

---

# Environmental Crises and the Evolved Mind

Jason Zinser\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Wisconsin Colleges (UWMC) – 518 South 7th Avenue Wausau, WI 54401 USA, United States

## Abstract

The causes of environmental degradation are as varied and dynamic as the problems themselves. However, one cause, which is often neglected, is how our evolved (innate) psychological dispositions contribute to ecological crises. Behavioral economics and moral psychology have demonstrated that our reasoning is often irrational and our moral judgments are, at times, capricious. Global climate change, perhaps the preeminent ecological and human crisis in our history, is a paradigmatic example of how our psychological dispositions can frustrate a coordinated response to the crises. I will highlight the challenge that climate change poses with respect to our evolved mind by contrasting it to a different environmental challenge, chemical pollution. I will argue that the threats of toxins in the environment are much easier, in some respects, to perceive and responds to than the threats posed by climate change. For example, the success of Rachel Carson in sparking the American environmental movement and advancing environmental policy is, in part, due to our ability to recognize the associated risks of pollution. Unfortunately, the threat that climate change poses does not "present itself" to our evolved mind in the same way that pollution does. I will conclude by offering some strategies to respond to these problems in light of our innate psychology.

---

\*Speaker