

Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity

by Mike Hulme (2009)

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Reviewed by Scott D. Wright

University of Utah

“A good place to look for wisdom...is where you least expect to find it: in the minds of your opponents.” (Jonathan Haidt, 2006) — the epigram in M. Hulme’s (2009) book

Three of the four finalists for the 2009 Gerald L. Young Book Award focus their direct attention to the topic of climate change and all three represent timely publications given the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (Dec. 7 - Dec. 18, 2009) in Copenhagen, Denmark. However, this particular book, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, by Hulme (2009) reaches the highest standard of the Gerald L. Young book award in Human Ecology by tapping into several issues that reflects the mission and philosophical stance of the Society for Human Ecology. We value critical thinking, engaged dialogue, and creative solutions to the challenges of human-environment interactions. We have an interest in interdisciplinary approaches within international settings. Finally, we place a strong emphasis on research findings that can be translated in applications to educational settings. And with these guiding principles, Mike Hulme has written a provocative and inspirational book that centers on the intersection of science and society. Not everyone will agree with his interpretations, but his approach is refreshing and a much needed catalyst to generate scholarly discussion on the topic. Hulme’s perspectives are vastly different than the usual lock-step press releases we are accustomed to. For example, Hulme argues that climate change is real but the COP-15 conference was the wrong way to go about tackling it given the scope of the issue and the diversity of cultures and social priorities that were present at the conference. In effect, Hulme casts the challenge in a new heuristic, such that climate

change is not ‘a problem’ waiting for ‘a solution,’ rather, it is an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon which is re-shaping the way we think about ourselves, our societies and humanity’s place on Earth. He believes that man-made climate change is real, but that the actions that we should promote are those which build on existing successes, work at smaller scales, require less bureaucratic institutions and which simultaneously achieve a wider range of local benefits for society. Hulme expresses his perspective in this excerpt, “The idea of climate change should be used to rethink and renegotiate our wider social goals about how and why we live on this planet. We need to harness climate change to give new expression to some of the irreducible and intrinsic human values that are too easily crowded out — our desires for personal growth and self-determination, for creative experimentation relationship and for community. In this way climate change can be assimilated into our future. If we harness the full array of human sciences, artistic and spiritual endeavors, and our civic and political pursuits we can reconcile climate change with our human and social evolution, with our instinct for justice and with our endurance on this planet.” (pp 361-362) Hulme acknowledges that there will be disagreements with process and desired goals, but he sees this as an opportunity towards enlightenment in human existence.

About the Author

Mike Hulme is Professor of Climate Change in the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia (UEA), and founding Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. He has published over a hundred peer-reviewed journal papers and over thirty books or book chapters on climate change topics. He has prepared climate scenarios and reports for the UK Government, the European Commission, UNEP, UNDP, WWF International and the IPCC. He is currently leading the EU integrated research project ADAM (Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies), a consortium of twenty-six institutes contributing research to the development of EU climate policy during the period 2006-9. He co-edits the journal *Global Environmental Change* and is Editor-in-Chief of Wiley’s *Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. He is a frequent speaker about climate change at academic, professional and public events, and writes frequently for the media.

Whole Earth Discipline: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto

by Stewart Brand (2009)

ISBN: 978-0-670-02121-5 (hardback)

Viking Press (Penguin Group, USA) New York.

Reviewed by Scott D. Wright, University of Utah
and for the Society for Human Ecology

“Nothing is as instructive as a worthy enemy” — Stewart Brand (2009)

The Gerald L. Young book award in Human Ecology captures the highest standard of scholarly work and reflects the mission and philosophical stance of the Society for Human Ecology. We value critical thinking, engaged dialogue and creative solutions to the challenges of human-environment interactions. We have an interest in interdisciplinary approaches within international settings. Finally, we place a strong emphasis on research findings that can be translated in applications to educational settings. Because our professional organization represents a diverse cross-section of disciplines and scientific perspectives, we often encounter a variety of perspectives that are both mainstream and part of the traditional literature in human ecology, as well as the alternative and visionary perspectives that challenge the status quo. In this case, Stewart Brand’s book, *Whole Earth Discipline: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto* is very much an iconoclastic work and, as some might see it, a contrarian viewpoint to the orthodoxy of environmental scholarship, which Brand believes has, to some degree, morphed into intractable ideological positions. Brand takes on several key areas that serve as dialogical hotspots for those in academia, NGOs, the mainstream media, bloggersphere, and the general public. Brand examines four “tools” that he claims environmentalists have distrusted and, “...now need to embrace, plus one we love that has to be scaled up. The unwelcome four are *urbanization, nuclear power, biotechnology, and geoengineering*.” The familiar one is natural-system restoration (or “mega-gardening”). Brand raises the bar on the debate and re-introduces a productive typology (“hedgehogs” and “foxes”) for all of us to consider as we state our positions on these issues. Some will deem Brand’s call for a metamorphosis of the green movement to be heretical, but his visionary (and dialectical) writings showcase both innovation and intelligence. Will the next phase and evolution in human-environmental interaction be identified as “blue-green” (environmentalists who embrace and weave in *science and technology*)? We shall see. In the mean time, we all have a lot of work to do and Brand has

offered a challenging, yet reasonable, path for all of us to consider.

Stewart Brand is the founder of *The Whole Earth Catalog* and *Co-Evolution Quarterly*. He is the author of *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT* and *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built*, and is the President and cofounder of The Long Now Foundation and cofounder of the Global Business Network.

Creating a New Consensus on Population: The Politics of Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Women’s Empowerment, Second Edition.

By Jyoti Shankar Singh

London: Earthscan.

252 pages

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Reviewed by Mary J. Marcus
Denver, Colorado

In the second half of the 20th Century, rapid global population growth impelled three major intergovernmental conferences under the auspices of the United Nations to address the problem. The first International Population and Development Conference (IPDC) took place in Bucharest in 1974. A second IPDC took place in Mexico City in 1984, followed up by a third and final conference in Cairo in 1994. The goals and policy recommendations that emerged from these conferences represented a sea change in world opinion and achieved socioeconomic progress in the developing world.

Jyoti Shankar Singh provides a UN insider’s account of the workings of each IPDC, detailing the process of building consensus on divisive issues, such as the role of women in society, and government sponsored family planning initiatives. What emerged from the deliberations is a sweeping array of international development and population goals and policy recommendations. A section of the book follows up on progress of nations in implementation of the goals and objectives adopted by the UN conferences.

Singh provides an overview of the accomplishments of each IPDC. The Bucharest conference established the principle that government programs designed to address population matters must be consistent with basic human rights. At the same time, the Conference confirmed the sovereign right of each nation. The program of action emerging from the Bucharest conference declares that ‘couples and individuals’

are entitled to have reproductive rights. The language agreed upon at Bucharest extending reproductive rights beyond the traditional family unit was not without controversy — the inclusion of the word ‘individuals’ set off a firestorm among conservative member nations, Singh reports; yet, the definition has stood the test of time.

Facing a gap in knowledge in many parts of the world of the relationship between women’s societal roles and fertility reduction, member nations in Bucharest addressed the fundamental need for understanding in these matters, Singh writes. The first conference linked the role of women in society and population growth and set forth fertility reduction goals, in tandem with policy recommendations designed to lower infant, child, and maternal mortality rates. Specifically, the Conference called on nations to ensure the universal availability of reproductive health care, to include information and services pertaining to family planning.

The second International Population and Development Conference held in Mexico City in 1984 reaffirmed and expanded on the achievements of Bucharest. The Conference reemphasized the goal of improving women’s position in the family and in society as a strategy for reducing family size. Member nations went a step further by declaring that the improvement in women’s condition is an objective important in itself. Clinics that provide reproductive health services were seen as the appropriate venue in treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, at a time of growing concern over the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Diverse viewpoints on family planning gave rise to controversy. Singh details conflict between the Reagan administration and other member nations. Reagan reversed the previous position of the U.S. on population, and sought to deny U. S. funds to organizations believed to be engaged in abortion related activities.

Non-governmental organizations, which had been relegated to a peripheral role in Bucharest, were brought into the mainstream at Mexico City, Singh reports. The Conference welcomed 500 observers from 185 national, regional and international NGOs and many organizations were invited to address sessions, contributing their expertise and experience. The subsequent growth of NGOs has been exponential and to the present day this sector has become a key player in meeting international goals, which may involve entering partnerships with governments. NGOs have been recognized for their advantage compared to some government agencies in terms of their flexibility and ability to reach less well served constituencies.

Singh considers the third UN Conference on Population and Development as “a turning point in representing an important shift in the views and perceptions of policy makers on reproductive health policies, approaches and goals relative to population and development.” The Conference set an agenda

to improve the quality of life of individuals wherever they happened to have been born. The issues of poverty, migration, sustainability, were viewed as connected to population and development. The author hails the support on the part of the 179 member nations meeting in Cairo for international initiatives to empower women as “an extraordinary breakthrough.”

The end of the Cold War impacted the Conference by the elimination of ideological tensions and by the emergence of new countries in Central Europe and Central Asia. The Conference cited a need to ensure the availability of reproductive health services, including contraception, in Eastern and Central Europe following the Soviet break-up. The Clinton administration overturned the previous U. S. opposition to of abortion related activities and demonstrated greater interest and involvement with the ICPD mainstream, Singh says.

In advance of the IPDC in Cairo, considerable work was done in preparatory meetings in an effort to reach agreement on a number of contentious matters, such as a concern on the part of some nations and of the Holy See that abortion might be sanctioned as an acceptable form of contraception. The author details the particulars of these sessions in which a diverse viewpoints were negotiated and language carefully parsed in documents to forge a program of action that could be ratified by the world body.

Singh categorized the evolution of policy development from Bucharest to Cairo based upon four broad areas: integration of population and development strategies; population growth and structure; reduction of infant child and maternal morbidity and mortality; population distribution and migration. A decade after the third conference, there were no plans for a fourth global conference, which might have invited challenges to core principles from the Bush Administration. However, a series of conferences and special sessions were convened to assess implementation of the established goals. Moreover, Singh points to ongoing efforts through existing UN agencies to monitor progress within the stated 20-year timeframe ending in 2015.

The Millennium Summit in 2002 brought together 189 member nations to review key objectives established at Cairo. The Summit crystallized IPDC principles with a statement outlining Millennium Development Goals. These included eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education; gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; eradication of HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability.

Singh writes this comprehensive account of the International Population and Development conferences and related UN activities with an insider’s authority. A permanent UN observer, he served as Executive Coordinator for the 1994 Conference in Cairo while concurrently acting as the Direc-

tor of the United Nations Population Fund, Technical and Evaluation Division. In addition to his personal recollection, the author conducted interviews with key personnel and reviewed official documents to augment his account.

While the author's prose is graceful, this is an acronym laden volume, perhaps more suitable for the UN scholar than the lay person. That said, the story of the international organization's improbably ambitious agenda to create a better world is remarkable; the UN's successful campaign to trans-

form world opinion to the good, despite parochial objections, (notably, opposition from several conservative U.S. Administrations) even inspires. One hopes Singh will feel the muse around 2015, the end of the UN timeframe for achieving the stated goals, and that he undertakes a thorough review of the outcome of the mission begun in 1974 as it has unfolded throughout the world. He is without question the scholar to undertake the project.