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Correlation between the Fluctuations in Worldwide Seismicity and in Atmospheric Carbon Pollution

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Abstract: Crucial stages in the geochemical evolution of the Earth's Crust, Ocean and Atmosphere could be explained in the light of assumed low-energy nuclear reactions (LENR) triggered by seismic activity. LENR result in the fission of medium weight elements accompanied by neutron emissions, involving Fe and Ni as starting elements, and C, N, O as resultants. Geochemical data and experimental evidences support the LENR hypothesis. The present time series analysis highlights significant correlation between the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate and the global seismic-moment release, whereas the trending behavior responds to the anthropogenic emissions. The fluctuations in the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate time series, inexplicable in terms of anthropogenic emissions, could be explained by cycles of worldwide seismicity, which massively triggers LENR in the Earth's Crust. In this framework, LENR from active faults must be considered as a relevant cause of carbon formation and degassing of freshly formed CO₂ during seismic activity.

Keywords: atmospheric evolution; seismicity; low-energy nuclear reactions; Carbon pollution; time series analysis

1. Introduction

Recent geochemistry studies have demonstrated that the Earth's crust and atmosphere have undergone significant changes in their chemical composition over the last 4.5 billion years [1–10]. Undoubtedly, one of the basic characteristics of the early stages of the Earth's formation was the presence of a highly toxic primordial atmosphere very different from today's, whose origin is still being investigated. Various hypotheses have been formulated regarding the variation in the atmospheric composition over the Earth's life time, such as degassing from volcanism [11,15], heavy bombardment by asteroids [16,17], and production of free oxygen by cyanobacterial photosynthesis leading to the Great Oxidation Event [18–20], none of them fully convincing and conclusive.

On the other hand, the changes in element concentrations appear to be intimately correlated to the tectonic activity of the Earth. Recent data on the composition time variations in the Earth's atmosphere have shown that CO₂ and H₂O concentrations in the atmosphere increased dramatically between 3.8 and 2.5 Gyr ago, between the tectonic plate formation and the most severe tectonic activity. This primordial Carbon pollution is related to drops in the concentrations of Fe and Ni as well as to jumps in the concentrations of Si and Al occurred in two step-wise transitions: 3.8 Gyr ago,

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at the beginning of tectonic activity, and then 2.5 Gyr ago, during the period of the most severe tectonic activity [21–26], as shown in Figure 1.

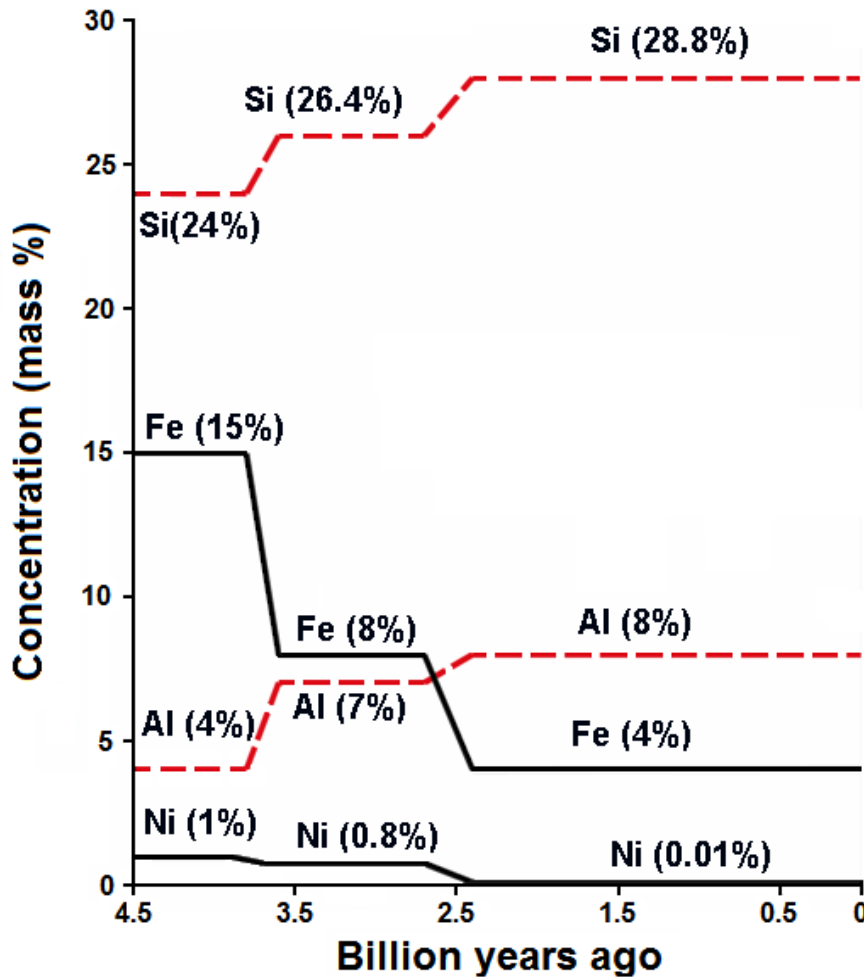
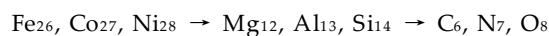


Figure 1. Estimated changes in the concentrations of Fe, Ni, Al, and Si in the Earth’s Crust during tectonic plate formation (3.8 Gyr ago) and during the most severe tectonic activity (2.5 Gyr ago).

Successively, between 2.5 and 2.0 Gyr ago, N₂ and O₂ concentrations increased sharply (Great Oxidation Event) in concomitance with the most relevant formation of the Earth’s continental crust [18–20]. Thus, a significant coupling appears between the periods of intense tectonic activity and the sudden increments of CO₂ (and H₂O), and later of N₂ and O₂ levels in the atmospheric composition over the Earth’s lifetime [1,19,20] (see Figure 2).

The chemical balances underlying the geochemical evolution of the Earth’s crust, ocean, and atmosphere can be considered as indirect evidences of recently hypothesized low-energy nuclear reactions (LENR) [27–31], occurring massively in the Earth’s crust during periods of intense tectonic activity, and hierarchically organized into two different sets:



where the atmospheric elements (C, N, O) can be regarded as results of the second set of reactions, involving Si, Al, and Mg as starting elements. In particular, the estimated Mg increment (3.2%) is equivalent to the Carbon content in the primordial atmosphere (particularly high in the form of CO₂ and CH₄). The second part of reactions (1), involving Mg as starting element and C as resultant, can be regarded as an alternative or a competing mechanism with volcanic degassing [11–15] by which tectonic forces added CO₂ to the atmosphere toward the end of the Hadean period [30,31].

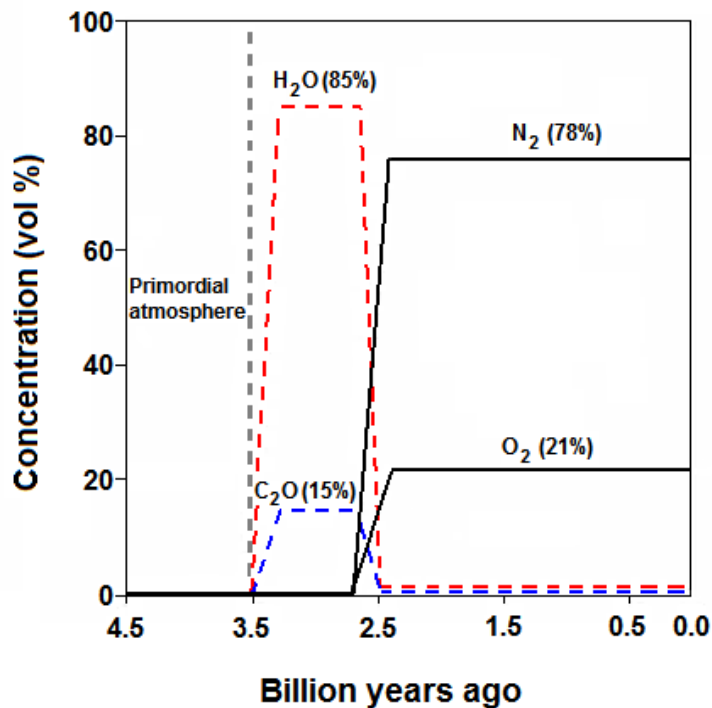


Figure 2. Variation in the atmospheric composition over the Earth's life time. During the Archean era, about 15% of the Earth's atmosphere was constituted by Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), and the remaining part was mainly composed by Water Vapor (H₂O).

Some quantitative considerations and experimental evidences can be advanced to support this hypothesis. First, assuming a mean density equal to 3.6 g/cm³ and a thickness of ~60 km of the Earth protocrust, the mass increase in Mg (~3.5 × 10²¹ kg, corresponding to 3.2% of the mass of protocrust involved in the reaction), and therefore in C, implies a very high atmospheric pressure. Given a terrestrial surface area of 5.1 × 10¹⁴ m² and considering the same gravitational acceleration for the proto-Earth, we obtain an atmospheric pressure of 660.70 atm. This very high value, plausible and consistent with the conditions prevailing between 3.8 and 2.5 Gyr ago, is corroborated by models presented for a CO₂ and CH₄-rich primordial atmosphere with ground level pressures of some hundred atm (~650 atm, as was the value reported in [1]).

Furthermore, significant neutron emissions have been measured both at the Earth's crust scale during earthquakes preparation stages (Figure 3) [32–35] and at the laboratory scale during crushing tests on non-radioactive rock specimens.

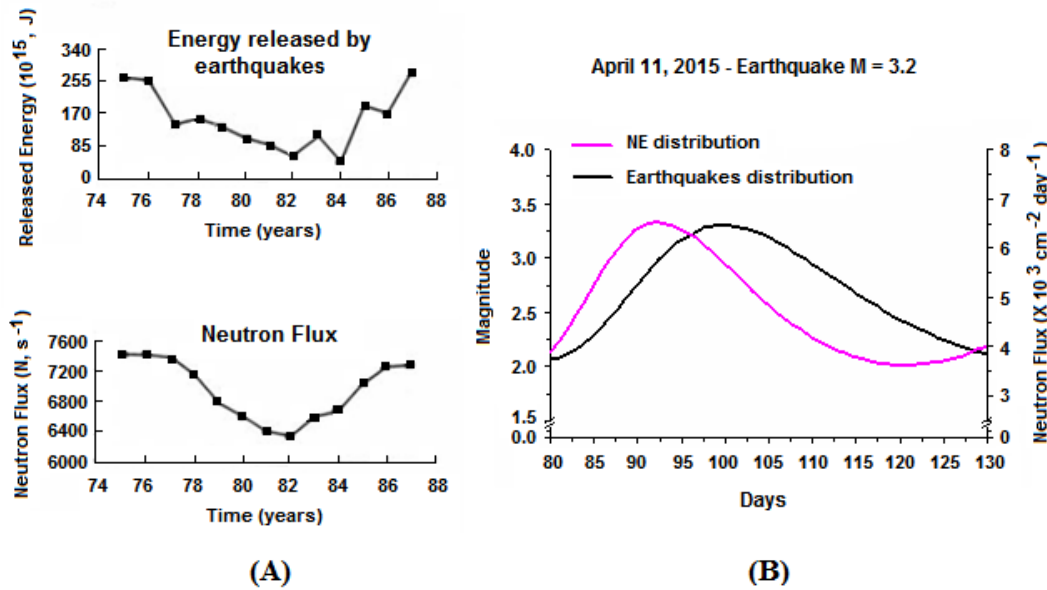


Figure 3. (A) Seismic activity and neutron flux measurements in the period 1975–1987, Kola Peninsula, Russia [32]; (B) Typical time correlation between fitting distributions of neutron flux measurements at the Murisengo gypsum mine, and a local seismic swarm (magnitude 3.2 main shock) [35] (B).

During the laboratory experiments, neutron and other forms of energy emissions have been measured in correspondence to micro- and macro-fracturing [36–40], with final considerable reduction in the Fe content consistently counterbalanced by an increase in Al, Si and Mg contents [27–29]. A further evidence supporting the link between seismicity and variations in the atmospheric CO₂ is the spatial organization of CO₂ release from the ground in the Nepal Himalayas, apparently controlled by large earthquakes [41].

2. Atmospheric CO₂ and the Carbon Cycle

Carbon dioxide is an integral part of the carbon cycle, in which carbon is exchanged between the Earth’s oceans, soil, rocks, and the biosphere at two different rates: the slow carbon cycle, involving geochemical processes between the atmosphere, oceans, soil, rocks and volcanism, and the fast carbon cycle, which refers to movements of carbon between the environment and living organisms in the biosphere, including photosynthesis and respiration [42]. The slow-rate geochemical processes, including the formation and burial of carbonates, the burial of organic matter (on land or in the ocean), and the volcanism have largely determined the flow of CO₂ into and out of the atmosphere on multimillion-year time scales. As currently accepted, the reduction of atmospheric CO₂ caused by these burial processes appears to be bound by tectonic processes, which return the carbon from the Earth’s mantle and crust to the atmosphere through volcanism degassing (less frequent as earth mantle progressively cooled). Later, the flow of atmospheric CO₂ began to be controlled by other natural processes such as the origin and the expansion of forests, which caused increased burial of organic carbon by photosynthesis, and the respiration of living organisms, which added back CO₂ to the atmosphere [43,44].

In the pre-industrial era, the flow of atmospheric CO₂ was considered to be largely in balance, with natural sources nearly balanced by natural CO₂ sinks. Since the Industrial Revolution, the anthropic activity has perturbed the carbon cycle directly adding carbon to the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels and land-use changes (mainly deforestation). According to the carbon cycle

models [45], about 57% of the anthropogenic CO₂ emissions should be removed from the atmosphere by the biosphere (vegetation and land) and oceans, which behave as carbon sinks.

As current atmospheric CO₂ levels exceed measurements from the last 1000 years and are rising quickly, anthropogenic perturbation of the global carbon cycle is considered to be the only responsible for causing the dramatic increase in CO₂ of the contemporary Earth's atmosphere [46,47]. In accordance with this paradigm, the global carbon budget describing the exchanges of CO₂ between the atmosphere and the other major carbon reservoirs is currently given by the following balance equation:

$$\text{atm growth} = \text{fossil fuel} + \text{land use change} - \text{ocean sink} - \text{land sink}$$

where geochemical terms are usually neglected, as their rate is considered too slow to have some relevance on the atmospheric CO₂ concentration over hundred- or thousand-year timescales, or because they became relatively infrequent, like volcanism. However, some doubts remain regarding that balance, since the ocean sink is estimated by a combination of global ocean biogeochemistry models and the land sink is often estimated from the residual of the other budget terms [47]. With regard to the latter point, recent studies suggest that the role of tropical forests may have been yet very poorly quantified, indicating a terrestrial tropical carbon sink larger than the usual estimates [48,49]. Accounting for this finding while balancing the global carbon cycle implies that the currently considered carbon sources are larger [50], and/or the existence of other carbon sources to be considered in the budget.

3. Data Analysis

Observing the relationship between the anthropogenic CO₂ emissions and the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate (compare diagrams in Figure 4A,C) plotted in Gt C (year)⁻¹ from 1955 to 2013 (the choice of the period is motivated by the need for comprehensive and reliable data), some evidences may cast some doubts on the fact that anthropogenic emissions effectively drive all the atmospheric CO₂ growth [51–53]:

- the significant acceleration in the anthropogenic emission rate, largely due to China's contribution, observed since 2002 and not reflected in an analogous trend of atmospheric CO₂, which yet continued its steady growth;
- the downward trend of atmospheric CO₂ in some periods, especially from 1988 to 1993, despite the continuous growth of the anthropogenic emissions;
- the intensive cyclic fluctuations around the trend line in the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate in spite of the smoother increase in the anthropogenic CO₂ emission rate.

Consistently with neutron emissions observed in correspondence to fracturing at laboratory and Earth's scales, the hypothesized LENR related to neutron emissions from active faults may be regarded as the principal cause of magnesium depletion and the consequent carbon formation and degassing of freshly formed CO₂ during seismic activity. In this way, it is worth investigating the possible relationship between the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate and the global seismic-moment release rate (Nm year⁻¹, newton-metres per year).

The seismic moment M measures the size and the energy of an earthquake according to the definition, $M = \mu A \delta$, where μ is the shear modulus of the rock in which the fault is embedded, A is the area of the fault break, and δ is the mean displacement across the fault during the earthquake. M thus has dimension of torque (Nm) [54].

Therefore, a comparison among the rates of anthropogenic CO₂ emission, global seismic-moment release, and atmospheric CO₂ growth shows that all the considered time series show an upward trend, linear for atmospheric and anthropogenic data, quadratic for seismic data instead (diagrams of Figure 4A–C).

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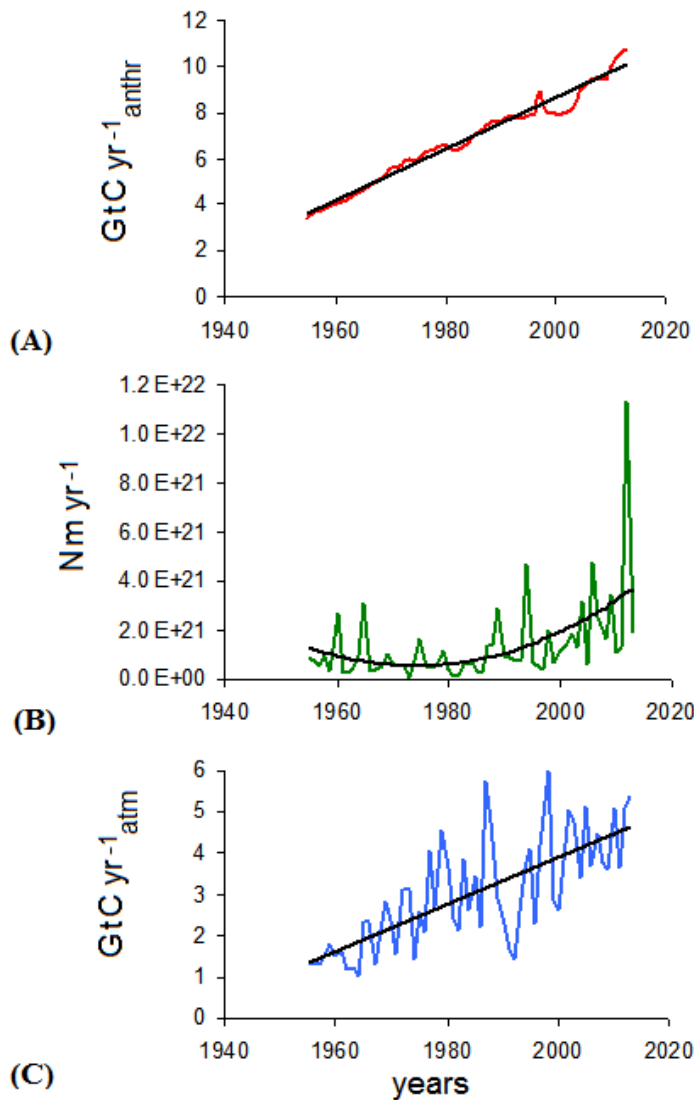


Figure 4. (A) Time series plots (1955–2013) of annual anthropogenic CO₂ emissions; (B) Global seismic-moment release; (C) Atmospheric CO₂ growth rate (C) with trend lines in black.

However, it is worth noting that anthropogenic CO₂ emissions exhibit low-amplitude fluctuations when compared to those of the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate (compare Figure 4A,C), i.e., up to one order of magnitude smaller considering peak-to-peak excursions.

A further remark results considering the periodicities hidden in the fluctuations of the time series. The FFT analysis of residual data, obtained by subtracting the trend component from the actual data, shows that the low-frequency components (approximately lying in the 0–0.15 year⁻¹ interval) in the anthropogenic emission spectrum prevails over higher frequencies, unlike more uniform mixture of components in seismic-moment release and atmospheric CO₂ spectra, where spectral peaks appear at high frequencies as well (compare FFT diagrams of Figure 5).

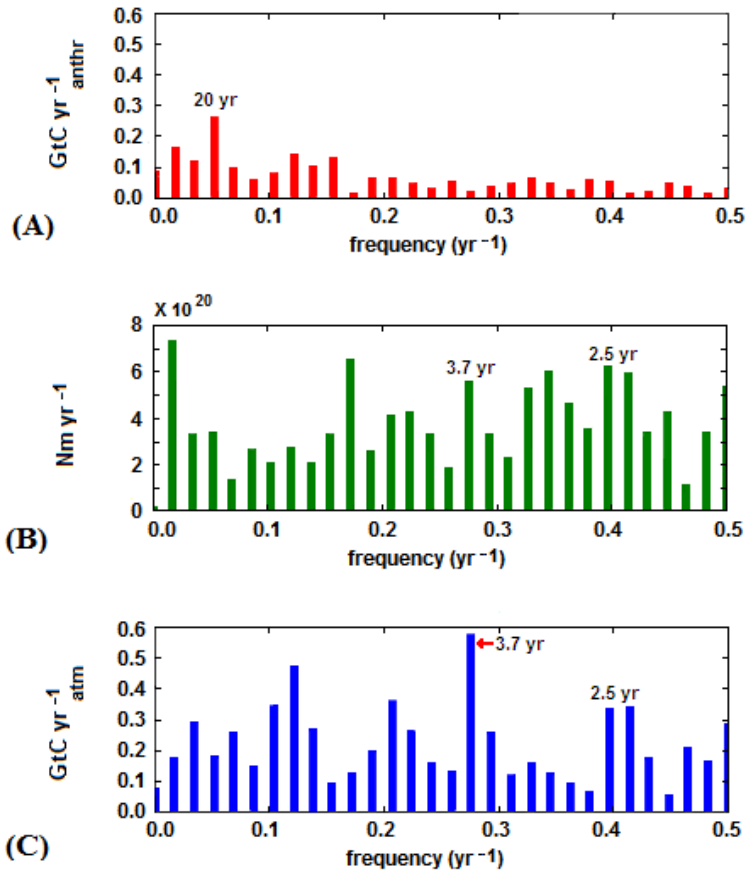


Figure 5. (A) FFT spectra of the de-trended time series: anthropogenic CO₂ emissions; (B) Global seismic-moment release; (C) atmospheric CO₂ growth rate. Note: the discrepancy between the main peaks of anthropogenic (20 year) and atmospheric (3.7 year) spectra; the peaks shared, e.g., at 2.5 and 3.7 years, by seismic and atmospheric spectra.

As shown in Figure 5A, the anthropogenic time series exhibits a dominant spectral peak at 0.05 year⁻¹, equivalent to a 20-year period which results to be uncorrelated with atmospheric CO₂ fluctuations, since this periodicity is not relevant in the atmospheric spectrum (observe the fourth spectral component of atmospheric CO₂ data in Figure 5C). Conversely, atmospheric fluctuations exhibit a main periodicity of 3.7 year, almost absent in the anthropogenic emission spectrum. This discrepancy looses partly the bond between anthropogenic emissions and atmospheric CO₂ growth rate.

Instead, the 3.7-year periodicity is relevant both in atmospheric CO₂ and in seismic-moment spectra, as well as other periodicities like spectral peaks at approximately 2.5 years (see Figure 5B,C). Actually, these periodicities are almost absent in the anthropogenic time series, as if the fluctuations in the atmospheric CO₂ growth were preferably driven by the seismic activity rather than by the anthropogenic causes.

4. Conclusions

The presented results derive from geochemical studies on the chemical evolution at the Earth's scale that affected Mantle, Crust, and Atmosphere during the periods of the most severe tectonic activity, corroborated by experimental evidences of neutron emissions during rock fracture with concomitant changes in the elements concentration of the specimens.

It is important to observe how the conventional assumptions of chemical elements' migration do not imply the nearly perfect satisfaction of the mass balances, whereas the chemical balances among the most abundant elements derived from geochemical data are considered as indirect evidences of conjectured LENR reactions. The atmospheric elements (C, N, O) can be regarded as results of a set of reactions, involving Si, Al, and Mg as starting elements, massively triggered by tectonic activity. In particular, this conjecture not only accounts for atmospheric CO₂ formation and its variations over the Earth's life time, but could provide an explanation also to some observed anomalies in the correlation between the atmospheric CO₂ growth and the anthropogenic emission rates.

By examination of the time series, fluctuations of the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate cannot be explained in terms of low-amplitude anthropogenic emission fluctuations (nearly an order-of-magnitude difference). Furthermore, the main periodicities of these two phenomena are different.

Although variations in climate variables are recognized as important drivers of the interannual variability of the atmospheric CO₂ growth rate [55], the present relationship between atmospheric and seismic variables appears to be rather robust during the last 50 years, and provides a new diagnostic tool for better understanding of the global carbon cycle.

In conclusion, the time series analysis demonstrates the trending behavior of atmospheric CO₂ growth rate in response to the anthropogenic emissions, whereas, in the light of LENR, atmospheric CO₂ fluctuations can be ascribed to the cycles of the worldwide seismicity.

Supplementary Materials: Earthquake data are available online at <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/search/>. CO₂ emission data are available online at <http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbonbudget/archive.htm#CB20147>.

Author Contributions: conceptualization, writing—review and supervision A.C.; investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation G.N.

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