

Response Paper

On Chapter 9: Climate Change

Looking at the topic, the first question that one faces is whether climate change is something to be cared about. We proceed to answer this categorically.

The author starts off by giving us the practicality of climate change. It clearly goes to show that the effects of climate change have started to predominantly effect our quality of lives, depending on the location we are living in. That is: to say that if we live in an area heavily ridden with pollution, we have a huge impact on our daily lives. If not, we probably do not see that much difference. Take into example New Delhi. Citizens are already smoking 20 cigarettes a day, without actually touching even one. However, an average US citizen has a better quality of life, and would not probably see the difference his/her own actions cause.

Looking at it from this point of view, we can see that there exist two categories of people to be considered for answering the above answer. Let us first look at it from the US citizen's point of view. If this person adopts a egoist approach: the answer is pretty clear, he will not be caring about the affect his actions not the climate, up until the effects show up in his country. Hence, we can also argue that this approach could care about not just immediate affects of his actions. Say that this person gets to know that the US will be getting unbearably hot in the coming 10 years due to the pollution caused by an US citizen, it goes to show that the person might now actually adopt a sustainable lifestyle, to minimise his discomfort in the coming years.

Adopting the Utilitarian approach, the person just need to know the collective number people who are being adversely effected by climate change (or his contribution to it). It is very clear that the number of people who are being affected by **one** persons contribution will be more that that person alone.

So, in that case, it seem the hedonistic calculation points towards the person developing a more sustainable lifestyle.

However we arrive now to the example that¹ Johnathan Glover has proposed : as the person is not causing the same damage to every one who is being affected .

The example that was proposed is analogous that a US citizen is going to be taking up a 100 units of carbon consumption (instead of beans) and the affected people (instead of the villagers) , have been robbed of 1 unit of carbon consumption(beans)by that person only.

However the fact remains that the person is in the end robbed of a 100 units, by the collective country .So , if we look at it from an individuals point of view , the Utilitarian point (Rule, Act ,and Preference)of view is of not much use , as the damage caused in both the case are same.(In case the person does not cause the harm to climate , he is going ahead and causing himself discomfort which is equivalent to the discomfort that would have otherwise been caused to the people being affected.)

This shows that looking at climate change individually in this sense is not at all feasible at all.If we look at it from an entire countries point of view however , it give us a clear answer following the “Complicity principle”² : the entire country must adopt a sustainable point of view.The Complicity principle has substantial backing while considering countries ,as is put very clearly by the bandits example given by Glover.

The Utilitarian point also can be argued from another approach , that is , the harm being caused to the future generations of humanity by one’s actions today.It is clear from the historical arguments given by the author that the industrial revolution has affected the climate immensely , and is the basic reason why the European nations and America have a huge historic contribution to take care of.

This bring forward the question whether we should care about the harm to future generations .Some might argue that we hold certain moral obligations , towards our future generations as we exist only because of our previous generation.However, it seems the Industrial revolution is another quintessential counter here.The previous generations harm is the reason why climate change has reached to where it is currently.So we may not really have the moral obligations we believe that the previous generation has.

Looking at it from the previous generation’s point of view, they did not have any idea of the consequences they had , as is argued by the developed nations in the UN conference as

¹ Peter Singer , Practical Ethics

² Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age, Christopher Kutz

stated by the author. This counter, would have however only stood validity if the previous generation, on coming to know of the harm being caused by them to the climate and its long lasting impacts on the coming generations, would have immediately switched to the more sustainable style of living.

If the person adopts a Kantian approach, it is clear that the person is using those affected by his/her actions as an end to his/her comfort. This again points the person to develop a more sustainable approach.

The Indian's point of view (ie: those who are more affected), is not that much of interest, any approach would clearly yield the answer that he / she should be moving towards a more sustainable style of development. The damage being done by a citizen of India is directly affecting them, so, even the egoist approach would go forward and push for a sustainable lifestyle.

Coming to the challenge being described by the author, the challenge of controlling climate change, we see that practically speaking allotting carbon emissions quota would be the way to go about in case we have to afford a secure future for our generation.

Looking at the historical perspective, the developed countries have a lot of weightage in the harm being caused. However, the argument that could be made now is whether the current generation of the developed nations should be the ones suffering for the damage being caused by their previous generation.

However, a great counter behind this would be that the developed nations continue to enjoy the benefits that the previous generations have enabled for them. Unless they are ready to give up on those **benefits** (trade benefits etc), the above argument will not hold through.

In addition to this, the quota allotment follows a very seemingly uniform per capita carbon consumption unit. The author argues, that it fails to see the unique demographic of

every country, as this system might actually be of advantage and disadvantage to a country depending on that.

As argued in the book, a nation predominantly dependent on paddy consumption , might have a high per capita carbon consumption. However , it is very clear that the consumption is justified ,as might be used for the the food and agricultural needs of other nations.

This could be countered that the nation that is producing paddy is actually gaining quite a lot of economic benefit from selling it off to other countries .So , it is actually gaining the required money to buy the required emission permits for its agriculture needs.

In conclusion , the emission quota system is the one that is the most practically viable , as it is the one that goes ahead and actually provides a sure shot way of countering climate change , and at the same time working towards easing the poverty of the nations that have not yet been industrialised .The carbon tax system , is one that should be implemented regardless of it minimal benefit , as it promotes altruism .Encouraging an Altruistic nature , is the only way we can actually go forward in reducing climate change in the long term.