

Preface

Many people regard climate change as an impending problem. I do not. Given the need to take immediate and drastic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the threat posed by climate change has already reached a crisis point. However, a successful resolution to the crisis will require more than an effective emissions protocol. Unless the world's high-income nations begin the transition to a qualitatively improving steady-state economy, and low-income nations follow suit at some stage over the next 20–40 years, trying to avoid catastrophic climate change will be akin to putting a square peg in a round hole. To put it another way, if the world continues its predilection with continuous GDP growth, a well-designed emissions protocol will be as useless as the paper it is written on.

This book sets out why we must abandon the goal of continuous growth; how we can do so in a way that improves human well-being; what constitutes a safe atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases; and what type of emissions protocol and emissions-trading framework is likely to achieve a desirable climate change outcome as well as promote the broader goal of sustainable development.

During the preparation of this book, a number of crucial United Nations climate change conferences were convened, including the highly publicised Copenhagen meeting in 2009. The initial aim of the Copenhagen conference was to establish a legally binding emissions protocol to take effect at the end of the first Kyoto commitment period in 2012. Sadly, no such accord emerged. At the 2012 meeting in Doha, an agreement was reached to further extend the Kyoto Protocol and to develop a new emissions protocol in Paris by 2015 to take effect in 2021. As promising as this sounds, deep emissions cuts must begin in 2016 if the rise in average global temperatures is to be restricted to 2 °C above pre-industrial levels. Thus, even if a strict new protocol is established, more must be done to kick-start the reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions during the 2016–2020 period.

Unfortunately, as I write this Preface, there is little sign that a new emissions protocol will achieve the emissions cuts necessary to prevent dangerous if not catastrophic climate change. Nor, given the need to quell GDP growth to realise greenhouse gas emissions targets, does an international agreement look

like surfacing to deal adequately with population growth, biodiversity loss, and the rising rate of natural resource use—a sad reality attested by the abject failure of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20).

With the Paris conference fast approaching and the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report having reconfirmed humankind's contribution to global warming, the world's leaders must take the 'bull by the horns' and put long-term concerns ahead of short-term political interests. Should they fail to do so, humanity not only faces a climatically tempestuous future, but one where human well-being, freedom in the liberal democratic tradition, and international peace will be gravely jeopardised.

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