

# Should Climate Change Impact the Ethics of Lifelong Guidance?

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## Author Note

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## Abstract

The discussion on global warming is part of a global increase in ecological awareness that has been going on for some time now. Though the research results and the predictions contain some uncertainties, it appears clear that the global climate is warming at quite a fast pace and that this warming is largely due to human influence. At the same time in order to ensure the welfare of the citizens of European countries, the objective of economic policy is continuous growth. Major tools for achieving this objective are lifelong learning and lifelong guidance. The observed and predicted changes connected to climate change bring forth the issue of global ethics of lifelong guidance. In this article we ask how we can define the ethics of lifelong guidance if we are to consider both sustainable development and well-being of citizens. Individuals who conceive of themselves as participants in a generational continuum have duties to their predecessors and descendants. Therefore the ethics of lifelong guidance should be based on the principles of sustainable development.

*Keywords:* climate change, lifelong guidance, ethics of guidance, sustainable development

## Climate change as a catalyst for ethical discussion of guidance

We are beginning to realize the essential role of the environment and the limits it imposes. As Treanor (2008) puts it we are perhaps facing questions of the physical survival of humankind. In this paper we try to locate the ethical grounds of lifelong guidance in an age of environmental crisis. Usually the main argument for lifelong guidance is the pursuit of individual good – but what is individual good in an age of climate change? How should environmental responsibility and sustainable development be taken into account in the ethics of guidance?

Discussion on global warming is part of a global increase in ecological awareness that has been going on for some decades. A well-known landmark of this discussion was the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, published in 1962, which quite dramatically brought the pollution of the environment through industrialization and increasing consumption to public attention. The work has been considered to be the symbolic basis of the modern environmentalist movement (Hirvi, 2001; Palmer, 1998). Just before the 1970s oil crisis, the Club of Rome published the report *Limits to Growth* which, despite controversy, accelerated the strengthening of the international environmentalist movement (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 1972).

Public discussion of climate change gained momentum with publication of an extensive international research report on climate in the spring of 2007 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007a, 2007b). According to the IPCC, global warming brings both advantages and disadvantages, but the disadvantages are predicted to outweigh the advantages. The worst case scenarios are catastrophic for large areas of Earth and for numerous people living in those areas. Although the research results and the

predictions made contain uncertainties, it appears clear that the global climate is warming and that this warming is most likely largely due to human influence (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007b; Thorpe, 2007).

From the late 1980s to early 1990s, oceanic currents changed significantly in the northernmost parts of the Atlantic (Greene & Pershing, 2007). Furthermore, it has been observed that the glaciers and permafrost areas of the circumpolar zone and of land areas close to the circumpolar zone have begun to melt. The consequence is a rise in sea level. Extreme weather phenomena such as heavy rains, heat waves and droughts are becoming more common and more intense. Regional changes have begun to occur in food production. According to predictions, the most densely populated areas of the globe will be among those most severely affected by negative consequences of global warming (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007b, 48).

## Balancing between sustainable development and pursuit of economic growth

A report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The concept of sustainable development requires that we see the world as a system that connects space and a system that connects time. According to Myers and Kent (2008, 148–151), we should preserve water, fight against hunger, recycle, increase energy efficiency, booster family planning and primary education, reduce corruption and take care of wildlife conservation. Those are not easy tasks but the bottom line is humankind has a common future and people have intergenerational responsibilities.



Although the idea of sustainable development is gaining popularity and it is officially accepted by governments, the logic of economical growth is still given priority in present politics. As Myers and Kent (2008) point out in modern societies there are numerous institutional mechanisms that favour the increase of gross domestic product at the expense of sustainable development. Respectively the European Union's lifelong learning strategy aims at making Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world (European Commission, 2000). In order to ensure the welfare of the citizens of European countries, the objective of economic policy is continuous growth. Within the EU lifelong guidance<sup>1</sup> as a part of the lifelong learning policy has been highlighted as the key means of increasing wellbeing as well as improving employment rates and productivity (European Commission, 2000; Sultana, 2004). Lifelong guidance is defined as a tool for enhancing social justice and equality in the labour market, but it can be said also that the more important objective is to improve employment rates and make more effective use of the labour force.

In a society oriented toward economic growth and high productivity, a context of self-explanatory necessity is easily created for educational and career choices. Lifelong guidance for citizens should benefit national economies - although objectives of individual personal development and social equality are also mentioned as premises of guidance provision and lifelong learning. Nevertheless, it can be observed that guidance is receiving more and more interest from industry and commerce as well as the labour market. Thus guidance has its own institutionalized political technologies and established practices (as defined by Foucault, 1991; Miller & Rose, 1990) independent of the positions of individual guidance practitioners.

### Outlining the ethical grounds for lifelong guidance

Changes in society influence both political and practical positioning of

lifelong guidance. They also affect the definitions of lifelong guidance, lead to re-evaluation of the status of lifelong guidance, and create entirely new guidance professions (Sultana, 2004; Sweet & Watts, 2006). Therefore lifelong guidance transcends its conventional boundaries and is forced to redefine itself. But it is not so clear that the foundational premise of ethicality and the pursuit of the social good find their place and significance in this process.

In Europe the purpose of guidance is in line with the lifelong learning strategy of the European Union (2000, 2006). It enables citizens of all ages and at any phase of life to analyze their own interests and skills, make educational and vocational decisions and manage their individual span of development in learning and at work (European Council, 2004). This definition emphasizes a client-based approach, the promotion of social equality and an extensive examination of the concept of guidance as one of the underlying factors of a competitive economy (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004).

Among others, Peavy (2004, 21-23) has discussed what is most characteristic of guidance and what sets it apart from other forms of professional support and assistance. Guidance is usually seen as relatively autonomous practice despite its multiple connections with structural, political or power-related forces in society. Traditionally guidance promotes individual good; therefore, core competence standards in the field of career guidance mostly refer to the promotion of individual good. The ethical code of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) also follows this principle (IAEVG 1995). The core of expertise in lifelong guidance lies in understanding the foundation of human interaction, reinforcing the indivisible value of a human being, pursuing genuine interaction and contact as well as accepting the guidance client without reservations.

The ethics of lifelong guidance may well be seen as based on promotion of individual development, learning and growth. The issue of how the ethics of lifelong guidance can be interpreted in supporting the good of the community, and which kinds of premises this point of view can be built on, has received less attention.

### From the good of the individual to the good of the community

We will shortly follow some central ideas in Alasdair MacIntyre's (1984) moral philosophy which have to do with reinforcing the ethics of community. The central argument in MacIntyre's (1984) work is that it is very difficult in today's world to find a common rational framework for ethical discussions, which is why discussions of ethics do not lead to a shared view of the moral ways of doing things. As Treanor (2008) emphasizes, there is no single assumption of the good life or one uncontested idea of virtue.

MacIntyre is a supporter of Aristotelian virtue ethics and sees this ideology as a kind of balancing view to be considered in parallel with an individual-based ethical study. In Aristotle's virtue ethics, the virtue of a person is defined from the perspective of the community. A good person is an individual who works for the good of the community and does his/her best for the community. In working for the good of the community and of him/herself, the person seeks to develop the kinds of virtues in him/herself that benefit the life of the community, such as fairness, honesty and courage. Loyalty to the community is based on the conception of man according to which another person is seen as a friend and friendships as the foundation of the ethical nature of the overall community. The duty of humanity is to live a life ruled by reason in the community and for the community.

MacIntyre (1984) claims modern liberal individualism has reached the end of its road. Within individualism a person defines his/her moral duties based on subjective emotions. That is far too narrow an approach to be used as

<sup>1</sup> Concepts of career guidance and lifelong guidance are often used almost as synonyms in the EU language. "Career" is broadened to cover the whole life path, including work, education and free time activities. We have chosen to use the latter concept because it relates to the idea of lifelong learning and it has fewer restrictive connotations.



the foundation for ethical thinking, and it is destroying what little is left of the common rational basis for moral ideas on which the community-based approach in moral thinking is presently based. Belonging to a community, understanding and committing to the principles fostering the life of the community, facilitates a good life. A good life is not an individualistic project. Sustainable development and sustainable ethics then, calls for a shared foundation of values, in which the beliefs concerning the purpose of being a human being and the ideals of a good life have been defined collectively.

### **Environmental awareness and the ethics of lifelong guidance**

When the environmental challenge is taken seriously we claim that the practice of guidance should consciously seek to bridge the gap between an individualistic way of thinking and one that highlights the good of the community. In other words: It is not enough to foster the good of the individual. We argue that lifelong guidance practitioners should take a stand on global matters affecting humanity as a whole. Towards the end of this paper we outline a proposition for an environmentally aware ethics of lifelong guidance. Starting with McIntyre we also develop this idea from a basis in global ethics (Sihvola, 2004) in relation to environmental ethics (Treanor, 2008) and to discussions of citizenship (Gleeson, 2001).

According to Sihvola (2004), a discussion of global ethics is necessary for two reasons. First of all, such discussion motivates us to define values that people all over the world share but of which they are not necessarily clearly conscious. Developing this kind of moral awareness and creating communication systems in service of the same can steer people's individual behaviour. Secondly, global ethics is needed in order for political activity to be able to renew local and global institutions and make them more equitable. This is how we can influence the structures and networks of international systems. Institutions can be developed that steer people towards behaving in a morally tolerable way, even if we can never be completely free of the typically human features of self-

ishness, prejudice, fear and haste. (Sihvola 2004, 209–211.)

Sihvola's (2004) other argument for global ethics has to do with the role of institutions in society. Educational policy, including career guidance policy, has traditionally been considered a means of societal influence as well as a way to educate so-called good citizens (see also Ollila 1997, 20–21). If we establish the conscious moral guidance of people's behaviour as one of the essential tasks of institutions, it is particularly important to engage in an open and principled societal and political discussion of the ideology such a task is built on. Openness is also called for when institutions plan and construct their overall plans and strategies. The essential question here is how moral guidance could be implemented in practice in an open and equitable manner. It is not to be taken for granted that ethical ideals are in a logical relationship with behaviour on the institutional level any more than they are on the level of the individual.

According to Gleeson (2001) the present world political order encourages moral parochialism. Citizens of states are not generally willing to take responsibility for what happens outside their borders, and governments are reluctant to pursue policies that require sacrifice of the national interest for the sake of achieving global environmental objectives. Gleeson asks how people who belong to different societies and have different goals and values can become willing to cooperate in solving environmental problems. One approach is through identifying and justifying values, principles or ideals that promote transnational governance. To find such ideals it is natural to appeal to the cosmopolitan tradition. Cosmopolitanism is both an ethical and a political doctrine. It asserts the existence of universal ethical ideals or principles, and it advocates a political order in which these ideals can be universally realized. Cosmopolitans believe that there are universal principles of right or justice, and many of them promote the development of global political institutions capable of ensuring that human rights or universal principles of justice can be realized everywhere in the world.

Therefore, at least to some extent, the reinforcement of global ethics means

openness to cosmopolitan tradition. In lifelong guidance practices it means taking real responsibility of the future of humankind and sustainable development. The client-based approach in guidance needs to be revised into a more holistic, community-based approach. We argue here that we should conceptualize clients not only as individuals pursuing individual goals but also as citizens with collective responsibilities. Following Gleeson (2001) citizenship requires considerations about the purposes of a political society and values it entails in relation to how people conceive themselves. Citizens have responsibilities in an intergenerational continuum. Citizens are supposed to cooperate for the sake of the common good. Citizenship implies solidarity, a willingness to make sacrifices for other citizens. Gleeson (2001) argues that individuals as participants in such a continuum are predisposed to cooperate with each other to achieve or protect the goods they value, including environmental goods. Citizens need to share this responsibility and support forms of governance that facilitate sustainable development. According to Myers and Kent (2008), this is not an easy path because of the many institutional roadblocks: jurisdiction, global trade agreements and relatively stable professional practices among other things. Nevertheless, all societal actions are founded on human actions. What humans have constructed can also be de-constructed and re-constructed by humans.

### **Conclusions**

Individuals who conceive of themselves as participants in a generational continuum will be more inclined to demand or accept political means for achieving the common good. They do not have duties only for the presently existing members of their family or community, but also to their predecessors and descendants. They will be motivated to make new political relations of cooperation, and these relations will be the basis for their conception of citizenship. Citizenship encourages relations of solidarity. People who cooperate with each other to maintain good for themselves and their descendants are likely to appreciate their interdependence. These relations of interdepend-