

Abstract

In this thesis, the theory of rational irrationality is used to explore the incentives behind seemingly irrational beliefs held by a large part of the contemporary American society towards anthropogenic climate change. Applying causal analysis, three questions are answered: “is it rationally irrational for people to be indifferent towards climate change?” “Are Americans inherently more likely than others to hold irrational beliefs about global issues such as climate change?” If so, “is this phenomenon rooted in certain values that constitute the American identity?” The author focuses on specific “American values” and uses statistics and recent empirical studies to find correlations and causality between those values and the exhibited behavior of individuals, while discussing its possible causes and implications. The study concludes that the root cause of irresponsibility of the American citizen towards climate change is a lack of social mechanisms rewarding individuals for holding epistemologically accurate beliefs. The author then proposes a set of general measures to be prioritized in order to improve social reward mechanisms in the American society. If implemented, those measures should be able to effectively enforce epistemic rationality in the U.S. political debate, which is desirable especially in the so-called “post-factual” era of Donald Trump’s presidency.