Joe Skimmons

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Resistance to Climate Change is Not Enough

Perhaps the most significant issue in our world today is that of climate change. Although supported as fact by ninety seven percent of the scientific community, our current reaction to the issue is sluggish at best. Even within the last forty eight hours, the Trump administration made the decision to take down the Environmental Protection Agency's webpage on climate change, claiming to be eliminating “confusion by removing outdated language”. Among the consequences found in America’s current indifference to climate change, one dark truth is especially accentuated: a general self-centered attitude of our country.

Two avenues of debate have arisen to counteract climate change, economic and moral. Both are used commonly in the modern arguments against this terrible issue, but the effect on their respective audiences are very different. It is clear that the economic argument has the edge. Recently, most positive news for climate change has come as a result of economic incentive. According to CNBC, multiple corporations have stated that “investing in a low-carbon economy will not only help foster a healthier environment, it is also a key to unlocking new business growth potential for the US and around the world”. Corporations including General Mills and American Electric Power pledging to “keep cutting carbon emissions for economic reasons” are creating some of the most compelling action against climate change to date.

Modern moral arguments simply do not have the same teeth as their economic counterparts. Playing on the ethics of opposing climate change and drawing from values and beliefs that every citizen has the right to a stable environment, these topics focus on the future of our planet and our responsibility as citizens of the earth to protect our home. Moral arguments do not mention any reward in present day, like the economic ones, but call to the audience to be unselfish and forward thinking. Instead of giving incentive to change our ways, moral arguments ask us to trust that our sacrifices will be enjoyed in the distant future. While they are raised with the best and most pure intentions, such as President Obama pleading that “how we answer will have a profound impact on the world that we leave behind not just to you, but to your children and to your grandchildren” (Obama) in 2013, these arguments are not simply effective enough on their own. Even President Obama had to frame that address in an economic lens in order to reach his intended audience.

You may be wondering, if moral arguments are not effective, then why not just focus on economic arguments and allow them to drive change? While the two arguments may be attempting to reach the same end, they were certainly not created equal. The very fact that moral arguments are not effective on their own prove the selfish nature of humanity, and exposes an even darker layer the personality of people in power. According to Donald A. Brown, Associate Professor for Environmental Ethics, Science, and Law at Penn State University, “Some go so far to assert that people don’t care about ethics and therefore only self-interest-based arguments should be used to convince people to enact domestic climate change legislation. In other words, they argue:”get real” only self-interest arguments matter” (Brown).

Although ethically wrong, this would be fine in our world today save for one key fact: Economic arguments fail to recognize the real victims of climate change. Those who are in power and positions of influence in our country will not be affected once we begin to feel its effects. They will simply turn on their AC or pay for any damage done to their property by rising storm surges while the real victims are those powerless to do anything. The true terror of climate change is that it will not affect those who have the power to stop it, but it will hit those who are poor and toothless in any economic sense, while those with influence wait for the perfect economic opportunity to cash in.

The current administration’s response to climate change is shocking enough, but the implications of this realization takes the terror of climate change to a new level. How can we, as human beings, leave such a terrible future for those who have no power to stop it? Our children, grandchildren, and peers deserve better treatment than what we are offering, and it goes against our responsibility as citizens of the earth to let this happen.

In reality, climate change still needs to be fought, no matter the avenue of discussion. The economic consequences, the foremost factor in resistance to climate change today, must be made clear to every person the economic power, because that is what will drive them to take action. In today's world people of influence simply are not likely to think outside of their own lives. However, it only takes one to put the future of our planet before their own finances before our charge against climate change is able to be driven morally as well as economically.

Analysis:

The project I aimed to accomplish was exposing the hypocrisy of our modern climate change arguments in order to get readers to carefully consider their positions on climate change. My publication of choice was the New Yorker magazine. In order for this to have an effect, I had to target a more affluent readership, like that of the New Yorker. My aim was to show the readers with economic influence that the current stance against climate change, to focus on the economic benefits first, creates a moral problem that is inherently self-centered and could create problems in the future. In order to accomplish this, I began with an interesting hook, focusing on a recent development in the Trump administration's stance on climate change, to grab the audience’s attention. The use of a current event here is important to give my argument weight in the world today. From there on my paper had a darker tone that I was hoping would shock readers and make them reflect on their own motives against climate change.

In moving from my P3 to the oped, my foremost change was to alter my language to reach a wider audience. Instead of leaning on support from multiple academic sources and articles, I tried to let my own voice drive the essay. Also, I aimed to reach my claim faster and more efficiently so I could spend the majority of the writing trying to win over the audience and convince them of the danger of only supporting economic arguments. While in P3 I did not reach my most evolved form of my claim until over halfway through its length, this oped reaches it almost immediately and allows me to expand on it in a way that clears its intentions up for the audience. I also used more ethical argumentation as opposed to facts and figures to keep the attention of the reader throughout the piece. My essay ends on a hopeful note that I intended to make the reader think about their own motivations and thoughts toward climate change which, given the New Yorker’s generally affluent readership, could have an effect on the future of the climate change debate.