

## CARING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: GLOBAL CITIZENS and MORAL DECISION MAKING

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From: The Conversation 2015

*Image: Global citizens care about the earth we share with others. Shutterstock.*

In a recent cogito blog post, Clive Hamilton claims that the greatest crimes of recent years will surely prove to be human interference with and disruption of the Earth's climate. He writes, "Above all, in denying the evidence or failing to take action commensurate with the known danger, these individuals have been violating their duty to the truth." I wholeheartedly agree. Of course, figuring out what to do next is a complicated matter.

Debate is swirling as to what kind of climate change policy the political parties will come up with that will be supported by the general public. Yesterday, Michelle Grattan noted that,

This week's Essential poll found 53% thought Australia was not doing enough to address climate change; only 28% said Australia was doing enough. The picture would change once people were faced with the costs of change, but still this does indicate that many people would be open to more action if a policy was well put together and effectively communicated.

The language of the climate change debate is often centred on cost and on power. By 'power' I mean more than one sense of the word. Power refers to the power sources we are using, and the prospect of future power sources based on renewable energy sources, as well as political power and economic power (which influence one another).

Perhaps I am being idealistic, but it would be nice if the climate change debate could focus on ethics, moral decision making, and future peoples who will be affected by decisions and policies made today. If the debate was cast in these terms, the politicking would look very different. Partly because to truly take climate change seriously we must think globally as opposed to simply from a Nationalistic perspective.

Some important moral considerations have been highlighted within the [Kyoto protocol](#). The Kyoto protocol outlines an obligation for every nation, particularly rich nations, to act on climate change, fund relief, invest in alternative energy sources, and provide solutions to displaced persons as a result of climate change. However, action on climate change is driven by the government and politicians, which often results in weak and ineffectual policy.

There is a need to prioritise moral considerations which include social implications of climate change alongside economic and political concerns. One way to achieve this is to see ourselves as 'global citizens' which highlights the need for collaborative and cooperative action.

Seeing ourselves as global citizens involves realising that we all live on and share planet Earth. This involves a shift in our moral perspective whereby we care about others we have never met in countries we have never visited. Being a global citizen involves focusing on what we have in common rather than on our differences.

Due to our technology, we are more connected than ever before. If we seek to educate new generations to think about themselves as global citizens, they will see the benefits of communal global action that may protect our planet. It may also further encourage the idea that we can live harmoniously with others who are different to ourselves.

## The Media's depiction of the Climate Change debate

The Australian journalistic media's eagerness to display 'both sides' of the story has historically resulted in an unfair balancing of opposing views whereby climate deniers were given an equal footing with scientists who argue that we have ample evidence for human causation of global warming. These deniers make up less than 5% of the scientific community.

Scientists and commentators have started making better use of the media in order to effectively communicate scientific findings. The blog Climate Progress, edited by Joe Romm, seeks to dispel fallacies presented in media reports on climate change. Climate Progress was named one of the 25 'Best Blogs of 2010' by Time magazine. As intelligent blogs and other sites (like The Conversation) gain popularity and accolades, awareness increases of the need to engage critically with news reports.

Similarly, Professor Stephan Lewandowsky, a behavioural psychologist, initiated the website Shaping Tomorrow's World, which encourages discussion of the challenges facing solutions to climate change. Lewandowsky also supports critical engagement with ideas, further evidenced by the fact that he and co-author John Cook have made their book, *The Debunking Handbook* available for free download.

How we talk about and report on climate change is important. Having the debate is vital and the conversation must be inclusive and accessible. By discussing the ethical considerations alongside modelled predications of the impacts of climate change and supporting an inter-disciplinary approach to the problem, we can situate the debate within a real-world context. If people can link statistics and data to their own moral responsibility as global citizens, this can be used to support policies that are practical as well as moral.

## One World: the ethical obligation to consider ourselves as global citizens

We simply cannot afford to remain in a Nationalistic *modus operandi*. In his book *One World: the ethics of globalisation*, Peter Singer claims we must move towards a sense of unity through globalisation, understanding the world ethically as one 'place'. The shift from a Nationalistic perspective to a global one involves changing the way we think about ourselves as well as our moral obligations. This isn't easy, but it should be done.

Likewise, if there is to be policy changes that look to long term solutions for climate change, there must be public pressure on governments. This requires the general public to understand the ethical implications of the climate change debate. Thus, the debate must be practical, contextual, as well as moral.

Placing reliable scientific information within a 'real world' framework would enhance general understanding. Scientific facts are not immune to ethical and social considerations. In an optimistic view, as Naomi Klein and non-profit NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE Australia point out, the solutions to climate change issues could also be the solutions to poverty and widespread inequality as the world starts to work together as a global unit. Moral philosophers would surely agree that maximising benefits for all people includes preventing widespread injustices to the poor and developing nations who have done the least to deserve the severe adverse impacts of climate change which have already begun.

The grim warnings are a reality. 'Act now' is not hyperbole. By identifying ourselves as global citizens with an obligation to every other person, as opposed to simply those in our own countries, we can make a psychological shift which has moral and social, economic and political ramifications. Any realistic solution to climate change must be inclusive and holistic.

This article was originally published on The Conversation.

<https://theconversation.com/caring-about-climate-change-global-citizens-and-moral-decision-making-44771>

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