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## Why we won't Stop Climate Change

By Andreas Pingouras

### The Reality

The devastating amazon wildfires, the disastrous Australian bush-fires, the record-high temperatures in cities across the globe, the ongoing droughts and civil unrest in much of the world, these are all symptoms of a much larger problem. It is an inescapable reality that we have destroyed our environment, and we continue to do so with no regards for the future. According to a report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by 2017, the average world surface temperature had already increased by 1°C compared to pre-industrial levels, with an average rate of about 0.2°C increase per decade. Because of this, the IPCC has framed the ongoing climate crisis as part of a new geological epoch for our planet, the Anthropocene, meaning the age of Humans. This unfortunate new epoch is marked by an incredibly fast rate of worldwide temperature increase caused by us, which is unlike any natural process the earth has ever been through in its entire history.

We already know this one single degree will have disastrous effects on our climate, the ecosystem, and our own lives. Temperature increase is more rapid over land than water, which is as devastating for humanity as it is for the rest of the ecosystem. The current

rate of warming could result in an increase of over 2°C by 2050, with current agreements hoping to maintain temperature increase at 1.5°C. This seems all the more improbable, however, as corporations, governments, and people continue to ignore the reality of the climate emergency.

### The Problem

Despite global agreements and plans to maintain warming near 1.5°C, and despite the effects of climate change being reported by scientists and organisations around the globe, humanity continues to live in blissful ignorance, or, rather, negligence. But why is this? Why do we continue to act as if nothing is wrong, despite the looming threat of human extinction?

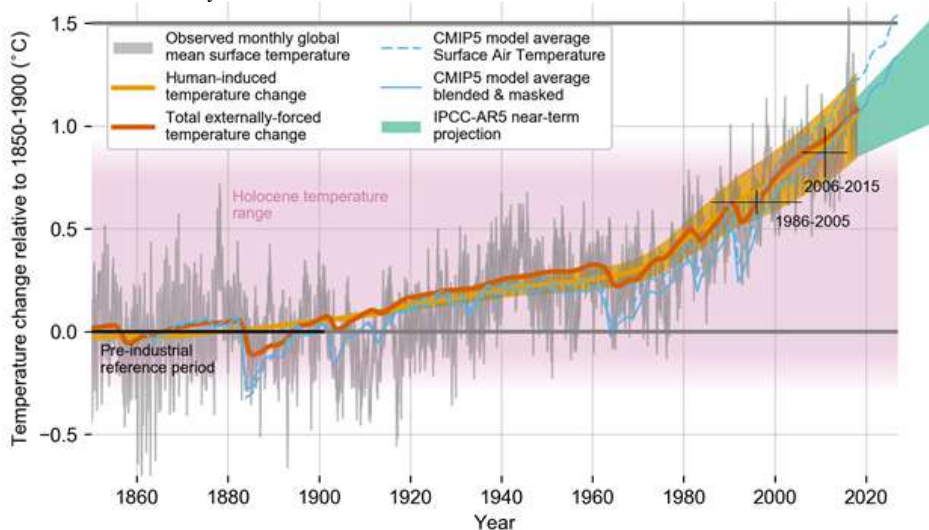
Arguably, it is our own psychology that is condemning us on a path to climate suicide. Our human brain has enabled us to rise above the rest of the animal kingdom and to develop technologies that would have seemed like magic just 200 years ago, yet this human brain is, at the same time, incapable of assessing the threat this progress poses to our planet, as well as to ourselves.

The threat of climate change is often perceived as a kind of chronic, uncertain threat with a potentially high impact (Reser et al., 2011).

This kind of potential threat is treated differently by the mammalian brain than more immediate threats (Fiddick, 2011). This latter type of threat processing, i.e. immediate threats, induces fear that motivates action against a threat found in the present context of the actor, for example in the presence of a predator. Potential threats, on the other hand, are never something tangible, never something that the mammal can certainly sense in its present context, and so usually induce anxiety instead of fear.

Interestingly, Resser et al. Describe the threat of climate change as being perceived as "indirect and virtual" by most people, a description that fits nicely with the definition of *potential threat* in the literature. It's a threat that's realised out of sight, in the far off future or in some faraway land. Consequently, the nature of this detachment means threat-reducing behaviour is not as motivated or quick as immediate threats. This is not the end of the story, however. Researchers have suggested a motivational system that can be induced specifically by the presence of stimuli suggesting potential threats instead of immediate threats, which can then produce the motivation for behaviour that might reduce that threat (Hinds et al., 2010).

Yet, the relative absence of immediate stressors related to climate change in most people's lives makes inducing this motivation all the more difficult. In fact, for many, this existential threat is almost completely absent from their immediate environment, and people often put up barriers to diminish and disregard the threatened state that would otherwise be induced by climate change. These barriers can manifest as a denial of personal responsibility, a perceived inability to affect larger organisations and governments, an increase in the perceived costs of lifestyle changes, and a doubt in the efficacy of any potential actions to fight climate change, due to the threat's perceived distance and uncertainty (Kleeman et al., 2001). In fact, it can be argued that, because of the uncertainty of the problem, as well as its absence in our everyday lives, there is an ever-present difficulty in even perceiving climate change as a potential threat, let alone acting to fight it.



Source: 2018 IPCC Special Report on 1.5 °C

**The Solution**

Despite the pessimistic title of this article, this doesn't have to be the end of our civilisation. We are already seeing the effects of climate change, which will hopefully work to change people's perception and help people see the real danger behind this nebulous concept. We might not be able to stop climate change because it's already happening, and we are close to the point of no return. However, even if we act late, we can still ensure a safer future. Despite the consequences of a planet warmer by 1.5, 2, or even 3 °C, it's still worth stopping this process at whichever point we manage to do so. The reduction of any degree of suffering is still a worthwhile goal

But how can we go about doing this, if people don't even consider climate change as a dangerous enough threat? Well, the same science that has painted this bleak picture can also provide the answer to this seemingly impossible problem. The perception of climate change has been described by psychologists as a "substantially constructed and socially represented phenomenon", one based on narrative and societal pressures and attitudes (Reser et al., 2011). This kind of

research helps to highlight the social and cultural essence of any potentially effective solution. In fact, research has found that something as simple as a group discussion can change one's behaviour towards being more environmentally-friendly (Werner et al., 2012).

This definition of the problem can provide a roadmap for how to begin solving it. For a phenomenon such as this, the construction and propagation of an environmental culture and identity should be central to any solution. For one, a self-identity revolving around environmentalism was found to correlate with some pro-environmental behaviours (Whitmash and O'Neil, 2010). Additionally, research on children has found that parental attitudes on the environment can affect a child's pro-environmental behaviour through the construction of environmental norms (Matthies et al., 2012). In fact, the construction of such norms seems central to behavioural changes even in adulthood. For this to be successful, both the attitudes of the people surrounding an individual, as well as their actions, need to align with a pro-environmental stance to help propagate pro-environmental behaviour (Smith et al., 2012).

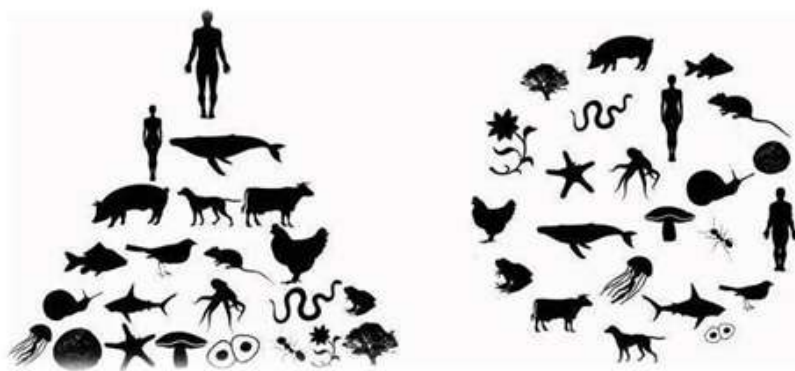
One tangible way in which this is realised, for example, is through a change of attitudes on the level of employers and leaders, that has been found to act as a motivator for top-down cultural change in work and organisational environments (Graves et al., 2013).

Given this knowledge, then, we can begin to plan a path towards a more sustainable future. To overcome the threat climate change poses to our species, and to our planet, we would need to build a global culture that's centered around respecting the environment and those around us, be they human or otherwise. While policy-makers and corporations refuse to act, people are also largely unwilling to pay the price of a sustainable world. The radical lifestyle and organisational changes needed to combat climate change require equally radical cultural shifts that can act as a foundation for the future of this planet.

## Inside the Mind of Other Animals The Anthropocentric Illusion

By Anastasia Dima

*"She was too tired after their long, hot journey to set to on the delicious food, as her daughters did. She had one paralysed arm, the aftermath of a bout of polio nine years ago, and walking was something of an effort. And so, for the moment, she was content to rest and watch as her two daughters ate. One was adult now, the other still caught in the contrariness of adolescence - grown up one moment, childish the next. Minutes passed. And then her eldest, the first pangs of her hunger assuaged, glanced at the old lady, gathered food for both of them and took it to share with her mother."*



This, surprisingly, is not part of a novel but Jane Goodall's anecdotal notes when she was studying the chimpanzees of Gombe, in Tanzania, during the 60's. She was one of the first field researchers that opened a window into their lives along a span of many generations and made unprecedented observations of their tool-using processes, the relationships they form inside their community and the behavioural changes they undergo during different developmental stages. However, she had been criticized of ascribing names and personality traits to the chimpanzees, using human psychological terms in her scientific notes and ultimately committing the so-called 'sin' of anthropomorphism.



Any of us at  
any moment



Source: Redbubble silverorlead

### Neuroscience pun

Control your emotions.

- Amy G. Dala

We are sorry not sorry for this pun. Email better quotes to us at [newsletter.cognito@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.cognito@gmail.com)



Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human-like characteristics and mental states to other animals and is an inherent part of our perception of the world. Being able to attune one's attention to other living beings in the environment, conspecifics or predators alike, is a major advantage for survival. It has been hypothesized that (Caporal & Heyes, 1997), anthropomorphism serves as an automatic response when trying to quickly identify or explain a human-like behaviour and there is not enough information at hand. We instinctively attribute intentions to this behaviour and this interpretation is restrained as soon as we find another, more logically satisfying explanation. Consequently, our anthropomorphic tendencies have an inevitable effect on society and culture throughout human history; from forming everyday relations with pets and domesticating animals to conservation policies and welfare regulations that favour species which are phylogenetically closer to us, carry more similarities both in morphology and behaviour and are thought to experience emotions (pleasure and pain) (Martín-Forés et al., 2013). This seems to be independent of their ecological importance, in the sense of how the species and their niche maintain a balance in the ecosystem.

Should anthropomorphism be a critical part of the research process or does it only lead to biased assumptions? This has been hotly debated among many researchers through the years. It is logical to assume that species that are phylogenetically close (like humans and other primates), meaning having diverged from a common ancestor late in evolutionary history, and exhibit similar behaviours under similar circumstances, also share the same cognitive mechanisms that underlie these behaviours. The famous primatologist Frans de Waal (1997) supports the idea that based on these phylogenetic similarities we should not deny anthropomorphism, rather integrate different anthropomorphic elements critically that could lead to valuable insights and ideas, in the process of formulating testable hypotheses, always taking into consideration the species-specific behaviour, their niche and natural history. Either way, we'll always view the world through our anthropomorphic 'glasses'.

Perhaps, the problem lies deeper, in the anthropocentric perspective through which

animal behaviour research is conducted, when humans are put in the 'comparative centre' as Louise Barrett (2011) suggests. Researchers that delve into the study of behaviour and cognition should maybe contemplate on two things: first, how we fundamentally perceive ourselves, not as another species that is part of the animal kingdom, but above all other species on the top of nature's pyramid, and secondly, what are the motives behind the scientific questions we pose, expanding the scientific knowledge and unraveling the mysteries of nature, or answering questions of our own concern in a utilitarian way with the possibility of a future application. There are certain mental capacities such as theory of mind, language and self-awareness that are considered uniquely human and are often labelled as 'higher' cognitive processes. Research puts a great effort in detecting these traits in other species, as proof of our own uniqueness or finding the precursors of these characteristics as a way to retrace the thread of our own evolution. However, we should not ignore the fact that species that are closer to us, like chimpanzees, live and interact in a completely different habitat than us and even though their senses are similar to ours, they have their own unique adaptations and may perceive the world in a completely different way.

Louise Barrett proposes that in order to acknowledge and restrain anthropocentrism, we have to shift the focus of studying only what is happening solely inside the brain in relation to an observed behaviour to a more embodied approach that combines the dynamic nature of brain processes, bodily states and the environment. In this way, we accept the fact that all species have certain adaptations and skills that are always context-dependent, and their behaviour should always be studied based on their ethology, natural habitat and sensory abilities.

But how do all these fit in the bigger picture, how do we as individuals perceive other species and nature in our everyday life, and how could this ultimately affect the environmental crisis that we are facing nowadays? A human-centred perception of the world sets an exploitative attitude towards other animals and all living entities and shapes negatively animal ethics and our relationship with the rest of nature. According to deep ecology supporters (Thompson & Barton, 1994), "anthropocentrists feel that the environment should be protected because of its value in maintaining or enhancing the quality of life for humans. In contrast, ecocentric individuals value nature for its own sake and, therefore, judge that it deserves protection because of its intrinsic value." So, is it the case that we should start adopting a more ecocentric stance? When we act anthropocentrically, we always set the line between "us" as humans and "them" as animals, even if we have good intentions of

"protecting" certain species. What we consider right or wrong will always be subjective, and it will inevitably lead to discrimination against other animals and the environment. Maybe we should reconsider our fundamental views on how we perceive our 'human identity', not as something static, but as something ever-changing, following the changes of the environment, thus denouncing the rules of normativity and deconstructing, in this case, the human/animal binary.

At the end of the day, maybe all this can be viewed merely as theoretical talk, detached from the direct action that should be taken upon the environmental crisis that we are facing. Nonetheless, a change in our mentality can help us strike at the core of the problem. This won't happen in a day, and *the 'how'* remains to be investigated...but asking ourselves a different question is always the first step...

## Do you need a Break? Saturday Morning Cartoons!

By Ángela Santiago Aranda

Is your internship driving you crazy? Do you miss the carefree time of your childhood? In that case you might need to take a break and relax, and we know how. Cinema of the Dam'd invites us to go back to our childhood days, when we woke up on Saturday mornings to watch our favourite cartoons. Of course, this was always accompanied by a delightful bowl of the sweetest cereal! Sounds great, right?



For three euros, you have the opportunity to become a child again and spend the Saturday morning lying on a sofa or, if you prefer, on one of the big cushions on the floor! If this is not enough for you, you might reconsider it once you see the adorable, chubby, purrrfect cat that will ignore you (or not) whilst you decrease your cortisol levels.

Some of us have already tried this plan, but we would like to hear what you do in Amsterdam to relax. **Share your "must-dos" with InCognito and let us spread them for you!**

Source: Facebook Cinema of the Dam'd

# Climate Change and the COP25

By Siel Hoornaert

Climate change is arguably the largest current threat to our society - or rather, the world. Global warming is a phenomenon which affects every country over the globe, albeit unequally. While everyone contributes to some degree to the increase of our earth's temperatures, the thinning of our atmosphere, the rising sea levels, the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and many more devastating consequences, not everyone does so equally. The countries that contribute most to climate change, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, are the United States of America, China, India, Russia, Japan, and Germany - in fact, these make up well over half of the emissions of the entire world (Levin & Lebling, 2020). Notably, these are not the countries which are being hit hardest by the effects of climate change (Irfan, 2019). However, despite the immense amount of research that demonstrates how disastrous the consequences could be if action is not taken (i.e. not simply banning plastic straws...), there is a shocking lack of both action and urgency from the world's governments and policy makers.

The Climate Summit COP25 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference) was recently held in Madrid, in which heads of state, environmental organisations, scientists, and many other delegations gathered to discuss agreements and promises to combat climate change. The summit was originally supposed to be held in Chile, but due to social unrest in the South American nation, it was relocated to Spain at the last minute. 27,000 delegates participated in what was the longest climate conference on record (Evans & Gabbatis, 2019). However, many matters remained undecided upon and were pushed to next year's conference. In fact, the secretary general of the U.N. called the outcome "disappointing" (Evans & Gabbatis, 2019). There seemed to be a large divide between what was happening inside and out of the conference halls; outside, Greta Thunberg led thousands of activists in protest to call for immediate action, whereas inside, little progress was being made. Members of environmentalist groups stated that they felt that those countries that were responsible for climate change should "pay up" (Irfan, 2019). As mentioned briefly earlier, this is not the case.

Australia was singled out for blocking agreements, resisting progress and trying to get out of agreements through loopholes and exceptions (Chang, 2019). More recently, the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has infamously denied the possible role of climate change in the bush fires that have been raging throughout the country, or the scientific link

between the burning of fossil fuels and climate change. He is committed to fossil fuels (Australia is the largest exporter of coal in the world) and blocked the climate plan of his predecessor, Malcolm Turnbull, when taking office (Kormann, 2020).

The United States was also condemned for blocking climate change talks. In fact, greenhouse gas emissions in the USA are currently increasing (Irfan, 2019). Heads of state from other smaller, developing countries have both directly and indirectly called out the USA for contributing so heavily to climate change, despite not being vulnerable to its effects as other countries with significantly less resources are (Irfan, 2019). President Trump repeatedly said (and continues to say) climate activists are "alarmists" who are in search of control and power, that 'we' should not be so pessimistic - and especially that we should not panic (BBC, 2020).

Similarly to the USA's approach to climate change, Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro has also resisted action, in addition to pulling out of hosting the COP25 in the first place. Bolsonaro has also threatened to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, making it abundantly clear that climate action is not a priority for the Brazilian government (Watts, 2018). Recall the fires that burned the Amazon, which is colloquially referred to as the "earth's lungs."

In contrast to these reactions, the European Union presented the Green New Deal at the COP25. The EU was disappointed in the lack of progress since the Paris Agreement and at the conference itself, and firmly stated that the EU is committed to climate neutrality by 2050, an ambitious goal (European Commission, 2019). The EU, on behalf of all its member states, presented a plan (largely financial) on how to meet the objectives they set for themselves by 2050. Despite the large variance in progress regarding climate neutrality among EU member states, with some more successful than others, the EU has made it clear at the COP25 that it "cannot afford to leave anyone behind" (European Commission, 2019).

While there were many more delegations and countries present at the COP25 in Madrid, these were perhaps the most notable reactions, and shed light on how different countries/world regions are treating the threat of climate change. We see a large divide - Greta Thunberg, Anuna Dewever, and many other young people sailed all the way to South America (and back) to attend the conference and to emphasise the importance of reducing emissions, while other delegations (such as the Belgian climate ministers) 'planepooled' - yes, you read that right - to the Spanish capital. Let us hope that the next climate summit, the COP26 in Glasgow, UK, will be more productive.



Source: me.me