

# The Most Important Issue of Today is...

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There's no prize for guessing what the majority of Millennials think the biggest problem in the world is today.

According to a number of surveys and polls, the most pressing issue affecting most twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings is *climate change*. In second and third place, depending on the poll, the challenges of homelessness and the economy are the agreed upon crises that must be tackled next.

These issues are undoubtedly very important. But they are not the most important issues of our day--far from it.

From the vantage point of the present moment, it is notoriously difficult to see one's own generation objectively and what threatens it the most. More often than not, the really threatening problems of a given moment in history come upon us like the Trojan Horse, undetected and lost in the crowded airwaves of popular wisdom. It's only with the distance of time, and with the dispassionate and critical eyes of historians examining the landscape, that we start to get a handle on the forests our ancestors could not see for the trees.

As important as social and environmental concerns may be, a much greater problem threatens us today, one which permeates the public square like an invisible and deadly radioactive fallout that few seem to have noticed. It is a fallout which literally renders not only meaningful communication virtually impossible, but dullens our intellects and grossly hampers our ability to find solutions to genuine challenges of any kind.

We are experiencing, perhaps for the first time in history, the total annihilation of the *metaphysical foundations of words* and thus the total emptying of language altogether.

English contains a host of words which have become hollowed-out carcasses, detached from the civilization that gave them meaning centuries ago. Words like justice, love, happiness, rights, faith, beauty--all the words we might consider to be the most important in any language--have quite literally become meaningless in the contemporary discourse.

This is not a partisan problem facing one end of the political spectrum or the other. Most people, both on the left and the right, are hard-pressed to define the meaning of "human rights" when asked to do so. And most Millennials today define "love" and "happiness" as kinds of feelings, and "faith" and "beauty" as subjective states of mind.

Why should we recognize this emptying of language as the most pressing issue of the day?

Human reason is founded on the use of language. Our ideas, concepts, opinions, and insights are all based on our ability to use language. Consider, for example, words like dystopian, natural law, virtue, infantilization, and *anomie*. These words, like all words, are not simply words: they are also concepts and rich ideas. Knowledge of words is essentially knowledge of ideas. Knowledge of ideas is knowledge of problems, solutions, and what is of value. The better our use of language, the better our mastery of ideas.

The great failure of our generation is not an environmental issue, or a human rights issue, or anything external to the mind of the individual. For without the ability to marshal language properly in the exercise of reason, one would have no hope of evaluating what is truly important and what is a red herring or worse, a deception.

**Questions:**

1. What is the main point (thesis) of the article?
2. What is the article proposing: and is this proposition stated or implied?
3. What do you think of the argument the article is making?