

International Conference on “Energy and Climate Policy: Towards a Low Carbon Future”

Reasons for Climate Change Policy

Makoto Usami

Tokyo Institute of Technology
Japan

Overview

- 1 Motivation: the international benefit-burden imbalance in developing climate policy.
- 2 Question: why should the governments of industrialized countries develop climate policy?
- 3 Examine the traditional view: the national interest of each developed country.
- 4 Examine one alternative: the historical liability of citizens in affluent societies.
- 5 Suggest another alternative: a human right to basic sustainable living conditions.
- 6 Conclusion: the superiority of the human-right view to its rivals.

1 Motivation

Two levels of studies on public policy: tool/ground.

Assumption: public policy should be justifiable because it entails cost.

Characteristics of the CO₂ emission problem: international externality & intergenerational externality, historical cumulation.

Common agreement: governments of industrialized (and of newly industrialized) countries should develop climate policy.

International benefit-burden imbalance in developing climate policy:

- Costs faced by those living in the North at least in a short term,
- More benefits provided to those living in the South.

The need of justifying climate policy.

2 Question

Standard assumption 1: the primary responsibility of a government is to promote the common interest of its citizens.

Question 1: why should the government of an industrialized country develop climate policy at its citizens' cost?

Standard assumption 2: a government is supposed to act in the name of its citizens.

Question 2: why should citizens in an industrialized country have their government to develop climate policy and shoulder its cost?

3 Traditional view

The national-interest view

Straightforward version: climate policy advances the national interest—the common interest among citizens—of an industrialized country.

Problem with the straightforward version: costs outweigh benefits in a short term.

Modified version: climate policy advances the present and future national interest—the common interest among present and future citizens—of an industrialized country.

Further issue: grounds for intergenerational concern (e.g., Beckerman and Pasek (2001); Page (2006); Usami (2007a)).

Problems with the modified version: costlier current precaution than the near-future adjustment , intergenerational discount.

4 One alternative view 1

The historical liability argument:

1. The offender is obliged to pay compensation to the victim.
2. If the offender did not pay compensation to the victim, the offender's descendant who received economic legacy is obliged to do so.
3. Past individuals in the North cumulatively emitted CO₂, causing the harm to present individuals in the South through climate change.
4. The past offenders were obliged to pay the present victims.
5. Current individuals in the North, who received economic legacy from their ancestors, are obliged to pay the cost of climate policy as compensation for their ancestors' emissions.

4 One alternative view 2

Problems with the historical liability argument:

- Smaller amount of past emissions than that of contemporary ones.
- The non-identity problem (Parfit (1984); cf., Usami (2007b))
 1. The biological identity of each person depends on his/her ancestors' identities and their behaviors, which are in turn dependent on a variety of preceding events.
 2. If it were not for past industrialization in the North, present persons would not exist and other persons would do instead in the South.
 3. Non-existence of victims in a possible world implies no harm in the real world.
 4. If there is no harm, no one owes liability.

5 Another alternative view 1

Preliminary consideration

1. The nature issue: which is the nature of rights, will or interest? (e.g., Kramer et al. (1998))

Will theory does not explain inalienable rights or rights-holders who are unable to make decision; Interest theory explains both.

2. The legality issue: which are human rights, legal or non-legal?

Human rights are needed when existing laws do not suffice to protect the basic interests of individuals at the domestic or international level.

Human rights can be transformed into legal rights by international agreements, domestic enactments, and so on.

3. The holder issue: who has human rights?

Future generations cannot have human rights at present, because the non-identity problem otherwise arises.

5 Another alternative view 2

The environmental human right argument (cf. Merrills (1996))

1. The content issue: what right do we have in the context of climate change?

Two groups of human rights: civil & political / economic & social.

Conventional conception: a right to basic living conditions.

Refined conception: a right to basic *sustainable* living conditions.

Some of these conditions depend on a relatively stable climate.

Correlating duties: protection & provision.

2. The agency issue: who should secure environmental human rights?

Potential obligation of all individuals on the globe.

The principle of local priority: a government is primarily obliged to secure the human rights of its individual citizens; if this government fails to do, other capable governments are obliged to do instead.

Capable governments in the climate change problem.

8 Conclusion

Question on reasons for climate policy:

- Why should the government of an industrialized country develop climate policy at its citizens' cost?
- Why should citizens in an industrialized country have their government to develop climate policy and shoulder its cost?

The national interest view does not make a full success, because the great cost of policy is not fully justified from the patriotic perspective.

The historical liability argument fails, because it faces the non-identity problem.

The environmental human right argument is immune to both of the difficulties.

References

- Beckerman, Wilfred and Joanna Pasek (2001), *Justice, Posterity, and the Environment*, Oxford University Press.
- Kramer, Matthew H., N. E. Simmonds, and Hillel Steiner (1998), *A Debate over Rights: Philosophical Enquiries*, Oxford University Press.
- Merrills, J. G. (1996), "Environmental Protection and Human Rights: Conceptual Analysis," in A. E. Boyle and M. R. Anderson, eds. (1996), *Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection*, Oxford University Press, pp. 25–41.
- Page, Edward A. (2006), *Climate Change, Justice and Future Generations*, Edward Elgar.
- Parfit, Derek (1984), *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press.
- Usami, Makoto (2007a), "Government, Civil Society, and Posterity," a paper presented at the First International Symposium on Democracy for the Sustainable Future, Kyoto University, Kyoto.
- (2007b), "Global Justice: Redistribution, Reparation, and Reformation," *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, Beiheft 109, pp. 162–169.