**Why we disagree about climate change**

Climate change will not be 'solved' by science, nor will it be 'solved' by the evangelical campaigning, knife-edge diplomacy and media spinning we saw at last month's international climate change summit in Montreal. Climate scientists worked overtime during 2005 to deliver new insights into the risks we are facing by heating the planet, yet the hoped-for breakthrough in the climate talks did not emerge. It seems we still don't agree about the nature of the problem, nor about the design portfolio of solutions. Progress may have been made, but only if you take a non-linear view of progress and measure it using a diplomatic scale …a rule-book has been agreed, a twin-track approach adopted for post-2012 action, a new fund established for adaptation.

Underneath the surface, these climate change negotiations reveal the full complexity, inequality and intractability of a troubled world, a world where different ideologies, cultures, faiths, and economics battle for ascendancy and power. Climate change is now far more than a discovery of the natural sciences and can no longer be defined, debated and defused through advances in scientific knowledge. It is, today, as much a cultural phenomenon as a physical reality. Debates about climate change still defer to the authority of the meteorologists and the earth system modellers who argue that this tipping point or that climate impact will provide the final piece of evidence to ensure a breakthrough in the negotiations.

We disagree about climate change and what to do about it not because the science is still emergent, uncertain or incomplete. We disagree because everyone has a stake in the problems raised by climate change, and in the solutions offered. To reconcile these different and often competing stakes we need to harness the full array of human sciences, artistic endeavours and civic and political pursuits to make progress – burdening science alone with the responsibility will not make for good science, nor for good policy. Here are some of the many facets that are needed in this more subtle and eclectic approach.

We need to understand the different epistemologies of science and the way different political cultures endow science with varying levels of authority. The role of science in American political culture, for example, is quite different to it's role in the UK. Science always speaks with a conditional voice, or at least good science always does; we must recognize that skepticism, uncertainty and doubt are essential features of any science-led public policy debate. Different economic frameworks lead to quite radically different prognoses for addressing climate change. The different estimates of the cost of mitigating climate change vary by a factor of ten, but this is quite understandable if one digs into the underlying economic framings of the problem.

Then there is the need to face up to our psychoses – what we fear and why. These powerfully shape the way different individuals and different cultures evaluate and cope with climate risks. And responding to climate change is much more a battle about political philosophies, about how we frame our understanding of the relationship between the individual, society and nature, than it is about improving climate prediction tools or narrowing the associated uncertainties. Our views of development and how we think of

progress in human welfare and well-being, are more powerful shapers of attitudes to climate change than whether science pronounces that we have crossed an abstract point of no return for preserving our present climates. And we need to accept that our fundamental beliefs about morality, human dignity and our ultimate destiny will often drive the category of solutions we bring to the negotiating table.

Climate change is not a problem waiting for a solution. Engineers are very useful people, but they are not going to give us the answer here. And climate science will never deliver the certainty about future change nor unambiguously define the probabilities of climate-related risks which will provide the world with the necessary tool-kit to decide what to do. We need a far richer array of intellectual traditions and methods to help analyse and understand the problem of climate change – behavioural psychologists, sociologists, faith leaders, technology analysts, artists, political scientists, to name a few. And we ultimately must recognize that climate change is the most deeply geo-political, not simply environmental, issue faced by humanity. Climate change will not be 'solved' by science. Yet climate change *can* be reconciled with our human and social evolution, with our endurance on this planet, if we allow it to escape from its scientific ghetto ….. and in this sense can be defused from being a looming threat to mankind.

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