

# WHATABOUTISM

OUR  
CARBON FOOTPRINT  
IS TRIVIAL COMPARED  
TO (\*)...



...  
THEREFORE  
IT MAKES NO SENSE  
FOR US TO TAKE ACTION,  
AT LEAST UNTIL (\*)  
DOES SO.

(\*)  
CHINA  
USA  
INDIA  
etc. | Choose  
a country  
where you  
do not live.

Fig.1.  
Whataboutism

Created from Lamb WF et al. (2020)

# WHAT ABOUT ISM

“Our carbon footprint is trivial compared to [country X]. Therefore it makes no sense for us to take action, at least until [country X] does so.”

This argument focuses attention on distant (or politically convenient) perpetrators over whom we have little control. Or on industries where reducing carbon emissions is difficult.

- It is more useful to focus on the emissions per person than those of whole countries because larger populations are more likely to produce more emissions. For example, the USA has per-person emissions nearly twice that of China
- A lot of China’s emissions come from manufacturing the consumer goods they export (to us)
- Here in the UK we have been emitting CO<sub>2</sub> for much longer than many other countries, so our total historical emissions are among the highest
- Not only is setting an example one of the best ways to bring about change - and may give a reputational / first mover advantage - but a tipping point can come from a minor change. Once a few countries achieve zero emissions it will suddenly become the norm
- Given that every fraction of every degree of heating matters, everything you do, however small, matters. From a moral point of view, whether you are Chinese, Brazilian or British, everyone should switch their way of life to a sustainable one
- CO<sub>2</sub> has no borders so what one country emits will have consequences elsewhere: this is called, amongst other things, social injustice

