

# Climate change and international ethics<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Climate change is a complex collective action problem on a global and intergenerational scale. All sorts of otherwise unproblematic activities become morally questionable due to their contribution to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. All sorts of pre-existing vulnerabilities increase the danger that changes in climatic patterns result in humanitarian catastrophes.

Climate change thus poses challenges for normative theory as such. There are ethical questions such as: How to balance the right to development and poverty reduction with our duties to reduce greenhouse gases for the sake of future generations? There are conceptual questions like: How are we to understand normatively significant responsibility in the context of complex collective action problems? There are questions relating to ethical guidelines in circumstances of risk and uncertainty. Finally, there is the question of how to motivate people to do the right thing where there is so much distance in time and space between those incurring the costs of combatting climate change and those most benefitting from preventing it. This links to policy questions as to what kind of political institutions are realistic, legitimate, and efficient in providing climate protections.

There are particular challenges which require us to reassess our approaches to ethics in international relations: How are we to deal with the situation that those who hold the most power and have the greatest capacities for realising an effective global climate policy have the least incentives to do so? How are we to assess the relevant normative concerns when they involve issues more complex than those enshrined in the minimal ethical consensus of formal human rights? In particular, what kind of normative framework is suitable to evaluate across cultural differences issues as distinct as raising energy prices, job losses, increased risks relating to extreme weather events, threats to cultural traditions (e.g. Inuit relying on a particular quality of snow and Americans used to going for a Sunday drive in a powerful car), and the loss of statehood for low lying Small Island States doomed by raising sea levels?

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This chapter will not attempt to answer any of these questions. Instead it will analyse the different strands of these interconnected questions and present an overview of the current approaches. To do so, the first section briefly presents the current understanding of climate science that forms the background of the debate and explains which features are deemed as normatively significant. The second section identifies the different (yet interconnected) angles of debates on justice in the context of climate change. The third section takes a look at the different theories of justice most prominent in influencing the current debates and their shortcomings. The fourth section hones in on the particular role of international relations in the latest approaches to climate justice focusing on the need for discursive and relational approaches to justice. The final section concludes this chapter highlighting the importance of continued commitment to the values underlying human rights in the context of demands for mutual recognition and a better understanding of the global public sphere.

## Understanding climate change and its normatively significant features

Ethics concerns what we ought to do and presents principles and theories to make sense of right and wrong, to analyse norms and values, and to evaluate justifications for our judgements about justice. What we ought to do depends to some degree on the situation we find ourselves in. Debates on climate justice developed in line with changing assumptions about climate science on the one and the political sphere on the other hand. Early debates (e.g. Agarwal and Narain, 1991, Shue, 1992, Shue, 1993) focused primarily on burden-sharing. There was clear evidence that emissions need to be reduced to prevent global warming and the main question was how to do so in a fair way. Assumptions about the nature of climate change, differences in contributions, and different vulnerabilities influenced debates about what justice requires. Particular attention was given to the idea of “common but differentiated responsibilities” expressed in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration at the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992. In the Fifth IPCC Assessment Report (AR5)<sup>2</sup> a more urgent picture of the scientific situation emerged. It made clear how considerably and how rapidly emissions need to be reduced to prevent dangerous climate change. As a result, the focus of the debate shifted. Caney, 2014 and Shue, 2014a emphasise that our focus must now be on harm prevention. Fairness is still important, but – given the urgent need for action – for the moment it is less important that everyone contributes their fair share of efforts as long as sufficient efforts are ensured to prevent dangerous climate change. This focus draws attention to questions of political

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<sup>2</sup> The UN’s International Panel on Climate Change conducts regular overviews of the science on climatic changes (Working Group 1), its environmental, social, and economic implications (Working Group 2), and the opportunities of mitigation (Working Group 3). These reports are available from: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>.

feasibility in international relations. These more political background assumptions provide a second set of concerns that shape the debates on what we ought to do about climate change.

With regard to climate science and the studies about the likely impact of different emission trajectories, the most reliable source of information is still the AR5 report as the next evaluation of all the relevant research (AR6) will not be finalised until 2022. In its Summary for Policy Makers (IPCC, 2014), the AR5 highlights a number of issues that are of normative significance and thus influence the relevant debates of justice. The first message to policy makers is that climate change is real and caused by human activities that increase the amount of greenhouse gases (GHG) accumulating in the atmosphere (SPM 1). Normatively, this raises the question of differentiated responsibility for climate change as different parties emit different amounts of GHGs (past, present, and/or accumulative).<sup>3</sup> The second message (SPM 2) emphasises that these changes increase the likelihood of “severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems.” (IPCC, 2014, 8) There is an implicit assumption, that we ought not expose future generations to these risks. In the more detailed evaluation it is also highlighted that these risks are “unevenly distributed and are generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities” (IPCC, 2014, 13). This raises further questions of fairness. SPM 2 highlights furthermore, that “[l]imiting climate change would require substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.” (IPCC, 2014, 8) Together with the explicit warning about irreversibility and abrupt changes, this explains the urgency that prompted the likes of Caney and Shue to propose a change of focus from burden sharing to harm prevention in debates on climate justice. The third key message for policy makers (SPM 3) notes that managing the adverse effects of climate change must involve adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development. It highlights that different possible pathways involve different trade-offs in terms of the allocation of risks and burdens to different groups/generations. SPM 3 explicitly notes that the relevant policy decisions involve questions of equity, justice and fairness (IPCC, 2014, 17). The final message to policy makers highlights the need for comprehensive changes to our current way of life as individual adaptation and mitigations options will not be enough on their own. It explicitly includes “suitable governance structures” among the conditions necessary for a successful implementation of climate protection efforts that are compatible with sustainable development and poverty reduction (IPCC, 2014, 31). As we will see below these observations all link up with the various angles of climate justice debates.

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<sup>3</sup> Technically, it would be better to speak of contributions as decreasing carbon sinks (e.g. though deforestation) is as harmful as actively emitting. For ease of writing I use emitting and contributing interchangeably in this chapter.

There is a further relevant aspect that runs through all IPCC assessments: climate change and its implications involve a lot of uncertainty. The reports evaluate the available evidence (limited, medium, or robust), the agreement among different studies (low, medium, high), overall levels of confidence in the claims (very low, low, medium, high and very high), likelihood of events (from virtually certain to extremely unlikely), etc. (IPCC, 2014, 2, Fn. 1) These qualifications are necessary, on the one hand, because of the complexity of the climatic system and the fact that not all the relevant interactions are fully understood yet. On the other hand, especially with regard to assessing how climatic changes impact on human welfare, much depends on how people shape their institutions, economies, and living conditions between now and the time when the environmental changes occur. In this respect the ethics of climate change falls under the scope of the ethics of risk: Which risks may we impose on others? Which ought to be avoided? At what cost?

## Different dimensions of climate justice

**The ethics of risk.** The question about how to evaluate what we ought to do in circumstances where we have an incomplete understanding of the consequences and their likelihood challenge the foundations of moral reasoning. This challenge is obviously bigger for consequentialist approaches to ethics which define the morality of an action in terms of their outcomes. However, it is also a challenge for deontological and contractarian approaches as almost all ethical evaluations factor in consequences in some way. To act, e.g. according to Kant's categorical imperative, we need to assess what the world would look like if the axiom of our action were to become a universal law. Rights based theories furthermore must assess to what extend imposing the possibility of a rights violation is and is not like directly violating the right in question.<sup>4</sup> In the context of climate justice, people often refer to the precautionary principle implying that we ought to act risk-averse were serious moral hazards are a possibility and that we, furthermore, ought to take precautions against any such threats emerging.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there remain many open questions as to how to systematically assess the relevant thresholds of sufficient knowledge, risk, etc. based on moral theories.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Nozick, 1974, 7.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Jensen, 2002, Manson, 2002, and Gardiner, 2006a.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview, see Hansson, 2014. These questions come up with particular urgency in debates on climate engineering. See e.g. Heyward, 2014, Shue, 2017, and Wong, 2016.

**Intergenerational justice.** The challenge of moral reasoning under conditions of uncertainty is only one of the problems of intergenerational justice. Other important questions concern the lack of reciprocity, the power that current generations have over future generation, and the metaphysical question in what sense future people might be said to be harmed or to have rights. The key question is what do we owe to future generations? And what is the foundation of these duties? A minimalist common-sense approach is enough to get the idea of climate duties of the ground: We can assume that there will be people in the future who share at least some of the fundamental interests that are to be protected by human rights and that acting in a way that is likely to result in circumstances where these interests cannot be met is – in that sense – wrong. A world characterized by dangerous climate change will most likely put human rights at serious risk, and thus ought to be avoided. However, as soon as we go beyond minimalist approaches to intergenerational justice, further questions arise: Locke, for example, demands that we leave as much and as good of natural resources but it is not clear what does that actually mean. Modern approaches spelling out whether, what, and how much of it, we ought to save and/or provide for future generations disagree on each of these questions as well as on the foundations of any duties we might have.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, metaethical concerns about the status of future people intrude. These debates, most famously those around the so-called Non-Identity-Problem often given philosophical debates on climate justice a bad name for being too abstract and too removed from reality to be in any way helpful for helping to promote the urgent climate action needed.<sup>8</sup>

**Global distributive justice.** As mentioned before, initially the climate justice debate focused mostly on the challenge of allocating the costs involved in addressing climate change in a fair way. While there are differences in weighing and emphasis, three criteria are usually seen as relevant in deciding who should do something about climate change and how much this is their responsibility:

1. the ability to do something about the problem,

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview, see Meyer, 2016, for detailed discussions, see e.g. Gosseries and Meyer, 2009 and McKinnon, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> The NIP refers to a concern Parfit raised with regard to person affecting ethics. If someone's existence depended on actions the outcome of which she is now considered to be harmed by, can we really say she was harmed by these actions? If we understand harming as making someone worse off than they would otherwise be, someone with a minimally decent life cannot be seen as harmed by an event without which she would not even have been conceived and born as the unique individual she is. Given the pervasive effects of carbon intensive technologies and the intergenerational character of climate change, this is seen as a concern for climate justice and there are numerous approaches to address the concern. See Parfit, 1984 for the initial debate, Roberts, 2015 for a general overview. See e.g. Meyer, 2003, Moellendorf, 2014, and Page, 2006 for some of the key discussions in the context of climate change.

2. the degree of responsibility for causing/contributing to the problem, and
3. the degree to which one benefits from (current and past) emissions generating activities.

The ability to do something about mitigating climate change, engaging in adaptation, and/or assisting those who are most vulnerable to climate change induced problems is of normative significance for nearly all writers on the issue. It might just be used to highlight that those without or with only very little capacity to actively engage in climate policies cannot be held to extensive duties in this respect. This is the intuition underlying claims that developing countries are entitled to keep on developing as far as this is necessary to eradicate severe poverty and ensuring the opportunities for a decent life for their populations. A key concern for many climate justice theorists is that this issue cannot be discussed without regard to wider issues of global justice. One intuition here is that the wealthy ought to alleviate the plight of the poor to some extent simply because they can. The ability to pay principle (APP) is thus often also used to explain why rich nations are seen as having greater duties than other countries to engage with climate policy.

However, this claim is often also (or alternatively) supported with reference to the responsibility for contributing to the problem that many rich countries have given their high levels of GHG-emissions (past and present). The basic idea “you break it, you pay for it” has a lot intuitive pull and gave rise to the so-called polluter pays or contributor pays principle (PPP or CPP). There are however, a number of reasons why high levels of GHG-emissions do not always directly link to moral responsibility, blameworthiness, and/or liability for climate damages. This has partly to do with the difficulties of pinning down the causal relationship between particular emissions and specific damages caused by climate change. Moving from duties to compensate to a greater share in duties to mitigate does not make things that much easier either. The focus on responsibility also links to questions as to who the relevant units are – individuals, states, corporations... – and to what extent they can be seen as causing emissions in a manner that satisfies the criteria for attributing morally significant responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

A third principle relevant in the context of distributing the duties relating to climate justice attaches to the benefits resulting from GHG-emissions: the beneficiary pays principle (BPP). The idea is that difficult questions of responsibility can be avoided by identifying those who benefit from carbon intensive activities and asking them to pass on some of these profits to those who suffered from the

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. the discussions in Bell, 2011, Caney, 2005a, Duus-Otterström, 2013, Gosseries, 2004, Jamieson, 2010, Meyer and Roser, 2010, Neumayer, 2000, Page, 1999, Schinkel, 2011, Vanderheiden, 2008, and Zellentin, 2014.

emissions that enabled these benefits. Some link this to theories on unjust enrichment, others to the idea of internalising the costs of relying on carbon intensive industries.<sup>10</sup>

Many accounts of climate justice seek to find ways of how to best combine these three concerns in hybrid accounts that are theoretically convincing and practically feasible.

A further factor considered in the context of these distributive questions, is the background situation: as mentioned by IPCC, 2014, p. 13, different states and people within states are vulnerable to climate change to different degrees. Many of these vulnerabilities have less to do with natural and geographical factors but rather are the result of social and economic disadvantages. Many climate ethicists point out that some of these disadvantages and thus additional vulnerabilities are at least partly the result of historical injustices like e.g. colonialism or current injustices in the global economic order. Shue speaks of “compounding injustices” in this context and Caney provides a more general argument why questions of climate justice cannot be meaningfully discussed without reference to a wider theory of global justice.<sup>11</sup>

**Rectificatory justice.** Given the relevance of historical injustices, but also in line of the idea that some agents hold more responsibility for the problem of climate change, questions of rectificatory justice arise. As mentioned before, these questions are particularly difficult in this context for several reasons. Firstly, most rectificatory theories require a fairly uncontested causal link between the acts of particular agents and the harm in question. The complexity of the climatic system makes such direct causal chains impossible. Furthermore, given the considerable time delay between emission intensive activities and harms resulting from climatic changes caused by them, many of the harms involved will not come to pass in the lifetime of the emitters. Thirdly, rectificatory duties are usually seen to require that the agents acted wrongful in some manner. Ill intend is one factor here, but negligence or recklessness can also give raise to rectificatory duties. The difficulty with regard to climate change is to identify the relevant wrong. One way is to distinguish between permissible subsistence emissions and problematic luxury emissions. However, given that both have the same impact this is somewhat artificial and the question as to where to draw the line is difficult.<sup>12</sup> Once more a wider theory of global distributive justice must be presupposed. Finally, the losses caused by climatic change often are difficult to rectify. Rectification – where it goes beyond easy cases like the

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<sup>10</sup> Key texts in this debate are e.g. Butt, 2014, Caney, 2005b, Goodin, 2013, and Page, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See Shue, 1992 reprinted as Shue, 2014b, chapter 1 as well as Caney, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> The distinction is introduced in Agarwal and Narain, 1991 and Shue, 1993. For an account of the difficulties involved in determining the moral status of emissions by individuals, see e.g. Meyer and Sanklecha, 2011.

restitution of stolen property within a couple of days – is always complex.<sup>13</sup> There are different positions as to what the appropriate aim of rectification should be (e.g. restoring the status ex ante versus making the victims whole) and different accounts about how to best achieve this (often what seems required is compensation plus some sort of apology).<sup>14</sup> The harmful consequences of climate change include threats to people's food security, their health etc. which can be ameliorated or prevented by pre-emptive protection efforts. However, other consequences no longer be prevented and cannot be offset by money – how could a payment compensate for the loss of cultural traditions (e.g. in case of the Inuit) or the loss of national sovereignty (e.g. for disappearing Small Island States)?

**Non-ideal theory.** Given that the nature, foundation, and content of some relevant duties concerning climate change remain severely contested, it is not unsurprising that there is widespread reluctance to do something about climate change. However, some relevant duties are clear enough (e.g. engaging in mitigation that limits the problem as well as adaptation that softens the harmful consequences). So are the moral hazards involved in further delays. The longer we wait, the more painful and tragic the choices between development, mitigation, and adaptation will become.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, there is considerable reluctance on the political level to engage with effective climate policies. Gardiner, 2006b suggests three reasons for our failure to be motivated by our moral duties with regard to climate change: a) the remaining doubts regarding the complex interaction of causes and effects, b) the temporal delay and/or geographical distance between any burdensome climate action and the expected benefits, and c) the complex interconnected character and global scope of the problem that makes it all too easy to see others as more responsible and/or to worry whether one's efforts might not be undermined by the actions of others. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that there is real danger that mitigation and adaptation efforts might be too little and/or too late. This raises a host of questions often summarised under the title of non-ideal theory: What are our duties in circumstances where we know that some relevant duty-bearers will not do their duty? Is there a duty to pick up the slack? Or does this lead to a reduction of our duties to ensure that we are not even further disadvantaged in comparison to the free-riders? Given the urgent need for effective climate justice, the focus is often on what kinds of institutional arrangements might be sufficiently feasible, legitimate and effective even if they fall short of the ideal. This is a field where the complex

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g. Butt, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Hill, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Shue, 2016b, Shue, 2016a, and Shue, 2017 for urgent appeals highlighting the danger that we will leave future generations in a desperate situation.



interplay between substantive justice and procedural justice plays out and compromises are deemed justifiable that under different circumstances would rightly be criticised as unjust.<sup>16</sup>

**Secondary injustices.** While most of climate justice seems to be focused on global relationships, it is important not to lose sight of implications in the domestic spheres. Debates often focus on the fairness between the rich industrialised states of the global North and the developing states of the global South. However, there are large inequalities within most states. There are very rich people in the South whose lifestyle contributes more to the problem on an individual level than that of many poor people in the North. There are many extremely vulnerable people in the North that are vulnerable not only to climatic changes but also – or alternatively – to the implications of mitigation efforts. Setting a fair price on GHG intensive activities, for example, could – without appropriate political counter efforts – easily lead to energy poverty in the North.<sup>17</sup>

## Different approaches to climate justice

What is noteworthy about the political theory/moral philosophy literature on climate justice is that the proposals predominantly come from a broadly liberal perspective heavily shaped by post Rawlsian analytical philosophy. It is only very recently that the debate has been challenged with regard to its approach to how it theorises political morality. In the past, the critique often centred on the fact that the demands of justice identified by political theorists are unrealistic given the current political climate. In the following I briefly sketch the moral underpinnings of the predominant approach and two alternative approaches.

Eriksen, 2016 distinguishes between three approaches to global justice a) justice as impartiality, b) justice as non-domination, and c) justice as mutual recognition.<sup>18</sup> The difference between these approaches is not so much the content and/or the most foundational value commitments as the core political values of liberty, equality, and community all are relevant in some form for each of the approaches. Rather, the main differences lie in, on the one hand, in the precise interpretation and

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive collection of different views on non-ideal theory in the context of climate change, see Heyward and Roser, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> For a systematic debate on such secondary injustices, see e.g. Heyward and Page, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> This trias is similar to that identified by Boran, forthcoming, focusing on a) liberal approaches, b) civic republicanism, and c) Habermasian focuses. However, as we shall see there are important differences in the understanding of the relevant features of republicanism. There also are both similarities and differences between Eriksen's conception of justice as mutual recognition and Boran's ideals about Habermas and the public sphere.

relative weighing of these values relevant, and on the other hand, in the assumptions made about what kind of institutional framework might best serve to realise these ideals.<sup>19</sup>

**Justice as impartiality.** This approach, which predominates the climate justice debates in political theory, assumes that fundamental values are best protected through a framework of universal human rights that are guaranteed through impartial international institutions. It is often linked to liberalism but it is important to note the huge diversity within this family of theories. It includes, for example, utilitarians, deontologists, and contractarians who disagree deeply about the nature of morality. It includes cosmopolitans as well as liberal nationalists who disagree about normative significance of borders. Finally, it includes very different moral demands based on sufficitarian, egalitarian, libertarian and many other approaches to justice. What unites all these competing positions are a set of very basic shared commitments and assumptions: a) individuals are the ultimate unit of moral concern, b) individual autonomy is of great value,<sup>20</sup> c) equality matters, d) impartiality is a cornerstone of justice, and e) justice is best realised through universal rights. The commitment to equality here refers to an equal standing within the rule of law. Again, there are huge differences between different positions within this broad school depending on how rich or thin the commitments to political, economic, social, and/or cultural rights are deemed. Nonetheless, these shared commitments mean that the focus of the climate justice debate influenced by this family of approaches is united in trying to identify a set of rules and regulations that clearly identify everyone's rights and duties based on impartial principles. Most contributions furthermore share the assumption that strong international institutions are necessary to achieve climate justice.

**Justice as non-domination.** One set of critiques of the broadly liberal mainstream approach to global justice comes from neo-republicans who argue that the focus on rights and legal institutions preferred by many liberals does not leave enough room for democratic self-determination.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, and relatedly, it does not address the question of power and how patterns of

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<sup>19</sup> See Zellentin, 2018 for a more detailed analysis.

<sup>20</sup> This pens out differently in different approaches under the general approach of justice as impartiality. It can and often does link to liberal demands concerning individual freedom. It also can and often does lead to demands about respect for diversity and/or the requirement to provide justifications and/or seek the consent of the governed etc.

<sup>21</sup> Like liberalism, neo-republicanism includes a family of ideas where individual approaches might differ quite profoundly. Eriksen, 2016's interpretation is predominantly shaped by Pettit, 2010. My interpretation in Zellentin, 2018 is strongly influenced by Laborde and Ronzoni, 2016. While all these accounts of neo-republicanism strongly emphasise non-domination, Boran, forthcoming focuses on the communitarian elements of republican traditions which emphasise the self-determination of particular communities.

domination distort the entire process of legal protection from the beginnings in legislature (who gets to decide? who gets to set the agenda? etc.) to the legal practice (who has the means to bring a case to court? who can afford the better lawyers etc.) These are worries on the national level, which must be even more pronounced on the international level given the huge inequalities of power raging here. The positions of different parties in international climate policy negotiations are shaped by very different degrees of economic (and military) power on the one hand and very different vulnerabilities in terms of pre-existing poverty but also adaptation capacities, economic and/or political dependencies etc. Given these circumstances, we should worry about how much influence patterns of domination might have. The commitment to equality in this tradition differs in two respects from the one shaping justice as impartiality. First, and most importantly, it focuses on the equal standing of different agents in terms of power relationships: no agent should be in a position where they find themselves vulnerable to arbitrary power.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, while many of the participants within this debate share the view that individuals are the ultimate unit of moral concern, this tradition allows to consider communities and polities to be agents of normative significance in their own right. This allows to debate their equal standing as a matter of justice independent of its instrumental value to the interests of individuals within these polities.

**Justice as mutual recognition.** Eriksen, 2016's third approach to justice offers a more radical critique: for both justice as impartiality and justice as non-domination the normative evaluations happen from an impartial outsider perspective. Both traditions acknowledge that in real life all sorts of conscious and unconscious biases are liable to distort the real picture of what people's rights should be and what kinds of domination they might be vulnerable to, but there nonetheless remains the conviction that an objective perspective is in principle possible. The family of approaches that Erikson summarises under justice as mutual recognition challenges this idea and argues that at the very best we can develop a shared perspective through appropriately open discourse. The commitment to equality here shifts from an observer to an agent-centric perspective. The starting point is seeing each other as entitled to participate in the discussion about what the normative significant features of a situation might be, what kind of norms might be appropriate, and even what kind of reasons we should be offering to each other. The claim is, that given all the historical evidence of cultural imperialism and more or less conscious biases we cannot ever assume that our reasoning is in any way objective. In the context of climate justice this challenge is relevant, for

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<sup>22</sup> For classic accounts of non-domination in the domestic sphere, see e.g. Pettit, 1999, for non-domination in the international sphere, see Laborde and Ronzoni, 2016.

example, in the context of indigenous communities that value their relationship to nature in a profound way which cannot fully be captured by the human rights framework that is currently deemed the standard reference point for global ethics.<sup>23</sup>

## Climate justice and international relations

Boran offers yet another angle of critique of both liberal approaches (justice as impartiality) and neo-republican approaches (justice as non-domination): she criticises that these philosophical approaches operate on an incorrect understanding of international relations. Her critique is linked to justice as mutual recognition in that she to some extent relies on some of the same critical theory literature. However, it comes from a completely different angle. As mentioned, ethics is about deciding what we ought to do in a given situation. Where we misunderstand the situation, we are unlikely to correctly determine what it is that we ought to do. Boran's main critique is that mainstream political theory operates on the basis of a mistaken view of international relations.<sup>24</sup> It uncritically assumes a statist view of the world. This not only refers to republicans and liberal nationalists who consider political communities as normatively significant agents. Even cosmopolitans, who do not contribute much moral significance to national borders, rely on states and state institutions to develop, realise, and protect the international legal protections they consider as essential for guaranteeing basic rights.<sup>25</sup> The reality of climate negotiations and climate politics, however, involves a great number of very important non-state actors which are completely omitted from mainstream debates on climate justice in political theory. Modern approaches in political studies and international relations offer powerful challenges to the neo-realist view of the international sphere which seems to inform the empirical assumptions on which most political theorists operate. According to Boran more nuanced understandings of the international arena generally and the global public sphere within which climate policy is debated and negotiated in particular are necessary to develop appropriate normative guidance on what to do in this arena.

Boran's second key critique is that current approaches to justice (be they liberal or neo-republican) cannot hope to operate well in the complex sphere of multi-layered, multi-agent, interconnected, and interdependent political action of the modern globalised world.<sup>26</sup> It is this route that leads her

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Zellentin, 2018, 13ff.

<sup>24</sup> See Boran, forthcoming, chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Shue, 1996 on the importance of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling basic human rights across the globe. The tension between the universal demands of human rights and the reliance on states to actually guarantee these rights, is noted and debated within mainstream political theory, e.g. with regard to the so-called possession and sovereignty paradoxes. See e.g. Woods, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> See Boran, forthcoming, chapters 4 and 5.

towards the same literature that motivates Eriksen's justice as mutual recognition. In particular, she argues that Habermas's thoughts on structural transformation might offer a better way to address the complex and interconnected normative issues laid out above than the axiomatic normative approach predominant in current political philosophy.<sup>27</sup> She furthermore emphasises relational approaches to justice such as those discussed by e.g. Fraser and Honneth, 2003, Fraser, 2005 and Forst, 2011. The core idea, which also resonates in the debate on justice as mutual recognition, is that in the view of an extremely complex problem (like climate change) and an extremely complex and interconnected world, we cannot hope to spell out in abstraction who owes what to whom and why. Rather, to have any hope of generating the kinds of changes necessary to prevent climatic changes from turning into humanitarian catastrophes we need to focus on how we relate to each other and how we create the kinds of societies that can hope to address these challenges. Merely creating an appropriate legal framework is not enough, what is needed is real societal change. This is the more so because – as non-ideal theorists rightly notice – there currently is insufficient political support for establishing efficient international legal institutions.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to some of key issues, angles, and challenges of climate justice and identified some of the most relevant ethical concerns. It briefly introduced the theoretical framework that informs most of climate justice literature in moral philosophy and political theory – justice as impartiality – and identified three angles of critique. Each of these approaches raises valid concerns. As justice as non-domination highlights: when discussing ethics in international relations we need to take into account the subtle influences of power that any legal system can only hope to tame but never to fully extinguish. As justice as mutual recognition notes: we need to be much more aware of the historical contingency of our moral commitments and much more sensitive to the viewpoints of those who have historically been excluded from or neglected in discourses on (global) ethics. Finally, as Boran shows, if we hope to provide ethical theories that are in any form action guiding, we must collaborate with international relations scholars to first develop the best possible understanding of the situation. While it might be tempting to dismiss much of the current climate justice literature in view of such fundamental critiques, this would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. The normative analysis of the different issues, angles, and challenges presented in the first part is based on analytic political philosophy. While these analyses and theories might not show

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<sup>27</sup> See Habermas, 1989 for the initial idea and Boran, forthcoming, chapter 4 for the application on the issue of climate justice.

the full picture, they show an important part of the picture. Yes, we need a clear picture of the empirical situation, but we also need a clear picture of the normative sphere of the web of interconnected and interdependent moral demands linked to climate change. Furthermore, while it is absolutely required to open up discourses about normative ethics and while axiomatic reasoning is not the only valid way to contemplate these issues, it is one way that has historical and contemporary relevance and helps us to better understand why we believe what we believe when we enter in conversations with those who disagree. Finally, while it is clear that an appropriate system of international rules and regulations cannot be the sole focus of our thoughts about what we ought to do about climate change, it is one very important part. And while rights never are the entirety of morality, individual rights esp. in the form of basic human rights, are essential backstops for protecting vulnerable individuals. The key challenge for ethics in international relation is to integrate the different insights in a way that is complex enough to do justice to the complexity of the issues and clear enough to offer meaningful action guidance.

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