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Climate justice

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effects on future generations. The perfect moral storm created by climate change makes it easy for the current generation to go on behaving in a manner that will damage future generations without having to feel bad about it.

Instrumental solutions to the climate problem

Many climate scientists agree that in order to stop climate change, governments must take drastic collective action as soon as possible. At the same time, economists emphasize that such measures would bring high costs and that over-ambitious measures would unnecessarily damage the economies of individual countries. Citizens and governments are dependent on each other to solve the climate problem. But acting in the collective interest by reducing our dependency on fossil fuels also brings high costs, such as the costs involved in investing in new climate-neutral technologies and the income that a country might forgo if the production and export of goods declines. These high costs of cooperation make it tempting for individual countries to not cooperate and to let the problem be solved by other countries.

When the climate problem is seen as a social dilemma, then the logical solution is to arrive at an even distribution of the costs through international treaties. One example of this is the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty signed by a large number of industrialized countries in which the rights to emit greenhouse gases and the obligations to reduce emissions are

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Emissions, wastes, and resource depletion all pose threats to living organisms, including human beings. Because environmental risks do not necessarily materialize at the place where they originate from, the risks and benefits associated with environmental impact are not equally distributed.

On a local scale, those living in high-poverty and ethnic minority groups are the ones often suffering most from these environmental risks. They live closest to smoke emitting factories, polluting highways or waste disposals. These groups are often disadvantaged on several other aspects as well, like having poor labour conditions, low levels of education, and low levels of political participation.

On a global scale, the unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits associated with these risks is equally pressing. The countries that contribute most to climate change are not the ones that suffer the gravest impact. The average per capita CO₂ emission in the US, for example, is about 16.5 ton and that of the European Union is 6.7 ton. But a country like Bangladesh, that is extremely vulnerable to climate change due to the increased risk of flooding, has a per capita CO₂ emission of only 0.4 ton.

The term *climate justice* is often used to refer to these global inequalities and the responsibility to take action to reduce climate change. There are two main arguments that point at affluent countries having a responsibility in this regard. First, as mentioned above, the causal contribution to climate change by affluent countries is much larger than that of poorer countries. Second, affluent countries are generally better able to take action to reduce climate change.
