

What Climate Change Tells Us About Ourselves

[KPBS interview](#)¹

The issue of environmental justice is also being considered on a global scale. Franciscan friar and theology professor Martín Carbajo Núñez is mounting a lecture series in Oceanside on the moral implications of climate change.

Professor Núñez emphasizes the importance of reacquainting ourselves with the natural world. KPBS is Jane Hyneman sat down with Núñez to explore what climate change could be telling us about ourselves.

Martín thank you so much for joining us today. Tell me a bit about what the connection is between morality and climate change.

- Morality is about our behavior: how our behavior conditions everything. The current environmental crisis is caused by human behavior. That's why it is morally relevant, because we are responsible for that; we must respond for what is happening to our world.

When we talk about climate change we only think about scientific approaches to it. From a moral standpoint we should think about what can people do to help the environment.

- Levinas says that Western philosophy has put the "I" at the center: "I think therefore I am". Everything revolves around the "I", the thinking subject. To avoid a new Holocaust, we must put the "thou" at the center.
- Now we find ourselves amid another crisis, an environmental crisis. We too have to reflect about the mentality that is behind our behavior and that is conditioning our way of facing the ecological problems. If we don't change the way we understand ourselves, if we don't change our anthropological conception, the current crisis will not be adequately addressed.
- My thesis is that, along history, already from the Greek period, Western Society has assumed two dualisms: ontic and ontological. Based on them, it has proposed the thesis of human exception. This thesis affirms that we are exceptional. We are so different from all other creatures that we can use them as we wish, They are only raw material for us.
- This ontic dualism has conditioned our way of thinking and goes together with the ontological dualism, which separates completely our spirit from our body. Descartes, for instance, used to say that the body is a machine and that every animal, every creature, are also machines. They have been created by God and thus they are perfect machines but at the end only machines, nothing else. If we don't change this mentality, we won't be able to address this ecological crisis, because mental ecology goes first.

¹ <https://www.kpbs.org/news/environment/2018/10/23/what-climate-change-tells-us-about-ourselves>

That's an interesting point there. What do you say for people who don't believe that climate change is even caused by humans.

- Well, I think that the reason is that we still think that we do not depend on nature, that we are different, above it. We can be here or there, and even our body can be modified at will. As we believe to be above nature, we do not really trust scientists when they tell us that we have to behave in a different way to avoid global warming, otherwise we will be in trouble. We don't really take scientists seriously: well, what they say maybe true or maybe not, we think. As we have other interests, we prefer to minimize the problems. We have to change our mentality.
- When we go, for instance, to a hotel, we take care of the room, of course, because we know that if we do something wrong, when we leave, we will have to pay for it. But that's perceived as a heteronomous obligation, a command that comes from outside. We have not assumed that internally. When we are in our home we see things in a different way, because that is our home. We do not take care of it because we are afraid of something or because we have been commanded to do so. We take care of it because it is ours.
- The world is our home and we depend on the earth. It is not a question of being a master of nature; it's a question of being ourselves. Our identity depends on the kind of relationships we establish. If we apply this autonomous behavior to our relationship with nature, everything will change. Otherwise, we will suffer.

How do you think people got so detached from nature

- Well, we live in this society where everything is understood in a conflictive way, as if war were inevitable at all levels. We think that, to be fully ourselves, we have to fight in order to be the first in everything. I remember one person saying: "The second is the first of those who are unsuccessful". That is not true. As Christians, we believe in Somebody who humanly speaking was not a successful person. He died on the cross. We need to accept that unsuccess is part of our lives. This new mentality will help us to see also nature in a different way. Our identity depends on our relationship with nature.

Earlier you mentioned that nature is crying out in what ways do you see that nature is crying out

- Until the 1960s, let's say, we were destroying and using resources in a moderate way. But after that period, we have become too invasive. How is reacting nature as a macro-organism? with a fever, with global warming. Thus, it is creating the conditions to destroy us because we have become dangerous pathogens. If we don't react, we can destroy nature or nature will destroy us.

Thank you so much for joining us. Professor Martín Carbajo Núñez will be holding another lecture at the Franciscan School of Theology in Oceanside at 7:00 tomorrow night focusing on our hyperconnected generation.

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