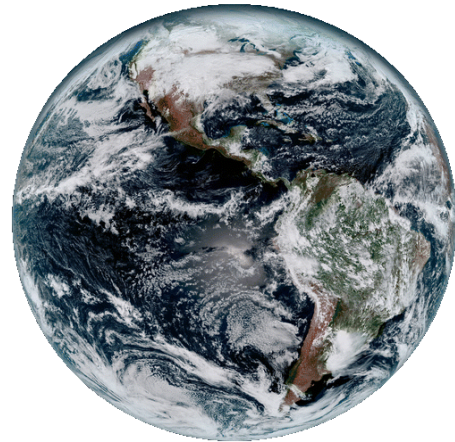


# ETHICS of CLIMATE CHANGE – Mindful Climate Action

The issue of climate change is scientific, economic, political and cultural. But many argue that climate change is fundamentally a moral issue, and warrants a moral response. Here are some of the reasons:

1. Because our moral integrity requires us to do what is right
2. To honor and celebrate the Earth & Earth systems
3. Because we love the world and it is beautiful
4. Because justice demands it
5. Because compassion requires it
6. For the stewardship of God's creation
7. Because all flourishing is mutual
8. For the full expression human virtue
9. To honor our duties of gratitude and reciprocity
10. For the sake of all forms of life on the planet
11. For the sake of the Earth itself
12. To honor the rights of future generations of all species
13. For the sake of the children
14. For the protection of our human rights



(Source: Moore Nelson, *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, 2010)

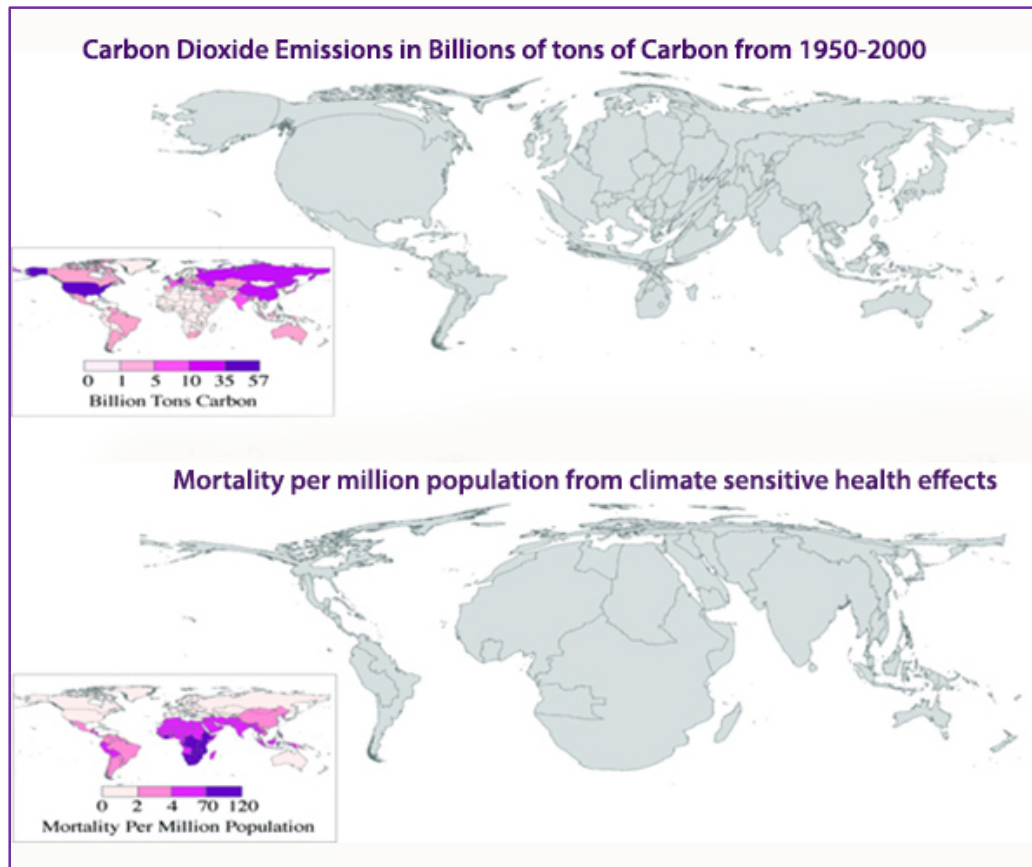
We know that climate change is leading to all sorts of world changes: rising temperatures, rising sea levels, shifting habitats, shifting and worsening precipitation patterns, intensifying storms, escalating number of droughts and wildfires, among other catastrophic changes. We know as a consequence that humans are suffering, and will continue to suffer. We also know that other inhabitants of this fragile planet are suffering too, plants and animals. In fact, the World Health Organization has deemed climate change to be the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century, catapulting climate change into an ethical issue.

A primary response to ethical concerns about climate change has been international action to address the issue, particularly through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Multinational action is required because no single country can reduce emissions sufficiently to stop greenhouse gas concentrations from continuing to grow. Other international bodies taking up the challenge of climate change include the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Because the extent and urgency of action required to mitigate emissions depends on vulnerability, a key question is the degree to which human society and the natural environment are vulnerable to detrimental impacts of climate change. Due to climate change, some will suffer disproportionately, and it is becoming increasingly clear that those least responsible bear the worse consequences.

A growing moral obligation to climate change has led to the climate justice movement. Climate justice prioritizes vulnerable populations and human rights to share the burdens of climate change impacts more equitably and fairly. This movement resonates with the ancient Native American Seventh Generation Principle that decisions we make today must support a sustainable world seven generations into the future.

The 2015 Paris Agreement combined climate justice and care for future generations on a global scale when 195 nations agreed to combat climate change and unleash actions and investment towards a low-carbon, resilient and sustainable future.

How are the causes and burdens of climate change related?



*Cartogram showing Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Billions of tons of Carbon from 1950-2000 (top) vs. Mortality per million population from climate sensitive health effects (bottom).*

The graphic above provides insight by combining statistical information with geographic location, distorting locations based on the data represented. The top map shows the cumulative billions of tons of carbon dioxide emissions from the period 1950-2000. Note that the United States is bulging. Meanwhile, the bottom map depicts mortality per million population from climate-sensitive health effects of malaria, malnutrition, diarrhea, and inland flood-related fatalities. This reveals which countries are the most vulnerable to our changing climate.

It is clear that those most vulnerable are the least responsible; thus, the victims who have done little to cause the problem are suffering the most. In general, those most at risk cannot successfully petition their own governments for protection, as those governments are resource poor, stressed, and unable to satisfy the many needs of their people. Furthermore, those most at risk are poor and therefore have fewer adaptation options, and they often lack the strength and resiliency to withstand the many stressors coming from climate change.

Many institutions and high profile individuals support a moral and ethical response to climate change. Around the world, people are endeavoring to change policies and develop new technologies, but it isn't necessary to be a politician or scientist to make a difference. We can all be part of the solution by simply changing our behaviors. The first step is being mindful of our actions and making choices that are better for our personal health, better for those more vulnerable than us, better for future generations, and better for the planet.

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