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Sending me back to think again [1]

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Jim Manzi [3] has managed to get me to at least rethink one of my long held beliefs about climate chaange and what we should do about it. Rethink still, not quite change my mind.

My basic position has always been that climate change is indeed happening and that we now need to look at the economics of the situation: it's not, as many insist, either an immediate or catastrophic problem, rather a low level and chronic one. Thus I reject the Gore and other catastrophists (including the Stern Review) thoughts that we need swinging carbon taxes (or cap and trade agreements) now: I'm rather more inclined to the Nordhaus view that low carbon taxes now, with a road map for their gradual rise over the decades, will provide the incentives for the necessary changes. Such taxation being, of course, revenue neutral, so that other taxes should fall as they are imposed. One thing that rather underlies my complacency about such taxation is that on things like air travel and oil we already have the necessary levels of green taxation recommended: not just by Nordhaus, but by Stern. So we've already done what we needed to do, we just need to wait the time that such changes in relative prices will take to influence behaviour as the stock of cars, heating systems and the like is replaced.

I'm also aware of the Hayek point: that we can't actually know what, exactly, the correct level of such taxation should be, but again, low and gradually rising taxation doesn't worry me all that much, not over decades.

However, Manzi goes further and makes me think that quite possibly I'm wrong in all of the above. That is, that the political system is so disfunctional, so appallingly corrupted by special interest pleading, that it will never be possible to roll out such carbon taxation across the economy without the price soaring above any possible benefits. If he's right, and he is indeed very convincing, then that leaves only one path we can possibly logically follow.

Technological development and whatever adaptation we need to do to fill in the gaps. I can't say that that worries me either really: my day job is on the fringes of said technological development and the one thing we really do know about human beings is that we adapt pretty well.

All of that said, I do urge you to read Manzi's post [3]. Perhaps this is another of these problems which is simply too important to be left to politics?

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