Cultural Dimensions of Climate Action: Humanities Perspectives on Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is one of the defining challenges of this century, yet scientific consensus alone has not been enough to produce the scale of action the crisis demands. This paper examines how cultural values, belief systems, and meaning-making traditions shape the way communities perceive and respond to climate change. Drawing on cultural theory, the environmental humanities, and cross-cultural psychology, the paper argues that the persistent gap between what people know about climate change and what they do about it is substantially a cultural problem, not only a political or economic one. Four dimensions of this argument are examined: the influence of cultural values on environmental concern; the role of literature, history, and the arts in constructing dominant ideas about nature and ecological responsibility; the cultural mechanisms that sustain climate denial and disengagement; and how indigenous ecological knowledge and locally grounded approaches offer alternative frameworks for sustainability. The paper argues that humanities scholarship offers resources that technical and economic approaches to climate action have consistently overlooked, and that addressing climate change effectively requires engaging with the cultural soil in which scientific knowledge takes root or withers.

Keywords: Climate change, cultural dimensions, environmental humanities, sustainability, cross-cultural values, indigenous ecological knowledge

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CLIMATE ACTION: HUMANITIES PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY

The scientific case for urgent climate action has been made with increasing clarity over several decades. Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have documented the physical mechanisms of global warming, projected consequences across ecosystems and economies, and laid out the scale of emissions reductions required to limit warming to manageable levels (IPCC, 2021). And yet the gap between what the science demands and what societies deliver has remained stubbornly wide. Emissions continue to rise. International agreements fall short of full implementation. Public concern fluctuates with the news cycle. Climate-skeptical movements retain political influence in several high-income countries. This situation raises a question that physical science alone cannot answer: why, in the face of well-documented danger, do societies so often fail to act?

One answer is that climate change is not only an atmospheric phenomenon; it is also a cultural one. How people understand nature, what obligations they believe human beings hold toward the non-human world, how they process risk and uncertainty, and what stories they tell about the future are all shaped by the cultural contexts in which they live. These factors do not merely color the reception of scientific information at the edges; they determine whether that information is absorbed at all, what emotional register it activates, and whether it is experienced as a call to action or as a threat to existing identities and ways of life (Hulme, 2009).

This paper takes that insight seriously and examines climate change through the lens of the humanities, broadly conceived to include cultural theory, history, literary studies, philosophy, and the social study of science. This is not to suggest that the humanities should replace scientific or economic analyses of climate change. Rather, it is to argue that any approach to sustainability that ignores cultural dimensions is working with an incomplete picture. As Giddens (2009) noted, the major obstacles to climate policy are not mainly technical but political and psychological, and both of those categories are deeply cultural in character.

The paper is organized around four central themes. The first concerns the relationship between cultural values and environmental concern, drawing on cross-cultural research to examine how dimensions such as individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation shape climate attitudes and behaviors. The second looks at how the humanities have theorized the cultural roots of the ecological crisis, from the history of ideas about nature to contemporary literary representations of climate change. The third examines the cultural mechanisms that sustain denial, apathy, and disengagement, with attention to the social functions that climate skepticism serves for particular communities. The fourth turns toward constructive possibilities, asking what indigenous knowledge traditions, religious ethics, and community-based sustainability movements can offer to climate action that top-down technical approaches cannot.

The argument throughout is that culture is not a soft variable to be noted and set aside; it is a fundamental dimension of the climate problem, one that humanities scholars are particularly well positioned to analyze and address.

CULTURAL THEORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Climate Concern

Cross-cultural psychology offers one of the most systematic frameworks for understanding how cultural context shapes environmental attitudes. Hofstede's (2001) model of cultural dimensions has been widely applied to questions of environmental concern, with results that suggest culture shapes not just what people know about environmental problems but how much those problems register as personal or collective concerns requiring action.

Hofstede identified six dimensions along which national cultures vary: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. Each has a plausible relationship to environmental concern and to the specific challenge of climate action. Table 1 summarizes these dimensions and their implications for climate behavior and policy.

Table 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Their Relevance to Climate Action

Dimension	High Score	Low Score	Relevance to Climate Action
Power Distance	Acceptance of authority-led climate policy; deference to institutional direction on emissions targets	Skepticism of top-down mandates; demand for participatory, consensus-based approaches	Shapes whether populations accept government-driven climate policy or require broad public mobilization
Individualism / Collectivism	Preference for voluntary, market-based solutions; resistance to mandatory collective action	Receptivity to shared sacrifice, communal norms, and collective resource stewardship	Determines political viability of regulatory versus incentive-based climate instruments

Masculinity / Femininity	Economic growth and material acquisition prioritized; environmental quality treated as secondary	Quality of life, social equity, and ecological well-being are more salient public concerns	Predicts public support for climate investment relative to competing economic growth objectives
Uncertainty Avoidance	Demand for codified evidence before action; resistance to probabilistic risk claims	Greater comfort acting under ambiguity; more adaptive to uncertain, complex risk scenarios	Shapes receptivity to probabilistic climate projections and willingness to act on future risk
Long-term Orientation	Intergenerational thinking; willingness to bear present costs for long-term decarbonization benefit	Short-term political and economic priorities dominate; immediate returns favored	Most directly relevant to willingness to invest in mitigation with long payoff horizons
Indulgence / Restraint	High material consumption; consumer culture associated with lifestyle-driven greenhouse gas emissions	Cultural norms of moderation and restraint more compatible with low-carbon behavioral change	Shapes individual and household consumption patterns and voluntary emissions reduction

Note. Based on Hofstede's (2001) six-dimensional model of national culture. "High" and "low" scores refer to positions on Hofstede's index scales for each dimension. Relationships between dimensions and climate behavior represent tendencies at the national level and are not deterministic at the individual level.

Individualism, for instance, tends to correlate with a preference for market-based or voluntary approaches to environmental problems and with resistance to collective regulatory solutions. In highly individualist cultures, climate policy framed as individual moral responsibility often lands differently than policy framed as collective sacrifice or burden-sharing. Conversely, collectivist cultures may be more receptive to community-wide behavioral norms around resource use, though they may also exhibit deference to authority that can either accelerate or obstruct environmental policy depending on the stance of governing institutions.

Long-term orientation, perhaps more directly than any other Hofstede dimension, bears on climate action, since climate change is precisely a problem where present costs yield future benefits. Cultures with a strong long-term orientation tend to be more structurally disposed toward climate investment, though the relationship is complicated by other political and economic factors. Uncertainty avoidance also matters: high uncertainty-avoidance cultures tend to demand clear, codified responses to known risks, but they may also resist acting on probabilistic future risks whose precise contours remain uncertain, creating an apparent paradox for climate communication.

These relationships are not deterministic. National cultures are internally heterogeneous, and the Hofstede dimensions describe tendencies rather than fixed traits. The model has also been critiqued for treating nations as culturally homogeneous units and for understating the role of economic development in shaping values (Inglehart, 1997). Still, as a framework for generating comparative hypotheses about cross-national variation in climate attitudes, it remains analytically productive and has generated a substantial body of empirical research.

POST-MATERIALIST VALUES AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

A parallel tradition of research on values and the environment comes from the work of Ronald Inglehart. In his theory of post-materialist value change, Inglehart (1997) argued that as societies become economically secure, their citizens shift from materialist priorities such as physical safety and economic

welfare toward post-materialist ones such as self-expression, quality of life, and environmental protection. This shift, driven by generational replacement as younger cohorts raised in conditions of relative affluence replace older ones shaped by scarcity, predicts rising environmental concern in wealthy societies.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) elaborated this framework in their human development sequence, linking economic development to cultural change and eventually to democratization and civic engagement. Environmental activism, on this account, is partly an expression of the cultural shift toward self-expression values that accompanies rising living standards.

The post-materialist thesis has been influential, but it raises uncomfortable questions when applied to climate action. If concern for the environment is itself a product of material comfort, what happens to climate solidarity across the North-South divide? Low-income countries, where vulnerability to climate impacts is often greatest, may have the least cultural and political space for post-materialist environmental advocacy. Meanwhile, high-income countries where post-materialist values are most prevalent are also the largest cumulative emitters of greenhouse gases. The cultural sociology of climate concern thus has an uncomfortable politics embedded within it.

Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) introduced the concept of the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) to capture a broader shift in public attitudes toward ecological thinking, away from the dominant social paradigm that treated nature as a resource for human exploitation and toward a recognition of ecological limits and human interdependence with natural systems. The NEP scale has been widely used to measure environmental attitudes across cultures, and cross-national comparisons have confirmed that NEP scores vary substantially by country, with implications for how different societies receive climate messaging.

THE HUMANITIES AND CLIMATE DISCOURSE

Literary and Cultural Narratives of Nature

How a society imagines nature shapes how it responds to threats to that nature. This point has received surprisingly little attention in mainstream climate policy discussions, which tend to treat public communication as a matter of information transmission rather than cultural meaning-making. Humanities scholarship offers a different perspective, one that begins with the observation that nature is never encountered in the raw; it is always mediated by stories, images, concepts, and norms that carry deep cultural freight.

Plumwood (2002) diagnosed what she called the ecological crisis of reason: the tendency of Western rationalist traditions to construct a radical separation between human beings, understood as rational, cultural, historical subjects, and nature, understood as passive, mechanical, ahistorical background. This dualism, she argued in *Environmental Culture*, has not only shaped philosophy and science but has permeated everyday life, producing a worldview in which the exploitation of nature appears as natural order rather than as a choice with ethical and ecological consequences.

Cronon (1996) made a related point from a different angle. The American cultural tradition of valorizing pristine wilderness, he argued in his widely cited essay "The Trouble with Wilderness," has paradoxically made it harder to engage responsibly with the environments in which people actually live. By constructing nature as something pure and separate from human activity, wilderness ideology channels environmental concern toward spectacular but marginal landscapes while excusing the ecological damage of ordinary life.

These arguments have concrete implications for climate communication. If Western cultures have inherited a conception of nature as either pristine wilderness or exploitable resource, and if climate change threatens both, then different cultural groups will interpret that threat differently. For those whose

engagement with nature is organized around wilderness preservation, climate change becomes a crisis of ecological integrity. For those with no cultural vocabulary for nature apart from economic utility, it registers primarily as an economic risk management problem. Neither framing, by itself, generates the broad moral engagement that the scale of the crisis seems to call for.

Literary representations of climate change, a growing genre sometimes called climate fiction or cli-fi, are beginning to supply new narrative resources. Novels, films, and other cultural forms explore futures shaped by warming in ways that scientific reports and policy documents cannot. Scholars in the environmental humanities have argued that these imaginative resources matter for public engagement with climate change in ways that are difficult to quantify but real.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

One of the most cited papers in the environmental humanities is Lynn White Jr.'s (1967) argument that the historical roots of the ecological crisis lie in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Writing in *Science*, White contended that the Biblical mandate for humans to exercise dominion over nature provided the ideological foundation for a distinctively Western exploitation of the natural world, and that any resolution to the ecological crisis would therefore require a change in fundamental religious attitudes.

The White thesis generated enormous debate and has been challenged on historical, theological, and empirical grounds. Many scholars argued that White overstated the influence of religious ideology relative to economic and political factors, and that Christian traditions contain substantial resources for ecological ethics that his reading overlooked. But the thesis performed an important function: it placed the question of cultural and religious values at the center of environmental explanation, insisting that ecological outcomes cannot be understood without reference to the beliefs and worldviews that shape how societies relate to their natural surroundings.

More recent work in environmental history has complicated and enriched this picture. Historians have documented how European colonialism exported destructive land-use practices along with extractive economic systems, how industrialization transformed human relationships with nature in ways that cut across religious traditions, and how the specific cultural constructions of race, class, and gender intersect with environmental degradation. These accounts do not support any simple thesis about cultural determinism, but they consistently confirm that culture matters: the beliefs, values, and social arrangements of particular societies have shaped environmental outcomes in ways that neither pure economic nor pure technological determinism can fully explain.

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO CLIMATE ACTION

Social Identity, Motivated Reasoning, and Climate Denial

One of the most striking features of the climate debate in several countries is the extent to which acceptance or rejection of climate science has become a marker of group identity. Kahan et al. (2012) documented this pattern with considerable empirical care, showing that greater scientific literacy does not reduce polarization on climate change; in fact, among those with the strongest scientific reasoning skills, the partisan gap in climate concern is widest. This is because for many people, the relevant question when encountering information about climate change is not whether a claim is accurate but whether accepting it marks one as a member in good standing of one's cultural community.

This phenomenon, which Kahan and colleagues describe in terms of cultural cognition, reflects the general human tendency to filter evidence through prior commitments and to weight the social costs of belief revision heavily. If accepting climate science is perceived as aligning oneself with political opponents,

or as threatening the economic practices on which one's community depends, then even high-quality scientific information may produce resistance rather than persuasion.

Norgaard (2011), in her ethnographic study of a Norwegian community, documented a different but related phenomenon in her book *Living in Denial*. The community she studied was well-informed about climate change and not particularly skeptical of the science, but had developed social norms that functioned to suppress climate-related anxiety and keep the topic off the agenda of everyday conversation. Denial, in her account, is not primarily an epistemic failure but a social accomplishment: a way of maintaining the collective emotional comfort needed to continue daily life without confronting a deeply disturbing reality.

Dunlap and McCright (2011) documented the organizational infrastructure of climate denial in the United States, showing how a well-funded network of think tanks, advocacy groups, and media outlets has worked systematically to manufacture uncertainty about climate science and delay regulatory action. This organized denial is not simply a cultural phenomenon; it is a political and economic one. But it succeeds by deploying cultural resources, playing on identity, values, and distrust, in ways that purely scientific or economic rebuttals cannot easily counter.

RISK PERCEPTION ACROSS CULTURAL CONTEXTS

The cultural theory of risk, developed by Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) in *Risk and Culture*, provides a broader framework for understanding why different social groups perceive environmental risks so differently. Douglas and Wildavsky identified four cultural rationalities associated with different types of social organization: hierarchical, individualist, egalitarian, and fatalist. Each generates characteristic patterns of risk perception. Hierarchist cultures tend to defer to institutional authority on risk matters; individualists discount collective risks and prefer market solutions; egalitarians are sensitive to systemic and distributional risks; fatalists view risks as essentially uncontrollable.

Applied to climate change, cultural theory predicts that perception of climate risk will be shaped not just by technical information but by the social worldview of the perceiver. Those embedded in individualist cultural contexts will tend to see climate risk as exaggerated or best managed through market mechanisms, while egalitarians will tend to see climate risk as severe, systemic, and requiring collective action. This explains much of the pattern of climate opinion in polarized societies, where climate views track cultural worldview more closely than scientific literacy.

Leiserowitz (2006) tested similar propositions empirically in a survey of American public opinion, finding that risk perception of climate change was more strongly predicted by affect, imagery, and values than by factual knowledge about the climate system. People who associated climate change with dread imagery and who held egalitarian values were more likely to support climate policies, while those who held individualist worldviews were less concerned. These findings have direct implications for climate communication: changing minds about climate requires engaging cultural values and emotional responses, not just correcting factual misunderstandings.

Beck's (1992) concept of risk society provides yet another angle on this problem. In *Risk Society*, Beck argued that late modernity is characterized by the production of risks that are invisible, global, and non-discriminatory in their ultimate reach, but that nonetheless track existing social inequalities in their immediate impacts. Climate change is perhaps the paradigm case of a Beckian risk: produced by the industrial systems of wealthy societies, its costs fall first and most heavily on the world's poorest people. Managing this kind of risk requires not just technical information but a shift in the moral culture of risk allocation, a recognition that the distribution of climate burdens raises fundamental questions of justice, not just of engineering.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND ECOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS

Perhaps the most important resource that the humanities perspective brings to climate action is its capacity to take seriously forms of knowledge and relationship with the natural world that Western scientific frameworks have historically marginalized or dismissed. Indigenous ecological knowledge, sometimes called Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs about the relationships of living beings, including humans, to one another and to their environment that has been developed and transmitted across generations through cultural practice (Berkes, 2008).

TEK is not simply a collection of empirical observations about local environments, though it certainly includes that. It is embedded in cultural practices, social relationships, and cosmological frameworks that assign meaning and responsibility to human interactions with the natural world in ways fundamentally different from the dominant Western scientific model. In many indigenous worldviews, nature is not a collection of resources to be managed but a network of relationships in which human beings are participants rather than owners. This relational framework carries implications for climate ethics that academic philosophy is only beginning to engage seriously.

Berkes (2008), in his landmark work *Sacred Ecology*, documented numerous examples of indigenous resource management systems that have maintained ecological sustainability across long time scales in ways that Western resource management has often failed to replicate. This is not because traditional societies were uniformly in harmony with nature, a romanticized view that serious scholars of indigenous knowledge firmly reject, but because many traditional management systems embedded ecological constraints in cultural norms, ceremonies, and governance structures in ways that made them self-reinforcing across generations.

For climate adaptation in particular, indigenous knowledge offers practical resources. Indigenous communities are often among the first to observe and respond to climate-related changes in local environments, and their observations can supplement and enrich scientific monitoring in important ways. The integration of TEK with scientific approaches is increasingly recognized in the climate adaptation literature, though progress in practice remains slow, partly because genuine integration requires institutional recognition of indigenous authority over indigenous knowledge, not merely the extraction of useful information for external purposes.

O'Brien and Leichenko (2000) raised the problem of double exposure in a way that is directly relevant here: communities already stressed by economic globalization face climate change as a compounding vulnerability, not an isolated threat. Indigenous communities often sit at the intersection of these stressors, facing simultaneous pressures from land dispossession, economic marginalization, and climate impacts on the ecosystems their cultures depend on. Addressing climate change in ways that are meaningful for these communities requires engaging their cultural frameworks and knowledge systems, not just delivering technical adaptation plans developed elsewhere.

The challenge of integrating indigenous knowledge into climate governance is not merely technical; it is political and epistemic. It requires confronting the persistent tendency of mainstream institutions to treat indigenous knowledge as supplementary data rather than as a legitimate knowledge system with its own internal logic and validation mechanisms. The humanities have a role to play here, in developing the conceptual tools for cross-cultural dialogue about nature, knowledge, and responsibility that genuine integration requires.

CULTURAL PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Community-Based Approaches and Local Values

If cultural context shapes the reception of climate information and the motivation for climate action, it follows that effective climate policy cannot be designed in cultural abstraction and applied uniformly across different communities. What works in one cultural context may fail in another. Community-based approaches to sustainability, which build from local values and social norms rather than imposing external frameworks, operate on a different logic from top-down regulatory approaches, though the two need not be mutually exclusive.

Stern (2000) argued that environmentally significant behavior is driven by a combination of factors, including awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, and perceived behavioral efficacy. Critically, each of these factors is shaped by cultural context. What people believe they are responsible for, what social norms reinforce or discourage, and what actions they believe will make a difference all vary across communities in ways that affect how general sustainability goals translate into local action.

Adger et al. (2009) extended this kind of analysis to climate adaptation specifically, arguing that the limits to adaptation are social and cultural as much as they are physical or economic. Communities have thresholds of tolerable change that are defined not by objective measures but by the values, identities, and social structures that make particular ways of life meaningful. When climate change threatens to alter a landscape, a livelihood, or a seasonal rhythm in ways that cut at the roots of cultural identity, the adaptation challenge becomes not just logistical but existential.

This is not a counsel of despair; it is an argument for cultural sensitivity in adaptation planning. Communities are not static, and they have always adapted to change. But adaptation is more likely to succeed when it works with the cultural grain rather than against it, building on existing practices, relationships, and values rather than requiring their wholesale abandonment.

RELIGION, ETHICS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Religion is one of the most powerful cultural forces shaping human relationships with the natural world, and its role in climate action has attracted growing scholarly and policy attention. Faith communities represent the largest voluntary networks in the world, with reach into communities that scientific or governmental institutions often cannot access. How religious traditions interpret the human relationship to nature therefore has real consequences for the moral culture of climate action.

White's (1967) argument about Judeo-Christian dominion theology opened a debate that has continued productively. Even those who reject the thesis in its strong form acknowledge that theological frameworks bear on ecological behavior, and that the same tradition which may have contributed to environmental exploitation also contains substantial resources for environmental ethics. Traditions of stewardship, the sacredness of creation, and obligation to future generations can all be mobilized in support of climate action from within mainstream religious frameworks. Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical Laudato Si' mobilized Catholic social teaching to make a case for climate action as a matter of justice and spiritual obligation, reaching a global audience of over a billion people.

Similar resources exist in Islamic traditions of khalifa (stewardship), Buddhist teachings on interdependence and non-attachment to material goods, Hindu conceptions of nature as sacred, and the many indigenous spiritual traditions that embed ecological relationship in cosmological frameworks. None of these traditions is unambiguously environmental in its contemporary expressions; all contain strands that can be read in more or less ecologically responsible ways. But the fact that climate action can be framed

in terms of religious duty offers communicators and policymakers a cultural lever that purely secular framings lack.

Engaging religious communities on climate change is most effective when it connects with concerns and values they already hold rather than imposing an external environmental agenda. The relationship between religious ethics and political behavior is complex and often mediated by economic interest, social identity, and political affiliation in ways that religious teaching does not fully control. But religion remains one of the most powerful meaning-making systems in the world, and any serious account of cultural pathways to sustainability must engage with it seriously.

DISCUSSION

This paper has argued that cultural dimensions are not peripheral to climate action; they are structural features of the problem. Whether one considers why some communities engage with climate risk and others do not, why particular policy instruments succeed in some national contexts and fail in others, or how to build the sustained public motivation that long-term decarbonization requires, cultural analysis is indispensable.

Several implications follow from this argument. The first concerns climate communication. If risk perception is culturally mediated, as the evidence from Leiserowitz (2006), Kahan et al. (2012), and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) consistently shows, then effective communication cannot rely on a deficit model that assumes public resistance to climate action results from insufficient information. Factual information about climate change does not, by itself, move people who are culturally primed to resist it. Communication that engages values, builds on existing cultural commitments, and speaks to the concerns that particular communities actually hold is more likely to be effective. This is not manipulation; it is respect for the complexity of human motivation.

The second implication concerns knowledge pluralism. The climate crisis cannot be resolved by Western technical science alone, not because that science is inadequate in its own domain, but because it cannot by itself address the cultural, ethical, and social dimensions of the problem. Indigenous knowledge systems, as Berkes (2008) showed, offer both practical resources and epistemic diversity, different ways of conceptualizing the human-nature relationship that may generate solutions not visible from within the dominant paradigm. Taking these contributions seriously requires institutions willing to share authority over knowledge, not merely import useful data points.

The third implication concerns climate justice. O'Brien and Leichenko (2000) showed that communities most exposed to climate impacts are often those with the least influence over climate policy. This distributional injustice has a cultural dimension: the knowledge systems, values, and moral frameworks of vulnerable communities are systematically underrepresented in the international climate governance process. Rectifying this is not only a matter of political equity; it is also a matter of practical effectiveness. Solutions designed without meaningful input from affected communities tend to miss important local realities and to generate resistance that undermines implementation.

The fourth implication concerns the long time horizons of cultural change. The post-materialist value shift documented by Inglehart (1997) operates across generations; the deeper reconceptualization of the human-nature relationship that ecological sustainability may require is similarly multigenerational. This does not mean that rapid structural policy change is impossible or unimportant. The urgency of climate impacts means structural change cannot wait for cultural transformation. But it does mean that building a culture of sustainability, through education, the arts, religious engagement, and community practice, is not a luxury to be deferred until the emissions problem is technically solved. These processes need to run in parallel with structural policy reform.

It is worth acknowledging the tensions within the argument made here. Emphasizing cultural distinctiveness carries the risk of sliding into relativism, suggesting that all cultural approaches to nature are equally valid regardless of their ecological consequences. That is not the claim being made. Some cultural arrangements are more compatible with ecological sustainability than others, and humanities scholarship is capable of making those distinctions with care. The point is not that all cultures are equally right but that all cultures carry resources for engaging with ecological challenges, and that ignoring those resources impoverishes both the analysis and the practice of climate action.

CONCLUSION

The cultural dimensions of climate action have received far less systematic attention in mainstream climate discourse than the physical, economic, or technological dimensions. This paper has tried to show why that gap matters and what it might look like to begin closing it.

Starting from cross-cultural research on values and environmental concern, moving through the environmental humanities' analysis of cultural narratives about nature, through the social psychology of climate denial, and toward the resources offered by indigenous knowledge and community-based sustainability, the paper has built a case that culture is not a soft add-on to the hard problem of climate change. It is, in important respects, where the problem lives.

Scientific consensus matters. Policy instruments matter. Technological innovation matters. But none of them matters in a cultural vacuum. They land in communities that have inherited particular ways of understanding nature, particular relationships to collective risk and responsibility, and particular moral frameworks for thinking about obligations to future generations and to the non-human world. How those cultural inheritances interact with climate information and climate policy shapes what actually happens.

The humanities offer tools for analyzing these interactions that no other disciplinary tradition can fully supply: close reading of cultural texts, historical analysis of ideas and their consequences, philosophical examination of ethical frameworks, and ethnographic attention to the meaning-making practices of particular communities. These are not merely academic contributions; they are resources for the practical work of building a world that responds to climate change with the seriousness, and the cultural depth, the situation requires.

Future scholarship would benefit from more direct engagement between environmental humanities research and climate policy development, and from collaborative methodologies that bring cultural analysis and natural science into productive dialogue. The humanities do not need to wait for an invitation; the material is already there, and the urgency is real.

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