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The role of culture in climate change policy making:
Appealing to universal motivators to address a universal crisis

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Abstract
Climate change poses the first universal crisis of our planet; an urgent crisis, which demands urgent and universal policy. This paper analyzes both the universalist theory, which underlies universal policy, as well as the concepts of culture and cultural difference, which have been used to subvert prior universal policy, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Vienna Declaration.

Keywords: climate change, culture, universalism, policy

1. Introduction

> 'in the first decade of the new millennium, humanity…is more globally united and interconnected, more sensitized to the experiences and suffering of others…more conscious of alternative future possibilities and ideals, more capable of collective healing and compassion, and, aided by technological advances in communication media, more able to think, feel, and respond together in a spiritually evolved manner to the world's swiftly changing realities than has ever before been possible.'
> - Richard Tarnas, Natural Capital Institute (2007)

Climate change poses the first universal crisis of our planet. The natural world recognizes none of man's arbitrary national borders, trade pact zones, or gated communities and affects all humans in an unpredictable manner. It is an urgent and universal crisis that demands an urgent and universal policy.

But is universal policy possible in a world divided by cultural differences? Prior efforts, most notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and Vienna Declaration in 1993 (herein referred to collectively as UDHR), have failed in the sense of a 'universal policy' as individual governments have been allowed to interpret and implement human rights to accommodate 'cultural differences'.

But how big are these differences? Are these differences more salient than any set of universal principals shared by all people? Or is cultural difference too often evoked to mask

economic, political and other interests, knowing that others cannot dispute it without being judged ignorant or insensitive?

To look at the possibility of creating universal policy to address climate change, this paper will explore the role of culture in climate change policy making, looking at concepts of culture, cultural difference, universalism, and policy making, as well as the role that mythology, the media and our connected online world play in shaping our ability to construct a universal policy such as is needed to address a universal crisis of the scale of climate change.

2. Concepts of culture, relativity, and universalism

Of all the words in our language, none provokes more imagery, and misunderstanding, than 'culture'. The term 'culture' is commonly used in many ways, which roughly fall into two categories:

1. Visual and performing art, music, or people deemed more knowledgeable or superior by comparison to their counterparts (e.g., the 'high culture' opera audience looking down their Galilean binoculars at the masses of 'low culture' eagerly anticipating Domino Day; Wijers, 2007).

2. Anthropological studies of the audio and visual arts and behavior of an 'exotic other' (e.g., National Geographic magazine articles of half-naked, paint-covered bodies, indigenous crafts and ritual dances), which expose the anthropological frame of most cultural studies to date, a frame biased by its roots in colonialism. It assumes that culture is a set of characteristics held by exotic other peoples, which we – the norm – do not possess (Ashcroft et al., 1998).

However, if we look at actual definitions of culture, versus the way culture is spoken of, we find the broader definitions favored by communication scientists. Here, culture is defined both as 'a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization, field, activity, or society' (Merriam-Webster, 2007) and 'a comprehensive concept covering all the symbolic and material expressions in words, gestures, images and sounds that people derive an identity from and use in their efforts to distinguish themselves from others' (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2006: 11).

These definitions view culture as a set of ideas and behaviors that define a group of people, whether by gender, ethnicity, nationality, mother tongue, occupation, age, sports, hobbies, and/or even a passing phase. By this definition, no two humans are members of all and only the same cultural groups (Singer, 2000: 28).

With membership in a cultural group comes identification with that culture. Identification may play out in a recognized dress code, mode of speaking, participation in certain rites, etc. These

outwards symbols and behaviors are as much to show camaraderie and solidarity with other members of the group as they are signals to outsiders and 'opposing groups'. Throughout our lives, the relative importance of each identity is dependent upon the situation at hand. Some may remain in the background our entire lives, only to spring forward in sudden importance upon changing circumstances. 'Individuals carry multiple identities, which form their own universally unique whole' (Hamelink, 2006).

The United Nations (2004: 4) Human Development Report of 2004 'Cultural Liberty', states, 'culture is not a frozen set of values and practices. It is constantly recreated as people question, adapt and redefine their values and practices to changing realities and exchanges of ideas.'

So not only is each individual a member of a unique set of multiple cultural groups, but the cultural practices and values of each of these groups are constantly changing. This dynamic reality is a far cry from the static anthropological and class-based ways that ideas of culture are most often invoked. Culture is not intrinsic or genetic, but something learned and judged through nurture. Research on adopted children, who grow up in a land other than their land of origin, and studies of differences between identical twins provide further evidence (Singer, 1987). In practice, however, culture is often referred to a pattern of behavior that is inborn and, therefore, unavoidable and unchangeable.

Cultural difference

If we look at concepts of cultural difference, we again see anthropologically-biased, group-oriented cultural studies, such Values Orientation Theory (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961), and Hofstede's (2001) well-known organizational research, which attempted to quantitatively classify whole nations[1] along linear and absolute dimensions of beliefs, such as power, self, gender, predictability, and time. As conflict transformation expert, Michelle LeBaron (2003: 1) points out, 'any generalization will apply to *some* members of a group *some* of the time'. The challenge, and danger, of course, is in understanding 'who?' and 'when?' 'some' are. While these studies fit everyone in clean, little boxes and may be helpful for understanding broad cultural differences to some extent on a macro level, these theories ignore the immense complexity inherent in unique individuals and risk predestinating outcomes and the stereotyping associated with ethnocentricity.

In an attempt to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings based on cultural differences, an entire 'Intercultural Communications' industry has blossomed, filled with academic and commercial training, seminars, and 'Do and Taboo'-type books. Unfortunately, the more we hear about cultural difference, the more different we think we are and the more likely we are to assume that misunderstandings are cultural, and therefore, inherent, and therefore, unsolvable. The more likely we are to throw our hands in the air, call 'cultural difference' and walk away. The

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[1] Geert Hofstede (2007) classifies the entire Arab World and West Africa as homogenous blocks.

intercultural communications industry can actual leave its students feeling *less* at ease with the culture they will encounter than they would have without the 'training' and risk reinforcing and/or creating stereotypes by assigning a standard behavior to a large group of individuals (Undutchables, 2008).

If we return again to the actual definition of culture as 'the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization, field, activity, or society' (Merriam-Webster, 2007), than cultural differences could be defined as 'differences in shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices between societies'. These differences in shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices are learned *from* our societies. Some carry deeper cultural significance than others, but many are simply practices that have no deeper significance, although these differences can cost multinational organizations time, money and embarrassment when they get it wrong.

Ethnocentrism

Our tendency to see our way as natural and correct and to fear/ loathe/ distrust different ways as unnatural and incorrect is often referred to as ethnocentricity. One of the most noticeable displays of ethnocentricity can be seen in the current discussions in historically Christian Western communities that are struggling to 'integrate' non-native ethnicities, especially those of Muslim faith. The latter accuses the former of not accepting 'Western values' of equality and freedom, while the former remain appalled by the lack of values in Western societies reflected in high rates of violence, promiscuity, and divorce, along with a perceived lack of respect towards elders and the community. Each group remains convinced that the other lacks values and plays into the set of 'universal' stereotypes identified in the 1970s by anthropologist, Robert LeVine, and psychologist, Donald Campbell (1972: 173). Blaming 'cultural differences' between the 'native' and the 'newcomers', based not on how long a family has been in the country, but largely on the color of their skin and religious beliefs, is easier than addressing the very realistic fears of increasing economic disparity, decreasing congregations in the native's own faiths, and lack of space and opportunity.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are widely held beliefs about a definable group, which is caused by a combination of tension between diverse groups, negative experiences, inequalities, perceived threats and repetitive images used in the media. Over time, stereotypes can become a widely-accepted 'cultural truth', even in the face of multiple deviances. The stereotype becomes something to challenge, fight or disprove for members of these cultures instead of being judged on their individual behavior. We look for incidences which support the stereotype and tend to ignore incidences that contradict it (Burgess, 2003).

One of the original designers of Epcot Center, a permanent world fair located in Orlando, Florida, observed that visitors to the country pavilions typically disliked their 'own' country pavilion, while enjoying the others (personal communication). He hypothesized this happened because the country pavilions played to common stereotypes (e.g., German beer halls, Japanese pagodas, and Mexican Mariachi bands), which confirmed the stereotypes visitors hold of these countries. Yet, most visitors resented seeing their own country defined by its stereotypes, because they see they own country as naturally more complex.

It is nearly impossible to find a 'typical' anyone because there will always be an exception for the uniqueness inherent in an individual. As we look harder at what makes the so-and-so so typical, we realize that those characteristics also describe other cultures and are, therefore, not unique to them. As language expert, Abraam de Swaan (2006) always reminds us, 'precisely what makes us feel so unique may be the precise things we have in common with every other group.'

Even among studies of individual behavior within multi-cultural organizations (Gardenswartz et al, 2003), 'personal values accounted for a large proportion of individual variation in readiness for contact with others from a different group' (Connerley and Pedersen, 2005: 44). Even Clyde Kluckhohn, one of the creators of the Values Orientation Theory (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961), ultimately concluded that, 'despite wide differences in customs, there are apparently fundamental human values common to the diverse cultures of the world.' (Parsons and Vogt, 1962: 141).

Identity politics

Unfortunately, religious and ethnic groups have often been pitted against one another in the name of cultural differences to mask economic and political interests, avoid unpopular policy requirements (e.g., human rights and environmental responsibility), and justify discrimination against a particular group (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religion, age), knowing that others cannot dispute them without fear of being judged ignorant or insensitive. 'Identity politics' have been used by members of one ethnicity, religion, etc. to call attention to their own uniqueness, thereby creating dividing lines between themselves and 'the other side'. However according to the UNHDR 'Cultural Liberty Report' (United Nations, 2004: 3):

'there is little empirical evidence that cultural differences and clashes over values are in themselves a cause of violent conflict. (While)…violent conflicts have arisen… (primarily)… between ethnic groups…there is wide agreement…by scholars that cultural differences by themselves are not the relevant factor. Some…argue…cultural diversity reduces the risk of conflict by making group mobilization more difficult…Wars (are caused by)… economic inequalities,… struggles over political power, land and other economic assets. Cultural identity… (is not)…a cause but…a driver for political mobilization. Leaders invoke a single identity, its symbols and its history of grievances, to 'rally the troops'. It is not rare for groups to be dominated by people who have an interest in maintaining the status quo under the

justification of 'tradition' and who act as gatekeepers of traditionalism to freeze their cultures.'

Genocide typically starts when one identity (e.g., religion, ethnicity) dominates and minimizes the relevance of other identities. By focusing on this one identity, individuals become 'de-humanized' members of contrasting groups and can therefore collectively labeled as evil. By removing the individual human faces on members of this contrasting group, the members all merge into one homogeneous, two-dimensional face which is easier to dislike and distrust. Identity development plays an especially strong role in the first three stages of genocide – Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization identified by Gregory Stanton (Genocide Watch, 1998). It is this inherent and inevitable concept of cultural identity and violence, which Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen (2006), recently outlined. He argues that cultural identity-based violence is not inevitable and uses the manipulated brutality between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims during the partitioning of British India as a quintessential example of identity politics in action.

More recently, the Western propaganda leading up to the American-led invasion of Iraq fed on identity politics of Samuel Huntington's (1993) Clash of Civilizations. Its discussion of a cultural war, a war of civilizations, and a defending of democracy, helped to justify a Christian Crusade-like march into 'Muslim incivility'. Iraqis were alternatively mentioned as both terrorists and victims in need of liberation. However, as Reda Benkirane (2002: 2) of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance eloquently states:

> 'the problem with the application of Huntington's theory in the current context is that cultures and civilizations are now portrayed as playing the roles that nation-states played during the Cold War. Cultures and civilizations are seen as monolithic blocs acting on the geopolitical scene rather than as living and evolving organisms that need constantly to exchange and interact with their environment. Furthermore, the clashes Huntington classified as timeless[2] are more often camouflage for economic and political aspirations by local, regional and international power brokers.'

And, as Sen (2006: xvii) emphasizes, 'the prospects of peace in the contemporary world may well lie in the recognition of the plurality of our affiliations and in the use of reasoning as common inhabitants of a wide world'.

Political uses of cultural relativism

Cultural relativists still argue, though, that 'the concept of human rights is really a cover for Western interventionism in the affairs of the developing world, and that 'human rights' are merely an instrument of Western political neocolonialism' (Tharoor, 1999/2000: 2). It is from this basis that Asian Values' proponents, who helped engineer the Bangkok Declaration, claim that

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[2] Huntington (1993: 25) emphasized that the 'conflicts of the future will occur along cultural fault lines separating…seven or eight major civilizations… (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization)'.

the 'communitarian, Confucian and Buddhist Asian' is focused on social, economic and cultural rights while the 'individualistic, Christian Westerner' is focused on civil and political rights. 'Asian Values' proponents do not question international legal human rights documents as such; they question the emphasis by Western countries on civil and political rights.

However, they call more often to their 'national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of their peoples...' (ASEAN, 1993: 1)[3] as opposed to specific fundamentally different cultural values (Steiner, 2005). The need for governments to stabilize their political powers by meeting people's basic needs can be found throughout history and government. It is on this precedent that 'Asian Values' proponents argue that they prioritize a certain set of rights. 'Objections to the applicability of international human rights standards have all too frequently been voiced by authoritarian rulers and power elites to rationalize their violations of human rights—violations that serve primarily, if not solely, to sustain them in power' (Tharoor, 1999/2000: 5). According to Kim Dae-jung (1994: 2), former South Korean President and Nobel Peace Prize Recipient, 'Asia has a rich heritage of democracy-oriented philosophies and traditions...the biggest obstacle is not its cultural heritage but the resistance of authoritarian rulers and their apologists...it is widely accepted that English political philosopher John Locke laid the foundation for modern democracy. But almost two millennia before Locke, Chinese philosopher Meng-tzu preached similar ideas'.

However, in 1990 the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), created during the Organization of the Islamic Conference, asserted that because the UDHR was a 'western secular concept of Judeo-Christian origin, (it was) incompatible with the sacred Islamic shari'a' (Littman 1999: 1). Under the more extreme implementations of Sharia law, Muslim men have twice the power in a court than a woman or a non-Muslim man. However, the Prophet Muhammad created the Constitution of Medina (*Sahifat al-Madinah*), which was 'based on tolerance, equality and justice...many centuries before such an idea existed anywhere else in the world (Sajid, 2004: 1).

Ultimately, 'there does not need to be any trade-off between respect for cultural difference and human rights and development' (United Nations, 2004: 4).

2. Universalism[4]

> 'The crucial task is to fundamentally strengthen a system of universally shared moral standards that will make it impossible, on a truly, global scale, for the various rules to be time and again circumvented with still more ingenuity than had gone into their invention.

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[3] The exact wording vis-à-vis universalism is 'while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.'

[4] For the purposes of this paper, I refer to the philosophical understanding of universalism to mean the belief that universal facts can be discovered, in opposition to relativism, such as those which underpin the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Such standards will truly guarantee the weight of the rules and will generate natural respect for them in the societal climate.'
- Vaclav Havel (2000: 4)

'When have you heard a free voice demand an end to freedom? Where have you heard a slave argue for slavery? When have you heard a victim of torture endorse the ways of the torturer? Where have you heard the tolerant cry out for intolerance?'
- Kofi Annan (1997)

Universalist concepts have existed since the ancient Greeks, but universalism is often considered an Enlightenment concept (Hall, 1979; West, 1993; Wood, 1991). Universalists assert that beneath cultural differences, all humans share core philosophical common denominators (Maleuvre, 2004), ground ideas (Campbell, 1991), human identity (Littman, 1999), archetypes (Jung, 1934-1954), human nature (Wilson, 1978) and contend that universal truths can be identified. They claim there are experiences, longings, and needs that might unite human beings, *regardless* of any cultural, gender, or religious differences.

Universalism does not claim that we are all the same, nor does it refute that differences exist. The studies of these differences are important for effective international business and affairs. It is a disagreement about the extent to which differences, rather than universal principles, should be emphasized. Universalism has been understudied in the past primarily because cultural studies are typically based in either the anthropology field, which by its nature focuses on the unique patterns found in micro-slices of a specific culture and geography, or international relations, which focuses on state-based national differences. As E.O. Wilson (1999) claims, the study of human nature requires a cross-disciplinary study which crosses into communications, sociology, psychology, socio-cultural anthropology, political science, literature, theater and international relations.

So, despite its vulnerability to claims of post-colonialism, researchers like Didier Maleuvre (2004: 134) claim:

'the bias against any homogeneity…is…misguided, since it is on the basis of this assumption of universal dignity that respect for differences is claimed. Dignity is bestowed because I see, beneath the patchwork of culture, the human being — a human being whom I recognize as being like me…Concepts of justice and law, the legitimacy of government, the dignity of the individual, protection from oppressive or arbitrary rule, and participation in the affairs of the community are found in every society on the face of this earth…Tolerance and mercy have always, and in all cultures, been ideals of government rule and human behavior.'

Universalism is not simply the art of learning to 'delight in our differences', as Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said (United Nations, 2004: v). It is reaching deeper to find universal connections that supersede the differences and appealing to them. Anthropologists can continue to study nuances of tribes, and we can continue to celebrate diversity, but if too much emphasis is placed on the differences, we risk losing sight of the similarities. We must

understand the economic, personal and political interests behind cries of cultural differences, without fear of being judged ignorant or insensitive.

Universalism embraced

The idea of universal principals was embraced long ago by religious, activist, media and commercial organizations and underpins the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the very concept of the United Nations; from missionaries preaching their gospels and activist petitioning for greater representation to movies geared to our inner hero and 'glocal' marketing campaigns 'communicat(ing) in many languages but with one voice' (Interbrand, 2005a: 4). However, evidence of its existence goes back to the earliest myths created by man to explain the world view of a people (Campbell and Moyers, 1991). According to the pioneer of modern comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell, all mythology around the world and throughout the ages has been based upon the same universal, timeless and transcending themes or 'ground ideas' that proved that the human psyche, regardless of sex, nationality, or culture, craved basic ideas around which the world could be understood (Campbell and Moyers, 1991). They help us understand the mysteries of life, the coming of age, and death; our relationship with the spiritual world, nature, and each other; and the hero's journey, which 'serves as a template for life's major initiations – birth, coming of age, finding a partner and raising a family, growing old and dying' (Gerringer, 2006: 19).

Campbell argued that our physical environment and time in history shape the details of the myths we create, and that clashes between cultures are found in these details, not in the transcending themes underlying them. In the great Indian epic, Mahabharata, written more than 2000 years ago, the great rishi, Bharadvaja, argued against the traditional caste system with the question 'how…(can)…we have caste differences… (when)…we all seem to be affected by desire, anger, fear, sorrow, worry, hunger, and labour (Sen, 2005: 3-4)?

Campbell began with Carl Jung's (1968: 8 & 43, *paraphrased*) archetypes, the 'collective, universal, eternal, inherited and unconscious images identical in all humans', as a way of explaining why similar images reoccur in myths of completely different cultures. We see these images repeatedly in our dreams, which explains 'why myths and most stories constructed on the mythological model have the ring of psychological truth…(and)…accounts for the universal power of such stories' (Vogler, 1998: 15). The planning group for a new museum on mythology chose to focus on death as a key entry point for the exhibits because 'all questions are rooted in death' (Harness, 2007).

Universalism in the media

Storytelling still often follows the ancient patterns of the mythical heroes journey, and not coincidentally, the most successful films (e.g., Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Harry Potter, ET, and

The Lord of the Rings) both within the U.S. home market of Hollywood (Movie Web, 2007a and 2007b), as well as outside the U.S. (IMDB, 2007), reflect this theme. According to Christopher Vogler (1998: 10), story analyst of the Walt Disney Company:

> 'the pattern of the Hero's Journey is universal, occurring in every culture, every time. It is as infinitely varied as the human race itself and yet its basic form remains constant…stories built on the model of the Hero's Journey have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they deal with the childlike universal questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? What is good and what is evil? What must I do about it? What will tomorrow be like? Where did yesterday go? Is there anybody else out there?'

Even the highest grossing films made outside of Hollywood's global distribution reach: Wo hu cang long (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon), La Vita è Bella (Life is Beautiful), and Ying xiong (Hero) (Kaufman, 2004; Lists of Bests, 2007; Film Fest, 2004) have been either martial arts fantasies or stories of unusual heroes, which appeal to these elements. Crouching Tiger is:

> 'putatively set in 19th century China, but it could be anywhere, any when. It is a place of high honor and deep feelings, a place where people are bound by traditions and held captive by their forms. It is also a place of wild and mythic landscapes...from stark desert…to magic misty green mountains with deep dark lakes and steeply cascading streams that come braiding, tumbling down the rockslide heights. High, reedy bamboo forests wave, wondrous, in sighing winds…apart from all else, this is grand storytelling! It has passion, love, revenge...it expresses deep need and longing..' (Santoro, 2001)

Research on international television programming has found that violence, sex, heartbreak (e.g., soaps), body humor (e.g., Mr. Bean) and basic humor (e.g., Friends, Nanny, Cosby, Bundy, Sex in the City, Simpsons, South Park) export well because they are simple to translate and play to universally-empathetic and recognized characters and themes (Kuipers, 2007).

Universalism and cross-border interests

Some cultural groups cross traditional ethnic and national borders, such as expats, deaf people, professionals in almost any field (Rotary Club, 2007), athletes, and elites (aSmallWorld, 2007), as well as more harmful groups, such as pedophiles and racists. While individual academics attending an international conference will display any number of obvious signs of cultural difference, at the core, each attends the conferences and writes papers in order to present their work, which follows a common set of principles and rules, and be judged by their peers.

Part of what fuels the connect-ability of these groups is the ability to find each other. Since the usage of email and the Internet has exploded in the past fifteen years, social scientists have noted several communications techniques spawned by this technology – blogs, email chain letters, online petitioning, instant messaging, and video sharing – that break traditional

boundaries. The Internet allows kindred souls to organize around their causes and essentially broadens the geographic reach of the 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1991).

When Amnesty International (2007) wants to petition for the release of political prisoners around the world or the National Resource Defense Council (2007) wants to protest a potentially harmful dam in Chile, Internet activism provides information dissemination, petitioning, and fundraising opportunities. The recent uprising in Burma was fueled by online bloggers (YouTube, 2007) and digital camera mobile phone users updating the outside world. When the Burmese government wanted to close its borders, it first shut down the Internet providers, a measure as effective as a physical closure of airports or checkpoints (Mydans, 2007).

The environmental movement in particular has strengthened the embrace what one reviewer of the recently published One Planet book from Lonely Planet (2004: cover sleeve) called a 'celebration of…the connections and similarities that exist within…diversity… unifying moments in our superficially divided one and only planet.'

Universalism in commerce

According to Interbrand, one of the top brand management firms in the world:

> 'brands are…central to…democratic societies. They…have a profound impact on…the way we see our world (2005b)…(They) symbolize a promise that people believe can be delivered and one they desire to be part of. Through emotion, brands can achieve the loyalty of consumers by tapping into human values and aspirations that cut across cultural differences. Global brands (transcend borders), act as ambassadors for nations and capture the spirit of an age'. Global brands appeal to universal principals, but must be locally adaptable (2005a: 3-4).

Coca-Cola (happiness), Louis Vuitton (luxury) Nike (sport), and Harley-Davidson (freedom) are often touted as great lifestyle brands. Coca-Cola in particular has used universalist messages, such as 'One World, One Coke', for decades, becoming the most valuable logo in the world, at >US$ 66B in 2007 (Interbrand, 2007).

3. Universalism and climate change

So what does a discussion on human rights, universalism, and cultural differences have to do precisely with climate change policy making? Climate change is a universal crisis that demands urgent, universal policy, just as human rights seemed a universal issue following the destruction of World War II. True universal deployment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was derailed by politicians claiming 'cultural relativism' (ASEAN, 1993). The UN Resident Coordinator in China, Khalid Malik, has stated 'A clean environment is a basic right' (Malik, 2007). This moves the discourse on climate change policy into the discourse on human rights, where cultural difference has effectively been used to deny universal implementation.

The motivation for this research is twofold: to debunk cultural difference as a real barrier to universal policy making in order to avoid a cultural relativist derailment on climate change policy as well; and to look at how the flipside of cultural difference, universal motivations inherent to all humans, can be invoked to successfully address climate change around the world.

Climate change has been alternatively framed as an issue of human rights (Watt-Cloutier, 2004; Malik, 2007), religious stewardship (Evangelical Climate Initiative, 2007), and morality (Gore, 2006). The former frames climate change mitigation as universally-humanistic right, while the latter clearly emphasizes our responsibility.

Religion, morality, and the natural world

'Religious leaders, liberal and conservative…understand that all spiritual life begins with a sense of wonder, and that one of the first windows to wonder is the natural world.'
- Richard Louv (2007)

'science and religion are potential allies for averting mass extinction'
- E.O. Wilson (2006)

The religions of the world roughly fall into three categories: indigenous, polytheistic, and monotheistic. The primary difference between the faiths in these three categories lies in different perceptions about the origin of power. These beliefs impact how they view their relationship to nature. Indigenous religions generally perceive the earth as the primary source of power, viewing spirituality within the natural world, to which they must pay reverence, and see themselves as part of this greater system. Polytheistic religions generally perceive power as originating from within the self and view themselves as part of the natural world, but emphasize a simplicity of living in it which by its nature will tread lightly on the Earth. Monotheistic religions generally perceive power as originating from a heaven-based god. The natural world is seen as a gift from God, over which they act as benevolent rulers.

Indigenous and polytheistic religions tend to see environmental care as self-evident and wholly in keeping with centuries of theological practice, while monotheistic religions view environmental responsibility as a modern subject to be debated. The latter struggles to reconcile their monotheistic responsibility to worship but one god with the fear that environmental care will be seen as a form of worship of the earth.

However, as scientific evidence builds about the existence, causes and solutions of climate change, many of these religious leaders have spoken out about environmental responsibility and recognize that while they approach climate change from very different motivations and backgrounds, they share common interests with scientists and believers of other faiths in protecting the earth. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently reported that:

'In contrast to abortion and other hot-button cultural issues, which divide most religious groups in the United States, there is fairly strong consensus across faith traditions on

environmental policy…By a two-to-one margin (55% to 27%) respondents back strong regulations to protect the environment. Furthermore, the level of support is quite deep…Respondents in this survey were asked whether they favored stronger environmental regulations 'even if they cost jobs or result in higher prices'…(in ranking) priorities for religious voters, environment (53%) ranks higher than abortion (46%) or gay marriage (33%) (Pew Forum, 2004: 1-2).

Humans and the natural world

But what about our right to a healthy environment? According to Harvard Entomologist, E.O. Wilson (1984: 10):

> 'Our intrinsic emotions…crave the sense of a mysterious world stretching indefinitely beyond. The greater our knowledge, the deeper the mystery and the more we seek knowledge to create new mystery. Our sense of wonder grows exponentially.'

In his innovative research on ant colonies, Wilson (1984) found that humans had looked to the natural world for *understanding* and *meaning* for millennia. In more recent years, biologists, psychologists, educators, and designers, have confirmed that humans respond more deeply to just about any natural thing more than we would to just about any man-made thing. There is a complexity and a balance to the natural world that man cannot re-create. Somehow we instinctively know this and respond to that pull. We prefer entities that are complicated, evolving, and sufficiently unpredictable to be interesting. Nature provides us with *mystery*.

Given our choice, we will migrate towards a sanctuary that millennia ago would have improved our chances of *survival*. People in a variety of cultures and locations around the world prefer landscapes with tree groves that provide horizontal canopies, water, elevation changes, distant views, flowers, indications of other people or inhabited structures – all elements that indicate possible food, shelter, and places to explore. They make an artificial environment more habitable.

Contact with nature provides people with a sense of *joy*, which translates into a more effective space for learning, working and living.

In a study performed by the Heschong-Mahone (1999) group elementary school students in classrooms with the most [diffuse] daylight showed a 21 percent improvement in learning rates compared to students in classrooms with the least daylight. A study at Herman-Miller (2004) showed up to a 7% increase in worker *productivity* following a move to a green, day-lit facility. A Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory study (Kumar and Fisk, 2002) found that U.S. businesses could save as much as $58 billion in lost sick time and an additional $200 billion in worker performance if improvements were made to indoor air quality. Workers were more excited about work, in better spirits at work, felt less fatigue, and rated their job satisfaction higher in the new building (Kats et al., 2003).

According to Robin Moore, an expert on the design of environments for children, 'Natural spaces and materials *stimulate* a children's limitless imagination and serve as the medium of inventiveness and creativity' (Louv, 2007: 5). Louv further states that children played more creativity, cooperatively, and displayed longer attention spans with direct experiences in nature.

Innovators in a wide variety of fields have studied the natural world for design <u>inspiration</u>. In many cases, nature already provides us with many complex, self-sufficient systems to study, mimic, and test, which is far more efficient than trying to build new, inferior systems of individual parts at random. We already live with several revolutionary products that were inspired by nature – Velcro (barbs on weed seeds); the Sydney Opera House (milkweed pods and sea shells); the telephone (mimicked the Human tongue and ear drum); and of course, the most famous of all bird-watchers…the Wright Brothers (Benyus, 2002).

Future myth

Nearly a decade ago Campbell predicted that 'future myths' would revolve around a common concern for the planet upon which we all depend to survive (Campbell and Moyers, 1991). Spurred by environmental degradation (United Nations, 2005), increasingly severe weather, storms and droughts, demographic shifts, growing environmental ethics and financial concerns (Smart Growth, 2007) climate change and environmental stewardship have become mainstream conversation.[5] Charles Tilly's (2006) research on meaning making assert that dramatic changes, like the severe climate changes experienced in nearly every corner of the world, have forced people of diverse backgrounds to find reasons – or what he calls 'organized answers to the question of 'why?'' – for climate change. As Tilly further explains, 'while explanations for causes and consequences of major events (are) bound to cultural and national conditions and history…(the) giving of reasons… connects people with each other…(and)…provides… shared accounts of what is happening'. These shared accounts begin to constitute a common explanation or myth about the world around us. Climate change is increasingly seen as one the 'great narratives in global society' (Neverla, 2007), and through these conversations, societies can create a new mythology, which makes sense of the present and tries to predict the future.

4. Conclusion

> 'A Native-American taught me that the division between ecology and human rights was an artificial one, that the environmental and social justice movements addressed two sides of a larger dilemma. The way we harm the earth affects all people, and how we treat each other is how we treat the earth'
> - Paul Hawken (2007)

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[5] Fifty-eight percent of Americans, whose 'ecological footprint' marks one of the most disproportionate uses of the world's natural resources (Venetoulis and Talberth, 2005) believe not only climate change as a result of global warming has already begun, but that it is the result of man-made operations, not natural cycles (Zogby International 2006)

Thanks to the recent IPCC (2007) Assessment Report, the Stern Review (2006) and the collective actions of millions within the social justice movement (Hawken, 2007), the general public finally understands that climate change is real and that our human activities are the primary cause of it. 'Saving the planet' no longer means that the planet itself needs to be saved out of some feel-good principal, but that the human race needs to act quickly in order to preserve the delicate natural balance which allows us as a species to live here. The planet will survive. Will we be able to survive upon it? What steps need to be taken to mitigate the worst scenarios predicted in the reports mentioned above?

Unlike human rights, which are supported by the basic principles of religions and stable societies around the world, addressing climate change requires the engagement of millions of individuals performing multiple steps to reach a more obscure goal. In the Western world, this will likely include modifications of the consuming and mobile lifestyles to which we are accustomed. Successful engagement at this level requires personal, mass commitment to deeper, universal principals, such as those already found in mythology, art, religion, commerce, and human rights.

2007 has been labeled the tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) on climate change; the year that the natural world earned front page coverage, an Oscar, and even the Nobel Prize. Most importantly, it earned the respect and urgency of the general public (WPO and CCGA, 2007), who now want to know exactly what they have to do to help. According to the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM, 2004), 70% of Dutch citizens see climate crisis as a social dilemma, expect the government to organize a response and are prepared to adjust their own behavior if others around them do as well. However, policy makers, academics, and the media reporting on climate change often severely underestimate the willingness of individuals to engage in this process. Assumptions are made that 'lifestyles must be maintained' by business and governments, who, not coincidentally, may benefit from increases in energy uSage Publications. The Chairman[6] of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, who also represents the 'auto' state of Michigan, was so certain that the public was not willing to sacrifice that he threatened to introduce a huge carbon tax, simply so it could be defeated, in order to prove his point (Andrews, 2007).

However, instead of assuming a lack of commitment, we must *tap into the collective desire* that already exists *to unite against a common threat*. Show normal people how to do something in the face of a worldwide crisis instead of leaving them to our human tendency towards the environmental fatalism, already documented in the first century B.C. (Hudson, 1993).

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[6] John Dingell also represents the Democratic Party, which is currently seen as more willing to address the climate change crisis (Earth Day Network, 2006).

Following the attacks on 11 September 2001, most U.S. Americans were prepared to sacrifice anything to prevent another attack. Unfortunately, instead of calling for a reduction in arms proliferation or oil usage or an increase in diplomacy and personal reflection, U.S. President Bush told Americans to go shopping (Bush, 2001). This was supposed to show the terrorists that they would not beat us by changing our (consuming) lifestyle. This is in sharp contrast to the calls, and answers, for rationing during WWII, the oil-crisis induced run on energy-efficient cars in 1973-4, and the water rationing during the California drought in 1976-7. During the California droughts, residents were not allowed to wash their own cars, nor run their sprinklers, and were encouraged to take short, 'military' showers. Even in the most Libertarian-Republican type of neighborhoods, this kind of specific policy was welcomed. It was a collective cause around which neighbors rallied, made jokes, and used social pressure to ensure the reluctant conformed.

The success or failure of worldwide cooperation on 'global environmental governance' is dependent upon many factors, but any true climate change policy must be made inside of a *larger discussion of sustainable growth*, while '*connecting the dots*' between the economy, environment, security and energy. Research by IPCC Contributor and Fletcher Professor of International Negotiation, Adil Najam (2005), articulates how the G77 has effectively questioned the status quo assumptions of the G7 around the debate on climate change. 'First multiple sides coalesced into G77 and (later) the concept of sustainable development… allowed for a valuable dialogue (on global warming) between (the) North and South'. Sustainability can be defined in many ways, but at its heart is the idea that any man-made structure or activity is self-sustaining (i.e., producing and using its own energy, water, and air (oxygen), consuming its own waste, and providing in advance for its own decomposition). In other words, zero impact. Our structures and activity must find the balance of a new triple bottom line (McDonough and Braungart, 2002), a workable sustainability between people, planet and profit, where every project looks at the social, economic, and environmental impacts it has on the world.

In addition, we can *learn from the natural world* itself and those who live sustainably within it. Víctor Toledo (2000) demonstrates a clear link between indigenous peoples and biodiversity (90% of biodiversity lies within indigenous areas), providing clear evidence that our biodiversity can only be conserved if we 'maintain, reinforce or give control to the indigenous communities on their own territories and natural resources as well as sufficient access to information and technology, which give the communities both an economic incentive and a legal basis for stewardship' (Toledo, 2000: 10). In addition he argues that 'indigenous societies house a repertory of ecological knowledge which generally is local, collective, diachronic and holistic' (Toledo, 2000: 7). Their normal way of life minimizes waste and maximizes sustainability, exemplifying what we label carbon neutral/ low footprint lifestyle.

According to Friends of the Earth International (2007), more than 90 percent of food requirements in Africa are met with indigenous farming systems, such as saving seeds and native harvesting (LaDuke, 2007), which have sustained communities for millennia. Instead of battling over 'who owns lifeforms, foods, and medicines[7] that have throughout history been the collective property of indigenous peoples' (LaDuke, 2007: 2) we should be learning from their practices and stop the 'large-scale, industrialized, vertically integrated food production' by global agribusiness conglomerates (Kingsolver, 2003).

Further, since 'there is no technofix to the disastrous impact of air travel on the environment[8], the only answer is to ground most of the aeroplanes flying today' (Monbiot, 2006). Climate change mitigation will require a general *de-mobilizing of Western lifestyles* and a re-acquaintance with local sources. Distinguishing between the lack of trust and miscommunication inherent in lower-presence, mediated communication (Nevejan, 2007) and miscommunication that truly stems from culture difference will become even more critical.

Finally, we must *reclaim the discourse on climate change mitigation from the commercial world* and stop looking to the individual, profit-driven entities within the commercial world to solve our universal crisis. Climate change will only be solved through collective, public action into which commercial enterprises will have the opportunity to feed new technologies and ideas. Decoupling climate change solutions from the commercial will allow more de-centralized, more local solutions to flourish (Arnoldy, 2007). Included in this process is the dispelling of the notion that we must choose between environmental stewardship and economic growth. In the just released California Green Innovation Index (Next 10, 2006: 3), 'as a result of the first wave of green innovation, which began in the 1970s…California is more energy efficient and emits fewer greenhouse gas emissions per person than the rest of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom or Japan. California's economy has grown (20%) as a result of this first wave of green innovation'. In addition, its 'ratio of (greenhouse gas) GHG[9] emissions to GDP' has dropped from 0.45 in 1990 to 0.35 in 2004. One particularly interesting chart (Next 10, 2006: 18) shows that 'the growing separation (between carbon emissions cap and inflation adjusted GDP dollars per cap) illustrates the declining dependence of California's economic growth on environmental degradation'.

In his denial that a choice must be made between economic growth and human rights, Sen (1999) explains, there is a 'broad consensus on a list of 'helpful policies' that includes openness to competition, the use of international markets, public provision of incentives for investment and export, a high level of literacy and schooling, successful land reforms, and other social

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[7] Ninety-seven percent of all patents are held by industrialized countries (Howard, 2001).
[8] 'Aviation is the fastest growing cause of climate change. By 2050 it will account for more than 15% of world wide CO2 levels…every tonne of emissions from aircraft has the effect of 2.7 tonnes due to its 'radiative force'…aviation is one of the single largest threats to climate stability, and consequently to life on earth' (Garman, 2006: 1).
[9] Carbon emissions account for roughly 72% of all greenhouse gas emissions (Next 10, 2006: 18).

opportunities that widen participation in the process of economic expansion…(further)… there is overwhelming evidence to show that what is needed for generating faster economic growth is a friendlier economic climate rather than a harsher political system'.

The ideas outlined above are by no means conclusive, but I am encouraged by the swell of interest and support, not only to address climate change, but our broken relationship with the natural world and our world community. I close this paper with…

> '…nature, imaginative by necessity, has already solved many of the problems [10]we are grappling with. Animals, plants, and microbes are the consummate engineers. They have found what works, what is appropriate, and most important, what lasts here on Earth. After 3.8 billion years of research and development, failures are fossils, and what surrounds us is the secret to survival…The conscious emulation of life's genius is a survival strategy for the human race, a path to a sustainable future. The more our world looks and functions like the natural world, the more likely we are to endure on this home that is ours, but not ours alone.'
> - Janine Benyus (2002)

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