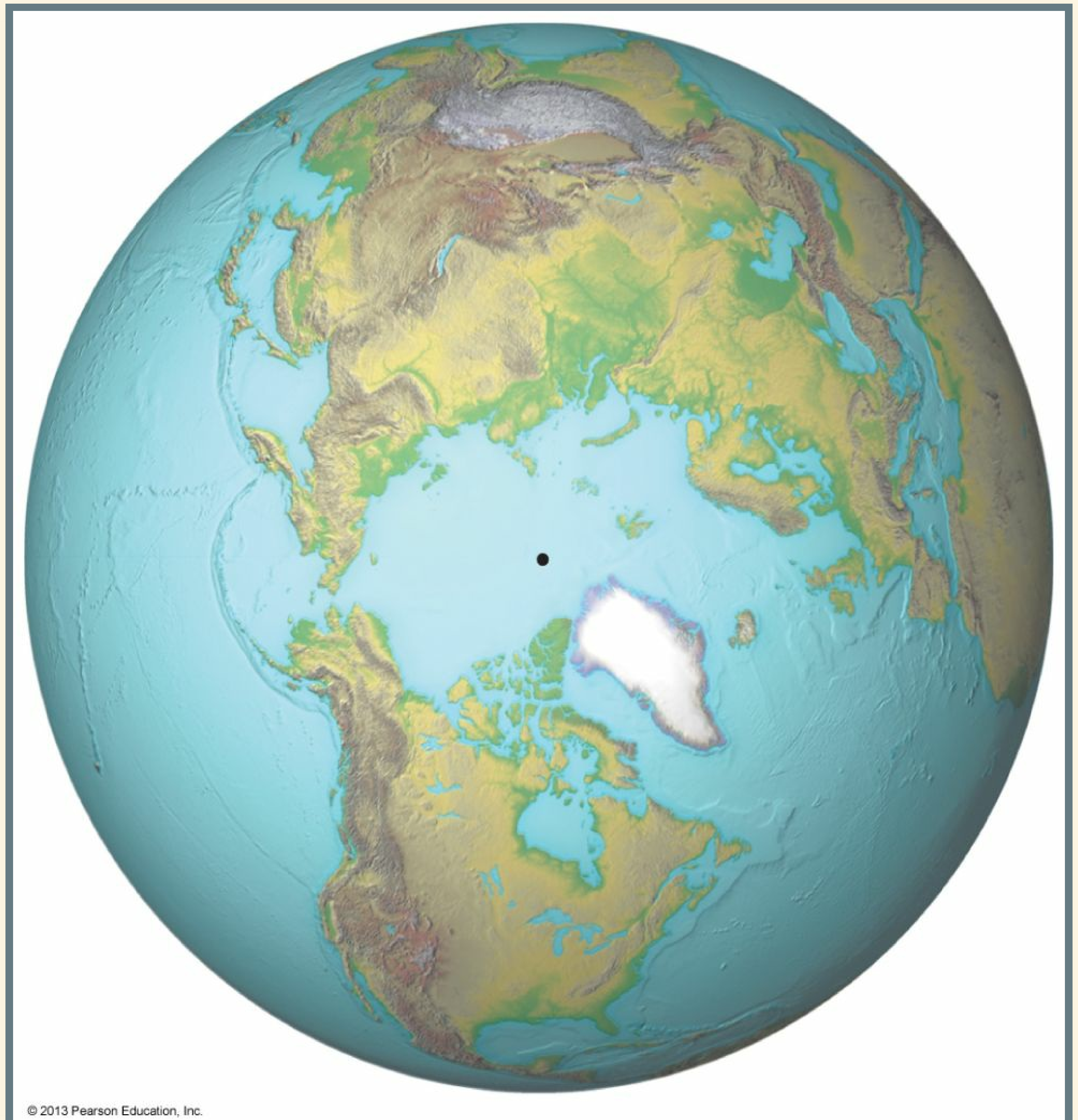
Sunlight on June 29th

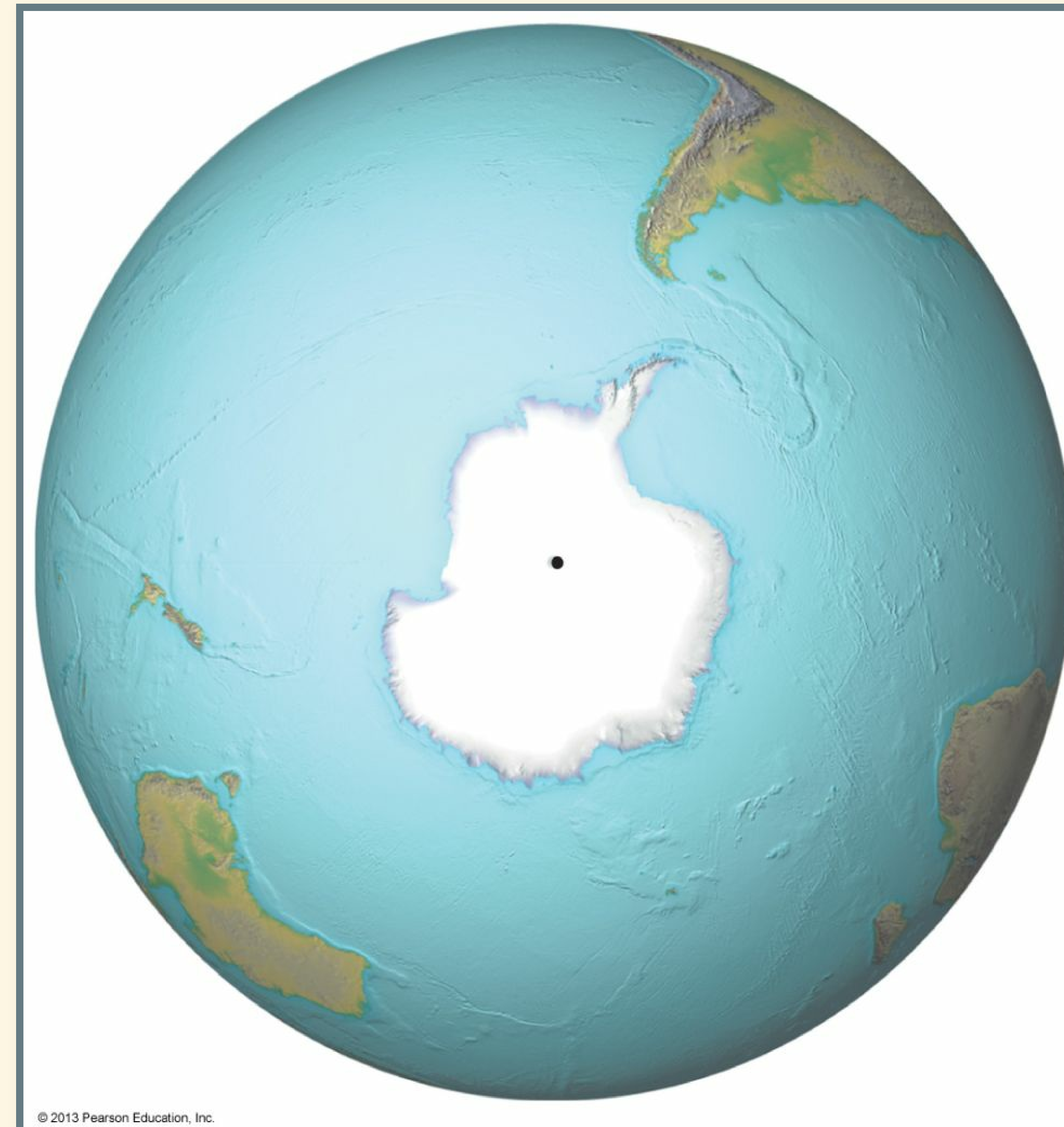


Question

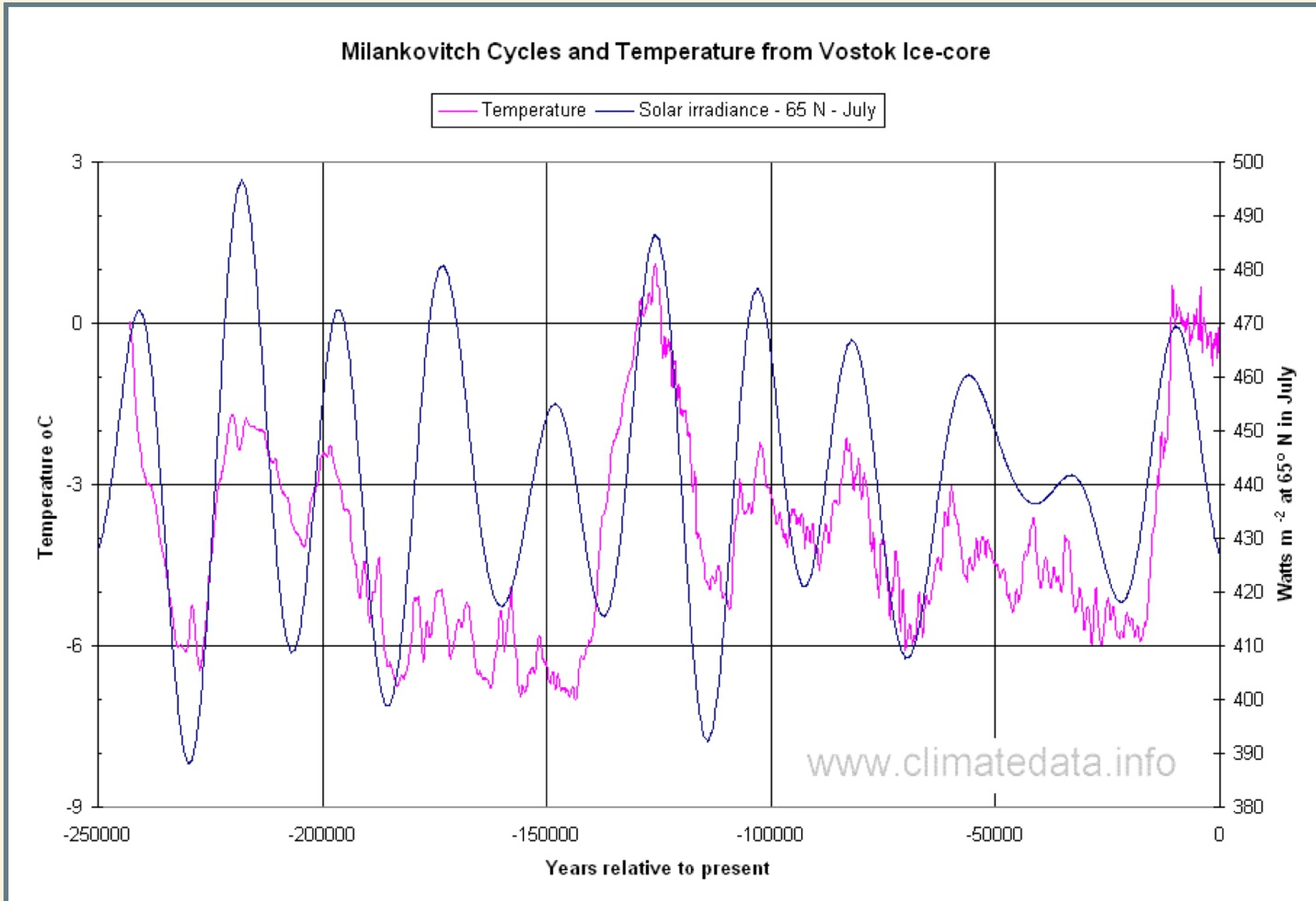
Why would the summer sunlight in the far northern hemisphere be so important?

Northern vs. Southern Hemisphere





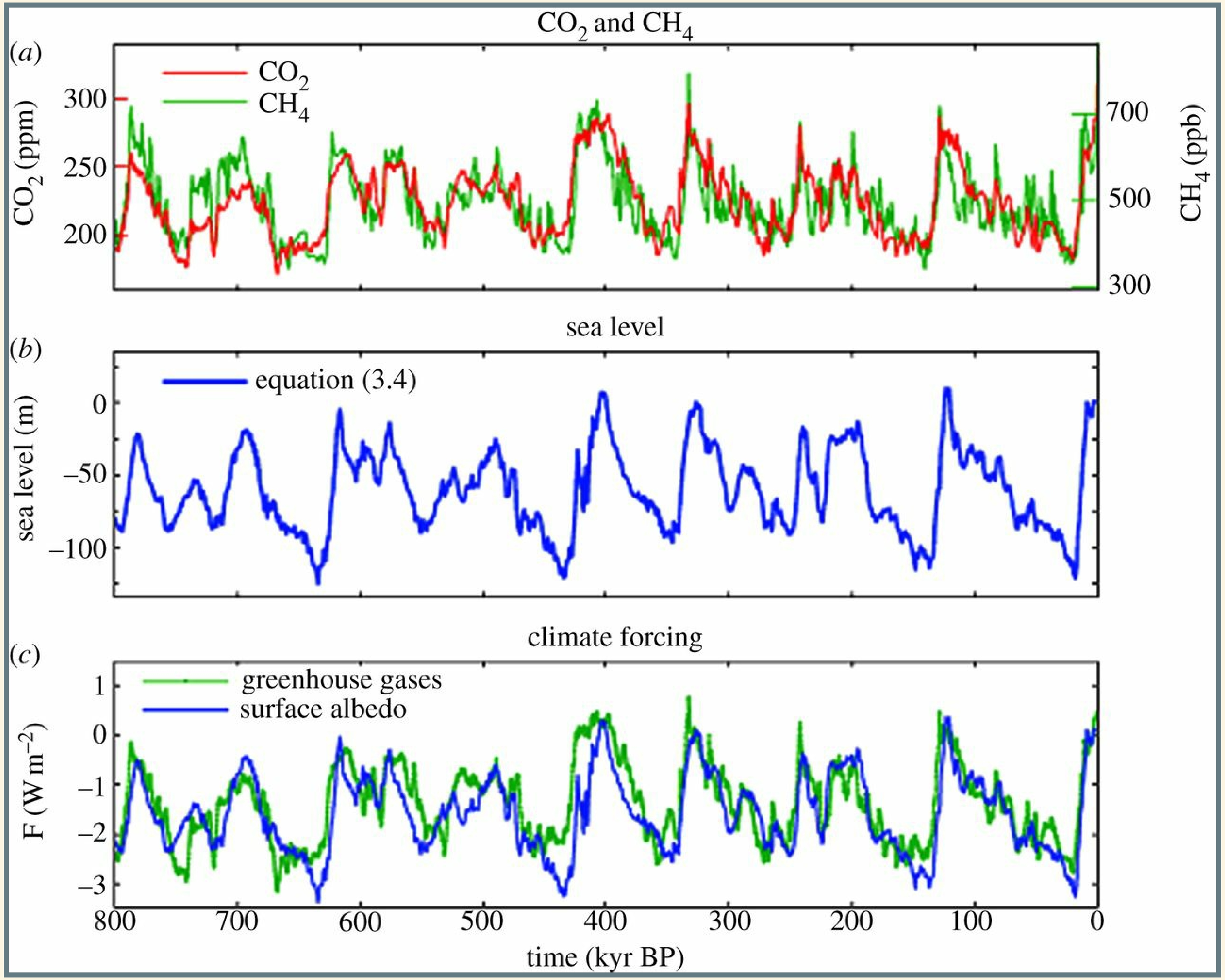
Timing of Ice Ages



Ice Age Feedbacks

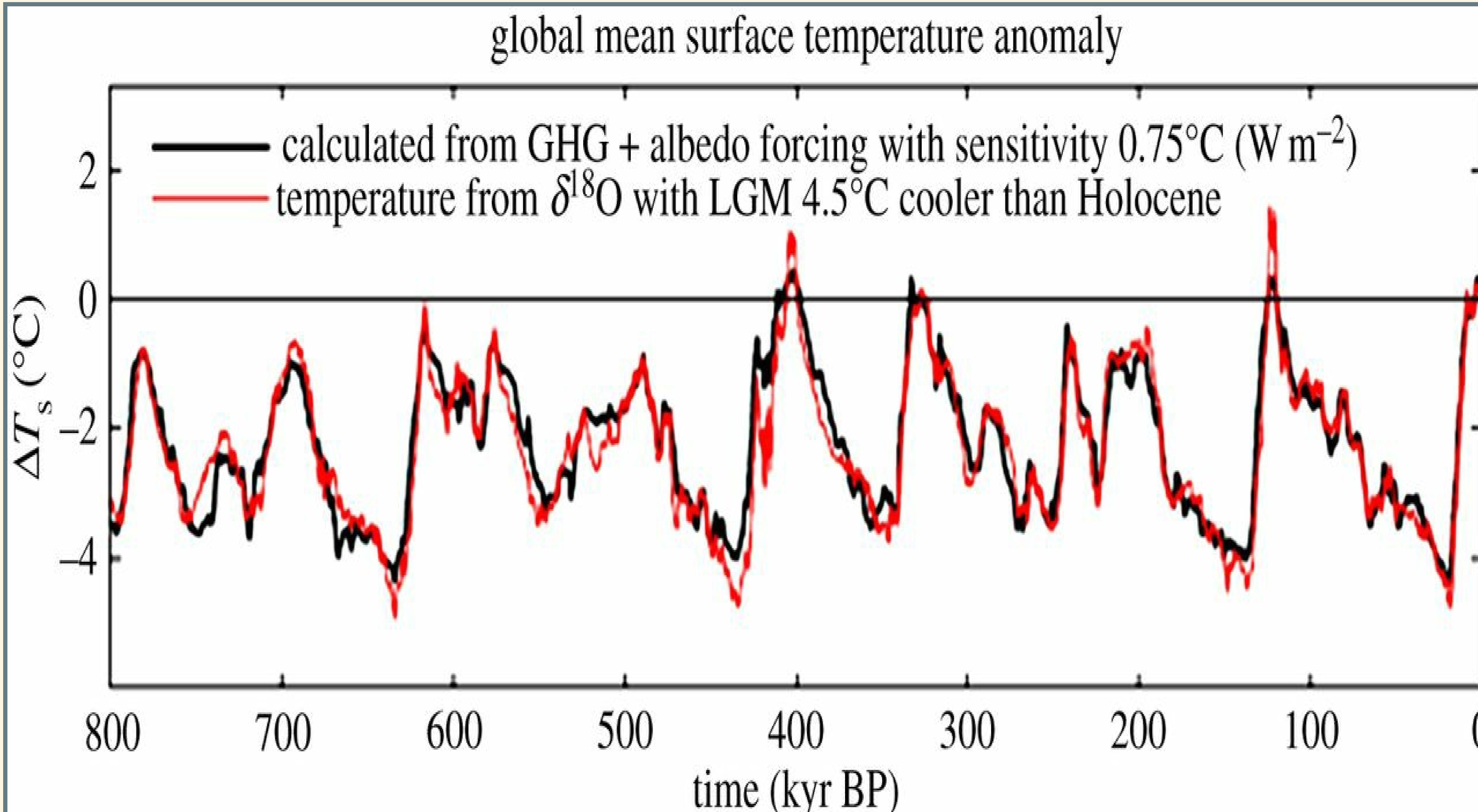
- Orbital cycles match timing of ice ages
- Changes in sunlight are too small to explain temperature changes
- There must be positive feedbacks to amplify them

Theory of Feedbacks



J. Hansen *et al.*, Phil. Trans. Royal Soc. A **371**, 20120294 (2013) doi:10.1098/rsta.2012.0294

Theory vs. Observations



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Ice-Age Feedbacks:

- Temperature starts to fall
  - Glaciers grow → higher albedo
  - CO_2 drops → weaker greenhouse
  - Colder
- Temperature starts to rise
  - Glaciers retreat → higher albedo
  - CO_2 rises → stronger greenhouse
  - Warmer
- Without CO_2 and ice-albedo feedbacks, ice-ages couldn’t happen
- Ice ages can’t happen with today’s CO_2 levels.

The Carbon Dioxide Theory of Climatic Change

By GILBERT N. PLASS

The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.[1]

(Manuscript received August 9 1955)

Abstract

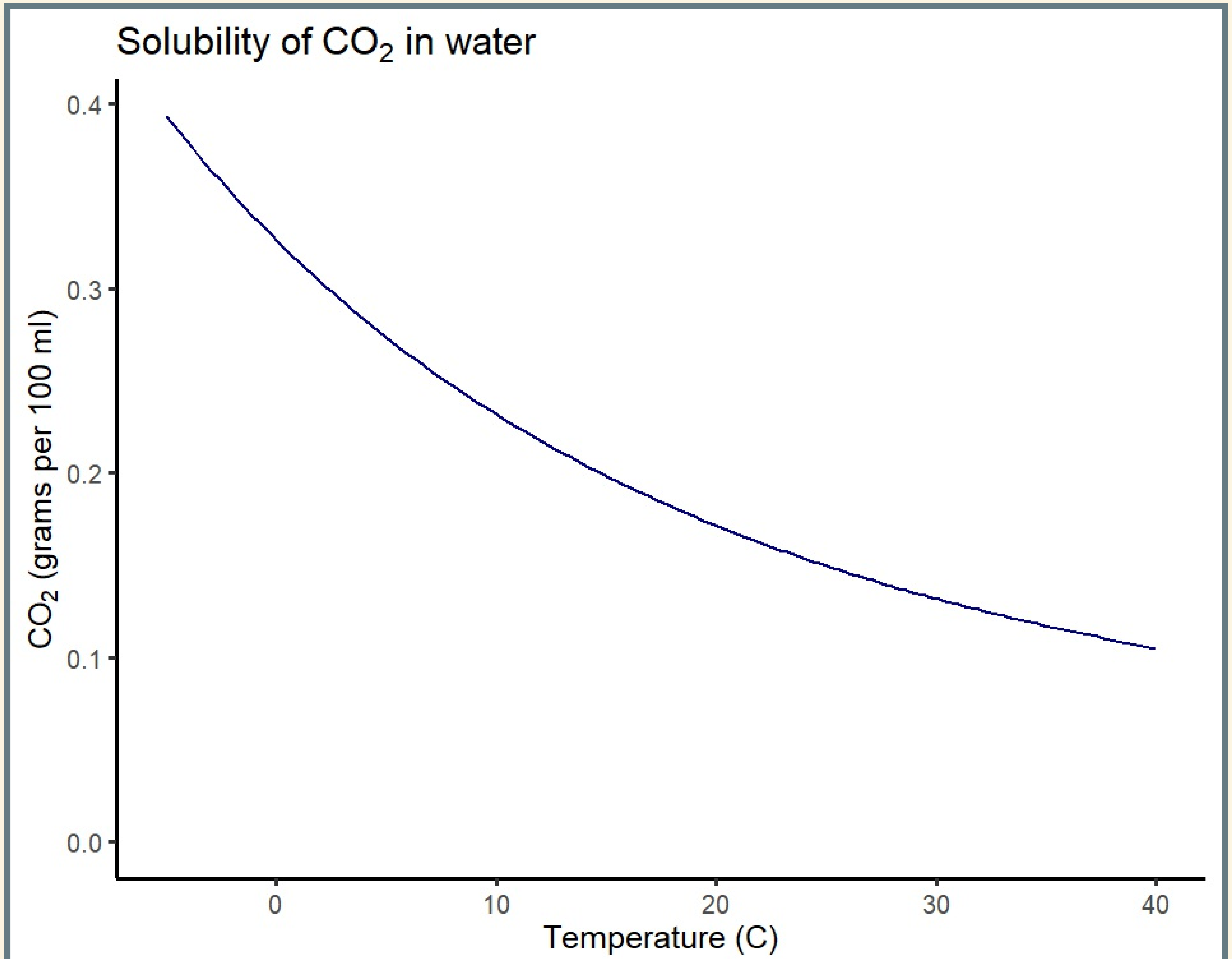
The most recent calculations of the infra-red flux in the region of the 15 micron CO_2 band show that the average surface temperature of the earth increases 3.6° C if the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere is doubled and decreases 3.8° C if the CO_2 amount is halved, provided that no other factors change which influence the radiation balance. Variations in CO_2 amount of this magnitude must have occurred during geological history; the resulting temperature changes were sufficiently large to influence the climate. The CO_2 balance is discussed. The CO_2 equilib-

predicted by the CO_2 theory. When the total CO_2 is reduced below a critical value, it is found that the climate continuously oscillates between a glacial and an inter-glacial stage with a period of tens of thousands of years; there is no possible stable state for the climate. Simple explanations are provided by the CO_2 theory for the increased precipitation at the onset of a glacial period, the time lag of millions of years between periods of mountain building and the ensuing glaciation, and the severe glaciation at the end of the Carboniferous. The extra CO_2 released into the atmosphere by industrial processes and other human activities may have caused the temperature rise during the present century. In contrast with other theories of climate, the CO_2 theory predicts that this warming trend will continue, at least for several centuries.

G.N. Plass, Tellus **8**, 140–154. (1956)

The Oceans Breathe

The Oceans Breathe

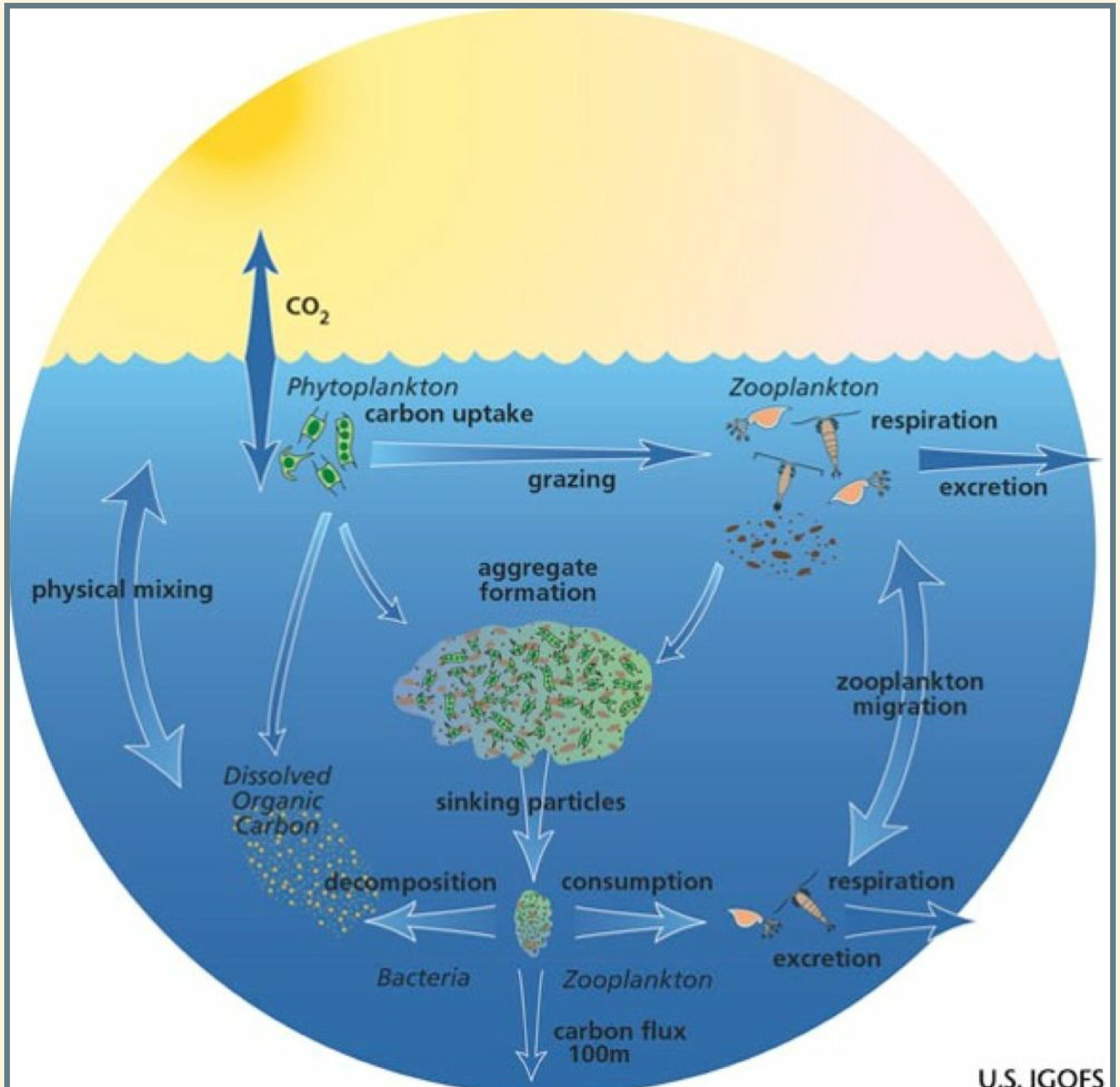


Solubility pump:

- Temperature rises:
  - CO_2 moves from ocean to atmosphere.
- Temperature falls:
  - CO_2 moves from atmosphere to ocean.

Positive feedback

Biological Pump



Structure of the ocean

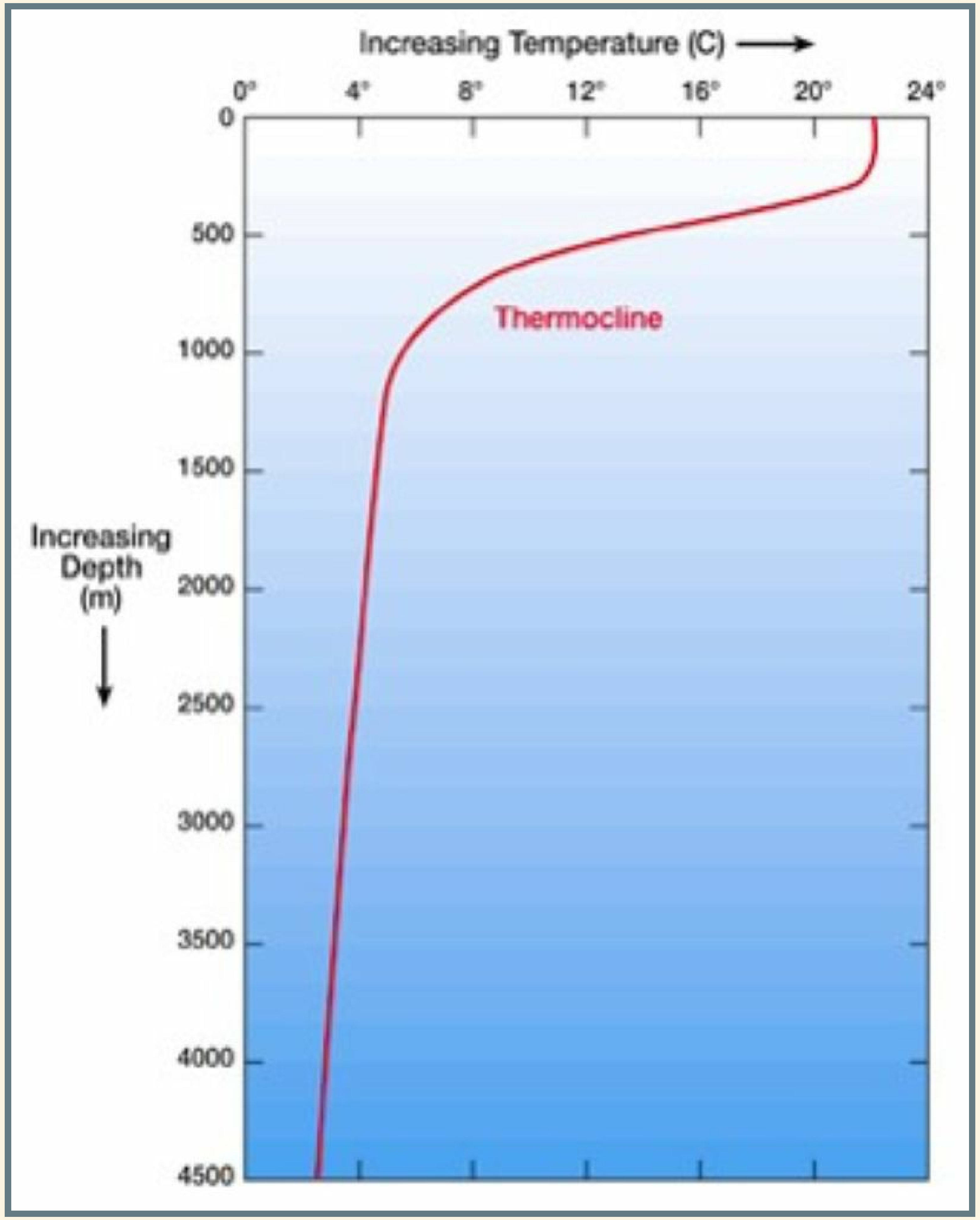
Structure of the ocean

Troposphere:

- Heated from bottom
  - (sunlight absorbed at surface)
- Warmer at bottom
- Unstable → well-mixed

Ocean:

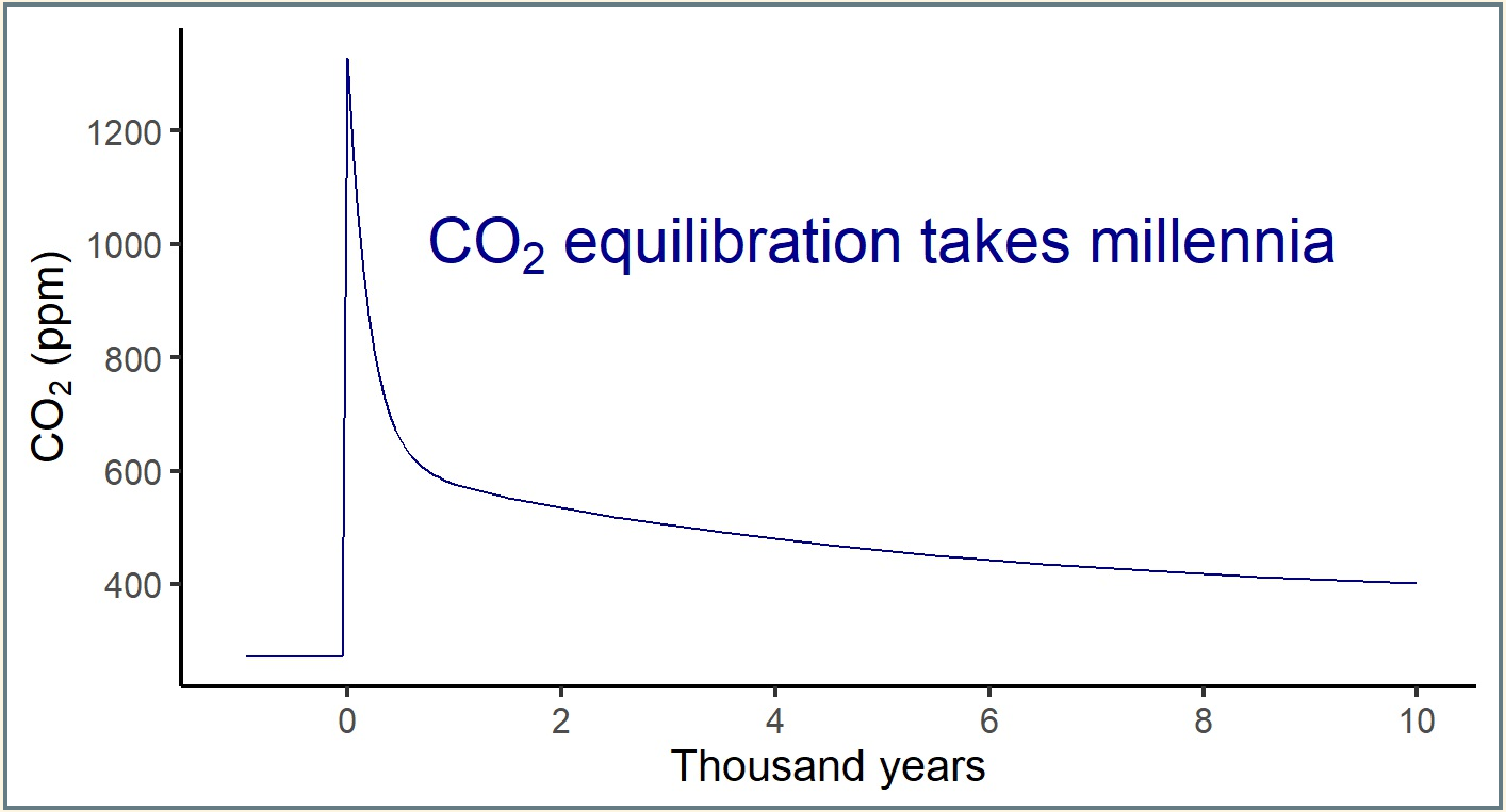
- Heated from top
  - (sunlight absorbed near surface)
- Warmer at top
- Thermocline as barrier to mixing
- Surface layer mixed by wind
- Deep ocean poorly mixed



Ocean Carbon Cycle

Numbers:

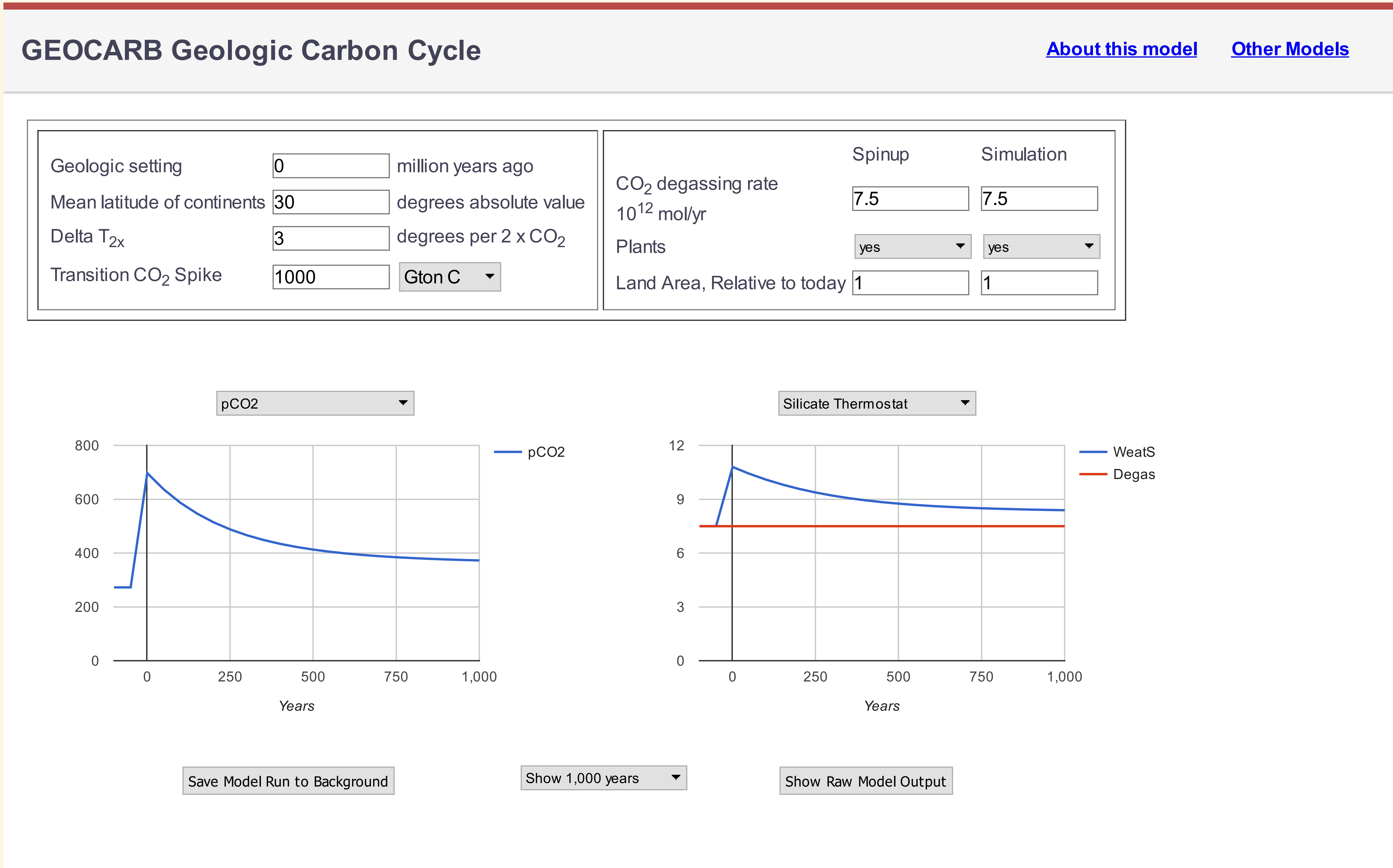
- Air ⇔ Upper ocean:
  - 1000 GT carbon in upper ocean
  - Very fast: 92 GT/year from atmosphere
- Upper ⇔ Deep ocean:
  - 38,000 GT carbon in deep ocean
  - Slow: 6 GT/year from upper ocean



CO2 equilibration takes millennia
CO2 (ppm)
1200
1000
800
600
400
0
2
4
6
8
10
Thousand years

GEOCARB Model

GEOCARB Model



GEOCARB Model

1. Set Transition CO_2 spike to 0
2. Monitor pCO_2 and Temperature
3. Set Transition CO_2 spike to 2000 GTon C
4. Look at different time scales
5. After 1000 years, how do pCO_2 and T compare to original values?
6. After 10,000 years?

The Rocks Breathe

The Rocks Breathe

- Carbonate vs. Silicate minerals
- Urey Reaction:

$$CaSiO_3 + CO_2 \Leftrightarrow CaCO_3 + SiO_2$$

  - $\Rightarrow$ **weathering** (reactions near surface)
  - $\Leftarrow$ **metamorphism** (high temp./pressure deep beneath surface)
- Silicate rocks formed at high temperature (igneous)
- Carbonate rocks formed at low temperature (sedimentary)

Why this is important

- Rain falls on silicate rocks
  - CO_2 dissolves into rainwater
  - Dissolved CO_2 makes rainwater is acidic
- Water dissolves silicate rocks
  - Dissolved ions (Ca^{+2}, SiO_3^{-2}, etc.)
- In oceans, plankton convert dissolved CO_2 and ions to calcite (calcium carbonate)
- Calcite ends up as limestone on sea floor
- **Bottom line:**
  - Weathering silicate rocks transforms atmospheric CO_2 to rocks on sea floor.
  - Detailed chemistry on Monday

Weathering as Thermostat

CO_2 is balance of volcanic outgassing and chemical weathering

- **Higher temperatures:**
  - More rain, faster chemical reactions
  - Faster weathering
  - Atmospheric CO_2 falls
- **Lower temperatures**
  - Less rain, slower chemical reactions
  - Slower weathering
  - Atmospheric CO_2 rises

Temperature of Earth

- As long as outgassing is constant, weathering acts as thermostat.
- Earth’s temperature has been remarkably stable over time.
- Change of volcanic outgassing changes “setting” of thermostat.

Temperature of Mars and Venus

- Mars used to be warm.
- Now it is frozen.
- Why?
  - Volcanic outgassing stopped.
    - All CO_2 converted to rocks.
    - No new CO_2 from volcanoes.
- Venus is scorching hot
- Why?
  - Runaway greenhouse:
    - All water evaporated
    - Chemical weathering stopped
    - Outgassing/metamorphism converted all carbonate rocks to CO_2 gas.