

Conservatism and Fighting Global Warming: An Either/Or?

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The modern environmental movement and much that it encompasses, such as fighting global warming, is commonly considered the antithesis to American conservatism. Environmentalists are watermelons: green on the outside, a communist red on the inside (Delingpole). This notion suggests that supporting the mitigation of global warming precludes holding to conservative values. Instead of supporting mitigation, many conservatives either deny the scientific evidence or minimize the need for government involvement. I hope to show that a close reading of some influential 18th, 19th, and 20th century conservative political philosophy texts reveals that one can be both a true conservative and a supporter of fighting global warming. Given the current partisan polarization in congress, both conservatives and liberals may benefit from my analysis. Conservatives can support mitigation policy without abandoning their core values, and liberals can appeal to conservatives in order to cultivate Republican support. Climate change will worsen due to our activities; eventual demand for action by the voters is inevitable. My reexamination might help conservatives stay relevant: as I will show below, those whom I define as minimalists, even deniers, may become supporters.

Methodological pragmatism: moving past irreconcilable ideologies

Can conservatives and liberals agree on aggressive climate change mitigation policies (which I will refer to as ACCMP)? If so, how? In an attempt to reach agreement, my philosophical method uses philosopher Andrew Light's account of methodological pragmatism, which aims to:

Help show the broader public how an embrace of their personal values, P, ought to lead to an embrace of some green goal G...[This is] necessarily a pluralist project, attempting to articulate the considered interests of the environmental community in as broad a set of moral appeals as is possible so that a broad range of personal values, P₁-P_n, can be shown to entail some common G ends. (Light 18)

Thus a methodological pragmatist helps inter-pluralistic communities, communities with fundamentally different value systems arrive at a common agreement. In other words helping to uncover the different paths, specific to each community, to climb the same mountain and arrive at an identical public policy proposal. By using methodological pragmatism, we do not need to have the same political or moral values to agree on a climate policy, as long as each of our value systems can independently support such a policy. This is a desperately needed approach. We do not have time wait until we all have the same values, both conservative and liberal support is needed to pass effective legislation in Congress, and the risk of waiting, according to the consensus of scientists, is too high given the realities of anthropogenic global warming.

Climate change: the basics

Evidence for anthropogenic or human-caused global warming (AGW) is supported by extensive research from many scientific bodies all around the world. Basic information can be found at NASA's website, *Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet* and in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability: Summary for Policymakers." (Shaftel; IPCC). AGW is caused by the large scale emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), mainly carbon dioxide (CO₂)—a naturally occurring trace gas in Earth's atmosphere. Some CO₂ is necessary for plant, animal, and human life; Earth would be much colder without it. Human evolution and development occurred while Earth's CO₂ concentration was relatively stable—our civilization adapted to historical sea levels, geographical temperatures and storm patterns. However, our current consumption of fossil fuels pulls ancient CO₂ out of the ground and into the atmosphere. As more CO₂ and other GHGs collect in the atmosphere, the planet warms. A phenomenon which exacerbates extreme weather such as droughts, floods, and storms and has the potential to trigger feedback loops that worsen the problem.

The primary emitters of GHGs—those mostly responsible for AGW—are wealthy, industrialized nations. The most vulnerable victims of AGW are those in poor, non-industrialized or industrializing nations—although those in developed nations are seeing and will see impacts as well, such as sea level rise (IPCC). The harshest effects of current GHG emissions are not instantaneous; they will come fifty or a hundred years down the road and will be suffered by our children and grandchildren. The costs of the effects, such as extensive damage to private property, are not included in today's fossil fuel prices. Thus climate change is an externality of fossil fuel consumption; it is unaccounted for in the price. However, this is viewed as a non-problem by most self-identified conservatives.

Conservatives and climate change; the polarization problem

According to recent studies by Pew Research, the polarization of AGW views is linked to political affiliation. When polled, 76 percent of liberals and 29 percent of conservatives agree that human activity is the primary cause of current warming—a 47 percent difference. In 2015, 54 percent of Democrats and 15 percent of Republicans identified fighting global warming as a top priority (Pew Research, "Public's Policy").

In order to apply methodological pragmatism to this issue, it is necessary to have a correct understanding of what I will call true conservatism. The implication is that there exist self-identified conservatives who claim to be true conservatives but are not. With respect to climate change, I will consider three conservative positions: (1) the deniers, comprising over 70% of conservatives (Pew Research, "Chapter 2"), who do not accept the 97% consensus among climate scientists that is endorsed by NASA et al. (Shaftel); (2) the minimalists, who accept that the world is warming due to human activities, but do not advocate ACCMP; and (3) the supporters, who encourage using conservative forms of ACCMP to fight AGW.

I will argue that supporters are true conservatives with respect to climate change, whereas deniers and minimalists are not. True conservatives, although based in very different values from liberals, nonetheless can arrive at the same position on ACCMP as liberals. However, unless more self-identified conservatives become supporters, endorsing a position politicized as a liberal cause can end in political failure. For former House Representative Bob Inglis, a Republican from South Carolina, this became his reality. In 2010, Inglis lost his House seat in a landslide election, a loss he attributes to his “Raise Wages, Cut Carbon Act of 2009” (Inglis). His congressional career was ruined: he became known as a RINO—a Republican in Name Only—a fake.

Conservatives seemingly face a stark choice: adhere to conservative norms, be a real conservative, or be a supporter of climate action and thus a RINO, a fake. But who defines conservative norms? Who—or what—defines what it means to be a true conservative in the 21st century? Is it large corporations or the 1 percent? Is it public opinion? Or is it conservatism as defined by key thinkers of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries? In this paper I will argue that public opinion or large corporation definitions of true conservatism is not necessarily true conservatism. I will rely on a definition of true conservatism as developed by key thinkers—Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, Robert Nozick, and Friedrich Hayek—who profoundly shaped political conservative philosophy. In what follows I will introduce their philosophies of social and fiscal conservatism, and then provide an example of ACCMP that does not entail an abandonment of their conservative values.

Core values of social conservative philosophy: what would Burke do?

1789, London: amidst the bloodshed and radicalism of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke, the father of conservatism, published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Kirk xii, 7). Russell Kirk, inspired by Burke and author of *The Conservative Mind*, has been called the reviver of conservatism in the 20th century (Nash). Both works reveal the core values of social conservatism. While Kirk lists ten conservative principles in *The Portable Conservative Reader*, I will discuss three in relation to AGW: the enduring moral order, tradition, and prudent change.

For many social conservatives, the Enduring Moral Order—from now on referred to as EMO—is eternal. For Burke and Kirk, the EMO is the backdrop against which all actions should be based. It is derived from God and religion: values which are eternal and universal. Thus it applies to everyone, everywhere. Kirk argued that “belief in an enduring moral order, by a strong sense of right and wrong, by personal convictions about justice and honor” will ensure a good society (Kirk, “Ten Conservative Principles”). Two of the most important conservative pillars—tradition and prudent change—emerge from the EMO.

Tradition, called the “principle of prescription” by Kirk, is the physical incarnation of the EMO (Kirk xvi). Tradition tangibly shapes the everyday lives of conservatives and the communities they live in. It is trusted; it has been modified, improved, but not necessarily perfected over long periods of trial and error (Kirk xvi). Tradition changes and develops slowly based on knowledge from empirical, observable evidence (Kirk 17). If developed correctly—with patience, compromise, balance and reconciliation—then “the great interests of mankind are concerned

through a long succession of generations” (Kirk 38). Since tradition is the safe, time-tested knowledge of the human species which is passed down generation through generation, it should override the whimsical desires of the individual (Kirk xvi). Humans are imperfect, a crucial reason why tradition should be followed with great care and radical change should be scrutinized with great caution. Through careful risk analysis social conservatives err on the side of caution; they keep their goals realistic and base them on probability. It is through this rationale that tradition emerges and attempts to provide us with harmony, order and security. However, when tradition no longer works, when it no longer conforms to the EMO, when it no longer provides us with harmony, order and security, then prudent change is required.

The writings of Burke show tradition and prudent change as inextricably linked; prudent change is the mechanism through which tradition changes and develops. It is implemented gradually, with careful observations. If successful, it eventually becomes part of new or altered traditions. Prudent change should be focused on relevant problems. Burke believed these problems could not be strictly defined in his text, nor any text because they change with time. Prudent solutions are formulated using the scientific method: disciplined and based on empirical evidence—not determined simply by preference, speculation, rationalism, a priori thought or a disregard for facts—and neither by short-term experience, because, Burke wrote, “the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate” (Kirk xvi, 9, 17).

In addition to his reliance on those who have long-term experience—whom today we refer to as experts—when making political decisions, Burke considered the long-term effects of our actions. In defense of future generations, he lamented the lack of prudence in society during the French Revolution:

...unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity...they should not think it amongst their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of an habitation. (Kirk 32)

His work is a warning to all: to the best of our ability, we must leave our children and grandchildren with a healthy environment and a healthy economic system. The health of this planet, the climate, is fundamental to the fabric of our society, and, based on present-day empirical evidence and (climate) experts, we do have the power to destroy it. We also have the conservative duty to change when needed, as Burke argued: “a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation” (Kirk 9). We should change prudently, based on observable evidence from experts that we process through the lenses of our EMO and our tradition. True conservatives support policies because of their long term implications, not merely due to their popularity (Kirk xvi).

Based on my interpretation, what position would Burke, or any true social conservative, take on AGW if he were here today? First, Burke would look at the evidence—the observed changes, the measurements, the 97 percent consensus from the experts. Then Burke would consider if and why he should care about the implications of AGW, based on his values. He would be concerned about the long term effects. He would understand that some change to tradition is

necessary. He would listen to the experts. He would endorse a gradual solution to climate change—even if the initial effects seemed lamentable—in efforts to secure long-term prosperity for his community (Kirk 17). It is radical for one to gamble on the scientific conclusions of 3 percent of scientists, rather than the 97 percent. If the 3 percent are right and the climate isn't changing, yet we act, we may lose economically. However, if we do not act, and the 97 percent are right, then the costs to the economy and the environment would be much greater. True social conservatives can defend their support for ACCMP as a prudent-risk analysis that is supported by the values of Kirk and Burke's social conservatism.

Fiscal conservative philosophy: long live freedom and the free market

By 1922, the rise of communism, socialism, and authoritarian governments compelled economist, scholar and philosopher Ludwig von Mises to publish *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analyses*. This work influenced fellow economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek, who went on to explain, for example, how changing prices communicate information more efficiently than centralized government ever could—work for which he later won a Nobel prize (Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences). In 1974, Robert Nozick published *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* where he introduced his 'Entitlement Theory' of justice in a free market society. Nozick's theory has three stipulations, of which I will discuss his requirements for just transfer. I will also discuss his argument against end-state principles of justice (Kymlicka 103). The works of Hayek, Mises, and Nozick possess a common thread: they all advocate for free market economics.

Fiscal conservatism contains Libertarians and many Republicans who consider free market economics and private property as the best options for protecting freedom and ensuring one's needs are met. Nozick's entitlement theory asserts that as long as current property holdings are justly acquired, a just distribution is any scenario that that results from unforced exchanges, known as just transfers (Kymlicka 104). Nozick believed the only time government has the right to redistribute property is when said property has been transferred or acquired unjustly—with force—and the only just taxation is for the protection of private property, i.e., for the police and justice system (Kymlicka 103). A statement from the Libertarian Party reflects Nozick's theory:

The only proper role of government in the economic realm is to protect property rights, adjudicate disputes, and provide a legal framework in which voluntary trade is protected. All efforts by government to redistribute wealth, or to control or manage trade, are improper in a free society. ("Libertarian Party Platform")

The ability of a free market society to protect its citizens' private property depends on citizens and corporations being held accountable for their actions. I should not be able to do something on my property that harms your property. To protect private property, all the costs of production and consumption of a product must be included into its price, otherwise called internalizing externalities. When externalities exist, costs that should fall on the producer and consumer are paid indirectly by the public in the form of lost productivity, taxes for hospital bills, environmental clean-up, etc. (Hayek). In "Taking Property Rights Seriously: The Case of Climate Change" Jon Adler, professor of environmental, administrative and constitutional law at the Case Western

Reserve University, argues that English common law upheld accountability and private property rights more strictly than today's policies. The court case *Whalen v. Union Bag & Paper Co.* is one example of broader fiscal conservative values which I will apply later to climate change.

New York, 1913: A pulp mill's operation pollutes a river in New York. A farmer sues on account of the violation of his riparian property rights. The verdict drawn for *Whalen v. Union Bag & Paper Co.* (208 N. Y. 1) forced the \$1 million pulp mill to shut down in order to protect the private property rights of the farmer. The defense unsuccessfully argued that the costs of shutting down the mill far exceeded the costs that would have been further incurred by the farmer (Adler 305).

During the case, the defense used the logic of a cost-benefit analyses. They attempted to make the court's decision contingent upon what would result if the property rights of the farmer were upheld (i.e., a \$1 million mill closed, hundreds of jobs lost, for the rights of one farmer). Had the court sided with the defense, this would be an example of end-state logic--making decisions based on the results of an action rather than the principles behind it. If fiscal conservatives are serious about private property rights, they should not advocate for the use of end-state logic, like the cost benefit analysis, in politics (Adler 310). Fiscal conservatives should agree with the court's ruling: even if the overall benefits to property owner A exceed the overall harm to property owner B, the action is still not justified. According to Nozick, when end-state principles of justice, such as cost-benefit analyses, are used on a governmental scale they grant the government partial ownership of individuals. This weakens private property rights because it allows governments to pick and choose when to uphold certain laws depending on the result (Kymlicka 103).

Freedom depends on the free market, which depends on private property rights, and private property rights depend on accountability. Here accountability applies to individuals and corporations. To be accountable, they cannot use force to manipulate others and they cannot harm, take or produce externalities that harm another's property without their consent (e.g. due to AGW-induced sea level rise, the flooding of one's home forces them to move). Any negative consequences of their actions must either be confined to their property or consented to by those affected, regardless of whether the net benefits outweigh the net costs. The basis of fiscal conservatism relies on logic based on freedom and private property rights, not end-state principles.

Many who identify as fiscal conservatives are concerned that the cost of mitigating AGW will be higher than the cost of enduring its impacts. While the costs of climate change cannot be quantified, scientists predict that they will be extensive (Shaftel). A study by independent climate research organization, Climate Central, asserts that some have already endured large-scale damage to private property in the form of Hurricane Sandy when an additional 75,000 homes flooded due to the rise in sea level alone ("Years of Living Dangerously").

Regardless, the cost-benefit analyses that is applied above by fiscal conservatives to climate change uses end-state logic, the same logic that governments use to violate private property rights according to Nozick. If one is serious about private property rights, one should argue that since AGW exacerbates the probability of severe droughts, storms and wildfires worldwide, then AGW damages private property (IPCC). Since AGW damages private property of those who are virtually innocent (those in developing countries), the use of fossil fuels where the external costs are not internalized no longer qualifies as just according to Nozick's entitlement theory. Based on the principles of free market economics, accountability and private property, a true fiscal conservative should support holding those who contribute to climate change accountable. True fiscal conservatives should support ACCMP's that use minimal government intrusion, policies which solve climate change by internalizing the externalities of fossil fuels, an approach Hayek himself suggested when asked how the free market could solve the pollution problem entailed by high a market production of goods (Hayek).

An example of methodological pragmatism

Different political values, same public policy consensus

There are several ACCMPs that have failed to pass in Congress because of conservative opposition. Some of the policies would have increased the size of the government by increasing their regulatory and monetary power. Unlike those policies, a national revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend policy (which I refer to as CFD) is one example of an ACCMP that can be supported by the value systems of true social and fiscal conservatives and liberals as well. It starts with a small fee on CO₂ at the point of extraction, such as the oil well or coal mine. The fee gradually increases each year. Border adjustments will be used to safeguard American goods and incentivize other countries to enact their own fee. Most importantly, the government does not keep any of the revenue: it is immediately returned to U.S. households in the form of a monthly dividend payment.

According to a nation-wide macroeconomic study done by the nonpartisan economic modeling firm, Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), a revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend benefits American families, the climate, and the economy. First, it can be used to cover the increasing price of carbon-based energy and commodities—66% of consumers will be economically better off or unaffected. Although the dividend can be used to cover increased costs, once the fee is high enough climate-neutral energy will become cheaper than fossil fuel energy, making climate-neutral energy the economic choice. The growing demand for cheaper, climate-neutral energy will spur investments by venture-capitalists and lead to more competition in the marketplace, increased efficiency and cheaper costs still (Nystrom and Luckow).

Secondly, although every household receives the nearly same dividend check, poor and middle class families will generally have funds left over because they consume less carbon. This surplus has a stimulus effect on the economy. The benefits of which include net increases in employment, jobs and GDP. After 20 years, CFD would inadvertently create 2.0 to 3.0 million jobs, add \$70-\$90 billion in additional annual GDP, and save over 200,000 lives due to increased air quality (Nystrom and Luckow).

With the benefits to the economy and American lives, the efficacy of CFD—50% of U.S. emissions cut in 20 years—is beside the point for fiscally conservative economists like REMI's Senior Economic Associate, Scott Nystrom. He makes it clear that he has no opinion on climate change. Regardless, he supports CFD as a no-regrets policy. He argued that it is good for the economy, so the reason why we implement—whether the climate is changing or not—is irrelevant (Nystrom). The empirical evidence of the REMI report, the gradual approach of the slowly rising fee, and the long-term economic and environmental benefits of the stimulus and fossil fuel reduction should appeal to true social conservative values. In addition, true fiscal conservatives can support CFD's use of free enterprise and accountability to both internalize the externalities of fossil fuels and grow the economy, not the government.

Conclusion: objections and responses

In closing, I will address two objections to conservative support for ACCMPs, one applicable to social conservative values, and one to fiscal.

Are Religious Values and Anthropogenic Climate Change incompatible?

The core of social conservative values—the Enduring Moral Order—is usually derived from one's religion. Burke overtly based conservative values on religion, and was himself a Roman Catholic (Nash). A central objection to fighting AGW is the argument given by Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) that belief in God and AGW are incompatible: the climate and its natural variations are exclusively in the hands' of God; the notion that man can change the climate is extreme hubris (Inhofe). Contrary to Inhofe's claims, *Faith-Based Statements on Climate Change: a collection by Citizens' Climate Lobby volunteers* provides endorsements of fighting AGW by sixteen Christian denominations (16-82). They all recognize that AGW is not the first time the aggregate of human actions have had the power to effect the earth on a global scale; the hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, and nuclear weapons are all examples of the once unimaginable power and responsibility that human progress has wrought (20). Their writings echo Kirk's and Burke's principles of imperfectability and prudence: "Even in the absence of perfect knowledge or unanimity...we have to take a position of prudence" (Kirk xvii; *Faith-Based Statements* 21). Each of their statements conclude that they find no contradiction between their religious values and accepting climate science. They refer to scriptures in support of our duty to care for the poor, to preserve God's creation through stewardship, and to recognize our ability to damage it: Gen.1:26-28; Ps. 24; Col. 1:16; Mt. 22:34-40; Mt. 7:12; Mt. 25:31-46 (*Faith-Based Statements* 20-22).

The discrepancy between Inhofe's statements and those collected by Citizens' Climate Lobby is, at least in part, due to differing interpretations of Holy Scripture. We cannot ask others to change aspects of their faith. But we can debate which position is more prudent and thus more conservative. As discussed earlier, 97 percent of climate scientists agree that humans can and are changing the climate, and three percent disagree. If we decide not to act, but the 3 percent are wrong, AGW is real, we would be responsible for unprecedented damages to God's creation. Conversely, if we do act with CFD or a similar policy, but the 3 percent are right and AGW is false, we will still grow the economy, create jobs, and reduce the concentration of

noxious pollutants (NO₂ and SO₂) (REMI). I argue that the prudent choice is the latter. A true social conservative would follow prudence, Burke's highest virtue.

In addition, some interpret The Bible's writings on stewardship not as preserving the earth, but instead as the duty of developing the earth to show one's dedication and respect to God's gift. One could assume that climate action would preclude development due to portrayals of ACCMP's in FOX News. However, for CFD the opposite is the case. It will not thwart development. It will increase it. As discussed, the REMI study found that CFD would inadvertently create 2 to 3 million jobs in 20 years, even after subtracting jobs lost, such as in the coal industry (Nystrom and Luckow). With policies like CFD, fighting AGW appeals to the Christian value of stewardship for God's creation and protecting the world's poor.

Can the free market solve climate change on its own?

Some fiscal conservatives, as minimalists, argue that even though AGW is happening, the free market will produce sufficient technology to mitigate climate change in the future without government intervention (Pew Research, "Chapter 2"). However, I hold that while the free market and human ingenuity are certainly capable of solving many problems that central regulation simply cannot, AGW is not one of them. Given that the main emitters of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) are wealthy, industrialized nations; the most vulnerable victims of AGW are and will continue to be those in poor, non-industrialized or industrializing nations; the indirect and delayed consequences, the incentives to act in the necessary amount of time, per IPCC reports, are non-existent. By the time the drastic effects of AGW are felt and a sufficient amount of people are concerned enough to considerably make climate-neutral choices, it will be too late to maintain the climate that human civilization is based upon.

To avoid this, we have to either keep most of the remaining fossil fuel reserves and resources in the ground or innovate and quickly implement much more efficient use of fossil fuels and carbon capture technology. In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol was adopted by various industrialized nations. Nearly 18 years later, solar, hydro and nuclear account for less than 10% of worldwide energy (*2014 Key Energy*). Due to the artificially low prices of fossil fuels, renewables are not being implemented at a rate fast enough to avoid crossing the Kyoto Protocol's 2⁰C threshold. Artificially low prices are the effect of unaccounted externalities, which I discussed earlier in this paper. These costs are not paid at the pump, but paid indirectly (e.g. climate change impacts, pollution related hospital bills, government subsidies, tax cuts to corporations, etc.). Unless an even playing field is created for fossil fuels and climate-neutral energy, a climate-neutral economy will not form fast enough to avoid crossing the 2⁰C threshold.

In closing, I have defined true conservatism as the values that stem from the social and fiscal conservative philosophies of Burke, Kirk, Nozick and Hayek. My analyses of their work reveal that the majority of self-identified conservatives in American society are not true conservatives regarding the issue of aggressive climate change mitigation policies. American politics are polarized, and fighting global warming is identified as a liberal cause. While some aggressive climate change mitigation policies, such as cap and trade, go against values of true conservatives, there are others, such as a revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend, that

embrace the values of true conservatism. Fiscal and social conservatives who are currently deniers and minimalists should reconsider their core values. If they are true conservatives, they should embrace conservative solutions to climate change. Social conservatives should look to their long-term focus, their caution, their principle of prudence and the eternal moral order, and fiscal conservatives to free-market economics, to accountability, and to private property rights as a guide. Conservatives do not have to choose between staying true to conservative values and fighting global warming. Instead, they have to choose between being true conservatives who fight global warming, or false conservative deniers or minimalists.

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