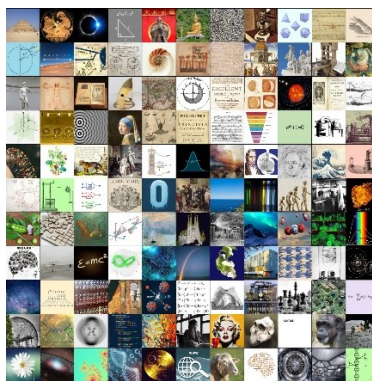




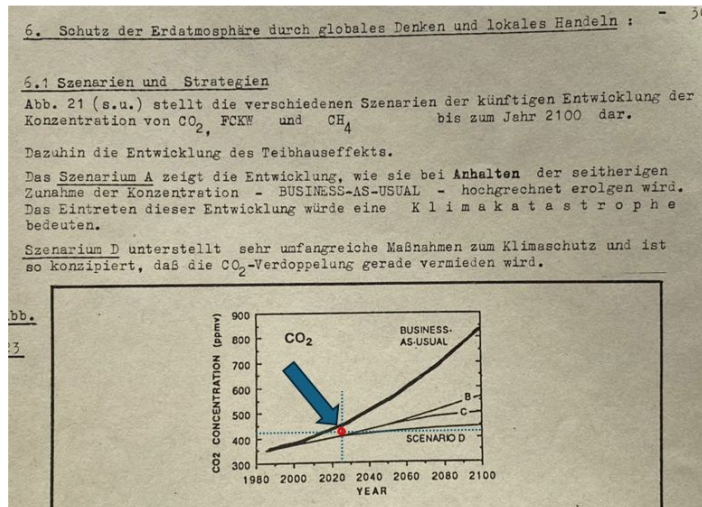
Climate Action

Things You Can Do To Make a Difference, as an Individual

Over the past years, many students and young adults in my circle of acquaintance, all around the world, have asked what they can do about the climate crisis? Is there a way out? Often there is a sinking feeling of being somewhat powerless as an individual, and of not knowing exactly what can be done. Thankfully, there are still reasons to be optimistic.

Looking at an old school book published in Germany in the early 1990s (see photo overleaf), we can see the issue very clearly. The photo is a graph showing projected CO₂ levels and how they are likely to rise with different scenarios including business-as-usual (that is, continuing without making substantial changes). The red dot has been deliberately marked to show the 2026 datapoint of approximately 428 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere. This is very close to the trajectory shown by the models in this book.

Amazingly, this kind of information and modelling has been available for 35 years – and, if we take into account the pioneering climate-change research of Svante Arrhenius in 1896, for more than 130 years. Even more remarkably, the subject has been taught in secondary schools and universities for decades, while climate modelling has continued to improve enormously. Yet the implications have still not been fully acted upon.



(Prof. FG Mugele)

Hoppenau, S. (1992), "Energie im globalen Treibhaus", Max-Planck-Institut für Meteorologie, Hamburg, Germany

Much of the focus now is on whether governments are reacting quickly enough, and whether industry is deploying the technologies at the necessary pace. This note, however, highlights another important point: **the individual**, together with governmental and industrial restructuring, has enormous power to drive change in a hopeful and meaningful manner.

The individual has **three very powerful levers**:

1) Occupational Agency

You can choose where you work, and **joining the modern green economy** makes a great deal of sense nowadays. This may be one of the most important direct contributions a person can make – as an employee, manager or founder of a climate-focused organisation (see list in the survey). This kind of employment is highly diverse. It includes technology, infrastructure, research, education, manufacturing, finance, law, government and other enabling activities.

Put simply, **your job may be one of the biggest climate actions you can take**. Through your skills, decisions, imagination, brainpower and hard work, you can potentially contribute to very large amounts of future CO₂ emissions being avoided.

2) Consumer Agency

Where you have financial and practical choice, you can also change your purchasing habits and adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. Here, your **consumer power** is unleashed. For example, you can choose to buy renewable electricity, or install a heat pump, or fly less, or go car-free, or buy an e-bike, or buy local food, or have a staycation.

When hundreds of millions of people – and eventually billions – make similar choices, the cumulative effect will influence markets and accelerate the transition towards a lower-carbon economy. For people with low incomes and limited consumption, particularly in developing countries, there may be relatively little scope for further reductions in personal consumption emissions. For those with greater financial resources and higher consumption, typically in developed countries, there is correspondingly greater scope, and arguably a greater responsibility, to reduce our CO₂ emissions.

3) Civic Agency

As an individual, you also have the **civic right to be heard**. You can protest peacefully, join climate-focused societies, advocacy and study groups, write to your local councillors, mayors and government representatives, and vote for political programmes and policies that support climate action. Civic agency is also particularly important where financial resources or consumer choice are limited.

With these three points in mind, I think it's clear that you, as an individual, have far more climate agency than you may realise.

One of the motivations for this survey is to show that there is indeed a great deal that an individual can do. As a result, I have devised a scheme in which **occupational agency (13%)** and **consumer-lifestyle agency (87%)** are combined into a simple 100-point score. The consumer-lifestyle component is informed by a recent evidence-based paper by Mario Herberz et al. in *Nature Sustainability*, published on 3rd August 2026, “*Psychological barriers to improving carbon competence*.” The weighting and ordering of the consumer actions (2–18) are also informed by the relative climate-mitigation potentials shown in Figure 1 of that paper, which draws on recent life-cycle-assessment research. I have simplified these relative differences into a practical scoring system for this public survey. The survey does not attempt to include civic agency, which is difficult to quantify, even though it is another important way individuals can influence climate action. In addition, the score should not be interpreted as a measure of moral responsibility, but rather as an indication of **potential individual agency**: the capacity to reduce emissions varies enormously between individuals, and those with higher incomes and higher consumption generally have greater opportunities to make large absolute reductions.

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