

## *Climate Change Denial - How Can we Stop Challenges to the Scientific Consensus?*

Climate change is the greatest collective action problem humanity will face. The spatial and temporal interplay between its causes and effects posed a significant obstacle to achieving robust policy initiatives. An additional challenge concerns those agents and interest groups, particularly in the US but also around the world, who have denied the existence of the problem or questioned its anthropogenic causes. This challenge has been underexplored from the perspective of legal and political theory.

The scientific consensus on climate change indicates that the climate is changing and that it is caused by anthropogenic activities. Nonetheless climate change denial has and continues to present a significant challenge to robust climate policies nationally and internationally. At a time when reliance on the epistemic authority of experts is being questioned resurgent claims by the denial countermovement appear imminent and the window of opportunity for limiting the worst effects of climate change is fast closing. This is an opportunity the world can ill afford to lose.

In the face of the widely accepted effect which climate change denial has had on the responses of political bodies and individuals to climate change we must consider how to respond.

How can we conceive of the effects of climate change denial? Can we maintain orthodox accounts of causation? Can we conceive of the effects of climate change denial as amounting to political inaction or the undue manipulation of public opinion on climate change? Can and should we see climate change denial as an enabling condition for this inaction or altering of public opinion?

It is clear that climate change denial is not the sole enabling condition for political inaction. Should we and if so how can we delineate the role of climate change denial from additional enabling conditions, including the collective nature of the causal process of climate change and competing demands on our resources?

What should our response to climate change denial be and what are the morally relevant factors for evaluating these options. Broadly speaking there are two types of prevention costs.

Firstly, those associated with preventing the acts of denial themselves. How could such acts could be prevented? This may include frameworks to directly prevent further expressive actions which contradict or question the consensus on climate science without sufficient peer-reviewed and published evidence to support such claims. Taking such steps may constitute censorship or interference with freedom of expression. Can we delineate instances of denial from pronouncements with which the majority of climate scientists may disagree? Given the severity of the harm at risk and prevalence of climate change denial (in light of the election of Donald Trump), would risking the 'slippery slope' be justified?

Alternatively should we focus on preventing the effects of climate change denial? To prevent the effects of climate change denial invokes a much broader set of options. This could include the publicizing of funding sources of elements of the denial countermovement. Demonstrating the link between fossil fuel based funding sources and many of the principal actors within the denial countermovement could discredit their claims. The primary costs involved with such transparency measures would be economic as opposed to rights-based. Would such costs prove more acceptable?

Do the normative conclusions drawn with regard to climate change denial have broader application? Would they apply to other concerted misinformation campaigns run against for

example proponents of vaccinations? If not what is the delineating element for climate change denial specifically? Is it the urgency of the problem? It's seriousness or scale?