

On Eschewing a Policy-Prescriptive Role for Science in Environmental Controversies

Johnny Lin
Physics Department
North Park University
Chicago, Ill.

Preview

Thesis: Environmental policy debates cannot be settled solely by appeals to science.

1.Philosophical arguments as to whether science determines policy goals.

2.How policy goals are translated into policy choice.

3.An alternative model for determining the content of creation-care.

Philosophical Arguments Regarding the Scientific Justification of Policy Goals

- Science provides the best description of the **state** of the environment.
- This is not the same as saying science provides the best description of environmental **problems**.

Science Alone Does Not Determine What “Should Be”

science → what is

what is + meaning of what is → what should be

Can We Determine “What Should Be” From “What Is”?

science → what is
what is → what should
be

Policy Choice Options to Accomplish Policy Goals

Problem: $A \rightarrow B$

Solutions: 1) $\cancel{A} \rightarrow B$

2) $A \cancel{\rightarrow} B$

3) $A \rightarrow \textcircled{B}$

In principle **any of the above three solutions** will accomplish the policy goal of dealing with the problem.

The Role of Values In Policy Choice: The Example of Global Warming

- Science demonstrates the earth's global mean surface temperature is increasing.
- This is due mainly to CO₂ emitted through the use of fossil fuels.
- This increase leads to harmful effects (e.g., more extreme weather, etc.).
- Thus, Christian stewardship entails actions to decrease fossil fuel use.

Policy Choice Are Justified By Non-Science Values: Example of Global Warming

- Romantic idealism: Nature is best understood and appreciated as pristine wilderness.
- Ecocentrism: Nature has a good of its own that it should be permitted to obtain apart from human influence.
- Minimalism: Humans should minimize their involvement in nature.
- Sin model: Avoid doing sinful acts.

Uncritical Application of Value Judgments Can Distort the Policymaking Process

Example of distortion when applying the sin model:

- Not all activities that result in environmental harm are necessarily, by themselves, offenses to God.
- Scripture teaches no sin is acceptable, but this may not be true about actions that impact the environment.
- Prematurely narrowing the scope of policy options.

An Alternative Model to Defining the Content of Creation-Care

Scriptural clarity of the **imperative** of creation-care is not the same as clarity of the **content** of creation-care.

- Humbler role for science in terms of defining the content of creation-care.
- Environmental problems are different from other types of problems: They may have many valid solutions.
- Good stewardship policy **requires** the insights of those we disagree with.