

Climate Change Denialism as a Value-Based Problem

SUMMARY

While scientific consensus on the reality of climate change exists, there is no such consensus on a social level. Attempts to address this problem through fact-based communication have only been of limited success. Investigating the role of individual values in climate change denial may hold the key to effective science communication.

INTRODUCTION

Effectively addressing climate change and its associated security risks requires a broad acceptance of the reality of the phenomenon by the general population. At the same time, the informational environment around climate change is characterized by an exceptionally high amount of mis- and disinformation.

OBJECTIVES

Starting from the hypothesis that established frameworks from the philosophical sub-discipline of virtue epistemology might have potential to tackle the problem of climate change denial in novel ways, it was our objective to identify possible gaps in climate change communication and education where insights from this domain might be applicable.

METHODOLOGY

A review of the relevant literature on climate change and science denial was conducted, with the goal of identifying how researchers currently think about the nature and role of values in this context. Literature in virtue epistemology was likewise reviewed for its potential to fill gaps in existing science communication approaches.

Epistemic Virtues

Epistemic virtues are general value-based heuristics that can help an individual answer the question „What should I believe?“.

Intellectual Humility

Accepting that one's own evidence and reasons for belief are likely not the best, strongest or most complete.

Intellectual Courage

The practice of believing new information if and only if one has good reason to do so.

Epistemic Justice

Taking into account the testimony of all those who deserve attention and only those who deserve trust.

Epistemic Diligence

Taking into account not just the quality of the information one has, but also the information one might be missing.

RESULTS / FINDINGS

The existing literature on climate change and science denial talks about values mostly from a descriptive, social psychology point of view. Engagement with values according to their own logic, in normative terms, is absent. This limits the abilities of researchers to conceive of effective educational approaches.

CONCLUSION

Virtue epistemology has potential to both engage values that are incompatible with the acceptance of climate change facts on their own terms, in a conflict of between values as opposed to entrenched values and new beliefs, as well as provide individuals with the necessary tools to navigate a disinformation-rich informational environment.

RELATED LITERATURE

- Stephan Lewandowsky. "Climate Change Disinformation and How to Combat It". In: *Annual Review of Public Health* 42 (April 2021)
- Aviva Philipp-Muller, Spike W. S. Lee, and Richard E. Petty. "Why are people antisience, and what can we do about it?" In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119.30 (July 26, 2022)