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Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment Coversheet & Feedback Form

[Please insert this coversheet as the first page of the assignment you are submitting]

For completion by the student: Student Name: Laura Stuart Obenauf		
Module code: HPPH7009	Student University Number: 2008365	Educational support needs: Yes/ No
Module title: Environmental Philosophy		
Module tutor: Rebekah Humphries		
Assignment title: Is it more important to mitigate climate change quickly or to do so equitably?		
Assignment due date: September 10, 2021		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Name <u>Laura Stuart Obenauf</u>		

Assignment Mark1st Marker's Provisional mark2nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark

External Examiner mark (if relevant)

Final Mark**NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board**

There is a large element of individuality apparent in your treatment of this topic & you make some plausible analogies & interesting claims. I think the issues of time & equity could be focused on a little more (in order to show how far your examples further a direct answer to the question. That said, it's clear that you've thought carefully about the practicalities of proposed answers & you've situated your answer within the context of two 'real-world' families, which is a very interesting way to approach the topic.

For completion by Marker 1:

Comments:

Marker 1 signature:

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For completion by Marker 2 / Moderator:

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Marker 2 / Moderator signature:

Date:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant):

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Is it more important to mitigate climate change quickly or to do so equitably?

Introduction

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead

To question whether it is more important to mitigate climate change quickly or equitably implies that there is a choice between the two – there is not. Thirty years ago, Michael Grubb advocated for immediate action on 'global warming' in the absence of a global agreement and cautioned that there was no time to waste.¹ However, impactful action has unfortunately been delayed largely due to debates of equity: who is responsible for solving this shared calamity and how can it be solved without creating more suffering? As such, climate change is a crisis propelled both by delay and inequity and thus requires both immediacy and impeccable equity to solve.

This is not the job of lawmakers alone. The lawmakers we hire through elections mirror our preferences and biases. As such, they cannot conceivably restore equity when their jobs (electability) depend on feeding our existing polarization and inequity. To seek equity and balance, individuals must begin with breaking one's own biases and holding behavior to account rather than waiting for an 'outside-in' solution while indulging in apathy, helplessness or sanctimonious indignation that 'someone else' is not taking appropriate action.

Positive, lasting change at any level require a willingness to become conscious of the motivations and actions beneath the problem, to fully understand corresponding ethics and consequences, a willingness to release habits, thoughts and circumstances that impede integrity, and finally, an integrity of attitudes, actions and lifestyle that promote a higher level of wellbeing of all. Through this paper, I will explore immediate

changing
these things
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takes
time

¹ Grubb, Michael, 'The Greenhouse Effect: Negotiating Targets', *International Affairs* (London), 66 (1990), 67-89, in CrossRef <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2622190>>

possibilities for inside-out, equitable action to mitigate climate change. First, I will examine the historic relationship between privilege, inequity and climate change; second, I will show how this triad continues today through a thought experiment; third, I will provide an ethical accounting of cultural obligations compared to consequences; fourth, I will explore thresholds, preferences and parallels to addiction; and finally provide ideas for individual activism and impact.

Inequity, Privilege and Climate Change

Analyzing inequity requires more than an evaluation of circumstance – such as the circumstance of being rich, or the circumstance of being poor – but the inequity of perception. When perceiving the circumstance of affluence versus the circumstance of poverty, one must note the bias of one's thoughts as this helps identify underlying cultural conditioning that may contrast from the actual ethical consequences of each lifestyle. Often, there is assumed moral righteousness in cultural conditioning – or convention. When circumstance matches convention, it is common to ignore or rationalize unethical consequences. However, as noted by both Aldo Leopold and Kenneth Goodpaster, history is a shameful parade of unethical debacles rationalized as cultural convention.² Not only do we ignore or rationalize the subsequent harms of our bias, but we eagerly pursue and perpetuate them – even at our expense.

*These seems out
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well put.

As for climate change, wealthy, powerful nations of today secured their purchasing power through overuse and exploitation of people and natural resources – including the atmosphere and fossil fuels. This catastrophically disrupted the planet's cycles and systems and also initiated a dangerous positive feedback loop: ever increasing displays of affluence and standards of living set impractical new expectations requiring more exploitation on a global scale. The privileged feel obligated to outcompete the expectation – thus continuing to overconsume; the unprivileged race to develop using cheap, albeit harmful methods used by their developed peers some 150 years before, to escape the neo-colonial dynamic and gain access to what little resources remain. As such, global negotiations stall as wealthy nations cannot fathom parting with their

² Goodpaster, Kenneth E., 'On being Morally Considerable', The Journal of Philosophy, 75 (1978), 308-325, in CrossRef <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2025709>>
Leopold, Aldo, 'The Land Ethic', in A Sand County Almanac (1949), pp. 102-115

acquired dependencies and privileges and developing nations don't have the purchasing power to demand better terms.³

Today, many do not feel a direct, individual connection to this historic or systemic exploitation. Believing exploitative episodes (and the ethical confusion that enabled them) are long past, or inflicted only in distant places, many object to economic or moral burdens for which they feel no responsibility. However, it is prudent to acknowledge that countries of privilege still represent the largest use of resource by far confirming that the conventions and actions established 150 years ago are still in play.⁴ In her paper 'Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development,' Vandana Shiva references A. Lovins who calculated the hidden costs of these mediated impacts. According to Lovins, the cheap and underpaid labor and resources which enable the idealized modern 'productivity' of the developed world (America specifically) is the equivalent of 250 slaves working a 40-hour work week per average individual. Lovins appropriately asks: 'how productive would we be' if we no longer could depend upon stolen resources and labor?⁵ To expand the bounds of the reader's ethical awareness and morality, Richard Routley used a thought experiment titled 'The Last Man.'⁶ In similar fashion, I introduce 'Two Families' inviting the reader to reflect on the bias of one's cultural conditioning.

Two Families

Please note: Each family represented in the thought experiment is motivated to provide the best care for their families in accordance with how they were taught. As such, each family believes themselves to be moral and ethical.

³ Grubb, Michael, 'The Greenhouse Effect: Negotiating Targets', *International Affairs* (London), 66 (1990), 67-89, in CrossRef <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2622190>>

Hardin, Garrett, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 162 (1968), 1243-1248, in JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1724745>>

⁴ Curry, Patrick, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., fully rev. and expanded. edn (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011) pp. 16-19, 21, 185

Grubb, Michael, 'The Greenhouse Effect: Negotiating Targets', *International Affairs* (London), 66 (1990), 67-89, in CrossRef <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2622190>>

Schumacher, E. F. (.), *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, repr. edn (New York: New York: Harper Perennial, 2010) pg. 26

⁵ Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed, 2009), in /z-wcorg/ pp. 7-8

⁶ Routley, Richard, 'Is there A Need for A New, an Environmental Ethic?', in *Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy Vol. 1* (Varna, Bulgaria: Sofia Press, 1973), pp. 205-210

First Family

First family has two adults and one child under 5 years old. The family is solidly upper-middle class with both adults working in senior positions at large corporations to provide security, comfort, education and maximized career potential for themselves and their child. Both question the overall ethics and practices of their companies – neither use the products their companies produce and understand the stock growth is largely due to cost-cutting and layoffs rather than product quality and relevance – but the compensation, and career mobility offered is substantial. Although proud of their career status, both are dissatisfied with what is accomplished versus the hours worked. As such, each adult is often anxious, agitated and cynical.

They live in an elegant 5,000 square foot house in a community with strict rules on aesthetics – manicured lawns and ornamental plants only – no gardens. Each adult commutes about 25 miles a day in two separate fuel-operated cars. Work hours necessitate nine hours a day, five days a week for their child at daycare who is showing emotional, developmental and behavioral problems. The parents believe it is the teacher's job to fix these issues with the tuition they pay. Based on that tuition, the teacher makes less than \$3.00 per hour for care of their child. With hectic schedules, they rely heavily on comfort and convenience at home to cope with their lives: season-agnostic thermostat settings, electric-powered appliances, packaged foods, the gig economy and service industry. Stress, and the rich restaurant-diet can make their health a struggle, so they rely on medications and pricey gym memberships to keep it in check. Obligated to keep up appearances, fast-fashion and box-store home goods provide budget-friendly aesthetics, in spite of troubling ethical practices. Although their combined salary places them in the top 5% of households, money is of constant concern, so it is common for them to skimp on tip or haggle for bottom dollar if anything less than the very best service is received.

From their perspective, they epitomize society's definition of success and thus see no connection between their choices and the ills of the world. They believe if others would work hard and 'pay their own way' as they do, things would improve. They are disdainful of those who receive governmental aid, though admittedly, they have debt like most of their peers. Their mortgage, utility bills, insurance, property taxes, car

payments and petrol requirements already have large price tags. Additionally, the services and conveniences on which they depend combined with their affluent tastes and that of their social group creates sizeable revolving debt. Fortunately, between their large tax refund (procured by their expensive accountant), and their annual bonuses – they can usually pay off their debt. Understanding they cannot keep up the hard-driving work circumstances forever, they feel dependent on the ability to retire. However, each year they seem to need more and spend more. Thus, they have no idea how to amass enough to confidently provide for their ever-increasing needs and tastes when they stop working.

Second Family

Second family is a single parent, one child under five years old, and a disabled grandparent whom the single parent also cares for. By the economy's standards, the single parent is unemployed as no income is received from a recognized business. However, the adult works by caring directly for the child, the parent and through regular services for neighbors such as child and home care. This adult prioritizes direct care for loved ones, home and community and will not take any job that requires neglect or outsourcing the care of child or parent at vulnerable ages and conditions to low-paid strangers. Although the adult does make income every week from this community-supported work, it definitely falls well beneath the poverty line.

The family lives in a rented 800 square foot 1-bedroom apartment paid for by a combination of low-income subsidies from the government and the grandparent's social security income. As with most low-income housing, the apartment is minimal: it is not air conditioned, or well heated, but it is kept meticulously clean with homemade natural products to avoid pest problems. Because it is not forcibly climate controlled, the family works and rests around the temperature extremes of the day. The family cannot afford a car, and so the parent walks to jobs, and a nearby farmers market for food – any longer trips require carpooling with neighbors. Because appliances, processed foods and time-saving conveniences cost a premium, life-sustaining tasks are all done by hand. Possessions are minimal as they not only cost money but create clutter which attracts pests. If items are purchased, they are vitally needed, nearly always prior-owned and nothing is wasted.

The child, who accompanies the parent everywhere, models the parent's calm, helpful attitude and behavior. The parent worries about the child's safety if the community disintegrates due to gentrification and the child's emotional health if exposed to other harmful influences too early. When caregiving responsibilities lessen in the future, the parent hopes to make more income. However, the parent considers spending money to make money (buying a car, clothes, time-saving conveniences) while neglecting direct responsibilities to home and community misguided.

Financially the parent has always been poor but is attentively devoted to the things and people in their care. The parent does not have any debt, does not collect unemployment – as that would require proving pursuit of a job which would result in the neglect of caregiving responsibilities – but does receive government-assisted rental income and healthcare for the family. The parent understands that broader society considers their lifestyle with disdain even hostility. However, from their perspective, they work constantly in the service of others, are a model of integrity and humility, and harm few by their actions. The parent believes things would improved if people focused on taking better direct care of their families, neighbors and lives.

Duty versus Consequences: An Ethical Analysis

*"If you want to change the world, go home and love your family" - Mother
Theresa*

The family's share a common sense of duty, or deontology: to be good parents and good citizens. However, their deontology diverges when it comes to their strategy. First family believes that duty to family and cultural community can be fulfilled through a profit-based, work-first approach. Displays of status and affluence are intended to purchase wellbeing and safeguard against any vulnerability with a heavy focus on future comfort. The second family believes that duty to their family and cultural community is fulfilled through direct contribution and responsibility regardless of profit. Relationship, and reciprocity are intended to provide what is needed when it is needed while safeguarding against the disintegration of esteem, family and community associated with neglect and greed.

If one is trained to the developed capitalist bias, the strategy of the first family is regarded as deontologically superior. Thus, systems, institutions – even our moral

education and sense of obligation – are designed to support this model. Conversely, the strategy of the second family is regarded as deontologically inferior – something to be avoided, penalized and corrected. However, when one considers the unfolding environmental catastrophes of climate change, and what the Huffington Post calls ‘The Meaninglessness Epidemic’ afflicting the 21st century indicated by the sharp increase of addiction, anxiety, depression, loneliness and suicide, one must consider the consequences, logic and ethics of this cultural deontological bias.⁷

First, we will consider mediated impacts to better understand the consequences of each lifestyle. Mediated impacts as defined by Barnabas Dickson in Robin Attfield’s book ‘Environmental Ethics,’ refers to an ignorance or dismissal of the consequences of one’s actions due to dispersal amongst many agents or the distance between cause and effect.⁸ For instance, one may think that disposing of a plastic bag does not make a significant impact; however, if millions of people believe the same – a Texas-sized island of plastic floating in the ocean occurs – with each person bearing mediated responsibility. The cycle compounds when those millions require new plastic bags.

With this considered, it is evident that First Family’s life is rife with mediated impacts either ignored, rationalized, or even promoted under the guise of ‘success.’ Harms to others include the earth due to the heavy resource expenditure for fuel and utilities, waste from dependence on packaged foods and takeout, heavy dependence on underpaid and unethically sourced labor and goods, and neglect of family in-need.⁹ Harms to self include: persistent agitation and anxiety, disconnection from belief or meaning in work, dissociation from a sense of self or belonging independent of money or status, and increasing dependence on comforts rendering life perpetually less

⁷ Cates, Jonna, ‘The Meaninglessness Epidemic - a 21st Century Disease?’, Huffington Post, (March 29, 2015) <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jonna-cates/the-meaninglessness-epidemic_b_6557760.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x0LnVbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAM7aZFP3wNOzQHIfLfeOVWg8iuLLiBo2EBnUstrHbbFk6xBELFLISm2PvL-BVAJ5YQ4U0QosnjCSKbvL7tVL7M-DzQszXKLZUu-l1v4-IL0x9fVtiLwsygyw9xZ1E2KYKYLZthv-iu9oShUJ-uWpsZ1CiRRbXuRDWqd5eJ_aate8D> [accessed December 31, 2020]

⁸ Attfield, Robin, ‘Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming, and the Scope of Ethics’, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 40 (2009), 225-236 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2009.01448.x>> pg. 229

Attfield, Robin, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003) pp. 81-82

⁹ O’Brien, Breda, ‘Swedish Childcare System is Hardly a Utopian Model’, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/swedish-child-care-system-is-hardly-a-utopian-model-1.584796edn>, 2011 vols (2011) <<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/swedish-child-care-system-is-hardly-a-utopian-model-1.584796>> [accessed June 20, 2011]

affordable. Conversely, the mediated impacts of Second Family's life are far fewer. By comparison, the energy expenditure is minimal with no car or commutes, a small living space to heat, and no exploitative conveniences. Second Family is intimately connected to family and community, finds a deep sense of meaning and integrity within day-to-day work, and sources most needs from within the community with little to no dependence on low-paid or unethically sourced labor and goods. As Second Family works within the context of what is needed and what is practical given the cycles of nature rather than to maintain a 'lifestyle,' - it does not depend on luxuries or the ideal of 'retirement' to salve the suffering of overwork.

Next, we will review the ethics of the consequences through the following philosophical categories: *biocentrism* – or the flourishing of individual life; *ecocentrism* – the flourishing of overall systems; *communitarianism* – the flourishing of a community defined by particularly boundaries; and *cosmopolitanism* – flourishing beyond the boundaries of a specific community.¹⁰ Beginning with *biocentrism*, a person conditioned to capitalist culture may argue that First Family is more ethical citing that fiscal affluence supports the family's flourishing and boosts the economy which subsequently creates income-generating jobs. However, this assessment ignores biocentric harms on nearly every level beneath fiscal or statistical assessment. A fiscally affluent yet emotionally impoverished family as outlined in the experiment is not flourishing; hyper-consumption of earth's resources to support comfort, luxury and convenience harms the flourishing of life on earth and the future flourishing of all beings – including First Family – who depend on the earth's resources for survival; and demand for work without the dignity of adequate wage or condition impedes flourishing by normalizing and perpetuating exploitation and suffering. *Ecocentrism* similarly exposes the inequity of First Family's life. The entire ecological web of human and environmental wellbeing is imbalanced and exploited to support the pursuit of profit. A capitalist may counter that Second Family's dependence on government assisted rent and healthcare does biocentric and ecocentric harm as these tax-funded services are a fiscal burden on gainfully employed 'hard-working' citizens. However, this argument does not acknowledge tax-funded conflicts which procure cheap resources rendering greater insecurity for already vulnerable populations whose

Relate to essay question.
Explain why for these examples help you to
further an answer in order to introduce the para below

¹⁰ Attfield, Robin, *Environmental Ethics : An Overview for the Twenty-First Century*(Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA : Polity Press, 2003) chapters 2,3 and 6

But are either
these
families
not free
to change
attitudes,
behaviors,
practices,
etc?

environment is destroyed in the process. Moreover, additional expense is dedicated to military intervention or judicial settlements to quell any unrest driven by inequity and exploitation. Second Family seems to clearly adopt a *communitarian* ethic with the prioritization of home, family and neighbors; however, this lifestyle may also be supportive of a *cosmopolitan* ethic in that it does not rely on neo-colonial methods of resource extraction and labor exploitation. There may be little to no direct connection outside Second Family's community, but there are little to no mediated harms either.

In reviewing the consequences, it is evident that any presumed superiority or moral obligation to the work-first, profit-generating model – and its promises of respect, success, security and liberty – must be reconsidered. Like all monocultures, this approach depletes, destroys and manipulates all in favor of short-term maximum yields of a single factor. In referencing the book, '*Poverty: the Wealth of the People*,' Vanadana Shiva notes that the subsistence lifestyle represented by Second Family must not be confused with real material poverty. Instead, real material poverty is actually the dark byproduct of unfettered privilege.¹¹ Say more here.

Change, Thresholds and Addiction

"Recovery from harmful behaviors shouldn't feel like a consequence." – Holly Whitaker

Positive change cannot last if enforced only through guilt, shame, deprivation or punishment. There must be personal investment and empowerment behind any change or else necessary energy will be misdirected toward resentment, defensiveness and hostility. As explored, over-consumptive behaviors may not be a matter of unhinged greed and hedonism but may reflect pathologies and compulsions driven by misguided moral obligation and cultural conditioning. The recognition that individual suffering – or addiction – may be at the root of compulsive behavior may attract – rather than reject through blame and shame – the many individuals who truly yearn for greater harmony and wellbeing yet have no idea how to break free of their life's inertia.¹²

¹¹ Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed, 2009), in /z-waorg/ pp. 8-12

¹² Kimmerer, Robin W., *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, First edition, edn (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013) chapters 'Windigo Footprints,' and 'The Sacred and The Superfund'

In developed, capitalist culture, 'more' is often considered the solution, and it is continually reinforced that benefits and pleasures will be awarded to those who work harder, longer, faster, show '#noexcuses' and achieve perpetually 'more.' However, the meaningless epidemic along with the pandemic has exposed how toxic the supposed cure is leaving many to ask 'why?' Why have we acquiesced to energy and time-sucking commutes that emit countless metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere when the pandemic proved many jobs can be worked from home? Why have we become so clueless as to basic living skills such as growing and preparing food, or building and repairing? What happens when supply chains and services we take for granted such as childcare, food production and waste removal are not available? Why are quality part-time positions not commonplace to allow for greater accountability in other areas of life? Why have we accepted 'work' and ambition as a viable excuse to disconnect from our children, adequate parenting skills and other caregiving responsibilities? Why do we compensate 'essential workers' so atrociously particularly when they put themselves in harm's way during a crisis?

All of these issues are connected, and deeply connected to the mediated harms exacerbating climate change reviewed in 'Two Families.' As the pandemic pushes well into its second year, and businesses are expecting workers to return to the workplace with the same single-minded rigor of pre-pandemic life – the time is ripe to address the motivation, logic and ethics of these pressures. Like members of the 'essential workforce,' who have used the revelations of the pandemic to abstain from the workforce – risking their fiscal and social survival – until certain hypocrisies and inequities are addressed, those with more privilege can use the power of their circumstance – the choice it affords, and the sacrifice it cushions – to make an impact on the climate-connected inequities the pandemic helped to expose.

Privilege is a spectrum, and with the spectrum comes varying thresholds. Those with less privilege arrive at the threshold of their vital needs whereas those with privilege arrive at the thresholds of their preferences. Preferences confused with needs are addictions. Individuals who are addicted feel they cannot cope without the compulsion or substance to which they are addicted – even when it is destructive. As the individual succumbs, they rely more heavily on the addiction for relief ensnaring themselves in a vicious positive feedback loop. The cycle is not broken until the addiction is identified,

This needs
business
support
to be
down.

the motivation that inspired the addiction is understood, and the person perpetually commits to wellbeing over habit. Blame, shame, alienation and punishment exacerbate addiction, whereas, understanding, connection, empowerment and wellbeing heal it.¹³

The privilege illustrated in 'First Family' represents an addictive cycle: the ideal of respect, belonging and self-actualization promoted by developed capitalist culture demands a lifestyle of status and aesthetic. Luxury and convenience required by the lifestyle demand increasing income from work, and work demands increasing coping mechanisms of the lifestyle. One must be able to identify the cycle of addiction in order to accurately separate vital need thresholds from preference thresholds. When one can accurately identify preference thresholds, one can work within them to act with higher integrity.

Individual Action

"Do small things with great love." - Mother Theresa

Some of the greatest revolutions of social equity were initiated and won through integrity, persistent commitment and sacrifice – often by those with the least privilege. Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, the Liberation movements of India and South Africa, are all examples of brave soul's willingness to risk discomfort in the short-term to attain equity in the long-term. However, as acknowledged by fictional superhero Peter Parker, aka 'Spiderman:' 'With great power comes great responsibility.' Today, as it has always been, privilege is power. In the case of climate change especially, the actions of those with privilege will make – or break – our world.

When working through preferences to ease or break addictive patterns, individuals may stop or reduce harmful sets of acts such as: using air conditioning, using energy-sucking appliances, driving short distances, buying packaged goods or anything disposable, throwing items away, eating meat, buying cheap ethically obscure products, relying on underpaid services and labor, buying ecologically harmful hygiene products and cosmetics; they may start beneficial sets of acts such as: gardening, composting,

¹³ Weiss, Robert, The Opposite of Addiction is Connection, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-and-sex-in-the-digital-age/201509/the-opposite-addiction-is-connection>, (2015) <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-and-sex-in-the-digital-age/201509/the-opposite-addiction-is-connection>>

conserving water, walking, cycling, carpooling, building community co-ops and shared services with neighbors, researching and implementing permaculture, zero waste, minimalism and extreme frugality ideas, educating communities and neighborhood associations on the need for and practicality of native natural landscapes over ornamental ones, blogging or hosting community conversations to share ideas, resources and build skills.

As individuals gain confidence in pushing through their thresholds, such individuals may take activism to a larger scale. Once coveted luxuries and perceived entitlements might be recognized as costly, addictive liabilities and willingly released. Jobs might be risked to conscientiously object to needless commutes or request alternative and part-time schedules which allow for greater holistic accountability. Individuals might become politically active and work with candidates or corporations to create and incentivize equitable community engagement. If negotiation is not possible in any of these areas, individuals might willingly step away from careers, social circles, political parties or cultural beliefs that continue to promote dangerous inequity.¹⁴

In 1990, Michael Grubb advocated for such immediate individual action and accountability. Knowing there was no time to waste – but also aware that global negotiations could be stalled indefinitely due to the necessary reckonings of equity and responsibility – he urged individual regions and nations to do everything in their power to limit emissions. Furthermore, his proposed contract and convergence solution would ensure personal accountability: individuals would lease carbon permits to cover their personal usage in exchange for investments in ecologically friendly energy. By requiring each individual to pay the true cost of the energy they consume, they become fully aware and directly responsible for the impact of their lifestyle. Thus, those with high usage can choose to keep emitting at the same level – if they can afford it – or, they can choose to change.¹⁵

say more here

¹⁴ Agovino, Theresa, Is it Time to Kill the 40-Hour Workweek? <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/0217/pages/is-it-time-to-kill-the-40-hour-workweek.aspx>, 2021 vols (2017) <<https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/0217/pages/is-it-time-to-kill-the-40-hour-workweek.aspx>> [accessed April 2021]

¹⁵ Grubb, Michael, The Greenhouse Effect: Negotiating Targets, International Affairs (London), 66 (1990), 67-89, in CrossRef <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2622190>> pp. 81-89

In the end, all we can control is ourselves. Stringent – even draconian – measures may or may not come, but we need not wait for our lawmakers, our employers, even our neighbors for permission to act. Empowered individuals who have liberated themselves from inertia and addictions and who have gained new skills and attitudes to face whatever approaches will be best prepared to face whatever decisions are made and will be the courageous visionaries needed to establish new standards.

Conclusion

"You must be the change you want to see in the world" - Mahatma Gandhi

In spite of the thirty years that have passed since Michael Grubb's predictions and proposal, we have managed to cross terrifying tipping points which all but confirm our planetary demise – yet we are still absent any clear global agreements, challenges to presumptions of the superiority of 'growth' and 'development,' and any clear commitment to review and amend individual choices that most impact climate change. We have lost precious time waiting for outside-in solutions, and therefore must approach solutions from the inside-out.

There is no viable choice between mitigating climate change quickly or equitably – instead, we must take individual action on our inequities immediately. As examined, action begins with awareness on the realities and history of privilege. It continues by examining how one is complicit in repeating this history, consciously or unconsciously, as illustrated through 'Two Families.' Next, individuals must scrutinize the ethics and morality of their deontology compared with the mediated consequences of their lifestyle. Action demands the individual seek where they are trapped in the cycle of addiction and liberate themselves. It asks the individual to resist slipping into the inertia of habits, assumptions and unethical obligations and instead courageously take a stand like others are currently doing and have done throughout history.

By immediately and consciously examining one's privilege and thresholds, committing to equitable changes with integrity, and setting new standards to help others transform, we are no longer passively complicit in the greatest global calamity of our time but are the crucial activists needed to save our world. Our actions and integrity influence the actions and integrity of the lawmakers we hire – in many ways, they follow our lead,

and fight for the standards we demand. Individuals are the only entities capable of acting *now* – and so we must begin.

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