Overcoming “Climate Change” Apathy

Course: PHI 2604 – Critical Thinking/Ethics
Topics: Four Topics Will Be Addressed in this Lesson Plan:
1) Can Democratically Elected Governments Deal with Long Range Problems and Solutions?
2) Contrasting the Ethical Values Exemplified by a Lifestyle Based on Fossil Fuel Dependence and the Ethical Values Exemplified by a Lifestyle Based on Environmental Awareness.
3) The Morality of Civil Disobedience: Can It Promote Awareness of Climate Change, and Is It Right?
4) Will Promoting Environmentalism Hurt the Economy or Help It?

Lesson Plans –

I. For **Topic One**, students will:

A. Read the following online articles (the first by Bill McKibben, and then a summary in Orion Magazine):

B. Consider the following quote from bestselling author, Orson Scott Card, in his novel, *Hidden Empire*,

   “And whom do we put in charge of helping us prepare to cope with such disasters? People whose only talent is for getting elected, and whose entire future consists of the run-up to the next election. It’s not their fault — anybody who doesn’t think and act that way won’t win. It’s the fundamental problem with democracy. No long-range thinking.”

Although he was not addressing the problem of climate change, Card’s quote could be considered in that context. Until quite recently, many politicians denied climate change, and some still deny that it is related to human activity, despite all of the evidence to the contrary. In the 2012 presidential election, the issue of Climate Change was never addressed in any of the three debates! (See: *Nearly absent in campaign: climate change*, The Miami Herald, October 28, 2012, p. 21A.) In fact, both candidates endorsed increasing the domestic production of fossil fuels in order to help the United States be less dependent on foreign sources. Can a candidate be elected while honestly presenting the need for a radical change in our fossil fuel dependent lifestyle?

C. Write a (minimum) five paragraph essay either supporting Card’s pessimistic view of democracy, or rejecting his view and outline a plan for a presidential candidate to honestly address the seriousness of the problem of Climate Change, yet attract enough supporters to possibly win a democratic election.

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II. For **Topic Two**, students will:

A. Read the articles in the following online booklet, with special attention to David Orr: *Lessons from Charley, Frances, Ivan, Jeanne, Katrina, Rita, and Wilma – Environment, Politics, and Global Destabilization, “Long Tails and Ethics: Thinking about the Unthinkable.”*
  
  [http://www.fgcu.edu/CESE/images/This_Sense_of_Awe_and_Wonder_without_Homero_Aridjis.pdf](http://www.fgcu.edu/CESE/images/This_Sense_of_Awe_and_Wonder_without_Homero_Aridjis.pdf)

B. One of the primary concerns of ethics is the concept of the good life. Make a list of what you believe are those things considered by our culture as indicative of the good life. Consider commercials on television, magazines, and found online that purport to illustrate the good life. Then, make a list of those things that are considered indicative of the good life according to the authors of the online booklet. Compare and contrast the ethical values demonstrated by each. What would have to be given up to lead a sustainable lifestyle? What would be gained? Write a paragraph indicating which set of ethical values are preferable and why.

III. For **Topic Three**, students will:

A. Research the history of civil disobedience in the United States of America. List at least three major issues that have lead individuals to resort to breaking the law to protest what they believed were immoral behaviors condoned by American society? Write a (minimum) three paragraph essay answering the questions that follow. Is it ever morally permissible to break the law? Was it permissible to break the law to protest any (or all) of the issues on your list? Why or why not?


D. Watch the following video featuring James Hansen (and any of his other videos as well) on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWInyaMWBY8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWInyaMWBY8)

E. Evaluate Dr. Hansen’s decision to engage in civil disobedience in regard to the issue of climate change. Was his decision justified? Why or why not? Write a (minimum) two paragraph essay defending your view and comparing Dr. Hansen’s protest to those on your list.

IV. For **Topic Four**, students will:


B. Watch the video by Amory Lovins (as well as other videos featuring Dr. Lovins): [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMTCNOlozTA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMTCNOlozTA)
C. Research the work of Dr. Jack Parker [the F.I.U. Professor (not the NHL Hockey Coach)]
D. It has been suggested that the issue of climate change has not been featured in the 2012 presidential election because both candidates believe that dealing with the issue will hurt the economy. (See: Nearly absent in campaign: climate change, The Miami Herald, October 28, 2012, p. 21A.) Write a (minimum) four paragraph essay concerning the following questions for both the American economy in the near future and the economy 50 years from now. What reasons are there for thinking that changes we might make in order to address that issue of climate change would have a negative impact on our economy? What reasons are there for thinking that the changes required to confront the issue of climate change and minimize its impact could stimulate our economy? Which view is correct? Why?

MDC Learning Outcomes:

GE Outcome #1: Communicate effectively using listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.
GE Outcome #3: Solve problems using critical and creative thinking and scientific reasoning.
GE Outcome #7: Demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to issues in society.
GE Outcome #10: Describe how natural systems function and recognize the impact of humans on the environment.