

The Freshwater Connection

Publication of the Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition - Fall 2021



Climate Change - Part 1 Some General Thoughts

To Live and Love with a Dying World - Wendell Berry

“The argument for despair is impenetrable, it’s invulnerable. You got all the cards. You got the statistics, the science, the projections on your side. But then we’re still just sitting here with our hands hanging down, not doing anything.

One of the characteristics of the machine civilization is determinism. You’ll find plenty of people who’ll tell you there’s nothing you can do, it’s inevitable. You can’t make an organization to refute that; **you’ve got to do it yourself.**”....

“That’s my argument in favor of this world, against the determinists. I depend on what I know of human goodness, but also on the flowers and the butterflies and the birds. The otters and the swallows – a lot of their life is just spent having a hell of a good time. The animals, so far as I can understand them, have **a great deal to say in favor of life. It’s a good world, still.**”

From - <https://orionmagazine.org/article/to-live-and-love-with-a-dying-world/>



OK - So Where Do We Go From Here?

“ The wheels of history can not be turned back: modern man neither can nor should give up the high degree of analytical intelligence gained in the course of centuries, nor should he lose interest in the great achievements in the material world. But these gifts can be matched by a conscious effort to restrengthen intuitive powers .” Franz E.Winkle, MD - 1953



“Now its time for all of us to go home and go to work in good ways”
Wendell Berry

How gratitude for nature can rein in your existential angst about climate change

This article, written by Barbara Jane Davy, University of Waterloo, originally appeared on The Conversation at <https://theconversation.com/how-gratitude-for-nature-can-rein-in-your-existential-angst-about-climate-change-156840>



We're all going to die. This is the repeated warning about climate change in some media: if we don't change our ways we face an existential threat.

So why haven't we got a policy solution in place? Reducing emissions is in our best interest, but despite widespread popular support for government action, implementing policies and programs continues to be difficult. Social science research shows that the more we hear about climate change, the less inclined we are to take action.

Talking about climate change reminds us that we are going to die, and that our modern way of life is killing our environment. Research in social psychology shows that hearing about climate change often prompts people to go out and buy more stuff.

However, participating in rituals that inspire gratitude for nature can reduce the desire to over-consume — and thus reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that fuel climate change. My research indicates that unconscious motivations and ritual practices may be more effective in shifting our behaviour than rational arguments in the fight against climate change.

The science is clear

We have lots of data on climate change, and there is scientific consensus on its accuracy. The topic is constantly in the press, yet most governments have been unable to put effective policy solutions in place. The reason for this is fear.

Death awareness makes people want to defend the worldview their sense of self-worth is vested in. Despite the fact that most people consciously endorse a scientific worldview and think that protecting the environment is important, we unconsciously believe consumption produces happiness.

It is this consumerist worldview that we unthinkingly defend when confronted with evidence of environmental threats such as climate change.

Motivations are tricky

Science tells us about environmental problems, but it does not necessarily motivate us to do anything about them. Research in behavioural economics and social psychology demonstrates a variety of unconscious factors that continue to influence us no matter how educated we are, or rational we think ourselves to be.

When people feel threatened, they tend to double down on their existing views. This is sometimes referred to as the boomerang or backfire effect, and it contributes to climate change denial.

Talking about climate change can be counterproductive to getting people to reduce emissions because providing more information only further convinces people that they are right. Threatening images and rhetoric can do more harm than good.

When climate change feels like too big a problem, we tend to shut down or blame others. Talking about it is overwhelming – it makes us feel guilty, afraid and apathetic. One of the most common effects of making people aware of their mortality is the scapegoating of others. Mortality awareness increases out group hostilities. It instigates attempts to displace blame and increases polarization in society.

We like to blame industry and corporations for climate change, but individual and household contributions have a substantial impact, accounting for 72 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from food and its production, heating and cooling homes and the fuel used by private vehicles. **Our personal actions matter.**

Former chief of staff of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Michael Vandenberg reports that individuals are the largest remaining sources of climate change emissions. Household emissions rise with increases in household income.

Strategic actions

Raising awareness about climate change should not be an end in itself. Bringing the problem to mind is not necessarily helpful, and without a solution, it may do more harm than good. Environmental protection is widely supported, but talking about climate change and global warming can be negative triggers that tune out the people we want to reach. Framing the message in terms of the shared values of the target audience is effective.

Research shows a range of possible responses to climate change messaging that arouses mortality awareness. Threats make environmentalists act in defence of their identity as environmentalists, but campaigning against air pollution can be a more pragmatic strategy for motivating climate change deniers. To use the effects of death awareness to promote pro-environmental behaviour, we need to activate shared norms from which people's sense of self-worth derives. We can use behavioural economics and other psychological effects to promote pro-environmental behaviour. These sort of psychological effects can nudge people toward better civic actions.

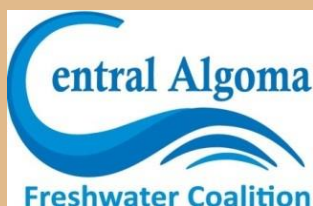
Implementing a "choice architecture" – the way choices are presented – that defaults to better environmental options makes people more likely to make pro-environmental decisions. The options available, and how they are presented, influence people's actions. For example, walkable neighbourhoods reduce emissions by making walking and cycling pleasurable choices, while winding suburban streets and big parking lots prompt people to drive to more.

When talking about environmental concerns, avoiding the use of economic language such as costs and drawing attention to gratitude can help keep environmental values top of mind instead of triggering the psychological effects that stimulate consumerism.

Expressing appreciation for what we have been given and publicly sharing our gratitude inspires a sense of contentment that makes people want to give in turn. Practices of praising ancestors (ancestor veneration) are surprisingly pro-environmental because they prompt people to want to pass on what they have been given rather than consume more themselves.

Raising awareness of these unconscious effects does not make them go away. We continue to be affected by these psychological effects even after learning about them, so we would do better to use them constructively.

Become a Member



Your annual membership fee will provide a base budget for work of CAFC and demonstrate the commitment of local partners working towards a common goal. A strong diverse group is an essential component in meeting the goals of the Central Algoma Region. Support us at <https://www.centralalgomafreshwatercoalition.ca/>