Climate Change and Christian Stewardship: Towards an Alternative Framework for Understanding Questions of Creation Care

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Outline

Main point: Determining the *content* of creation care is more difficult than commonly acknowledged.

What is climate change?

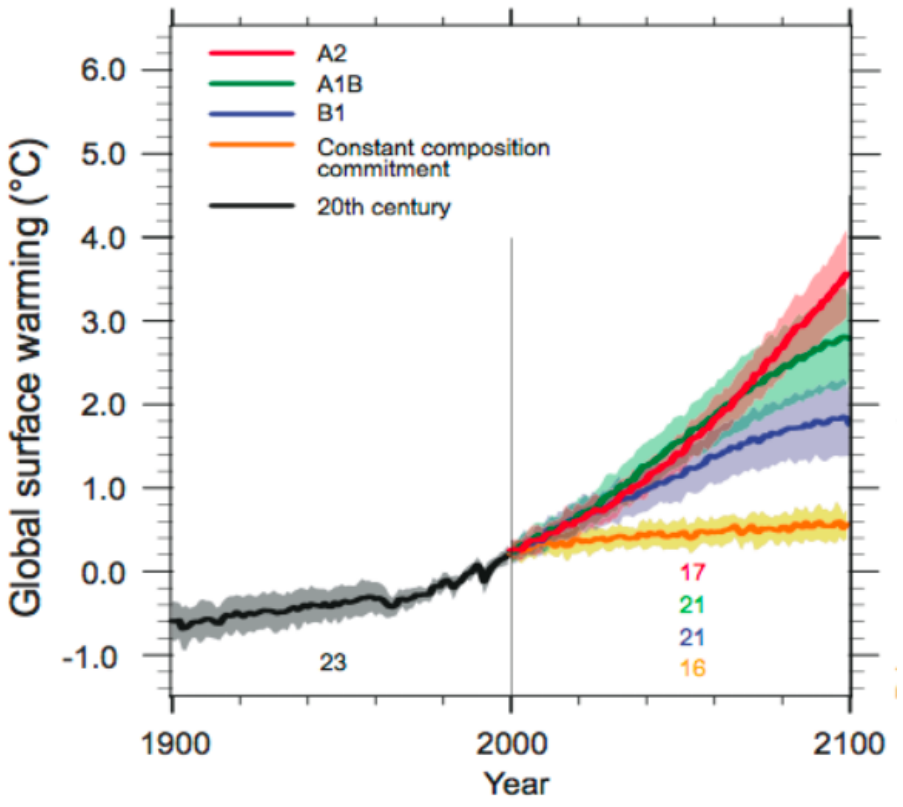
A limit to the Bible about the content of creation care

Towards a framework for “considered obedience”

Science epistemology and science-policy: Moving beyond policy-prescriptiveness

Conclusions

Past warming and possible future increases in global mean surface temperature



IPCC (2007)

- A2 scenario: Heterogeneous world, fragmented growth.
- A1B scenario: Very rapid economic growth with balanced energy sources.
- B1 scenario: A1 scenario population but economy is focused on sustainability.
- Constant composition: Hold CO2 constant at year 2000 level.
- Warming is relative to 1980–99.

Why “simple obedience” is not possible for God’s creation care command I

- Human beings are commanded to serve and protect creation as stewards (e.g., Gen. 1:28).
- Obedience to a command requires clarity in these three criteria:
  - **Importance** of the command (e.g., is it optional, a required duty, contextually applied, etc.).
  - **Goals** of the command (e.g., what is the command trying to accomplish).
  - **Practice** of the command (e.g., what you actually do to obey the command).

Why “simple obedience” is not possible for God’s creation care command II

- “Simple obedience” is where the criteria for obedience is clear without additional analysis. Thus:

  $$\text{command} \rightarrow \text{obedience}$$

  It may or may not be easy to obey, but the connection between command and obedience is direct and clear.
- Clarity means either:
  - Answers for the criteria are clear.
  - It’s clear that detail in that criteria is unneeded for obedience.

Why “simple obedience” is not possible for God’s creation care command III

- Example of a command with such clarity: “Do not steal”
  - Importance: It is required and context independent.
  - Goals: Character development, social peace, love of neighbor, etc., but because of the non-negotiable importance, perfect clarity in goals is unneeded for obedience to be possible.
  - Practice: Do not take that which you do not own.

Author: Popperipopp (from Wikimedia Commons)

Why “simple obedience” is not possible for God’s creation care command IV

- Aside: If importance tells us it’s a non-negotiable duty, clarity in goals usually does not matter for obedience to be possible.
- Creation care does not have such simple clarity:
  - The Bible makes clear the importance of creation care.
  - The goals and practice of creation care are only partially given in Scripture.
  - This is particularly true for modern environmental problems which often involve modern technology and concepts (e.g., CO_2 is, of course, mentioned nowhere in the Bible).

Why “simple obedience” is not possible for God’s creation care command V

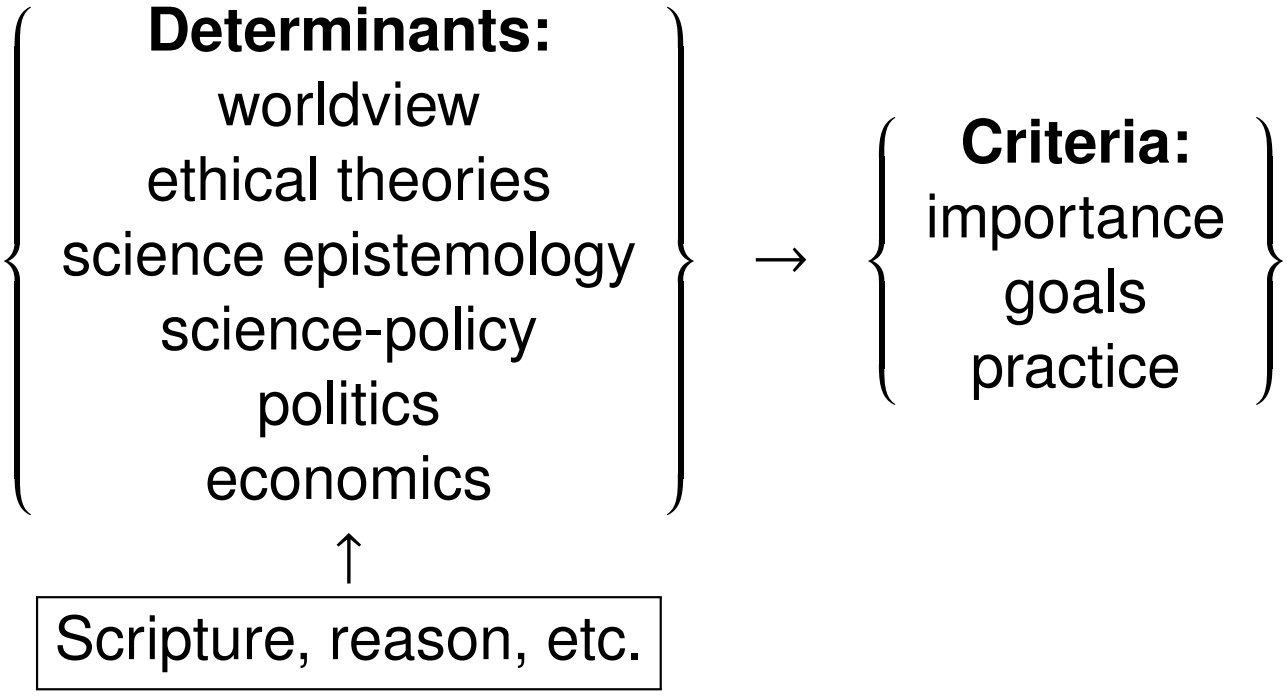
- We need more than the creation care command itself to figure out how to obey this command.
- Creation care is a command requiring “considered obedience.”

Considered obedience explicitly includes analysis of the criteria for obedience

$$\text{command} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{importance} \\ \text{goals} \\ \text{practice} \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \text{obedience}$$

Determinants and criteria

For creation care, the criteria for obedience are determined by the following determinants:



Unfortunately, most dialogue about creation care only covers a few of these determinants.

Preliminary thoughts on what the determinants tells us as applied to climate change I

- A full treatment of the determinants requires more time than I have.
- My book *The Nature of Environmental Stewardship,* which should be published by Wipf and Stock in 2015, will go in-depth on this.
- Preview: For science epistemology/policy, I'll:
  - Describe some question(s) we need to ask and answer about the determinant.
  - Discuss how different answers can lead to different responses to climate change.
- Goal: Illustrate the process of considered obedience and identify possible alternative avenues for dialogue regarding climate change.

Science epistemology and science-policy: Moving beyond policy-prescriptiveness I

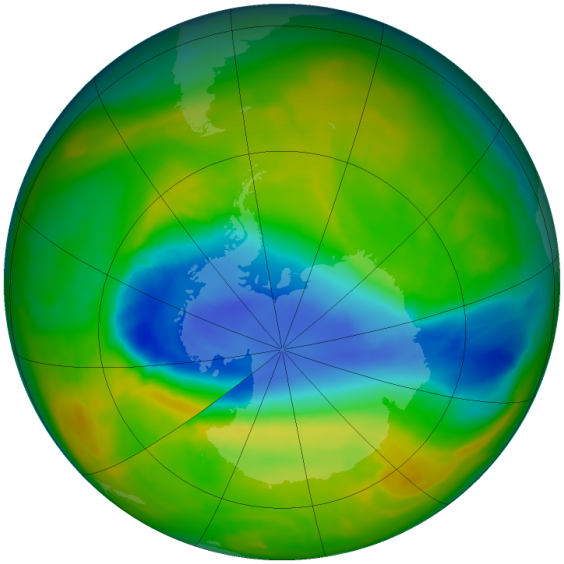
- Questions:
  - What is the authority status of science?
  - How should science be connected with policy?

Raphael, detail from “The School of Athens” showing (l-r) Plato and Aristotle (from Wikimedia Commons)

Science epistemology and science-policy: Moving beyond policy-prescriptiveness II

Example: Climate change policy discussions tend to use science in a policy prescriptive way:

- Policy prescriptive $=$ science determines policy.
- Conventional wisdom about ozone depletion fits this view of science: Scientists discovered the ozone hole and its cause, policy-makers listened to the scientists and banned CFCs, and the ozone hole was closed.



Stratospheric ozone on November 6, 2012. Credit: NASA Ozone Watch

Science epistemology and science-policy: Moving beyond policy-prescriptiveness III

- Discussions of climate change proposals, like the Kyoto Protocol, often follow this conventional wisdom understanding.
- What actually happened with ozone: Political action occurred even while the science was uncertain, tiered policies (instead of an all-out ban) helped stimulate research into alternatives, and creation of alternatives defused probable conflicts between stakeholders (Sarewitz 2004, Pielke 2007).

Science epistemology and science-policy: Moving beyond policy-prescriptiveness IV

- Answers and responses:
  - Policy prescriptive view of science only applies to most basic environmental issues.
  - Policy prescriptive view of science turns value controversies into technical problems, preventing a value debate.
  - Policy prescriptive view can feed a desire for “definitive” knowledge prior to political action and a tendency towards comprehensive solutions (Sarewitz 2004).
  - A humbler role for science in policy can lead to incremental solutions (Sarewitz 2004) and solutions that incorporate more stakeholders (Mills & Clark 2001).

Conclusions I

- Creation care, over contentious issues, is not a command that lends itself to simple obedience.
- Much of the disagreement over what to do regarding climate change are over the determinants of the criteria for obedience and thus cannot be solved by appeal to Scripture.
- Science may not be policy prescriptive. Solutions arrived at using science in a non-policy prescriptive way may: meet the needs of more stakeholders, incorporate more kinds of solutions, and have greater stability.
- Lastly . . .

Conclusions II

Before Q&A

After Q&A