

# *Why Do We Disagree on Climate Change?*

with Mike Hulme, “(Still) Disagreeing about Climate Change: Which Way Forward?”; Annick de Witt, “Climate Change and the Clash of Worldviews: An Exploration of How to Move Forward in a Polarized Debate”; Lisa Stenmark, “Storytelling and Wicked Problems: Myths of the Absolute and Climate Change”; Jonathan Moo, “Climate Change and the Apocalyptic Imagination: Science, Faith, and Ecological Responsibility”; and Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Can Science and Religion Respond to Climate Change?”

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CLASH OF WORLDVIEWS: AN EXPLORATION OF HOW TO MOVE FORWARD IN A POLARIZED DEBATE

by *Annick de Witt*

*Abstract.* The current gridlock around climate change and how to address our global sustainability issues can be understood as resulting from clashes in *worldviews*. This article summarizes some of the research on worldviews in the contemporary West, showing that these (ideal-typical) worldviews have different, and frequently complementary, potentials, as well as different pitfalls, with respect to addressing climate change. Simultaneously, the overview shows that, because of their innate reflexivity and their capacity to appreciate and synthesize multiple perspectives, individuals inhabiting integrative worldviews may have particular potentials with respect to addressing climate change. In the conclusion I argue that the policy challenge is to develop strategies that inspire the different worldview groups to actualize their potentials while mitigating their pitfalls, as well as to unite and mobilize them around a single vision that speaks to them all.

*Keywords:* climate change; cultural polarization; gridlock; sustainability; worldviews

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The phenomenon of (anthropogenic) climate change has become a topic of much debate, controversy, and disagreement (Hulme 2009), with “science” being one of the central players in the “drama.” Next to disagreeing about whether climate change is real and human-caused or not, we disagree about the solutions and potential pathways to a more sustainable society. For example, while for certain groups the further industrialization

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of agriculture, often supported by genetic modification of crops, is the solution to sustainably feeding our growing world population, for others this pathway is itself a serious threat to the environment (see, e.g., Levi-dow, Birch, and Papaioannou 2012). These latter groups tend to champion agro-ecological farming methods instead, thereby offering a substantially different—maybe even diametrically opposed—vision of the future of agriculture (e.g., UNCTAD 2013). Or, to take another example, while some see nuclear energy as a sustainable form of energy production, for others the waste products and risks associated with this technology are themselves considered serious environmental hazards. Thus, with respect to some of our major challenges, such as climate change and the transition to more sustainable economies and societies, we are faced with a profound clash of perspectives.

In these debates, different camps frequently use scientific data to argue for their own views, and discount those of others. As Daniel Sarewitz (2004) has argued, science—with its diverse (and generally disparate) academic disciplines, schools, paradigms, and methods—lacks the coherence to offer conclusive answers to complex, contested issues, such as climate change and the ways to address it. Therefore, rather than resolving such debates, more science tends to “make environmental controversies worse,” to use Sarewitz’s frequently paraphrased words. Moreover, as the work of Dan Kahan and colleagues (2012) has shown, contrary to popular belief, members of the public with the highest degree of science literacy and technical reasoning capacity were not the most concerned about climate change. In fact, they were the ones among whom cultural polarization was greatest. The authors conclude that public divisions over climate change do not stem from the public’s incomprehension of science but from a distinctive conflict of interest that can be best explained by fundamental differences in *worldview*.

Thus, rather than understanding these debates as resulting from mere disagreements over the facts, they can be better understood as resulting from clashes in deeper, value-laden perspectives, in worldviews. That is, from fundamentally different “philosophies of life” in conflict about what is real (ontology), how one can know (epistemology), what is of value (axiology), the nature and role of human beings (anthropology), and how society should be organized (societal vision/social imaginary). Understanding the role and dynamics of worldviews is therefore crucial for understanding “why we disagree about climate change,” as Hulme (2009) argues. Considering the different worldviews at play, we start to understand why these disagreements about climate change run so deep. From that understanding, we can start to explore, and experiment with, what can be done to move beyond these gridlock positions in the debate on climate change.

Therefore, this article will concisely summarize some of the existing research on worldviews in the contemporary West, showing that these

worldviews have different, and in many ways complementary, potentials (as well as different pitfalls) with respect to addressing climate change. I will argue that each of these different worldviews has a role to play in responding to what has been called “the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century.” Simultaneously, the overview shows that, because of their innate reflexivity and their capacity to appreciate and synthesize multiple perspectives, individuals inhabiting integrative worldviews may have particular potentials with respect to addressing climate change, and therefore deserve special attention. In the conclusion I briefly explore what this means for communication and policy, arguing that the policy challenge is to develop strategies that inspire the different worldview groups to actualize their worldviews’ potentials while mitigating their pitfalls, as well as to unite and mobilize them around a single policy-vision that speaks to them all.

*Research on worldviews in the contemporary West: The integrative worldview framework.* Worldviews have been defined as “inescapable, overarching systems of meaning and meaning-making that to a substantial extent inform how humans interpret, enact, and co-create reality” (Hedlund-de Witt 2013b, 156).<sup>1</sup> They consist of foundational assumptions and perceptions “regarding the underlying nature of reality, ‘proper’ social relations or guidelines for living, or the existence or non existence of important entities” (Koltko-Rivera 2004, 5). As several authors have argued, worldviews profoundly inform how environmental issues, such as climate change, are perceived, what are considered useful pathways toward solutions, and what is seen as the role and responsibility of the individual (Gifford 2011; Hedlund-de Witt 2013b; Hulme 2009; Nisbet 2009; O’Brien, St. Clair, and Kristoffersen 2010).

In my own research, based on quantitative and qualitative methods as well as literature reviews, I refer to the *Integrative Worldview Framework* (IWF). The IWF is an interdisciplinary framework that synthesizes original empirical research with research from a number of fields, notably developmental-structural psychology and sociology, including the extensive, cross-cultural, longitudinal database of the *World Values Survey*.<sup>2</sup> The IWF operationalizes worldviews into five major aspects (*ontology, epistemology, axiology, anthropology, and societal vision*), and offers a synoptic overview of the major, ideal-typical worldviews in the West, referred to as *traditional, modern, postmodern, and integrative* (De Witt and Hedlund in press; Hedlund-de Witt 2013a, 2013b). Earlier research using the IWF has demonstrated its usefulness for understanding the relationship between worldviews and the sustainability of individuals’ lifestyles, both conceptually (Hedlund-de Witt 2012) and empirically (Hedlund-de Witt, De Boer, and Boersema 2014). Moreover, a recent survey found consistent relationships between how traditionals, moderns, postmoderns, and

integratives relate to climate, energy, and biotechnology (De Witt, De Boer, Osseweijer, Hedlund, forthcoming).

These four “families” or categories of worldviews are concisely described in Table 1. This overview is neither exhaustive nor definitive, emphasizing the dynamic character of worldviews and the difficulty of comprehensively and accurately describing them. Of course, understanding worldviews in terms of such a high-level framework is necessarily based in a sweeping generalization of the complexities and ambiguities of reality. Moreover, these worldviews are of an *ideal-typical* nature, meaning that they are rationally and logically constructed models that can help researchers analyze and examine the real world. That is, ideal types represent “ideal” or “pure” types, which are as such not expected to be found in social reality. Instead a combination of different ideal types will often be found (see, e.g., Campbell 2007).

Moreover, while the succession from traditional to modern to postmodern has been fairly consistently observed in the history of Western societies (e.g., Inglehart 1997, 2008; Inglehart and Welzel 2005), the understanding of the integrative worldview is based on more limited (empirical) research and is therefore currently more hypothetical (e.g., Benedikter and Molz 2011; Gidley 2007; Hedlund-de Witt 2014a; Wilber 1995). Also, we do not know if other, non-Western societies will follow a similar progression, and can therefore not make claims to the framework’s cross-cultural validity. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005) present evidence to suggest that the progression is apparent in non-Western societies as well, even though cultural distinctiveness persists. That is, cultural traditions show a lasting imprint on, and thus *interact* with, the process of value change, rather than being immune to change or completely overtaken by it.

*Worldviews and climate change.* As argued in the introduction, different worldviews are associated with different responses to climate change. Although research has found that individuals inhabiting postmodern and integrative worldviews are generally more likely to be concerned about climate change than individuals ascribing to traditional and modern ones (De Witt et al. forthcoming), one can also observe different responses *within* these categories or “families” of worldviews. For example, a more traditional, Christian worldview can come to expression in a deeply felt “creation care,” or, on the other end of the spectrum, climate-denying perspectives.<sup>3</sup> These observations underscore the caution and nuance needed in this discussion of worldviews and their responses to climate change. Each of the worldviews appears to have potentials as well as pitfalls with respect to responding to the issue of climate change (see Table 2).

*Traditional worldviews* tend to be characterized by social and communitarian values and mindsets, generally emphasizing the rights and responsibilities of family and community over those of the individual.

**Table 1.** A concise description of four major ideal-typical worldviews in the contemporary West, according to the Integrative Worldview Framework (IWF)

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**Traditional Worldviews**

In traditional worldviews the religious sphere is generally not distinguished from the secular sphere, nor is metaphysics from science. Religious or metaphysical views on reality thus answer the big questions in life, and generally substantial faith is placed in religious authorities, such as scriptures, doctrines, and leaders. In this worldview, a transcendent God is usually seen as separate from the profane, earthly world, and man as fundamentally different from nature. The relationship with nature is frequently understood in terms of “dominion” or “stewardship.” Traditional worldviews tend to emphasize the importance of family and community, as well as values such as sobriety, obedience, discipline, solidarity, conformity, service, dedication, respect for tradition, humility, sacrifice, and austerity.

**Modern Worldviews**

Modern worldviews attempt to achieve liberation from imposed, oppressive, frequently religious authorities and understandings of the past, through an emphasis on rationality and critical thinking. The vision of reality tends to be secular and materialistic, as the existence of a higher power, divine reality, or intangible dimension is generally rejected. Science tends to be seen as the ultimate (frequently exclusive) source of reliable knowledge, providing access to objective reality. This “objectification” of reality generates a dualism between object and subject that has tended to lead to immense scientific, technological, and material/economic progress as well as to an instrumentalization of nature. Science and technology are generally seen as pathways to progress, and central means to address humanity’s most pressing issues. The autonomous, “self-made” individual has a central position. Individualistic and hedonistic values—such as freedom, independence, success, performance, social recognition, comfort, and fun—are usually dominant.

**Postmodern Worldviews**

Postmodern worldviews are characterized by a tendency to acknowledge and value multiple perspectives on reality, and are generally critical of science’s claim to exclusively provide objective knowledge. This worldview instead emphasizes the relativity and contextuality of knowledge, as well as the value of moral, emotional, and artistic ways of knowing. Frequently a somewhat critical attitude toward the modern model of society (e.g., ideas of progress, modern science and technology, capitalism) is observed, and the emancipation of marginalized and oppressed groups is a central motivation. This is for example reflected in the rise of social movements since the 1960s, promoting peace, multiculturalism, gay rights, and the environment, among others. Generally, postmodern worldviews celebrate diversity, heterogeneity, relativism, and “postmaterialistic” or “self-expression” values such as creativity, uniqueness, authenticity, imagination, feeling, and intuition.

**Integrative worldviews**

Integrative worldviews appear to be primarily characterized by a self-reflexive attempt to bring together and synthesize elements of other worldviews, or of domains that in other worldviews tend to be viewed as mutually exclusive, such as science (or rationality) and spirituality, imagination and logic, heart and mind, humanity and nature—perspectives that in the West have been in conflict for centuries. In this worldview, such opposing perspectives are frequently understood to be part of a greater whole or synthesis—on a “deeper level”—resulting in “and-and” rather than “either-or” thinking. Such a holistic or integrative perspective may lead to a profound sense of connection with nature, and an understanding of earthly life itself as imbued with a larger consciousness or “Spirit.” Universal, existential concerns—such as life and death, self-actualization, global awareness, and serving society, humanity, or even “life” at large—are often of central importance.

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**Table 2.** A generalized overview of the potentials and pitfalls of the four major worldviews in their responses to climate change

Worldviews	Potentials	Pitfalls
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creation care</li> <li>-Social/communitarian mindset in which social values are emphasized</li> <li>-Willingness to sacrifice</li> <li>-Care for the poor</li> <li>-Values like sobriety, stability, moderation, humility, reflection, and community may lead to lifestyles with a low impact on the environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Human-nature dualism</li> <li>-Conformism; suppression of the individual/individual creativity</li> <li>-Blocking of progress/development due to conservative mindset</li> <li>-Tendency to question scientific concepts that are viewed as contradictory to faith, tradition, or doctrine</li> <li>-Apocalyptic thinking (depending on one's religion)</li> </ul>
Modern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Critical rationality; commitment to (the results of) science</li> <li>-Sense of universal human rights and human dignity</li> <li>-Commitment to science and technology</li> <li>-Entrepreneurial spirit and creativity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Hubris</li> <li>-Technological fix (e.g., geo-engineering)</li> <li>-Instrumental (exploitative) approach toward nature</li> <li>-Materialism, hedonism, consumerism</li> </ul>
Postmodern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Commitment to green values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-By fighting the system and <i>status quo</i> sometimes creating more opposition ("the environmentalists who are against everything")</li> </ul>

*(continued on next page)*

Individuals endorsing traditional worldviews may therefore be more likely to make personal sacrifices for common causes, and in general may be more sensitive to arguments of a social nature (e.g., the effects of climate change on the poor, who will arguably be most powerfully effected by climate change, and the least able to adequately adapt to the changes). In certain contexts, they may display lifestyles that are less burdensome to the environment, due to values such as community, stability, conservation, moderation, humility, and reflection. These values may encourage behavioral choices with a relatively low impact on the environment, even though there often is no explicit commitment to green values (Vonk 2011). Simultaneously, individuals adhering to traditional worldviews may be more conservative in their outlook, and therefore critical of notions of

**Table 2.** (Continued)

Worldviews	Potentials	Pitfalls
Integrative	-Commitment to mobilize the public, emancipate marginalized voices	-Lack of ability to cooperate, align with other interests
	-Fight politically against vested interests	-Lack of embodiment
	-Critical attitude toward modern consumerism and reductionism	
	-Commitment to integrate, synthesize, and unify may be essential for overcoming polarization	-Perspective “not radical enough”
	-Ability to speak to multiple worldviews and potentially communicate a shared vision and approach that connects different cultures and peoples	-Vision may be marred by complexity, trying to include “everything,” therefore losing its (communicative) power
	-Self-reflexive, emphasis on own embodiment (“be the change you wish to see”), and inner change	-Focus on own embodiment and inner changes may result in underemphasizing the political reality of global issues and a lack of commitment to engaging in the “political fight”
	-Willingness for lifestyle change particularly in the realm of green consumerism	-Little willingness to sacrifice; e.g., generally world-traveling (CO2 intense) lifestyles

development and change in general, as well as of scientific concepts that are viewed as contradictory to their faith and tradition. For example, recent research (Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera 2014) shows that nearly half of Americans (49%) say the recent natural disasters are evidence the United States is experiencing the “end times” as described in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, such beliefs are not supporting a widespread social and cultural commitment to mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change, and may in fact undermine it.

When nature is understood to be given by God to humanity for its own purposes and benefits, this worldview may translate into a strong dualism between humanity and nature, as Lynn White argued in his famous though controversial thesis (1967). He called Western Christianity “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” (1205), ascribing the root cause of our ecological crisis to the medieval belief that God planned all of creation explicitly for man’s benefit and rule. By desacralizing nature, Christianity encouraged the exploitation of nature for humanity’s desires, in a mood of indifference to the feelings of other creatures and the value

of natural entities. At the same time however, the traditional worldview may be translated in a deeply felt sense of “creation care” and stewardship, as well as a care and concern for the poor. For example, the Evangelical Climate Initiative (2006, 313) argues that, “love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reasons for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action.” However, in general it is good to keep in mind that traditional worldviews are not necessarily of a Christian nature, even though many of them in (particularly) the West are. That is, there are, of course, also traditionalists with other religious origins. Moreover, not necessarily all Christians adhere to traditionalist worldviews. That is, religions, including Christianity, may come to expression in different ways, including potentially more traditional, modern, postmodern, and integrative ones (see also Fowler 1981).

In many ways, *modern worldviews*, as has been argued by numerous (environmental) philosophers (e.g., Plumwood 1993; Taylor 1989; Wilber 1995; Zwiers 2000), extend and reinforce the desacralization, objectification, and exploitation of nature that White primarily made Christianity responsible for. That “moderns” tend to display a more “instrumental” way of relating to nature has been affirmed in empirical research, and this orientation was also associated with less sustainable lifestyles (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Simultaneously, the likelihood of a “denial” of the phenomenon of (anthropogenic) climate change by individuals adhering to this worldview is much smaller, as the modern worldview is characterized by a strong belief in, and commitment to, the results of science—thus generally including the science on climate change. Moreover, because this worldview tends to emphasize rationality, the centrality of economic growth and material well-being, and the importance of individual rights, these individuals may be sensitive to rational arguments about the economics of climate change, the necessity of sustaining a healthy environment as the basis of our productive means, and the ways climate change may impinge on human rights and basic human dignity.

On the other hand, the (in itself valuable) liberation and empowerment of the individual associated with this worldview may translate into a kind of “hubris,” an attitude of humans thinking they can control nature and can “do better” than nature (e.g., De Witt, Osseweijer, and Pierce 2015), which may turn out to be problematic *vis-à-vis* addressing climate change. Empirical research shows that modern worldviews emphasize technological solutions and the correcting role of markets for addressing our environmental issues (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). While this may translate into a rational emphasis on science and technology for addressing climate change, it may also result in a denial of individual responsibility by (entirely) relying on technology to solve these issues. Generally speaking, tendencies of individualism, economism, and technological optimism are



associated with this worldview (see also Sneddon, Howarth, and Norgaard 2006). While its entrepreneurial spirit and creativity will likely be key to responding to climate change, at the same time, the rampant materialism and consumerism associated with this worldview is, of course, problematic in mitigating climate change, which will almost certainly demand profound changes in terms of our (Western) lifestyles and consumption patterns (e.g., World Watch Institute 2010).

Since *postmodern worldviews* are frequently the originators of the ecological critique of the modern West (such as its dominant ideas of progress, science and technology, capitalism), it naturally tends to espouse a commitment to green values. Generally speaking, postmodern concerns tend to be of a “post-material” nature, representing a shift from a focus on wealth to a focus on well-being, and from survival to self-expression: their scope is beyond the material, and touches on a range of quality-of-life issues, including the health of the environment (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Empirical research shows that individuals adhering to a postmodern worldview tend to feel more part of, and connected to nature (rather than relating to it in a more instrumental and controlling way), which also is found to be correlated with more sustainable lifestyles, including more sustainable diet and consumption patterns (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). With respect to addressing global environmental issues such as climate change, these individuals tend to emphasize different ways of relating to nature and underscore the role of individual behavioral change (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014; Taylor 1989). In a general sense, postmodern worldviews tend to be associated with a more widespread commitment and willingness to address these issues, and environmental organizations can frequently be classified in this worldview category.

While individuals adhering to modern worldviews tend to regard both science and the state as their major sources of authority (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), postmoderns emphasize other ways of knowing (i.e., art, morals, philosophy, intuition) and are generally more cautious and critical of these “bastions” of the modern West—especially where they mingle with commercial interests and the forces of capitalism. This caution and criticism is both their greatest strength *and* greatest weakness. On the one hand, it allows these individuals to reflect on modern assumptions and models from outside of the paradigm, frequently resulting in a more bold, reflexive, and far-reaching perspective on it. Most of the creative mobilization against vested interests and the deeply engrained power structures in our society (i.e., that of the fossil fuel industry) appear to (have) emerged from this worldview. Certain organizations have shown themselves to be highly effective in that respect. For example, in the domain of climate change, the organization *350.org*<sup>5</sup> excels in mass communication and mobilization, “speaking truth to power” while powerfully drawing on individuals’

emotional connection to nature and their fellow human beings, as well as on their often-damaged sense of justice, to organize and mobilize them.

Thus, individuals or organizations adhering to a postmodern worldview have frequently shown a great commitment to inform and rally the public and stand up for marginalized voices and interests—including, for example, those of indigenous peoples and species threatened with extinction. Simultaneously, as they tend to be “fighting” the system and the *status quo*, they frequently create opposition and forego possibilities of cooperation. In this context the argument made by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus (2004) is of interest—they accused the American environmental movement of conceptualizing environmental issues in such a (narrow) way that it necessarily results in a polarization of perspectives, thereby undermining alliance building and cooperation with other interests groups (e.g., industry, labor unions), and thus integration into larger society. The powerful and important criticism of postmoderns toward modern consumerism, the “dark sides” of technology, and materialism can turn into a negative attitude toward anything modern, making their perspectives “too radical” to constructively work with for many individuals and organizations in society. Also, as their “fight” frequently takes place in the political domain (e.g., Boutilier 2005), their focus may be less on their own embodiment—that is, the ways they are themselves participating in and profiting of the structures they are critiquing. Taking the case of 350.org as example, it is noteworthy that while this organization rallies people all over the world to speak up to their politicians and demand climate action in the public domain, hardly any of their countless initiatives focuses on addressing the private behavior and consumption patterns of their own adherents that are detrimental to the climate (e.g., eating factory-farmed meat).

In contrast with, and perhaps in response to, postmodern answers to climate change, individuals adhering to *integrative worldviews* tend to underscore this need for self-reflexive embodiment, the need “to be the change you wish to see” (referring to Mahatma Gandhi’s often-quoted statement). Political scientist Karen Litfin’s study of eco-villages worldwide (2009) offers a great example of how these communities tend to be guided by a shared worldview that could be called integrative (i.e., attempting to synthesize rationality and spirituality, economy and ecology, humanity and nature) and the ideal of locally actualizing and exemplifying the globally needed changes (see also Boutilier 2005).<sup>6</sup> Such ideas and ideals tend to translate into a willingness to change lifestyle as well as to more sustainable lifestyles, both of which have been affirmed in empirical research. That is, a recent survey showed that integratives were the most concerned about climate change, the most willing to engage in energy-saving measures, and actually consumed the least meat, which is one of the most high-impact behaviors in terms of climate change (De Witt et al. forthcoming). These individuals

often also emphasize the crucial importance of inner changes for addressing our outer crises, which is another way their self-reflexive attitude comes to expression (Hedlund-de Witt 2014a). However, this focus on one's own embodiment may also result in underemphasizing the political reality of global issues and a lack of commitment to engaging in the political fight. Moreover, the question remains to what extent these individuals are also willing to make personal sacrifices as the significance of the individual is (further) elevated in this worldview, and green consumerism (rather than consuming less) tends to be one of their main way of responding to our global challenges. For example, integratives tend to display outspoken cosmopolitan, world-traveling attitudes, which generally coincide with the generation of substantial amounts of greenhouse gases through air travel.

The holistic or integrative perspective of this worldview frequently leads to a profound sense of connection with nature, and an understanding of earthly life itself as imbued with a larger consciousness or "Spirit" (De Witt et al. forthcoming; Hedlund-de Witt 2014a), thereby potentially overcoming the objectifying, desacralizing, and exploitative attitude that has been qualified as root cause of our sustainability challenges by White and others. Indeed, as some have argued, the "cosmic piety" associated with this worldview may result in a profound sense of care for the health and flourishing of our planet as a whole (e.g., Giner and Tábara 1999; Hedlund-de Witt 2012; Taylor 2010), and may therefore be essential in responding to climate change. Moreover, the universal, existential concerns that characterize this worldview tend to lead to a greater concern about, and commitment to, global issues like climate change, which tend to be interpreted in the context of grand notions such as the "future of humanity," the "emergence of a planetary civilization," and "the evolution of consciousness" (e.g., Benedikter and Molz 2011; Bhaskar 2002; Gidley 2007; Hedlund-de Witt 2014a; Kelly 2010; Morin and Kern 1999; Wilber 1995, 2001).

Additionally, where the postmodern perspective frequently generates opposition, individuals adhering to integrative worldviews—particularly as a result of their desire to overcome duality and their innate self-reflexivity—may be better able to bring together polarized perspectives and support the conditions for finding common ground and synergy. As Sean Esbjörn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman (2009) argue, integratives (whom they call "eco-holists" and "eco-integralists") tend to see the importance of various—even contradictory—perspectives, are often capable of holding conflicting truths, and use skillful means to meet people where they are. Precisely because of its attempt at integration, this cultural movement appears to be relatively compatible with other cultural currents in contemporary society. For example, environmentally engaged individuals with a more integrative worldview may not translate their idealism into working for environmental organizations, but would rather become social entrepreneurs

instead, combining qualities of modernity (flourishing economies, capitalism) with qualities of the postmodern worldview (social goals, care for others and the environment) into approaches that they believe are more effective, are independent of (government) subsidies, and are compatible with the values of modern consumer society. This kind of “conscious capitalism” has become a social movement as well as a different approach to business that is informing the corporate sector at large (see, e.g., Hawken, Lovins, and Lovins 1999; Mackey and Sisodia 2013).

A contribution of this worldview may therefore be that it offers an integrative perspective and approach to addressing our urgent, planetary concerns that appeals to multiple worldviews and peoples. This could prove to be particularly significant in response to the current polarization and gridlock in the debate around climate change. However, some (mostly postmodern) critics have claimed the opposite, arguing that such perspectives are “not radical enough” and are in fact co-opted or marginalized by capitalist forces in society. On the other hand, through these more integrative perspectives and approaches, this worldview may be able to offer a compelling vision of what a sustainable society could look like; a vision that is able to speak to, and perhaps even unite, multiple worldviews, rather than just engaging one’s own (Hedlund-de Witt 2014a). Such a vision appears to be an essential part of the important task of public communication and large-scale mobilization for sustainable, life-enhancing solutions to our planetary issues (Moser 2007; Moser and Dilling 2007). Moreover, integratives tend to operate from a complex systems-level perspective, potentially enabling them to choose creative and visionary strategies that shift larger systems dynamics toward positive change (Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman 2009). However, due to the many perspectives and multiple dimensions of reality that integratives attempt to honor and include, their visions and approaches may be at the same time marred by complexity, thereby losing their (communicative) power.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it becomes clear that each of the four worldviews has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of responding to our urgent planetary issues such as climate change. In that sense, these worldviews are complementary: they all have something to offer (as well as to overcome). For policy makers, one of the most important questions is how to mobilize these different segments of the public at large, and develop strategies that activate their potentials while mitigating their pitfalls. Clearly, that demands the capacity to hold and appreciate (individuals with) multiple perspectives and worldviews (rather than trying to convince them of one’s own understanding of what is right and true and beautiful), understand where they come from, and inspire them to embody their potentials. It also

demands finding synergistic strategies that can inspire different worldviews around a single policy vision that speaks to them all, such as investing in renewable energy technologies (see De Witt and Hedlund in press). This insight therefore raises many possibilities for future research, including inquiries into how policy and communications strategies can be developed that successfully mobilize different worldviews, and studying cases that already excel in doing so.

Simultaneously, the overview of the different worldviews shows that individuals inhabiting more integrative worldviews may have particular potentials with respect to addressing sustainability challenges such as climate change (see also Brown 2012a, 2012b; Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman 2009; Hedlund-de Witt 2014a; Van Egmond and De Vries 2011). This is so because of their innate self-reflexivity; their capacity to appreciate multiple, even conflicting perspectives; their holistic and systemic understanding of complex, global issues; their sense of connection to, and care for, the health and flourishing of our planet as a whole; their willingness to engage in more sustainable lifestyles; and their commitment to come up with strategic, synergistic solutions. This means that the integrative worldview—while currently the least researched worldview—may in fact be the most potent one in terms of addressing the political and cultural disagreements surrounding climate change.

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#### NOTES

1. This section, which discusses the Integrative Worldview Framework (IWF) in a general fashion, has been published in a slightly different version before (Hedlund-de Witt 2014b).

2. The World Values Survey provides the most global perspective on values and worldviews, and the changes occurring in them over time, available to date ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)).

3. For example, many evangelical Christians recognize the moral angle of human-caused climate change particularly because of its potential detrimental effects on the poor, and view the issue as one of stewardship of the Earth. However, the *Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation* is a conservative evangelical Christian public policy group that opposes policies to reduce carbon pollution and slow global warming, purportedly to protect those same poor, questioning the science behind climate change as speculative and misleading ([www.cornwallalliance.org](http://www.cornwallalliance.org)).

4. Overall, however, Americans are more likely to say that these disasters are (also) the result of climate change (62%). In comparison with Americans from different religious backgrounds, particularly white evangelical Protestants stand out in being substantially more likely to attribute the severity of recent natural disasters to biblical end times (77%) than to climate change (44%) (Jones et al. 2014).

5. 350.org was founded by a group of university friends in the United States along with author Bill McKibben, who wrote one of the first books on global warming for the general

public. One of the main intentions was to build a climate movement that reflected the scale of the crisis. They organize coordinated days of action linking activists and organizations around the world. Today, 350.org works in almost every country in the world on campaigns like fighting coal power plants in India, stopping the Keystone XL pipeline in the United States, and divesting public institutions everywhere from the fossil fuel industry. All of their work “leverages people power to dismantle the influence and infrastructure of the fossil fuel industry, and to develop people-centric solutions to the climate crisis” (see [www.350.org](http://www.350.org)).

6. Robert Boutilier (2005) speaks of “neotribalisation,” referring to a movement in which there is a “thrust towards constituting communities on the basis of collective identities rooted in postmodern critiques of modernism” (30), aiming to apply the implications of global phenomena and perspectives to local stewardship practices. In his eyes, this movement frequently includes threads of contemporary, ecological, and spiritual philosophy that revisit and renew traditional views of the humankind–nature relationship.

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