Sigtuna Think Piece 3
The Wider Context Of Climate Change Discourse

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Abstract

This paper discusses climate change from the perspective of metaphorical vision. The paper asserts that there is one central metaphorical vision driving Western societies, notably the metaphorical vision of the enemy. The paper goes on to explain how this metaphorical vision manifests itself and how it is maintained through psychological and other social interests. It then provides an empirical example of a climate change project in Kenya that demonstrates the visibility of this metaphor surrounding climate change, and then provides a viewpoint of a business scientist, Bjorn Lomberg, who challenges conventional discourse on climate change. The paper finally considers what the educational implications are of perpetuating enemy metaphorical visions through climate change education and challenges researchers to consider whether the enemy metaphor can be overturned and changed as central metaphor in climate change education.

Introduction

The findings of the world's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are receiving significant amounts of attention across the world (Tanner & Mitchell, 2008). According to these authors, achieving an international agreement, especially under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), on emission targets, burden sharing, trading mechanisms as well as technological and financial assistance remains a high priority issue for the 'mitigation' of climate change. Tanner and Mitchell (2008) further add that the question of how to address climate change impacts in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction is becoming a major and pressing concern in many parts of the world.

The discourse on climate change has moved so rapidly that several issues around the topic are already known with reasonable confidence by scientists, such as the general causes, dimensions and potential impacts of climate change on one hand, and the adaptational, social justice and economic cases of climate change, on the other. The objective of this article is to present a wider context of the discourse of climate change as a way of contributing to some better understanding of the subject. In the process of this presentation, potential researchable areas will be highlighted for readers interested in pursuing further the orientation taken herein. In presenting this discussion, I consider it crucial for readers to understand how the immediate, local concerns and anxieties associated with climate change often have much broader and deeper contextual causes than those that may be immediately apparent.

Metaphorical Vision

Metaphorical vision of the enemy

The first point to state is that the whole discourse on climate change is locked into metaphor. Metaphor plays a fundamental role in our perception and comprehension as well as our thinking and writing about climate change. This point as it applies to education is discussed below in more detail. Societies and individuals differ in their choices of metaphors. Interest in metaphor is partly due to, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have shown, the point that the concepts of climate change that govern our thought are not just matters of science or the intellect but that these concepts are originally metaphorical in nature. How climate change is structured, understood and addressed is deeply metaphorical. Many of the linguistic concepts used in the discourse on climate change, as well as all the human ways of tackling it, are based on a metaphorical concept that I shall soon unravel.

While the idea that metaphor is central to the discourse on climate change may be generally clear to a good number of people, the related idea that the Western world is operating under a 'metaphorical vision' may still not be known by many people. According to Mills (1982b), who originated the notion of metaphorical vision, three periods in the history of Western attitudes to the environment are distinguished. In the Middle Ages, the environment and nature were seen primarily as a book. In the Renaissance, environment and nature were organised as a human being. In the modern age, the most influential metaphor of nature and environment has been the machine. Mills (1982b) posited that a society chooses one metaphor rather than another as the primary vehicle through which it seeks to comprehend and organise its environment and the world. Such a choice is highly indicative of the needs and aspirations of that society.

In the above paragraph, I have assumed that many people today have no idea that our world, each time, uses one metaphor in particular as the basis for the systematic development of a 'metaphorical vision' of the world. According to Mills (1982b) the history of Western attitudes toward the environment over the past 2000 years was based only on the above mentioned three metaphors.

Accordingly, what Mills (1982b:238) means by the term metaphorical vision:

> … is the tendency for a society to seize upon one metaphor in particular as the central vehicle through which it seeks to comprehend its world. Choice of one metaphor rather than another is highly indicative of the needs and aspirations of that society. The chosen metaphor is exploited for all its implications, around which a systematic world vision is elaborated.

In line with this definition, I shall argue in this paper that Western society deliberately chose the metaphor of 'enemy' as its bedrock metaphor for the period spanning the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the modern. Viewing the environment, nature and the earth as an 'enemy' has formed the bedrock of western approaches during all these three periods, including before the Middle Ages. In short, the 'enemy metaphorical vision' has deliberately been chosen by western society as basis to comprehend, organise and exploit the world. Based on this assertion,

interested researchers can investigate what implications were to be exploited by Western society by choosing the metaphor of enemy. The discourse on climate change, in this regard, is locked into the enemy metaphorical vision. The metaphorical concept of 'climate change is an enemy' currently structures what people do, how they understand and what they do about climate change. Let interested researchers verify this claim. The essence of metaphor here is understanding and experiencing climate change in terms of an enemy. This is what it means for the discourse on climate change to be metaphorical in nature. This premise will be elaborated as we proceed in this paper. For now, let me present the philosophical basis of the enemy metaphorical vision.

Philosophical statement on the enemy metaphorical vision

The enemy metaphorical vision has a firm foundation in Western philosophical thought. A philosophical justification for the enemy viewpoint is presented below:

> … the enemy, as embodiment of the primordial chaos 'rich in creative seeds', is the source of transformation. In so far as chaos is an intrinsically valuable part of religious life, the enemy is intrinsically valuable and, indeed, indispensable. If the enemy did not exist, one might say, we would have to invent him … since the enemy embodies all the chaos encountered in war, the act of identifying oneself with the enemy one kills is an initiatory descent into death that generates greater life. Ultimately, then, both war and the enemy embody the ideal of all religious life … perhaps it is only by fighting the enemy that we can simultaneously embrace both perfect cosmos, perfect chaos, and the union of the two. If so, then it would understandable that human societies always have, and always will, insist on finding an enemy to fight. (Chernus 1991:341)

The above statement of philosophy applies to a whole range of things, phenomena or conditions to which the idea of the enemy has been applied in Western society. The list of such things is almost endless – including flood waters, nature, women, population, political opponents, disease and, now, climate change. Applying the above statement to the topic under discussion, therefore, means that climate change:

    (a)   is now a source of transformation in much of the world, however this means it
    (b)   is intrinsically valuable and indispensable
    (c)   can generate greater life after humanity 'conquers' it
    (d)   might become the ideal of all religious life
    (e)   embodies all the chaos encountered in war
    (f)   would have been invented, anyway, if it had not existed
    (g)   will persuade all societies to insist on fighting it.

With the above implications around, it should be understandable if humanity at the moment witnesses the gradual spread of the discourse on climate change to virtually all corners of the globe, academic disciplines and to all forms of human endeavour. This diffusion process is something we are witnessing at the moment, and that is what it partly means for an object to help

create an enemy metaphorical vision for the entire world. Let interested researchers tackle the question: is climate change helping to create understanding of context as an enemy situation?

Rationale for the 'climate change is an enemy' metaphor
The justification for creating the 'climate change is an enemy' metaphorical concept is pegged at various levels presented next.

Opportunities to be generated: There are countless opportunities arising from choosing an enemy to be a central driving metaphor. Let readers add to this list themselves based on their knowledge. Firstly, allies, networks and partnerships tend to be formed aimed at addressing the enemy condition so designated. Secondly, unity of purpose among various players and organizations tends to be forged by an enemy situation. Thirdly, resources, talent and human attention usually come to be mobilised with relative ease as a way of addressing the enemy condition. Fourthly, a lot of human activity, movement and fuss tends to be generated in the process. Activity and movement are valued attributes by some people.

Innovation: Crisis as an offshoot of enmity is believed by some people to drive innovation; and climate change in itself has, indeed, generated a deep sense of crisis worldwide. In this regard, a 'culture of crisis and paranoia' that climate change generates can be seen to be a source of innovation in itself, as McKeown (2008:12) seems to suggest here:

> … people need some reason to make tough choices. Organisations find it even harder to make progress without knowing that it 'has to', and will usually wait until a real crisis comes along before getting on with the hard stuff that is essential to moving forward. A crisis is not the same as a disaster (although disaster may prompt a crisis). It is a 'crucial or decisive point or situation' or a 'turning point'. Such turning points force a choice between inertia and innovation. When faced with a crisis, ask: How can we use this crisis to inspire innovation?

Interested researchers could document the varieties of innovation inspired by climate change being a crisis situation.

The psychology of climate change: Being an enemy condition as argued herein, climate change is already brewing some distinct form of psychology among various actors and people. If climate change is an enemy situation, then some people are already at war with it. Here is what LeShan (2002:71–72) says about war:

> … the first modern research project I know of that asked the question 'Why do men go to war?' was started by the United States Army in 1916. When news of it reached General Pershing, he ordered the study discontinued. He said that the answer was obvious. 'Men go to war' he said, 'because they enjoy it.' Indeed, we cannot completely ignore this answer. (Bertrand Russell phrased it, 'many are happier in war than in peace'.)

There it is said. Waging war against climate change is likely to be enjoyed by many people for the following motivations cited by LeShan (2002):

(a) Displacement of aggression – this situation refers to the point that when there is something or someone to hate outside ourselves as a group, then our stresses are eased. Could it therefore be that hating climate change performs the same function among human beings? Research is needed to confirm or refute this.

(b) Projection of self-doubts and self-hatred – this situation is similar to item (a) above and refers to a condition in which when we find an outside scapegoat or target to absorb our self-doubts, feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness; then our tension is greatly decreased. Instead of feeling bad about ourselves, we feel good as we go out to rid the world of the evil of climate change.

(c) Lack of meaning and purpose in life – war against climate change holds out the promise of our being needed in a great cause. The need for intensity, colour and meaning in life is a strong and powerful drive, which war provides. For, instead of praising war (against climate change) directly, stories, novels or movies often applaud war's heroic, mythic and patriotic aspects among individuals. People involved in war get praised for courage, belief in the future and a faith in the best ideals of one's country in relation to climate change. In this way, they get a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

(d) A need for greater belonging to a group.

LeShan (2002:83) quotes Arthur Koestler as saying that:

the continuous disasters in man's history are mainly due to his excessive capacity and urge to become identified with a tribe, nation, church or cause, and to espouse its credo uncritically and enthusiastically, even if its tenets are contrary to reason, devoid of self-interest and detrimental to the claims of self-preservation.

This factor of 'belongingness' is crucial in motivating people to fight climate change, enlisting themselves in the fight out of an identification with a network, cause or unit of some kind. It would be instructive to investigate the varieties of climate change networks or units already established worldwide, regionally or nationally.

Operations of a metaphorical vision
Lynchpin for transformation: Much of our contemporary world is experiencing a certain type of change, which may not be pleasant to some people, as a result of the workings of the enemy metaphorical vision. According to Namafe (2006), this change is one that favours or saves a few at the expense of the suffering and dying majority. It is the same type of unpleasant condition that produces predominantly negative effects of one kind or another in politics, entertainment, economy, climate change, security as well as medicine, religion and so on, as shown in Figure 1. In Figure 1, the enemy metaphor is at the centre of the various elements portrayed in the diagram. It is a transformative factor. Moreover, the locus of climate change in the diagram can

be observed within a broader configuration of a wheel of change and transformation formed by the enemy metaphorical vision whose fulcrum is the enemy metaphor.

**Figure 1.** Transformation through a metaphorical vision
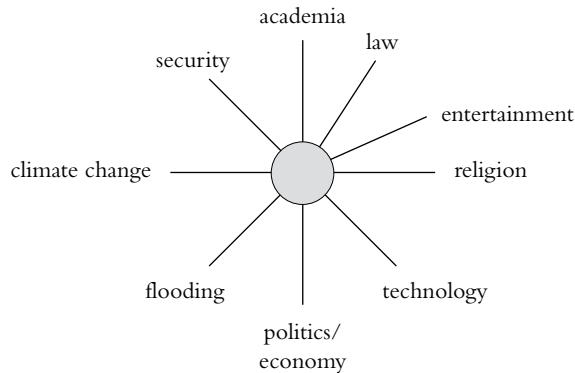
(Source: Namafe, 2006)

The same enemy metaphorical vision controls a host of other related features of human life, such as the following:

(a) thinking style – tactics, strategic plan, target audience, manoeuvre, risk society and so on.

(b) concepts used in scholarship – hazard, vulnerability, risk, threat, conflict, violence, force, mitigation, security, challenge, stress, disaster and so on.

(c) ordinary conversation – hammer! sort him out, shoot!

(d) actions – game scouts, war, argument, master, slave, retreat, mobilise, conquer, sacrifice, interrogate, boss and so on.

(e) institutions – police force, military establishments, defence counsels, security wings, victory ministries, freedom statues and so on.

Concepts generated in everyday life: The power of the enemy metaphorical vision over people arises partly from the fact that it is so deeply hidden as to merely generate offshoot concepts that people often use in their ordinary, everyday lives. Figure 2 below illustrates some of the subsidiary concepts generated by the enemy metaphorical vision. This range of concepts can be compared with people's response to the issue of climate change as cited by the International Climate Challenge (ICC) in Kenya in relation to some research by Jo Hamitton of Oxford University (cited in International Climate Challenge Programme, 2008:3).

Figure 2. Subsidiary concepts
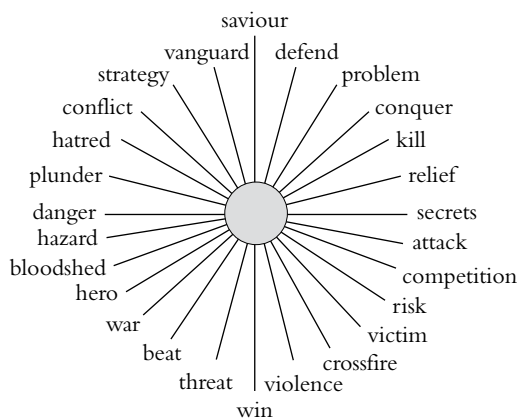
(Source: Namafe, 2006)

Educational Implications

The part played by the 'climate change is an enemy' metaphor in education
The metaphorical view of 'climate change is an enemy' has important implications in education. The first implication, noted by Taylor (1984), relates to how our choice of metaphors reflects and helps to organise our thinking, talking and writing about educational issues such as climate change. Much of education is conceptualised in terms of metaphor. Ideas transposed from their original fields of application (e.g. enemy) are being employed to describe, to legitimate and sometimes to explain complex multi-determined processes (e.g. climate change) in ways that, however useful, are often inappropriate to educational contexts (Taylor, 1984). This point, related to the concepts and assumed negative impacts of climate change, as well as the motivations which people get by fighting an enemy as discussed above, are illustrated in the use of concepts which are entering schools of Kenya through the work of the International Climate Challenge (ICC) programme.

Perils of inappropriate metaphors in education
Taylor (1984) has warned of the perils of transposing ideas from their original fields of application to education. Some metaphors may simply be inappropriate to educational settings or even wrong in themselves. Evidence of the inappropriateness of the metaphorical concept of 'climate change is an enemy' in itself can be gleaned from the following extended and technical account quoting Bjorn Lomberg, who is Professor at Copenhagen Business School and Head of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre.

Box 1. Obama on global warming

In one of his first public policy statements as America's president-elect, Barack Obama focused on climate change, and clearly stated both his priorities and the facts on which these priorities and the facts on which these priorities rest. Unfortunately, both are weak, or even wrong. Obama's policy outline was presented via video to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Governors' Global Warming Summit, and has again been shown in Poznam, Poland, to leaders assembled to flesh out a global warming roadmap. According to Obama, 'few challenges facing America and the world are more urgent than combating climate change.'

Such a statement is now commonplace for most political leaders around the world, even though it neglects to address the question of how much we can do to help America and the world through climate policies versus other policies. Consider, for example, hurricanes in America. Clearly, a policy of reducing carbon-dioxide emissions would have had zero consequence on Katrina's devastating impact on New Orleans, where such a disaster was long expected. Over the next half-century, even large reductions in carbon-dioxide emissions would have only a negligible impact.

Instead, direct policies to address New Orleans' vulnerabilities could have avoided the huge and unnecessary cost in human misery and economic loss. These should have included stricter building codes, smarter evacuation policies, and better preservation of wetlands (which could have reduced the ferociousness of the hurricane). Most importantly, a greater focus on upkeep and restoration of the levees could have spared the city entirely. Perhaps these types of preventive actions should be Obama's priority.

Likewise, consider world hunger. Pleas for action on climate change reflect fears that global warming might undermine agricultural production, especially in the developing world. But global agricultural/economic models indicate that even under the most pessimistic assumptions, global warming would reduce agricultural production by just 1.4% by the end of the century. Because agricultural output will more than double over this period, climate change would at worst cause global food production to double not in 2080 but in 2081.

Moreover, by implementing the Kyoto Protocol at a cost of $180 billion annually would keep two million people from going hungry only by the end of the century. Yet by spending just $10 billion annually, the United Nations estimates that we could help 229 million hungry people today. Every time spending on climate policies saves one person from hunger in a hundred years, the same amount could have saved 5000 people now. Arguably, this should be among Obama's top priorities.

Obama went on to say why he wants to prioritise global warming policies: 'The science is beyond dispute and the facts are clear. Sea levels are rising. Coastlines are shrinking. We've seen record drought, spreading famine, and storms that are growing stronger with each passing hurricane season.'

Yes, global warming is happening, and mankind is partly responsible, but these statements are – however eloquent – seriously wrong or misleading.[1]

Box 1. Continued

Sea levels are rising, but they have been rising at least since the early 1800s. In the era of satellite measurements, the rise has not accelerated (actually we've seen a sea-level fall over the past two years). The UN experts about a 30 centimetre sea-level rise over this century – about what we saw over the past 150 years.

In that period, many coastlines increased, most obviously in Holland, because rich countries can easily protect and even expand their territory. But even for oft-cited Bangladesh, scientists just this year showed that the country grows by 20 square kilometers each year, because river sedimentation wins out over rising sea levels.

Obama's claim about record droughts similarly fails even on a cursory level – the United States has in all academic estimates been getting wetter over the century (with the 1930's 'dust bowl' setting the drought high point). This is even true globally over the past half-century, as one of the most recent scientific studies of actual soil moisture shows: 'there is an overall small wetting trend in global soil moisture.'

Furthermore, famine has rapidly declined over the past half century. The main deviation has been the past two years of record-high food prices, caused not by climate change but by the policies designed to combat it: the dash for ethanol, which put food into cars and thus upward pressure on food prices. The World Bank estimates that this policy has driven at least 30 million more people into hunger. To cite policy-driven famine as an argument for more of the same policy seems unreasonable, to say the least.

Finally, it is simply wrong to say that storms are growing stronger every hurricane season. Even for the Atlantic hurricane basin, which we tend to hear about the most, the total hurricane energy (ACE) as measured by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has declined by two-thirds since the record was set in 2005. For the world, this trend has been more decisive: maximum ACE was reached in 1994, and has plummeted for the past three years, while hurricanes around the world have for the past year been about as inactive as at any time since records began kept.

Global warming should be tackled, but smartly through research and development of low-carbon alternative. If we are to get our policies right, it is crucial that we get our facts right. (*Sunday Post*, 14 December 2008 and www.project-syndicate.org)

This detailed account is presented in its entirety because, in the current situation, information on the 'enemy' view of climate change is so preponderant that readers may rarely find a contrasting viewpoint on it similar to this one.[2]

A hard nut to crack

According to Giddens (2006) climate change and its associated global warming are regarded by many people as the most serious environmental challenge of our time. At the same time it is recognised that the earth's climate is extremely complex and a variety of factors will interact to produce different consequences in individual countries at varying points across the earth.

If the argument in this paper is anything to go by I would suggest that, instead of climate change, the enemy metaphorical vision on which climate change is based is the most serious environmental challenge of our time. As stated in this paper, metaphorical vision produces a way of life for people. In this sense, Chris Patten (2009:12) argues that:

> … the biggest challenge for all of us, young and old, next year and for the indefinite future, will result from a different sort of change that is unlikely to respond simply to technological determinism. It results from the way we have been living for two centuries. If older leaders do not produce the right answers soon, younger generations will reap the whirlwind – sometimes literally.

Although he did not specifically pin point the enemy metaphorical vision *per se* as the sort of change which is unlikely to respond to technological determinism, Wachepa (2008:25) notes that, from an educational point of view, 'not even education can change that which society intends to maintain, especially as seen through a shared metaphorical vision.' In short, not even education can change the enemy metaphorical vision, or can it? This is a researchable question.

Conclusion

The discourse on climate change is now worldwide in coverage. This discourse, like most topics in scholarship and education, is heavily laden with metaphors. However, the 'enemy metaphorical vision' seems to, arguably, exert a central influence on the discourse. As a result, 'climate change' has come to be conceptualised in terms of an 'enemy'. As cautioned by Taylor (1984) such a metaphorical concept of 'climate change is an enemy' may in fact be weak, or even wrong in itself, especially when applied to education. Notwithstanding this point, this paper has suggested potential research areas for interested readers wishing to take this discussion on metaphor further. Above all, it is hoped that readers have appreciated that the immediate, local concerns and anxieties associated with climate change (e.g. flooding, global warming or some disease burden) often have broader and deeper contextual causes than those that may be immediately apparent (e.g. the greenhouse effect or rapid industrialisation). The whole discourse on climate change, and its associated concerns and anxieties, is just one of the many spokes of a metaphorical vision wheel whose lynchpin is the metaphor of the enemy.

Notes on the Contributor

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Endnotes

1   These assumptions about such statistics being misleading are also contested.

2   Editors' note: It should be noted here that contrasting perspectives on complex issues are often hotly debated, and while pieces such as the one presented here are useful in that they present challenging and different perspectives they are not without their critiques (e.g. some dissident views on climate change are said to be in the service of corporate interests who have vested interests in maintaining fossil fuel economies). Such pieces should therefore not be read naively. They also create epistemological uncertainties which may have material consequences of a different kind – as seen in the HIV/AIDS dissident debacle in South Africa – that led to unnecessary human suffering and early death for many people. The salient point here is the focus on more appropriate choices, and that there are different ways of looking at issues that may allow for more appropriate choices to be made.

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