EMPATHY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
Proposals for a Revolution of Human Relationships

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A PASSAGE TO INDIA

'Jenna Meredith can empathise more than most with the 4.5 million people made homeless by flooding in South Asia after her home in Hull, UK, was hit by flooding earlier this year. She travelled to Orissa in eastern India with Oxfam to meet families who have lost their homes.'

Photo: Chris Worral/Oxfam

Photo: Robin Hammond/Oxfam

This story appeared on the Oxfam website in August 2007. In June that year, the worst flooding in Britain for sixty years had destroyed Jenna's home. Not only had she and her two daughters lost their worldly possessions, but due to financial pressures, she had stopped paying her house insurance six months earlier. Jenna became a spokesperson for local residents on her housing estate who felt that the government was doing too little to help them. When she made a comment in a radio interview about how the people of Hull were living like refugees in the Third World, she was contacted by Oxfam, who invited her to discover what life was like for poor villagers who had recently faced flooding in India.

'It was heartbreaking,' she said, after returning from her one-week trip. 'I have been flooded out and lost everything so I know what it is like for the people in India. But in comparison I feel lucky. We can go and buy food from the shops, but the people I've met have lost their crops. They haven't got anything.' One person she spoke to was Annapurna Beheri, whose home and small family shop selling biscuits and tobacco were washed away. 'Annapurna was incredible. Her life has been turned upside down and now she has been reduced to living in a corrugated shack. I cried when the floods hit Hull, but she has nothing left and the family barely have enough food.'

Jenna was overwhelmed by her face-to-face meeting with the villagers in Orissa. 'Until you go to see a country like that for yourself, it's impossible to comprehend what's really happening. I know I can't walk away from this. I am determined to continue the campaign not only to get aid to those in need, but also to try to do whatever we can to

reduce the effect of global warming. I have had a life-changing experience. I'll do everything I can to make a difference.'[2]

EMPATHY AND THE CLIMATE GAP

How can we close the gap between knowledge and action on climate change? Millions of people in rich countries know about the damaging effects of climate change and their own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, yet relatively few are willing to make substantive changes to how they live. They might change a few light bulbs but they do not cut back on flying abroad for their holidays nor do they want to pay higher taxes to confront global warming.

One common approach to closing the climate gap is to argue that it is economically beneficial for us to do so: if we don't act now, climate change will become an increasing drain on national income as we try to deal with the damage, and individuals will face a reduction in living standards, for instance due to higher food and energy prices. A second major approach, based on ideas of justice and rights, is to argue that we have a moral obligation not to harm the lives of others through our excessive GHG emissions.

So far economic, moral or other arguments have not been enough to spur sufficient action. I believe that a fundamental approach has been missing: empathy.

Individuals, governments and companies are currently displaying an extraordinary lack of empathy on the issue of climate change, in two different ways. First, we are ignoring the plight of those whose livelihoods are being destroyed today by the consequences of our high emission levels, particularly distant strangers in developing countries who are affected by floods, droughts and other weather events. That is, there is an absence of empathy *across space*. Second, we are failing to take the perspective of future generations who will have to live with the detrimental effects of our continuing addiction to lifestyles that result in emissions beyond sustainable levels. Thus there is a lack of empathy *through time*. We would hardly treat our own family members with such callous disregard and continue acting in ways that we knew were harming them.

In this essay I wish to suggest that generating empathy both across space and through time is one of the most powerful ways we have of closing the gap between knowledge and action, and for tackling the climate crisis. The problem is that, until now, empathy has been largely ignored by policymakers, non-governmental organisations and activists. Oxfam's idea of taking a British flood victim to witness the effects of flooding in India is an exception. It is time to recognise that empathy is not only an *ethical* guide to how we should lead our lives and treat other people, but is also an essential *strategic* guide to how we can bring about the social action required to confront global warming.

To begin this interdisciplinary journey, I will discuss exactly what empathy means, then show that there is strong historical evidence that it is possible to generate empathy on a large scale and for it to bring about major social change. Following this I will explain in more detail what it would mean to promote greater empathy on climate change across space and through time, and suggest concrete ways of doing so.

Tackling climate change requires nothing less than a revolution of the empathetic imagination.

WHAT IS EMPATHY?[3]

If you pick up a psychology textbook and look up the meaning of 'empathy' you will usually find that two types are described.

Empathy as shared emotional response

The first form is the idea of empathy as a *shared emotional response*, sometimes called 'affective' empathy. For instance, if you see a baby crying in anguish, and you too feel anguish, then you are experiencing empathy – you are sharing or mirroring their emotions. This idea is reflected in the original German term from which the English word 'empathy' was translated around a century ago, 'Einfühlung', which literally means 'feeling into'.

However, if you see the same anguished baby and feel a different emotion, such as pity, then you are experiencing sympathy rather than empathy. Sympathy refers to an emotional response which is not shared. One of the reasons people often confuse the two is historical. Up until the nineteenth century, what used to be called 'sympathy' is what we mean today by empathy as a shared emotional response. Thus when Adam Smith begins his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) with a discussion of 'Sympathy', he is actually referring to a concept closer to the modern idea of affective empathy.

Empathy as perspective-taking

A second definition of empathy is the idea of empathy as 'perspective-taking', which the psychology literature refers to as 'cognitive' empathy. This concerns our ability to step into the shoes of another person and comprehend the way they look at themselves and the world, their most important beliefs, aspirations, motivations, fears, and hopes. That is, the constituents of their internal frame of reference or 'worldview' (*Weltanschaung*, as the sociologist Karl Mannheim called it). Perspective-taking empathy allows us to make an imaginative leap into another person's being. This approach to empathy became prominent in the 1960s through the work of humanist psychotherapists such as Carl Rogers.
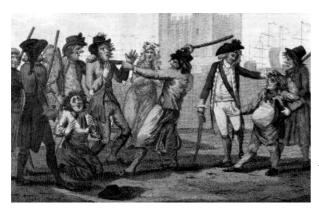
The way we do this quite naturally is evident in common phrases such as 'I can see where you're coming from' and 'Wouldn't you hate to be her?'. Although we can never fully comprehend another person's worldview, we can develop the skill of understanding something of their viewpoint, and may on that basis be able to predict how they will think or act in particular circumstances. Perspective-taking is one of the most important ways for us to overcome our assumptions and prejudices about others. For example, dozens of psychological studies show how perspective-taking exercises can be developed to help challenge racial and other stereotypes, by encouraging people to imagine themselves in the situation of another person, with that person's beliefs and experiences. Hence many empathy researchers, including Daniel Goleman and Martin Hoffman, consider perspective-taking as an essential basis for individual moral development. With perspective-taking, the emphasis is on understanding 'where a person is coming from' rather than on sharing their emotions, as with affective empathy.

While these two kinds of empathy are related, in this essay I will focus on the perspective-taking form, since this is the one that is most susceptible to intentional development and has the greatest potential to bring about social change. But what is the evidence that an apparently 'soft skill' like empathising can not only shape how we treat people on an individual level, but also have a mass social impact and be effective in tackling the hard realities of the climate crisis?

EMPATHY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

One of the great failures of policymakers and others engaged in confronting global warming is to recognise that developing empathy can bring about major changes in human behaviour and contribute to social transformation.[4] There is now compelling evidence that some of the most significant shifts that societies undergo cannot be fully explained without taking empathy into account, and that if governments and civil society organisations wish to promote certain forms of change, they should engage in generating empathy on a mass scale. The historian Theodore Zeldin argues, for instance, that learning 'to empathise with people different from ourselves' is one of the 'the most effective means of establishing equality' that modern societies possess.[5] Similarly, the educational thinker Alfie Kohn writes: 'Perspective taking offers a deep way of taking account of others when making decisions with them or for them. But it also offers a way of detoxifying the poisonous We/They structure of nationalism.'[6] Empathy is thus not just a psychological phenomenon but also a political tool.

An historical example demonstrating the power of empathy can be found in the struggle against slavery and the slave trade in Britain in the late eighteenth century. In the early 1780s slavery was an accepted social institution. Britain presided over the international slave trade and some half-million African slaves were being worked to death growing sugarcane in British colonies in the West Indies. But within two decades an unprecedented social movement had arisen that turned a large proportion of the British public against slavery, such that the trade was abolished in 1807. Recent research shows that standard explanations for this shift have failed to take into account the critical role of empathy. According to Adam Hochschild, there was a 'sudden upwelling' of empathy for the suffering of slaves due to factors such as public talks being given by former slaves, the use of posters and reports that educated people about their plight, and connections made between the pervasive practice of forced impressment of men into the British navy and the denial of liberty faced by slaves. Hochschild concludes that the success of the anti-slavery movement was based on the fact that, 'The abolitionists placed their hope not in sacred texts, but in human empathy.'[7]

A naval press gang at work, around 1780. Impressment gave the British public an empathetic understanding of the unacceptable denial of liberty that slavery entailed.

There are many other instances where empathy has brought about social transformation.[8] They illustrate how taking the perspective of others through a leap of the empathetic imagination erodes our ability to dehumanise strangers and treat them as being of less worth than ourselves. Empathy has the potential to create a microcosmic and personal form of social change, altering the way that people behave towards one another. That is, if we want change, we do not need a revolution of institutions or economic incentives: we need a revolution of human relationships.

Empathetic shifts are not just an historical phenomenon. In the past two decades there has been a significant growth of projects and policies that are designed specifically to generate empathy as a way of tackling social problems. They build on the work of

psychologists, sociologists and economists who have shown that not only do we often act on the basis of empathy, but that it is possible to increase our propensity to do so.[9] They also provide an important guide for how we might design an appropriate empathetic response to the challenge of climate change.

Some of the most innovate and successful empathy development is taking place in schools. In countries such as Canada, the UK and the USA, children at both the primary and secondary level are now explicitly being taught empathy skills as a way of helping to reduce aggressive behaviour, boost academic achievement and create community cohesion. In England, the government's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme (present in around three-quarters of primary schools) provides role plays, thought experiments, imaginative writing exercises and other methods for fomenting empathy. In Canada, the Roots of Empathy programme regularly brings a baby into the classroom to develop perspective-taking skills as a method of experiential learning.[10]

Another growing sphere of empathy policy is in criminal justice systems. The USA has led the way in restorative justice projects that involve those who have committed crimes engaging in face-to-face dialogues with their victims, and often the victim's family members, as a means of encouraging empathy and thereby reducing reoffences.[11]

Empathy is also the guiding principle of 'immersion programmes' that have been established by several international NGOs and inter-goveremental development agencies for their staff since the early 1990s. The World Bank, for example, has a 'Grass Roots Immersion Program' (GRIP) and a 'Village Immersion Program' (VIP), in which international staff spend up to a week living with a poor family in a rural or urban area in a developing country. The participants often help with tasks such as cooking or crop harvesting, and have opportunities to discuss daily life with their host families. According to one participant in a programme for the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the immersion helped create the 'ability to put into words the perceptions of poorer people and more ability to empathise with their perspective'.[12]

A Roots of Empathy class, Cardston Elementary School, Alberta, Canada[13]

We can draw three lessons from these historical and contemporary examples. First, that empathy can be generated on a large scale and can have major social impact. Second, that empathy is now taken seriously as a policy tool around the world (even if it has barely infiltrated strategic thinking about climate change). Third, that there are three key methods for actively generating empathy: through educational learning, by creating conversations between people, and by offering direct experience.[14]

But before sketching out my suggestions for how to design empathy projects that will bring about action on climate change, I want to explore in more detail the two human

realms where such climate change projects and policies need to be targeted: building empathy with people distant through time; and with people distant across space.

THE CHALLENGE OF DISTANCE THROUGH TIME

Climate change poses the fundamental problem of motivating us to act, and make sacrifices, on the behalf of future generations – people whose lives are distant from us through time. We need to cut our carbon emissions right now for the benefit of individuals who do not yet exist and whom we shall never meet. While we are aware of some impacts of global warming today, the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predict with strong certainty that the problems will get worse for future generations. Even if we take concerted action immediately, we are already locked into major and damaging climate impacts, even under the most conservative projections.

But why do we find it so hard to make policies that will benefit future people? A primary reason is because our political systems generally trap us in short-term electoral cycles (of usually four or five years), so politicians are largely unwilling to push for costly reforms that will only have an impact fifty years from now. In Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by contrast, the authoritarian Shogunate system encouraged political rulers to engage in visionary long-term policies such as mass tree planting to deal with extreme deforestation and soil erosion. These were leaders who wanted to preserve the nation for their own descendents, who they believed would inherit their political power.[15] Although I am not an advocate of authoritarian hereditary rule, it is clear that liberal democratic systems have a bias towards the present.

A second important reason for our short-term thinking is that not everybody is our progeny. We tend to care most for the people closest to us, especially those to whom we are biologically related. We worry about the welfare of our children and grandchildren. But the bonds start becoming weaker with respect to our great-grandchildren, and become almost completely absent when we consider the prospects for people a century from now to whom we are not related. This point is illustrated by a remark apparently made in the pub by the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Heldane, who said that he would happily die for three of his children or six of his grandchildren.[16] Added to this is the fact that we are not even particularly proficient at considering our own future welfare, illustrated by the case of smokers who seem willing to gain the pleasures of a nicotine rush today, even though they know that it may result in lung cancer and death in the future.

Economists have offered an extremely unethical solution to the problem of thinking about future generations in the context of climate change, which is known as discounting. Studies such as the Stern Review propose that we should 'discount' the future costs of climate change impacts, giving greater weight to costs incurred in the present.[17] For instance, using a discount rate of 5%, it would be worth spending only US$9 today to avert an income loss of US$100 caused by climate change in 2057. With no discount, it would be worth spending up to US$100. A high discount rate can consequently generate a strong cost-benefit case for deferring or limiting mitigation efforts. Yet if we believe all human beings are equal, we cannot morally justify deciding not to act today because future generations should be expected to pay more of the costs of climate change. Even Ramsey, the founding father of discounting, observed (in 1928) that it was 'ethically indefensible and arises merely from the weakness of the imagination'.[18]

This suggests a second way of approaching the issue of future generations, which is to argue that we have a moral obligation to act on their behalf to prevent climate change as a matter of social justice and in compliance with the idea of universal human rights.

Philosophers have got themselves into knots thinking about this, wondering about how we can ascribe rights to unborn beings, how we can take into account the uncertainties of the future, and how to deal with the ethical dilemmas of allocating scarce resources between those who are in need today and those will be in need in the future.[19] It is certainly true that ethical arguments based on justice and rights can have political force (as they did in the US civil rights movement, for example) and might encourage individuals and governments to take action to cut carbon emissions. But there is little historical evidence that human beings will undertake major efforts for unborn generations on moral grounds.

We need something more than moral or economic arguments to generate social action on climate change. We need to create an empathetic bond between the present and the future. We must become experts at imagining ourselves into the lives and thoughts of our great-grandchildren, and of strangers in distant times. When we fill our car with petrol or fly from London to New York, we need not only to believe that this is morally wrong or that it will have long-run economic costs. We also need to be able to feel that future generations are watching us, to consider what they might think, to put ourselves into their shoes. Such an empathetic connection may stir us into changing how we live and what we do.

THE CHALLENGE OF DISTANCE ACROSS SPACE

Climate change is as much a problem across space as it is one through time. Studies by development agencies demonstrate that weather events that are either caused by climate change, or closely resemble those that are likely to become increasingly common due to it, are already devastating the lives of some of the world's poorest people, who usually live in far away countries about which we know little. From floods in West Bengal to drought in Kenya to rising sea levels in Tuvalu, global warming is already having major human impacts and is forcing people to protect their livelihoods with new flood defences, faster-maturing crops and other emergency measures. Oxfam estimates that the cost of adapting to climate change in developing countries will be at least $50bn each year, every year.[20]

So we need to take action to help alleviate the difficulties faced by people today whose lives are threatened with a severe development reversal caused by excessive GHG emissions in rich countries. Unfortunately rich countries have a poor record of coming to the assistance of those who are distant across space, especially people from developing countries or whose cultures are very different from their own. In 1970 wealthy nations committed to contribute 0.7% of their annual gross national incomes as development aid. Today, the average figure is just 0.28%, with the US providing only 0.16% (Norway and the Netherlands are amongst the few countries to have achieved the target). We occasionally pour money into major emergency situations, as has occurred on multiple occasions since the Biafra crisis of the late 1960s, but our staying power is limited and we are easily distracted by other matters closer to home. By the end of April 2008, rich nations had paid only $92m into a UN fund to help the least developed countries with their most urgent and immediate adaptation needs, which is less than what Americans spend on suntan lotion each month.[21]

Why don't we do more to help? There are major academic industries in politics, sociology and cultural studies that attempt to answer this question. Some people argue that it is due to racial prejudices and the legacies of colonialism. Others, that nationalism prevents us looking beyond borders, or that we maintain ourselves in a state of collective psychological denial about the lives of the poor and our responsibility for their plight. There are those who believe that we have become anesthetised to the images of poverty

and destitution we see on television, or who suggest that most people feel that whatever they can give is too little to make any real difference so they do not bother. And there are analysts who claim we are simply too selfish to give a damn.

The most significant explanation, I believe, is simply that these people live far away and we don't know them. They are strangers to us. We cannot really imagine who they are and what their lives are like, let alone how the impacts of our carbon emissions affect them. Jenna Meredith's experience of meeting Annapurna Beheri was an exact counter to this kind of ignorance. If we personally knew people who had been flooded in Bangladesh we would be far more likely to do something about it than if we did not. That is the undeniable power of human relationships and the empathetic bond. When the Asian Tsunami struck at the end of 2004, the unprecedented humanitarian response can be explained not only by the scale of the disaster and its proximity to Christmas, but because there were so many Western holidaymakers amongst the victims. Tens of thousands of Europeans were sending text messages to check if friends or relatives abroad had been killed or injured. And even if their loved ones were safe, people could easily envision how one of their close friends or children travelling around Asia on a gap year might have lost their lives. The aid that went to countries such as Sri Lanka and Thailand was, to a significant degree, an empathetic reaction. Suddenly Asia was not full of distant strangers but rather friends or people just like us.

I believe that we should be supporting communities in developing countries to adapt to climate change on purely ethical grounds. We must, as a matter of justice, take responsibility for problems caused in poor countries by our own carbon emissions. We must recognise that these emissions are effectively violating human rights, and we need to avoid undermining other people's rights, whether they live around the corner or in a corrugated shack in Orissa.[22] But I know from personal experience that such beliefs are not sufficient to sustain practical action on the behalf of people in distant lands. Something more is needed. And that something is empathy. Whenever we hear of floods in India, we should picture individuals like Annapurna Beheri and try to imagine what she is feeling at that very moment. Whenever we joke about how climate change is giving us a lovely warm summer, we need to imagine that drought-struck farmers in Kenya can hear us chuckling in the sun.

EMPATHY PROPOSALS FOR THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

I would like empathy to become the watchword of a new era of policies, social movements, cultural projects and individual action on climate change. How can we encourage this empathetic revolution of human relationships? What exactly might it look like?

We can take as our starting point the small number of existing programmes and experiments that are already helping to generate empathy around the effects of global warming. But we also need to use our imaginations to envision new forms of social action that will develop empathy both through time and across space. We should consider how to generate empathy via the three methods described above: education, conversation and experience. Education refers to general forms of learning about people's lives based on secondary sources (e.g. books, photos, films, websites), whether it takes place within or outside formal educational institutions. Conversation entails dialogues, ideally face-to-face and involving two people, where individuals have a chance to get beyond superficial talk and discuss what is really important to them, and encounter the perspectives of those who are affected by their own actions. Experience involves some kind of physical or otherwise tangible activity that provides insights into another's daily life and worldview. All three approaches should be as personalised as possible in

order to create a strong empathetic connection that can inspire social action: abstract knowledge about climate change impacts is not enough. We must remember that Oscar Schindler did nothing to save Jews in Poland until he came to know individuals, to recognise their faces, to hear their personal life stories.

With respect to what already exists to generate empathy across space, the most established projects are in the sphere of education. Take, for example, the Hard Rain Project exhibition, which has been touring the world since 2006. It contains moving photos related to climate change, habitat loss, poverty, and human rights taken mostly by Mark Edwards, combined with lyrics from the Bob Dylan song 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'.[23] Many of the photos are exercises in empathetic perspective-taking, providing ways of understanding personal experiences of climate change in developing countries and distant regions. Conversational empathy has been promoted through speaker tours organised by development agencies such as Christian Aid and Action Aid, in which European audiences are able to engage in discussions with, for example, a farmer from Kenya whose livelihood has been devastated by drought and shifting rainfall patterns. Jenna Meredith's trip to India arranged by Oxfam is one of the few good examples of an experiential project to develop empathy (though one which raises the question of how we can create empathy on a mass scale, since not everybody can go to Orissa for a life-changing empathetic experience).

Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinking

Inuit hunter, Baffin Island, Canada, from the travelling exhibition Hard Rain.

Projects and policies directed at creating empathy through time are far from common. Some films on the theme of climate change are educational attempts to project us into the climate-changed future, from where we can best judge the carbon crimes that are being committed today. For example, *The Age of Stupid* (release due October 2008) is a story told from the perspective of an old man living in the devastated world of 2055, looking back at 'archive' footage of 2007 and asking 'Why didn't we stop climate change when we had the chance?'. With regard to conversational empathy, there are a growing number of child- and youth-led organisations that are attempting to alert adults to their concerns about climate change and engage the public in dialogue, such as Children in a Changing Climate.[24] Experiential projects on the theme of climate impacts on future generations are almost non-existent.

I believe it is possible to be far more ambitious and creative in our approach to building empathy. The following are a few ideas for generating empathy both across space and through time, which could be undertaken by governments, organisations in civil society and individuals.

Three proposals to generate empathy across space

Climate Diaries (education)
Small groups of individuals – for example members of a local residents' association, work colleagues or some friends – could get together to create Climate Diaries. Each person chooses a developing country and for one month collects news clippings and other information about the effects of climate change in their country. They should focus on gathering materials of a personal nature, for instance interviews with drought-hit farmers. The group then reconvenes to discuss what they have learned, share insights and plan any practical action they may wish to take as a result of their researches. Climate Diaries is an idea that builds on recognised forms of grass-roots community action such as affinity groups, which have been used by innovative organisations such as the UK's Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN).

Climate Pals (conversation)
The old-fashioned idea of pen pals could be revived for the age of climate change. People living in rich countries could engage in one-to-one conversations with those living in poor countries suffering from the effects of global warming, using cheap technologies such as Skype, Facebook, email and webcams. This might be facilitated by development agencies working in collaboration with organisations such as the British Council (who may be able to help with the problem of language barriers). Your Climate Pal would hopefully become a friend for life, and open you up to a new understanding of what climate change means for people's livelihoods. Existing programmes such as the Global School Partnership run by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) could be extended to match up Climate Pals from participating schools in Britain and developing countries.

Climate Corp (experience)
The Peace Corp established as a federal agency in the US in the early 1960s has given hundreds of thousands of young people the opportunity to experience the realities of living in poverty in a developing country, especially in Latin America. I would like the European Union to establish a similar programme called the Climate Corp. Young people would go on placements for a year to live with a community in a poor country hit by climate change. They would work on adaptation projects such as helping build flood defences, or engage in other work of use to their hosts, such as teaching English to village children. In EU countries with military service, Climate Corp should be offered as an alternative option. With the right marketing, joining the Climate Corp could become a rite of passage for young people as popular as back-backing for a year before university. One of the rules of Climate Corp is that you must travel to and from your destination without exceeding a carbon emission limit, which would force you to avoid travel by plane.

Three proposals to generate empathy through time

Climate Tales (education)
Oxfam has produced a teaching resource called Climate Chaos, which is a set of materials designed to facilitate learning about climate change amongst primary school children. One activity, 'From My Grandchild', asks pupils to imagine what life could be like in the UK in fifty years' time, when they may have a grandchild the age they are now, if the climate continues to change. They then write a story from the viewpoint of their

own grandchild.[25] Activities such as these, which might be called Climate Tales, help to develop empathy with future generations and should be firmly integrated into school curricula in rich countries. The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (mentioned above), followed by the majority of schools in England, contains an empathy component that could easily incorporate the kinds of imaginative exercises offered by Climate Chaos, and others including role plays. If empathy around climate change is to grow on a mass scale, it must have a substantive place in the education system.

Climate Conversation Camp (conversation)
There are hardly any projects that engage young people and adults in sustained conversations about matters of personal, social and political importance.[26] This is particularly the case with climate change, where policy-makers and politicians are more interested in talking with each other than with the young people whose lives will be most affected by global warming, and whose views represent the perspectives of future generations more than any other group in society. So we need to find ways of creating cross-generational conversations to develop the empathy of adults, especially those with political power. Climate conversations can obviously occur within families but they need to become far more extensive and structured in the public sphere. Youth organisations in Britain could, for example, hold an annual Climate Conversation Camp, where adults and young people gather to discuss the future impacts of climate change. The theme one year might be 'Life in London in 2100'. Politicians and representatives from adult interest groups could be invited to take part and encouraged to expand their empathetic imaginations.

The Climate Futures Museum (experience)
Without a time machine, it is impossible to give people direct experience of the future. But we can find ways to simulate the projected realities of every day life a century from today. That is why every major city in the world should establish a Climate Futures Museum. The purpose of a Climate Futures Museum would be to provide experiential learning designed to develop our empathy with future generations who will have to live with the impacts of climate change if we fail to take concerted action in the present. The museum would not contain standard informational displays behind glass cases or on computer screens. Instead, it would house experiential exhibitions that allow visitors to understand in reality what it would be like to have their homes flooded, to be faced by drought, or to experience a hurricane. You might have to put on a life jacket and be tossed around in a dinghy in a wave machine. Creative minds would be needed to design an empathetic experience that would be etched in your memory for ever.

EMPATHY PROJECTS	Status	*Education*	*Conversation*	*Experience*
Across Space	Current	Hard Rain Exhibition	Kenyan farmer speaker tour	Jenna Meredith's Oxfam trip
	Proposed	Climate Diaries	Climate Pals	Climate Corp
Through Time	Current	The Age of Stupid	Children in a Changing Climate	None identified
	Proposed	Climate Tales	Climate Conversation Camp	The Climate Futures Museum

A REVOLUTION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

There is no doubt that an empathetic transformation of society to confront climate change faces considerable barriers to its success. Political vision remains excessively short-term, the media can ignore or distort the threats of climate change, advertisers continue to lure us into excessive luxury consumption, and many people remain locked in their personal psychologies of denial about the realities of global warming and its destructiveness.[27] Yet is it worth remembering that all social revolutions have faced obstacles: those who led the movement against slavery and the slave trade in the late eighteenth century had to overcome multiple barriers to achieve their aims.

Moreover, I recognise that, historically, human beings are most likely to take major action and make substantive sacrifices when they fear for their own safety. That is why governments in Britain and the USA were able to introduce strict rationing and price controls during the Second World War. Similar levels of fear around climate change are only likely to arise if rich countries experience multiple climate disasters, for instance a hurricane hitting Manchester, the breaching of the Thames Barrier causing flooding throughout central London, or the shutting down of the Gulf Stream leading to a deep freeze throughout the country. However, the likelihood that such events may not take place until it is far too late to act on climate change, is even more reason to turn to empathy as a way of creating social action now.

Tackling climate change urgently requires an empathetic revolution, a revolution of human relationships where we learn to put ourselves in the shoes of others and see the consequences of global warming from their perspectives. The result will be an expansion of our moral universes so we will take practical measures to help those who are distant through time or distant across space. If we fail to become empathetic revolutionaries, the gap between climate knowledge and action will never be closed. Each of us needs to carve into everything we do, the empathetic credo, 'You are, therefore I am.'

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ENDNOTES

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[2] This section draws on information available at: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/climate_change/engelique_video.html; http://www.oxfam.org.uk/applications/blogs/pressoffice/?p=961; Yorkshire Post 31/7/7, http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/features?articleid=3093143.

[3] The text in this section, and part of the following one, has been adapted from Krznaric (2008), where full references can be found.

[4] See Krznaric (2007a and 2007b) for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between empathy and social change.

[5] Zeldin 1999a, 1633; 1999b, 3; 1995 236-55, 326.

[6] Kohn 1990, 158-9.

[7] Hochschild 2006, 5, 222, 366.

[8] For some examples, see Krznaric (2008).

[9] This literature is reviewed in Krznaric (2008). See also Jamieson's discussion of the ways that people sometimes sacrifice their self-interest for a greater good (Jamieson 1992, 144).

[10] I have discussed empathy education extensively in Krznaric (2008).

[11] Goleman 1996, 106-110.

[12] Irvine, Chambers and Eyben 2004, 6-10. See also the discussion in Krznaric (2008 forthcoming).

[13] http://www.westwind.ab.ca/ces/images/stories/CES%20Videos%20Home%20Page/img_1779.jpg.

[14] These three methods of developing empathy – education, conversation and experience – are examined in Krznaric (2007b).

[15] I have explored this case in Krznaric (2007c).

[16] Glantz and Jamieson 2000, 878.

[17] It should be noted that the Stern review is known for breaking with mainstream economic approaches by proposing a low discount rate. Yet it still incorporates discounting into its methodology.

[18] United Nations Development Programme 2007, 62-3. See also Glantz and Jamieson 2000, 877.

[19] For some of the philosophical debates, particularly with respect to Rawlsian conceptions of justice and utilitarianism, see Glantz and Jamieson (2000, 878) and Kymlicka (2002, 34-5).

[20] Raworth 2007, 3.

[21] Oxfam 2007, 1.

[22] See Raworth (2008) for an analysis of how rich-country carbon emissions are violating human rights.

[23] http://www.hardrainproject.com.

[24] http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org.

[25] http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/climate_chaos/day_two/files/afternoon3_from_my_grandchild.pdf

[26] For a rare example see http://www.oxfordmuse.com/projects/cornercafe0512.html.

[27] For an excellent discussion of denial around climate change, and how to overcome it, see Marshall 2007, 86-138. For analysis of other barriers to action, see Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002).