

AMEN TO CLIMATE CHANGE - in WEM Magazine; Thursday, September 04, 2008

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Contraction and Convergence (C&C) is like a perfect cadence in music says Aubrey Meyer*.

C&C is the name given by the Global Commons Institute (GCI) to the formal response we gave to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1995. To prevent dangerous rates of climate change, the objective of the UNFCCC is the stabilization of greenhouse gas (ghg) concentrations in the global atmosphere and the principles are precaution and equity. The UNFCCC Secretariat took the position in 2002 that 'C&C is inevitably required to achieve the Convention's objective.'

C&C makes it possible to demonstrate how we can solve the climate change problem at a rate that is faster than the rate at which we are creating it. Rolling out under the global emissions limit that achieves the objective of the UNFCCC [contraction], the international sharing of the entitlements to these emissions is that, in principle, they shall be counted as equal-per-head to all persons, but achieved by smooth transition [convergence]. Where the Kyoto Protocol picks a few numbers out of a hat, C&C is globally rational, transparent, and rooted 'full-term' in the objective of the UNFCCC. Unlike a lottery and as in music, the parts are referenced and sum of the whole.

Like Occam's Razor, C&C is not necessarily the only way to resolve the potentially endless international arguments about who is to blame for climate change. It is the least worst and the most transparent way of defining our responsibilities jointly and severally, fairly and effectively, under the terms of the UNFCCC.

We all now live in the double-jeopardy of climate change. For decades, the globally-asymmetric development of expansion and divergence has been growing at an average three percent per annum. The jeopardy is doubled because the damages to the climate this growth has been causing has been growing at twice that rate, at an average six percent per annum. Quite simply, we have been causing this problem much faster than we have been responding - say, with the Kyoto Protocol - to avoid it. Worse, two-thirds of the world's population survives on a mere six percent of global income and now also faces climate damage and death caused by the cumulative ghg pollution of the wealthy one-third. Knowingly or even unwittingly continuing with a half-hearted response to this is not just dissonant. It defaults to being what politicians have called the economics of genocide, where none of us will be able to avoid its awful, downstream consequences.

C&C takes this head-on, saying that securing the objective of the UNFCCC is paramount. It also recognises that globally-endemic poverty and the now dangerous rates of climate change are two sides of the same coin.

C&C shows how we can take this two-sided problem and turn it into one solution that guides us to deal with both, while ensuring we do enough soon enough to avoid dangerous, runaway climate change.

As there is great acrimony about this double-jeopardy already feeding the politics, I think it helps us to get beyond this by linking the solution to the timeless and universal rationale of music. We can say that correcting the past and present discord of expansion and divergence with the future concord of contraction and convergence, is, quite literally, like an Amen or perfect cadence in music.

In essence musicians have to do two things: one, especially if you are a string player, is to play in-tune; the other, especially if you are playing with others in an orchestra, is to play in-time.

Doing this is what the churches once called just or perfect time management. The hertz (or frequency) value of pitch is embedded in the perfection of the given intervals of the overtone series and this is incontestable and irreducible.

For example, an orchestra tunes today to 'A' 440 cycles a second and a precise doubling of that is 'A' 880 cycles, that gives the perfect octave above A 440. These are the tonic values, between which lies the also perfect mid-division value of 660 cycles, which gives the perfect fifth value at the dominant note 'E'. The cadential progression from the dominant to the tonic is, in music, literally the 'perfect unity' of an 'Amen' cadence.

All life is captive to this consonance, whether it is self-aware (cognitively resonant) or not. It is the fundamental reference signal of concord, against which all degrees of deviation into the even more complex intervals of discord are measurable. In religious language it is logos; self-referentially cognitive and perfect. It is indestructible, and therefore, true. It is the source of all proportionality, unavoidable and free.

This numeraire resonates at the heart of C&C. It attracts a globally-divided whole, back through equity in diversity cadentially to the unity we need to experience to survive climate change.

Of course, there are ideological reactions to this, but they simply reinforce what C&C is - a logical proposition. If there is something better, we had better find it soon.

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