Christian based approaches to environmental communication and hope

A synopsis of modern social and cognitive science around risk perception

Some questions

- What concerns you most about the discussion around climate change?
  - Deniers?
  - Lack of immediate progress?
  - Urgency?
  - Hopelessness?

– and what questions do you have about how to approach it with spirituality?

What emotions do people concerned about climate have?

Climate-engaged social media users express more urgency about action, offer broader policy support and have stronger emotional reactions to climate content

% of U.S. adult social media users who say ...

● Not engaged ● Engaged with climate content on social media

Climate change needs to be a top priority to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations — 57 ● ——— ● 87

Biden's policies to reduce the effects of climate change will not go far enough — 36 ● —— ● 58

The U.S. should phase out the use of oil, coal and natural gas completely, relying instead on renewable energy — 27 ● —— ● 54

Favor phasing out the production of new gasoline cars and trucks by the year 2035 — 39 ● ——— ● 73

The most recent time they saw content on social media about addressing global climate change, it made them feel ...

Motivated to learn more about climate change issues — 32 ● ——— ● 75

Angry that not enough is being done to address climate change — 24 ● ——— ● 67

Anxious about the future — 39 ● ——— ● 77

Confident we can reduce the effects of climate change — 38 ● —— ● 60

Annoyed there is so much attention on addressing climate change — 17 ● —— 30 ●

0   20   40   60   80   100

Note: Based on social media users. Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown. "Engage with climate content on social media" defined as those who follow an account, interact with posts, or post or share content on social media related to addressing global climate change.
Source: Survey conducted April 20-29, 2021.
"Gen Z, Millennials Stand Out for Climate Change Activism, Social Media Engagement With Issue"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Some inconvenient truths about climate change solutions – Becoming carbon neutral

- The problem is so complex it is categorized in policy world as a "super wicked problem"
  - Completely embedded in everything we do and use
  - No "silver bullet" solution to any part of the issue (such as Green New Deal)
  - The problem is never "really" solved

- It is a multi-generational problem
  - Our impact on the atmosphere ramped up only after WWII
  - Science only converged on the potential problem < 40 years ago
  - Learning how to re-jigger global economy takes time

- We will live in a different (how much?) world

- And, on top of all this, there is are divergent views of its importance

There is nothing simple about them

- Take poverty for example…

War on poverty

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **war on poverty** is the unofficial name for legislation first introduced by United States President Lyndon B. Johnson during his State of the Union address on Wednesday, January 8, 1964. This legislation was proposed by Johnson in response to a national poverty rate of around nineteen percent. The speech led the United States Congress to pass the Economic Opportunity Act, which established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to administer the local application of federal funds targeted against poverty. The forty programmes established by the Act were collectively aimed at eliminating poverty by improving living conditions for residents of low-income neighborhoods and by helping the poor access economic opportunities long denied them.[1]

As a part of the Great Society, Johnson believed in expanding the federal government's roles in education and health care as poverty reduction strategies.[2] These policies can also be seen as a continuation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which ran from 1933 to 1937, and the Four Freedoms of 1941. Johnson stated, "Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it".[3]

The legacy of the war on poverty policy initiative remains in the continued existence of such federal programs as Head Start, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), TRiO, and Job Corps.

Deregulation, growing criticism of the welfare state, and an ideological shift to reducing federal aid to impoverished people in the 1980s and 1990s culminated in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, which President Bill Clinton claimed "ended welfare as we know it."

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Poverty Bill (also known as the Economic Opportunity Act) while press and supporters of the bill look on, August 20, 1964

The "wickedness" of poverty has been intuitively understood by humanity for thousands of years:

Deuteronomy: ("For there never ceases to be poor in the land")

Matthew: ("The poor you will always have with you").

How do we individually approach many issues?

- It is based on our value system, our world views.

- This is roughly driven by our genetics (about half) and our community (about half).

Tenants of Cultural Cognition Theory

- Humans have innate (likely both genetic and societal) values that place them at some point in a continuum between "individualists and communitarians" and "hierarchists vs. egalitarianists"
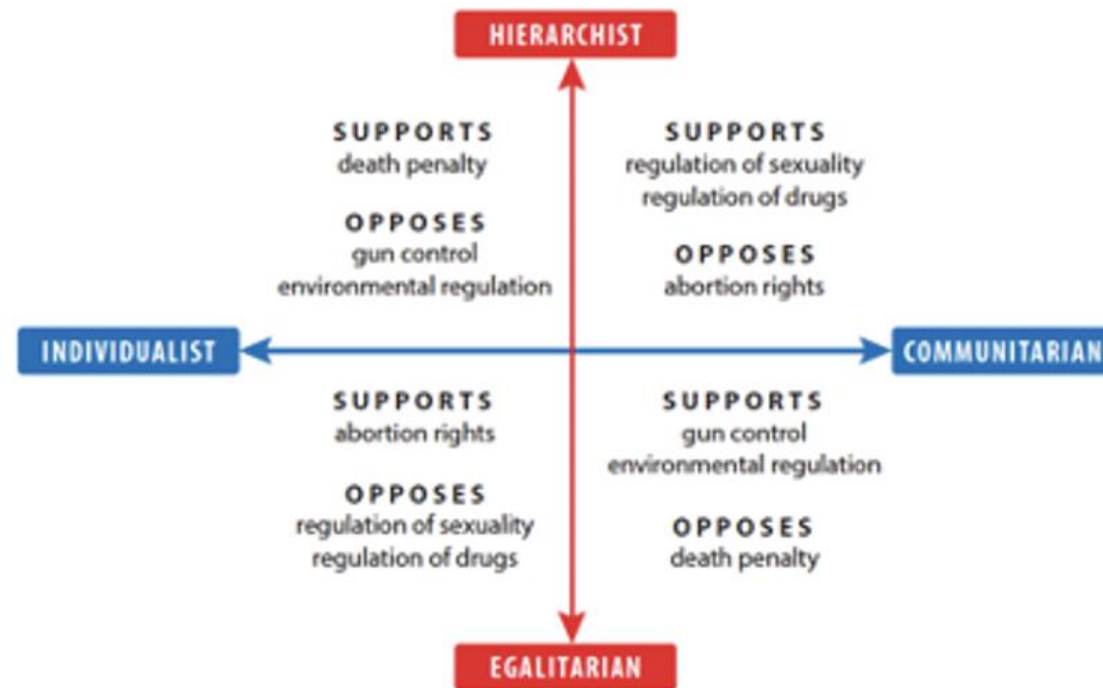

Figure 1
Clustering of beliefs.

The cultural cognition cluster of my Berkeley "Environmental Issues" class

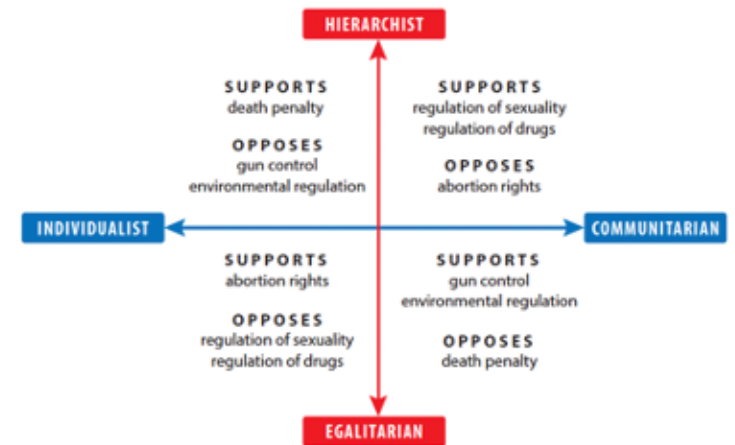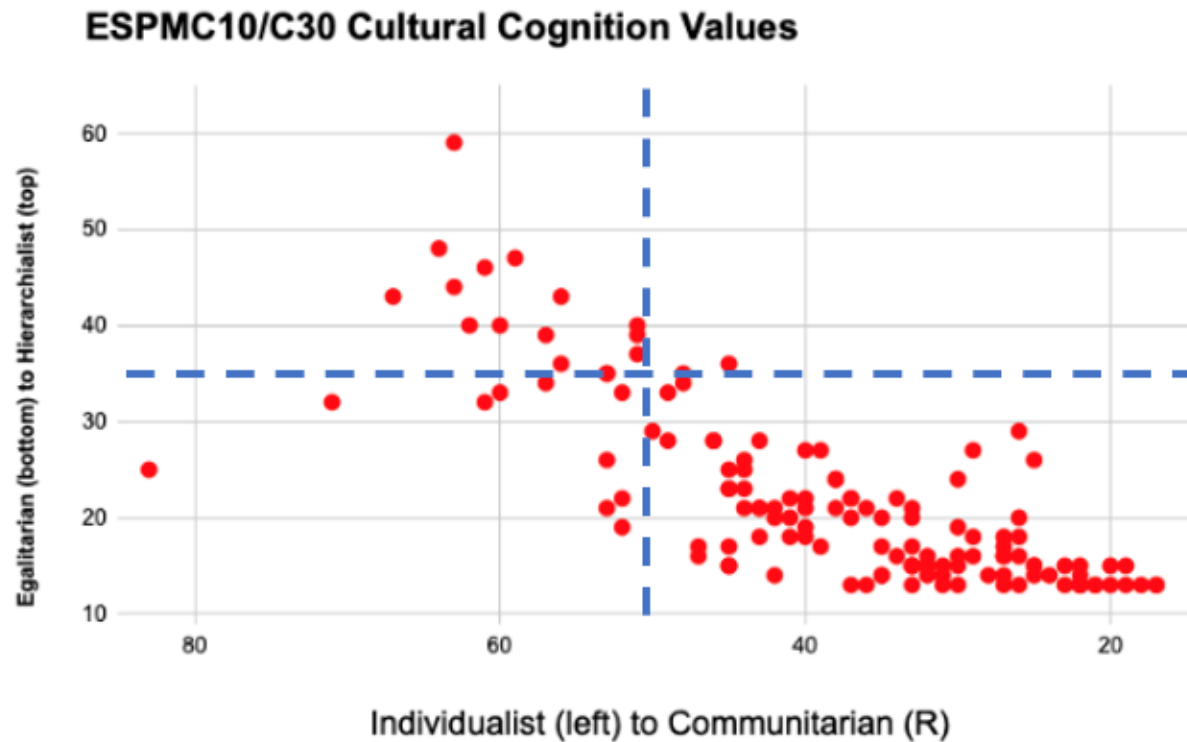Environmental Issues: 2022

Figure 1
Clustering of beliefs.

A simplification, but supported by social science

- Conservatives:
  - Are fearful (and fearful of change)
  - Afraid of losing their own control of situations
  - Place individual freedom in high regard

- Liberals:
  - Tend to be welcoming of change
  - Tend to welcome group intervention
  - Favor strong government

Both groups

- Are fully capable of ignoring facts (be honest, we all have done it)
  - Climate change and humans
  - NIMBYism
  - Anti-vax (a cross-cultural issue)
  - Supporting programs that have no demonstrable impacts
  - And most of us gather the wagons with our own identity group

How do we deal with serious climate issues in a contentious society?

Some suggestions/observations of experts on climate

- Stop (or reduce) focusing on deniers of "fact"
  - Increases polarization – would you want to be called a "denier"?
  - People don't want to be preached to or lectured

- Focus on steps to solutions
  - But this must be cognizant of the diverse value systems (and the strong importance of "personal freedom" to many)
  - Don't over-dramatize the situation (which makes it appear so intractable)
  - Must recognize one viewpoint is not complete and divergent views may improve ideas

Why focusing on "climate change denial" is counterproductive

Christian Bretter[a,1] [iD] and Felix Schulz[b]

Key points

- Lecturing or using the word "denier" puts others immediate in the defensive mode

- Solutions must be deeply cognizant that ~ 50% of society (in varying degrees) possesses many traits of conservatism.

- There is never 100% agreement on anything

- People resistant to top-down laws (such as mandatory electrical vehicles) may now reject them (based on lack of knowledge), but will likely adopt them out of simple advantages (see next example)

From Pew interviews with climate change objectors

Relatedly, many said EVs are no better for the environment than gas-powered vehicles or were unsure whether EVs are an improvement.

"If you talk to people about switching to electric cars versus diesel- or gas-powered cars, you're going to hear a lot of talking about how electric powered vehicles still produce a lot of waste, that they're not as reliable, that they're more expensive. Those are the questions that we've got and I think they're valid questions because sometimes alternatives are not always better, and we know that producing electricity is probably going to produce waste no matter what unless we switch to a wind-powered society or something." –Woman, 20s, Southwest

Many pointed to the lack of infrastructure and challenges with home charging as barriers to owning EVs.

"It's not practical for everyone to purchase a Tesla or be able to have the ability to plug in a car at their home or to, quite frankly, pay to charge up a car and have an additional expense or additional changes to their lifestyle that is always productive or applicable." –Woman, 30s, Midwest

Resisters to technology have always been here, and have changed their views

January 9, 2017 | AUTOMOBILES, THE 1910S

Get A Horse! America's Skepticism Toward the First Automobiles

The inventor who claimed the first U.S. car ever sold recalls the birth of the industry and the general public skepticism about automobiles.
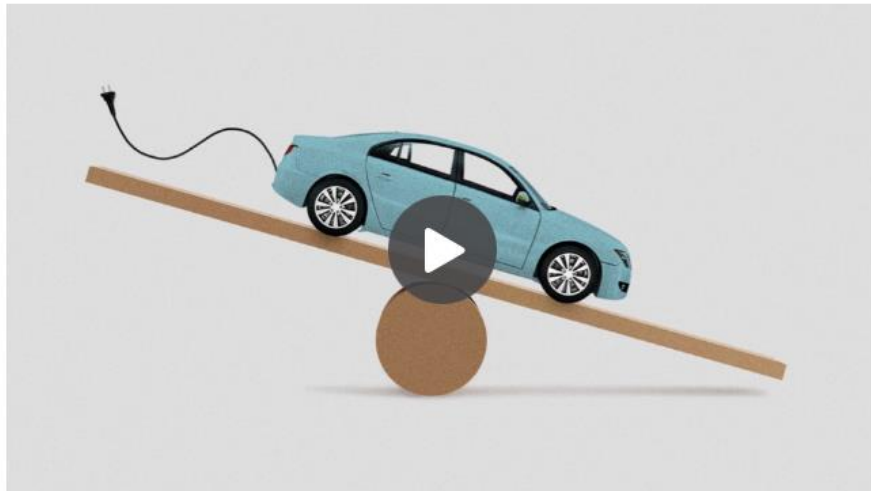
Alexander Winton

100 YEARS AGO, SOME PEOPLE WERE REALLY HOSTILE TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTOMOBILE

1902 Oldsmobile Model R Curved Dash Runabout

Patience, and hope

America passed the EV 'tipping point' — but many buyers still want gas

Once EVs cross 5 percent of new sales, they generally take over. U.S. hesitation could hinder that.

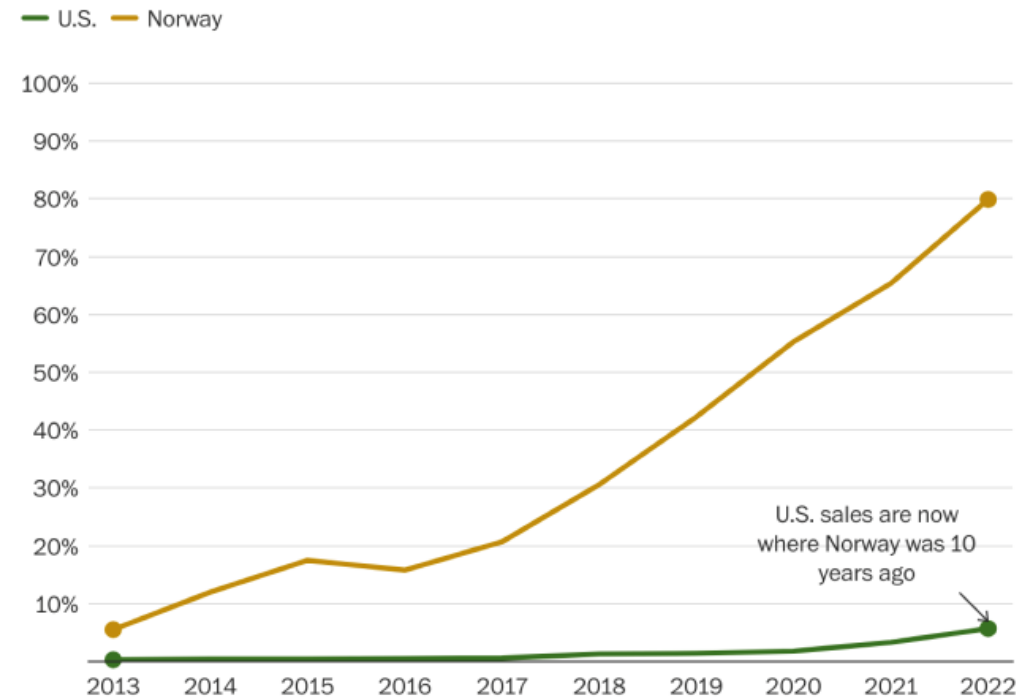BY SHANNON OSAKA AND EMILY GUSKIN
SEPTEMBER 18 AT 6:30 AM

(Illustration by Emily Sabens/The Washington Post; iStock)

There is a theoretical, magic tipping point for adoption of electric vehicles. Once somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of new car sales are all-electric, some researchers say, huge numbers of drivers will follow. They predict that electric car sales will then soar — to 25 percent, 50 percent and eventually to close to 80 percent of new sales. Early adopters who love shiny new technologies will be replaced by mainstream consumers just looking for a good deal.

Norway hit a tipping point for EVs 10 years ago

Percent of new vehicles sold that are fully electric

— U.S. — Norway

U.S. sales are now where Norway was 10 years ago

Source: BloombergNEF

THE WASHINGTON POST

Change

- There is evidence that if 25% of a group adopt a change, it causes a non-reversible trend

- Just a friendly hint: if you buy an electric car, don't put a "I love AOC" bumper sticker on the back if you hope for a higher adoption rate! 🙂

A couple of Biblical edicts come to mind in environmental communication

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Jesus exemplifies best what it means to be gentle. It takes tremendous strength to bring others into God's will, but when that strength is coupled with a selfless non-assertiveness, it produces a gentle person who can patiently endure much to bring about God's purposes for his people.

He straightened himself up and said to them,

 "Let the one among you who has never sinned throw the first stone at her."

Hope….

Critical discourse without hope is cynicism,

Hope without critical discourse is naïvete

(Rev. Max Lynn)

Hope

- You can't solve this by yourself – reduce the guilt

- It will take time - reduce the anxiousness

- Things ARE happening – reduce the anxiousness

- The world will be different – but not all of that will always be bad

From a young person undergoing climate anxiety therapy

"Don't get me wrong, the general state of our very existence being threatened by a warming planet is still frequently

on my mind," he told me, "but it hasn't haunted me like it was doing before."

He added, "There are people in society who are built to take on improving towns, cities, countries. I am not one of those people, and that is O.K." ♦