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What We're Missing: An Examination of Climate Change and Its Impact on Our World

The last century and a half marked the beginning of a truly modern world. We have devices designed to fit in our pockets and answer just about any question you could ask. We have metal tubes that can take us anywhere in the world, let alone into the stars, in mere hours. Science is growing just about as fast as the influx of problems it faces. Lifespans continue to extend, we have gained the capacity for convenience, we know more about our world and ourselves than before. We are richer, we are smarter, we are better off now than ever before. Yet despite all of our modern luxury, we find ourselves stuck around its very consequence.

Just about everyone has heard of the danger of climate change, but very few bother to understand it. And to most people, the problem seems simplistic: greenhouse gases are bad for the environment. The issues surround obvious sources, such as gas cars, factories, and cow manure; therefore, the solution is equally simple. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we need to cut down on CO₂. To many, this means biking or walking, turning off the lights when not in use, consume less meat. And we want to stop worrying about these issues. We want the problems climate change causes, such as a larger wealth gap, worse working conditions for laborers, and health concerns for low-income communities to stop. So, some people, living their comfortable modern lifestyle, will look at the issues previously discussed, make a few lifestyle changes, and call it a day. This sort of action, while potentially helpful, raises a few fundamental concerns.

The greatest concern, at least in my opinion, is a matter of global economics. Modern luxury and convenience are largely correlated with causing climate change. Generally speaking, first-world countries emit more. A team from Our World in Data calculated that the greatest emitters are countries where the oil industry is most active. Alongside being the archetypal backbone of modern life, the oil industry's centrality to our lives makes it very difficult to escape from. The Swiss Re Institute published a study in 2021 that concluded that by 2050 (under the current trajectory) that the world will lose 10% of its economic value, an estimate of 8 trillion dollars, making the poor poorer and the rich richer.

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Even if we asked the rich countries to cut down heavily on their use of greenhouse gases, it would only make so much of a difference. This is due to the fact that, as backed up by the Center for Global Development, 63% of carbon emissions come from developing countries. In many of these countries, people are trying to acquire a more comfortable lifestyle at best, and escaping oppression at worst. The point is simple: a large sum of humans aren't in much of a position to individual work against global warming. However, there is a clear hope. According to the team at Our World in Data, European countries that shifted their energy usage to more sustainable alternatives saw fewer emissions: "Prosperity is a primary driver of CO2 emissions, but clearly policy and technological choices make a difference." Essentially, it is not as much in the hands of the people but in the hands of the authorities.

This leads to my second concern, which has to do with our approach to climate change. Many campaigns surrounding such issues focus heavily on daily lifestyle changes. They emphasize the importance of using sustainable transportation, reducing one's carbon footprint, and so on. However, what many people fail to actualize is that the world is driven by greenhouse gases. These campaigns are not to blame either; we can't expect people to go completely green given that almost everyone would rather not give up their convenience. For example, we can ask people to stop driving gas cars, but we cannot ask them to stop using roads or stop living in their homes. An academic study conducted in China concluded that "The GHG emission for cement production alone is about 92%." Destroying parts of a carbon-emitting industry is not and will likely never be enough. To combat climate change in an efficient and effective way, we would need a global turnaround.

However, politicians and global leaders, especially of oil-producing and wealthy nations, are (to put it nicely) hesitant to give up the unmatched wealth that eroding the planet can bring. Many global leaders are so detached from the needs of the common citizen to even bother listening to their concerns. Frankly, the older and wealthier population that makes up the majority of global leaders has little to care about the effects of an issue that will outlive them.

So, you may be asking yourself: How does this pertain to an issue of justice, freedom, and peace? What difference can I, as a single person make? To the first question, I will reiterate that as climate change costs the world trillions, fewer economic resources means that the longer we wait, the harder it will be for lower-income communities to combat climate change; this is

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seen on the global and local level. To the second, the blunt answer is that no single person can make much of a difference. But doing good still means doing good, and good environmental behavior spreads, as the anti-climate change bandwagon grows. In the end, we are not necessarily combatting climate change for our own sake. We are combatting it for the sake of those who come after us, our children, grandchildren, and so on. The world is slowly but surely becoming a worse and worse environment to foster the human race and the necessary ecosystems meant to keep it alive. To me, this is not the average cry for help. Sitting idly by and watching the frequent apathy and procrastination that has surrounded this issue gave me one realization: this is my world just as much as it is everyone else's.

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