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Assignment 2 – Reflection paper:

A single point of failure is a concept dreaded by engineers, programmers, and anyone with a minimum appreciation for good design. And for better or worse, I often find myself reflecting on the existential threat of climate change from this rather technical perspective. This is because the problem with climate change is that whether people (and the governments representing them) are convinced to act and save the planet, is a direct result of whether they "believe" in the phenomenon as a real existential threat facing the planet, or just a hoax created by what some call the elites.
This is the single point of failure; the fact that what stops us from acting as a global civilisation to save our specie from extinction, is the state of denial shared by millions across the globe, millions who refuse the scientific consensus on what is happening to Earth.
In this assignment, I will discuss this state of denial and if the steps taken to solve climate change as an existential threat have been serious so far. And in seeking a diverse range of opinions, the reflection will share the thoughts of a psychology student, a business student and an AI language model as a reflection of the universal human knowledge.

In psychology, Alex says, we understand that humans are subject to a plethora of biases that guide our interaction with others but also with abstract concepts. So when the average climate-sceptic person thinks of the phenomenon, they are probably a victim of confirmation bias; the idea that people only seek information that confirms what they already know. This can be seen in the political divide in Western Europe and the US where climate change is a partisan issue; if you vote right because you believe in limited government, you probably watch Fox News in the US or BFMTV in France which will also serve you an unhealthy dose of climate denial propaganda.

Alex considers herself to be a climate-conscious person. When asked, Alex answered that renewable energy is an important step in fighting climate change. In her view, Sweden as a developed country should stop importing gas from Russia, close down all nuclear plants and moves gradually to fossil-free and carbon-zero energy sources. And when pressed however about the economic impact this will have on the livelihood of the average Swedish worker, Alex answers that sacrifices have to be made from everyone.

Lucas is a business student, and true to his business background, he considers the planet an asset and thinks that any solutions have to be done following a cost-benefit analysis. Lucas believes that the Swedish society is past the denial phase, he thinks that everybody understands the risks of climate change. People, however, cannot agree on how to solve it, since any solution will have winners and losers, and nobody wants to lose. I pressed him however, saying that many would argue that such an argument belongs to a climate sceptic toolbox, that anything less than radical change means that we all lose. He did not budge.

Lucas never heard of Degrowth, but it did not take him long to decide that it was the worst idea he has been told. Lucas believes that even if we have not done enough to counteract climate change, Degrowth will put the Swedish economy and business society at such a disadvantage it will render things worse. According to him, the relatively small size of the

whole Swedish economy means that any sacrifices will have little impact worldwide and that the international society ought to start with countries like the US, China and India.

The final “interviewee” is AI, represented by ChatGPT. ChatGPT is an AI language model, it does not generate its own ideas, but rather synthesises and expresses the ideas received as input from users worldwide. This is why ChatGPT is used here as a reflection of the universal voice of the internet; a complex mishmash of what people around the world think of when they interact with AI regarding the topic of climate change.

Given that ChatGPT has unlimited access to all related scientific research, the first step I asked as an interviewer is to ignore all the academic work and relate solely to popular understanding. First, I noticed that discussing climate change was impossible. An artificial language model cannot state a position vis-à-vis a topic such as climate change (but it kept reiterating that the scientific consensus is clear).

It did however provide a clear summary to reflect the level of understanding of different groups of people, groups that it differentiated using the education level, exposure to media and personal experiences. ChatGPT states that climate change is a multidisciplinary topic, hence it requires a certain level of understanding of different fields which most people lack. This is a reflection of the previous two interviews and how each looks at the concept from the myopic lens of their field of education. ChatGPT also refers to a similar concept to Alex; it says that people impose psychological barriers which blind them to such an existential threat.

This reflection helped me to understand how crucial the multidisciplinary aspect of climate change is. This is because even when people feel confident enough about a certain aspect (e.g., Lucas knew so much about the EU Carbon Permits), they have little understanding of the phenomenon, often underestimating its complexity while acknowledging its seriousness.