

Sample Response to “Kyoto Discord—Let’s Be Wise, if Not Right or Rich”

The following connects to pages 210-17 of *Acting on Words*.

After reading various background materials, in the fall of 2004, student Matthew Beazer worked on his own critical response to the topic of the Kyoto Accord in Canada. Rather than respond specifically to Gwen Kelly’s essay, Beazer focused on how the Kyoto agreement has performed in Canada in the period since its adoption. His approach may imply that since Kelly made a fundamental error of interpretation (in Beazer’s opinion, illustrated by the months and years since her essay was written), her points don’t need to be addressed specifically. Beazer does agree, however, with Kelley’s view that scientists are divided on whether global warming is caused by greenhouse gases. Here is Beazer’s rough thesis statement and outline of supporting discussion:

Student Outline of Critical Paper

Title: A Foolhardy Endeavour

Thesis: The accord addresses a non-problem (for reasons of bandwagon appeal); in any case, it excuses major emitters, does nothing to achieve its intended reductions in Canada (due to an ulterior agenda of redistributing wealth), but it does threaten the economy and relations with our major trade partner, the USA, a proven effective reducer of emissions.

Opening: Update background and give controlling idea (foolhardiness) and reasons as direct-box.

Sec 1: Climate change is not affected by greenhouse gases, so the accord lacks practical purpose

Sec 2: The world's second largest emitter is exempted, adding to the impotence of the agreement; credit trading provides a loophole undermining intent while revealing an ulterior agenda; in contrast, the Alberta and USA approaches are more practical.

Concl: Canada, having succumbed to bandwagon appeal, has damaged its economy and hurt relations with USA, all on a fool's errand.

Sample Student Critical paper

Here is the final draft essay that Beazer completed from his outline. Editorial footnotes comment on writing strategies and documentation techniques according to MLA style (see Chapter 19).

Kyoto Protocol: A Foolhardy Endeavour

Matthew Beazer

Despite much opposition from Albertan government officials, the federal government of Canada ratified its Kyoto Protocol agreement in December of 2002. This legally binding accord commits Canada to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases to six per cent below the emission levels recorded in 1990. This daunting task, which is now enforced by international law, must be accomplished before the year 2012. The United States and Australia, both heavy emitters of greenhouse gases, have not ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Similar to Alberta, the United States and Australia feel Kyoto imposes an unnecessary risk to their thriving economies and the standard of living of their citizens; moreover, they persist that there are too many counterproductive aspects in the protocol, which render it ineffective.¹ Although it is still difficult to decipher the long term effects of

¹ Editorial note: The opening provides updated background.

Kyoto on Canada, it is evident that Canada's economy may be at risk for the cause of a foolhardy endeavour.²

The Kyoto Protocol is designed to decrease human emissions of greenhouse gases in an attempt to inhibit climate change – a natural phenomena that is not influenced by human activity. Earth's climatic history is very diverse and has been subject to much change as shown by its several distinct glacial and interglacial periods. These drastic differences in climate illustrate the variance in earth's climate. There is also much evidence showing the "fact that Earth's climate has changed rapidly in the past and could change rapidly in the future" (Joyce)³. However, "many experts on earth's climate are now convinced that the twentieth century warming was in part human-induced" (Press et al. 552).⁴ They are convinced that earth's temperature increase is directly related to the increase in emitted greenhouse gases caused by human activity since the industrial revolution. Other climate experts differ in opinion. According to these opposing scientists, there are too many uncertainties in the modeling and predicting of earth's climate system to attribute any climate change to man-made sources. Only two per cent of annual greenhouse gas emissions from the earth to the atmosphere are attributed to human causes.⁵ Experts highly doubt that this additional two per cent is causing the observed increase in earth's average surface temperature; instead they attribute the increase to natural occurrences that have controlled earth's climate for thousands of years. It seems absurd to risk damaging economic stability for a cause that can not be controlled by human influence.

² Editorial note: The writer expresses his controlling idea (see Chapter 6) using a general thesis approach rather than a direct list. See p. 87 AOW.

³ Editorial note: The author of the website material is cited; no page number can be given because none exists

⁴ Editorial note: Using MLA, when there are more than three authors, give the first and then "et al." meaning "and others."

⁵ Editorial note: Should this statement of fact be supported by a citation? Why?

Several aspects⁶ of Kyoto intended to help countries achieve their target emission levels ultimately render the Accord counterproductive. One such aspect is the exemption of developing countries from the framework of the Protocol. China, which is the second largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, is exempt from meeting Kyoto qualifications. India is another country with high emissions that is exempt. The exemption of these types of countries seems to defeat the goals of Kyoto. They both have large population densities and rising economies that are consistently producing more emissions. In order to help these developing countries, the Kyoto Protocol allows non-exempt countries to invest in emission-reducing projects in developing countries. By so doing the non-exempt countries receive credit towards their own emission target goals. Many people feel this counteracts the purpose of the Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is instead a ploy to transfer wealth from developed countries to developing countries. Another controversial mechanism included in the Kyoto Protocol is the concept of emissions trading.⁷ This allows countries who are well below their emissions quota to sell emission credits to polluting nations. This means that countries that have a slim chance of meeting Kyoto requirements, such as Canada, may purchase emission credits, allowing them to pollute more without being penalized by international law. This aspect of the agreement counteracts the purpose of the Kyoto Protocol, which is to lower greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2% below the levels of 1990. These are some of the reasons that the United States did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Instead the nation has a 'made-in-U.S.A.' approach to emission controls that is neither monitored nor penalized by international jurisdiction. The premier of Alberta, Ralph Klein, also pushed for a 'made-in-Canada' approach to Canadian emission controls. This approach would have allowed Canada to approach emission controls at its own pace and according to its own terms; however, the federal government chose to adopt the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol, which are enforced by international law if not achieved.

⁶ Editorial note: The “several” aspects hark back to the direct-box reference to foolhardiness. The paragraph will now identify these aspects

⁷ Editorial note: This credit system and emissions trading may seem to uncover an apparent practical absurdity that was not foreseen in Kelly’s preceding essay

As Canada tries to please the international crowd with its climatic endeavours, it cannot disguise the symptoms of imminent failure. Canada's emission levels of greenhouse gases have increased drastically-- by 24%-- since 1990;⁸ therefore, in order to meet the target level, Canada must reduce current emission levels by 30% of the amounts recorded in 1990. It is a deficit that seems nearly impossible to deplete. "Indeed, as the UN monitoring report found, Canada has been one of the very worst offenders against the Kyoto agreement" (Simpson). According to the article by Simpson, the Canadian government spent 1.7 billion dollars in 1004 without any net reduction in emissions. The Canadian economy is also in a delicate position with its major trading partner, the United States, refusing to ratify Kyoto. Many fears have been voiced that investors will steer south of the border, thus hindering the progression of the Canadian economy. It is predicted that hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost as money is invested in reducing emissions. Indeed, the standard of living of Canadians is at risk, as there are any threats of increases in tax dollars, utilities, and transportation. In order for Canada to uphold its agreement, it would have to implement these unacceptable requirements. The federal government's rash commitment to the 6% reduction now seems unattainable, and, as a result, Canada will have to face the consequences prescribed by international law.

Although the effects of human activity of the climate are nearly non-existent, most people agree that the emission of greenhouse gases should be controlled. The controversy lies in how to implement these controls. The United States has implemented a 'home-made' solution that has helped them reduce their increase in emissions to 13% above levels in 1990. (Compare to Canada's 24% increase.) Canada has committed to the Kyoto Protocol, and is now under international law. It is evident that this will cost Canada greatly in the expenditure of billions of dollars, the degradation of the standard of living, and the growth of its economy – a great expenditure to control a climate that cannot be influenced by human activity.

⁸ Editorial note: Here the author should have provided a source. Why?

Works Cited

Joyce, Terrence. "Abrupt Climate Change." 2005

http://www.who.edu/institutes/occi/currenttopics/abruptclimate_joyce_keigwin.html

Press, Siever, and Jordan Grotzinger. *Understanding Earth*. New York: W.H.Freeman, 2003.

Simpson, Jeffrey. "The Dirty Lowdown About Canada's Commitment to Kyoto." *The Globe and Mail*. 2 December 2005:A23.

Focus Questions

1. Are there possible examples of opinion stated as fact (see Chapter 3)? If yes, illustrate with statements in the essay and explain.
2. Are there any unresolved or at least unrecognized apparent contradictions in the essay?
3. Further to question 2, look back to the discussion of logic and logical fallacies (Chapter 3). Is the thrust of this essay suitably logical? Can you detect any of the 10 listed logical fallacies? If so, explain why you believe your example is a fallacy.
4. What do you consider the main strength(s) of this essay and why? If it has changed your thinking on the topic in some way, explain how.
5. Do you agree with the editorial notations calling for citation of sources? Explain.

6. Is the tone of the essay, created in large part by choice of diction, successfully matched to the obligations of critical analysis?
7. Do you find the organization of ideas effective? Can you suggest any structural revisions that might strengthen the persuasive intention?
8. Do the listed works cited reflect a fair balance of views pro and con, as well as more neutral, purely informational sources? How would Beazer respond to the charges and claims in George Monbiot's 2006 book *Heat? A Manchester Guardian* columnist. Monbiot charges Canada with gross indifference and obstruction in global efforts to turn the tide of global warming. You can read some of his ideas by going to his website.
9. See John Roberts' critical response to Gwen Kelly's essay. His response is presented under Discussion 2, Sample 2 in the document "Virtual Discussion Groups," enrichment site, Chapter 14, p. 9 of that document. How might his point in that response lend support to Beazer's direction?