

The challenge of mitigation

Professor Simon Caney

Professor in Political Theory,
University of Oxford

Ethics, The Challenge of Mitigation, and the Future of Climate Research

16th May 2014

Professor Simon Caney
Department of Politics and International
Relations
University of Oxford

The Structure

I: Ethics and Climate Change

II: Ethics in AR5

III: Future Directions

I: Ethics and Climate Change

The role of ethics ... to guide

(1) What is “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, Article 2)

(2) What is a just response to risk and uncertainty? [“Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such measures” (UNFCCC, Article 3.3)]

(3) What is a just distribution of the burdens of mitigation and adaptation? “The Parties should protect the climate system ... on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.” (UNFCCC, Article 3.1)

(4) What is a just distribution of rights to emit greenhouse gases? Equal per capita view/contraction and convergence; greenhouse development rights; grandfathering.

(5) The ethical relevance of past emissions to (a) equitable burden sharing and (b) the just distribution of emission rights.

(6) What obligations does the current generation have to future generations both (a) in terms of preventing dangerous climate change and (b) distributing costs of mitigation and adaptation (“The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity” (UNFCCC Article 3.1)

(7) What moral constraints are there on mitigation policies (biofuels, nuclear, hydroelectric, hydraulic fracturing) or geoengineering (SRM or CDR)?

(8) Procedural Justice: Who has the right to be included in the decision making process (mitigation, adaptation)?

II: Ethics in AR5

Major Innovation

Ethics plays a key role in a IPCC Assessment Report for first time and moral and political philosophers included

Aim:

to outline some core concepts, justice, value, good (*conceptual* analysis)

to represent debates about nature of justice, equity and well-being (*normative* analysis)

Content of Chapter III

Justice, equity and responsibility

- Responsibility for burden sharing
- Intergenerational justice
- Historical responsibility and distributive justice
- Intra-generational distributive justice:
- compensatory justice and historical responsibility
- ethics of geoengineering
- nature of well-being
- nonhuman values

Findings (chapter 3)

Executive Summary

“Duties to pay for some climate damages can be grounded in compensatory justice and distributive justice” (p.5)

“principles of compensatory justice will apply to only some of the harmful emissions [3.3.5]” (p.5)

“Duties to pay for climate damages can, however, also be grounded in distributive justice [3.3.4, 3.3.5]”. (p.6)

Comments: Relation to SPM

Summary for Policy Makers:

“Issues of equity, justice, and fairness arise with respect to mitigation and adaptation.” (p.4)

“Sustainable development and equity provide a basis for assessing climate policies and highlight the need for addressing the risks of climate change.” (p.4)

“Many areas of climate policy-making involve value judgements and ethical considerations. “ (p.4)

III: Future Directions

#1. More systematic integration of ethical principles into analysis of mitigation; more on distributive impacts of mitigation policies; more on comprehensive normative framework for comparing mitigation options that goes beyond monetary impacts and enables comparisons and trade-offs.

#2. Developing accounts of energy justice that does not focus simply on rights to emit, but focuses instead on serving persons' capabilities (Sen)

#3. more on non-Western ethical perspectives for analysing climate change (Given it is a global problem, should not ethical analysis be informed by analysis of all ethical traditions?)

#4. Institutional design and the politics of climate change

(a) combining effectiveness with procedural justice

(b) incentivising longterm policymaking (courts, ombudsman, committee for the future, longterm performance indicators, UN High Commissioner for Future Generations)

Thank you!

Professor Simon Caney

Co-Director of *Human Rights for Future Generations*, Oxford
Martin School, University of Oxford.

Director of *Centre for the Study of Social Justice*, University
of Oxford.



Human
Rights FOR FUTURE
GENERATIONS