

Look, a big purple *rectangle!*

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## THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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### Under heat, climate-change contrarian won't wilt

By John Allemang  
From Saturday's Globe and Mail

*The controversial Bjorn Lomborg doesn't deny global warming. But he believes it's 'an incredibly bad deal' to spend so much money on cutting carbon emissions, he tells John Allemang*

Former Danish statistics professor Bjorn Lomborg created a storm of controversy when he published *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, a 1998 work that was denounced by scientists for its cost-benefit critique of the Kyoto Protocol but also praised for its willingness to challenge environmental orthodoxy.

Dr. Lomborg published a follow-up book, *Cool It*, a decade later and is now the director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, which explores how to do the greatest good in the world with limited economic resources. On Dec. 1, he will take part in the Munk Debate on climate change in Toronto. John Allemang spoke to him this week.

How does the upcoming Copenhagen summit look from your perspective?

We're trying to cut carbon emissions quite dramatically, yet we've tried this approach for the last 20 years and it hasn't worked. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, the OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries promised to cut carbon emissions back to 1990 levels by the year 2000. We overshot that by 12 per cent. Then at Kyoto, in 1997, we promised to go 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010. We'll probably overshoot that by about 25 per cent.

So I'm disappointed we're not trying to do something smarter in Copenhagen. It seems a safe prediction that we're going to be here in 2019 saying, gee, cutting emissions didn't work the third time either.

Why do you think the cycle repeats itself?

Munk Debate preview Participate in a live video chat with Bjorn Lomborg at 11 a.m. ET and George Monbiot at 1 p.m. ET

For politicians, it's about saying they promised good stuff: to cut emissions by 10, no 20, no 30 per cent! And that's what gets all the applause, not delivering what's been promised. So we have to find an approach that makes it easier for people to actually do something.

In a sense, the politicians' promises seem natural: We've got a CO<sub>2</sub> problem, so let's cut CO<sub>2</sub>. But that turns out to be incredibly hard. All the encouragement so far is about making dirty fuels so expensive we can't use them. But that's not going to work because nobody wants to vote for a government that makes fuel expensive.

What would work is to make clean-energy technology cheap: You'll solve global warming not because you're forced to or because you're green, but simply because solar power is cheaper than fossil fuels so everybody will switch.

That may take some time to achieve, but meanwhile you propose what you call "real-world" political suggestions to reduce global warming.

It's about making short-term solutions that will have real impact. For example, we estimate that by 2050, 80 per cent of all people will be living in cities. So we could actually make the world much better and cooler at very low cost by painting the city roads light colours, planting trees in green areas, adding water features.

But we also need a long-term solution. And it seems obvious to me that this means solar power, simply because there is overwhelmingly more solar power than anything else. Basically, the amount of sunshine the world gets in one hour is enough to power the world for one year.

So what would you like to see happen in Copenhagen?

We should invest dramatically more, say 0.2 per cent of GDP every year, in research and development into green-energy technologies. This would be 50 times more than what the world spends now, yet it would be half the price of Kyoto and much less than what any new treaty coming out of Copenhagen will cost.

People say, you shouldn't be a climate-science denier, and I agree. But likewise you shouldn't be a climate-economics denier. And in doing the numbers, we're saying that if you want to keep the temperature rise at two degrees centigrade by cutting carbon emissions, by the end of the century it's going to end up costing 13 per cent of the global GDP. And the benefit will be that for every dollar you spend, you end up avoiding two cents worth of climate damage. That's an incredibly bad deal

But if you spend money investing in research and development and green-energy technology, for every dollar you spend, you end up avoiding \$11 of climate damage. So you end up doing 500 times more good.

Much of the talk in climate-change circles is about the planet's future, but you prefer to argue from the human needs of the present.

Go around the world and ask people what they need: They don't care about a temperature rise that will be problematic in a hundred years when now their kids don't get an education, when they don't have enough food, when they might be dying from easily curable diseases or infections.

It's true that their lives and the lives of their kids and grandkids will be harsher with global warming. But they have much bigger problems right now. If you fix those problems, chances are they will also become much richer, much more robust and much better able to handle all the other issues the future will throw at them.

Al Gore talks about malaria being more prevalent in a hotter world, which is probably true - we suspect there'll be 3 per cent more malaria by the end of the century because of global warming. But we have 100 per cent malaria in some places right now that we could do something about very easily. So spending all your resources and focus at avoiding 3 per cent malaria in 100 years doesn't seem rational: Most people dying of malaria don't much care whether they're dying of the exciting new global-warming form of malaria or just the boring old variety.

You're not a climate-change denier, but you have created controversy by emphasizing the good side to global warming.

It's important to say that there will be more problems with global warming than benefits. But it makes sense that we should exploit the benefits we get - that fewer people will die of cold-related deaths, for example - at the same time we deal with the problems that have been created, such as the extra heat-wave deaths. Not talking about one part of the equation means we'll take a biased approach to good policies.

You've written about the exhilarating appeal of the environmental movement - why do you think young people feel the urge to line up behind Al Gore and not behind you?

In many parts of world, certainly in Europe, we don't have religion any more, we don't believe in God, we have a social-democratic welfare state, which means we've eradicated excessive inequality, so there's not an obvious "good" left to fight for. Which leaves the environment as one of those obvious good things where everybody can say, "I'm for the environment," and get a lot of immediate appeal.

One of my friends has told me, when he goes out on a date, he has to decide between saying he knows me or going to bed with a girl. I see his dilemma perfectly.

So you're the ultimate turn-off?

Yeah, I don't blame him for lying about it. It's such an obvious thing to say, "I want to do good." And I'm the

annoying guy who says, "Yeah, how much does it actually help, how much does it cost to do that?"

I'm encouraged so many people want to do good. But I want to make sure we end up doing good, and we recognize many kinds of good - not just the good that comes from cutting carbon emissions, but also the good that comes from making sure you deal with people dying of HIV, malaria, lack of access to food.

That's the kind of thing I want to make sexy. I want my friend to say he knows this guy who actually describes ways to do an immense amount of good, and possibly score on his date.

You're open about being gay - do you think your sexuality has affected your approach to the environmental movement?

Most people who are gay go through a period where they question everything, where they question regular social norms. When you've done that, you realize that just by asking those questions, even if you finally come up with an entirely bourgeois, boring answer, it actually is liberating - because you're making your own decision rather than just taking over something from your parents or grandparents.

Perhaps what I'm trying to do with the environmental discussion is to say let's not just do stuff because that's what everyone else is talking about. But let's ask ourselves where we can we make the best efforts so that future generations look back on us and say, "Wow, they did a lot of good with the money they spent."

*John Allemang is a feature writer for The Globe and Mail.*

*Live broadcasts of the Munk Debate on climate change will take place in cities across Canada this Tuesday. Tickets are available at [munkdebates.com](http://munkdebates.com)*

### **Munk Debate Preview**

*Watch live video of Bjorn Lomborg at 11 a.m. ET and George Monbiot at 1 p.m. ET as they discuss their strategy for Tuesday's Munk Debate on climate change.*