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Two Cheers for Climate Justice

IN RECENT YEARS, TALK OF CLIMATE JUSTICE HAS REALLY TAKEN OFF. On September 21, 2014, more than 300,000 people participated in the New York City “People’s Climate March,” many rallying around demands for climate justice. High-profile activists such as Bill McKibben, Jane Goodall, and Vandana Shiva participated, and so did United States senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Charles Schumer (D-NY), as well as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. A recent Google search for “climate justice” returned nearly 24 million hits, and a Google Ngram (figure 1) shows how the occurrence of the phrase has increased over the last two decades.

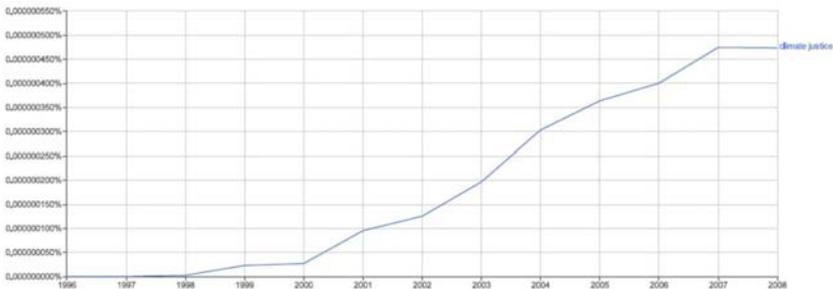


Figure 1. Source: <http://ow.ly/Qoxbr>

There are at least two different ways to view climate justice: as a set of ideas about which there can be competing conceptions (in this respect it is similar to global justice or distributive justice) or as a social movement. In the latter sense, “climate justice” often functions adjectivally as part of the expression “climate justice move-

ment,” a phrase which returns fewer than 4.5 million Google hits and for which Google does not yet generate an Ngram. These different senses of climate justice are reflected in two kinds of people who identify with this notion: climate justice theorists and climate justice activists.

The climate justice movement is important and provides one of the most significant avenues of hope to bring about a meaningful response to climate change. But that is not the sense of “climate justice” that I will mainly be discussing in this paper. My primary concern will be with climate justice in the sense in which it signals a conception of justice in much the same way in which “global justice” or “distributive justice” are used to signal conceptions of justice.

I began writing about global environmental justice in the early 1990s (see, e.g., Jamieson 1994), specifically in relation to climate change in the mid-1990s (see, e.g., Jamieson 2001). As an early advocate of putting concerns about ethics and values at the center of the climate change discussion, I am in a good position to survey the strengths and weaknesses of climate justice as an analytical concept.

KINDS OF JUSTICE

“Global justice” refers to justice that applies to the entire globe. The “globe” in this context is typically used to refer to the subjects of justice that live on this planet. These can be thought of as individual organisms or people, families, clans, nations, and more besides. Sometimes people use the expression “earth justice” to encompass nonhuman residents of the planet that are typically ignored in discussions of global justice—for example, animals, plants, species, the biosphere, the geosphere, or even perhaps the planet itself. “International justice” is a less expansive term than “global justice,” and is typically used to refer to justice between and among states. If we use the terms in this way, my failure to feed hungry people in a faraway country may be a failure of global justice, while the unprovoked American invasion of the same country would be a failure of international justice.

“Distributive justice” is used to refer to a particular respect in which justice may obtain (what I will call a “dimension” of justice): that is, it refers to justice in the distribution of what is of value. On most accounts, distributive justice is only one of several dimensions of justice. A more complete theory of justice is typically thought to include other dimensions of justice instead or as well, such as corrective justice, procedural justice, or justice in acquisition. A theory of distributive justice can be regarded as global in scope (Beitz 1973) or as limited to a particular society (Rawls 1971).

Climate justice is not a single dimension of justice. Rather, it may encompass multiple dimensions, such as distributive justice, procedural justice, and so on. Although global in scope, climate justice cannot be identified with global justice, whose concerns go far beyond climate. Nor can “climate” be seen as signaling a single good with which a theory of justice should be concerned, in the sense in which we may think of health and nutrition as goods that are within the scope of global justice. Climate is implicated in many goods, often in quite indirect ways (Caney 2010). Moreover, while people can be absolutely deprived of health and nutrition, they cannot be absolutely deprived of climate. Everywhere on Earth (thus everyone on Earth) has a climate, and this remains the case even when climate injustices occur.

Perhaps what climate injustice involves is not depriving people of *a* climate, but depriving them of *their* climate. In this respect climate justice may be like bicycle justice in a world in which everyone always has a bicycle. Bicycle injustice consists not in depriving someone of a bicycle, but in depriving them of their own bicycle.

But what if we provide people with better bicycles or better climates (many Russians seem to believe that climate change is producing a better climate for them)? We may think that even in these cases an injustice has occurred, for the replacements (even those that make them better off) have occurred without their consent.

The notion of consent is more fraught and its applications more difficult to understand than one might think (Manson and

O'Neill 2007). In the case of anthropogenic climate change, consent is an especially fraught and difficult notion.

Virtually everyone who will be deprived of their own climate contributes to their own deprivation. (It might be thought that future generations are an exception, but it is not clear in what sense the climate that they do not experience is *their* climate.) Suffering from a climate change to which I have contributed is in important respects different from being stabbed by an assailant (to which I do not consent) or being operated on by a surgeon (to which I do consent). In light of such considerations it would not be crazy to say that climate change impacts suffered by the United States (for example) are not injustices, given American obstructionism in shaping global climate policy and the extent of American emissions. At the same time, it seems plausible to say that some individual Americans can suffer unjustly from climate change since the impact of their losses may be out of proportion to their contribution to the problem and their ability to influence the policy of the American government. Indeed, it could be argued that their own government's emissions may constitute an injustice against them. If we suppose, for example, that Hurricane Katrina was a result of anthropogenic climate change, then we could reasonably say that the poor residents of New Orleans were victims of climate injustice, since their contributions to climate change and to US government climate policy were negligible. Yet at the same time it would not be crazy to say that the United States was not a victim of the anthropogenic Hurricane Katrina since American contributions to bringing it about were so significant. Rather than an injustice, it was a matter of pigeons coming home to roost.

Of course, we should not say that Hurricane Katrina was the result of climate change. But neither should we go out of our way to deny it. Asking whether specific events such as Hurricane Katrina are caused by climate change is a bad question, and no answer can be given that is not misleading. Asking whether Hurricane Katrina was caused by climate change is like asking whether a baseball player's single is caused by his .350 batting average. "Yes" is surely not the

correct answer, and similarly for both conceptual and scientific reasons it is difficult to attribute particular events (such as Hurricane Katrina) to climate change. But saying “no” falsely suggests that there is no relationship between a player’s batting average and his getting a base hit (or between climate change and the occurrence of single extreme events). In this case, as in many others, it is better to remain silent.

Lurking around in the conceptual background are difficult questions about whether we can be unjust to ourselves and what exactly the role is of human agency in questions of justice.

Consider first whether something can be unjust to itself. We might ask, for example, whether the United States can be unjust to itself (as opposed to the United States being unjust to its citizens, or the Supreme Court being unjust to the Congress). There is a tradition in philosophy associated with Kant that might seem supportive of this view. According to Kant, individuals can disrespect themselves; for example, when they fail to develop their talents (Kant 1785/2014, Section 2). Disrespecting oneself may be a moral wrong, but that in itself does not constitute an injustice. Imagine a case in which someone, early in life, is improvident about her future. She consumes instead of saves, spending all of her money on sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Can the older person say that her younger self treated her unjustly? While I don’t want to rule out the possibility of making a case for such a view, the principle that something cannot be unjust to itself seems initially plausible (Jamieson 2007a).

Now consider whether agency is required for injustice. Miami, Florida, is one of the areas on Earth with the highest frequency of hurricanes, and the Sahel region of Africa is one of the areas most susceptible to drought. If these places become more dangerous as a consequence of anthropogenic climate change, the attraction to thinking that an injustice has been committed are obvious: Some people have been made worse off through human action, but their “natural” riskiness does not seem in itself to imply an injustice if there is no agency involved. The principle that for an injustice to occur there must be an agent who commits it seems plausible, though there are complications.¹

The climate change that is underway is, of course, anthropogenic. The harm that it will bring will be incremental, but it may also lead to an unstable, disrupted, or even catastrophic climate. Even (perhaps especially) in these cases the language of justice is strained, since the structure of such a catastrophe would differ so greatly from paradigm cases of injustice—for even its victims will have contributed to the climate catastrophe.

KILLING WITH CARBON

Sometimes the injustice that is involved in climate change is seen as analogous to Woody Guthrie's idea that "some men rob you with a six-gun—others with a fountain pen." In both cases you are robbed and there is a robber, but in one case the robber is invisible or seen as something other than the criminal he is. Similarly, it might be said that those who kill innocent people with carbon are seen as respectable citizens, while those who kill with bombs and guns are viewed as killers, but they are both equally killers.

It is difficult to make this view stick. Consider the following example, which brings out the difference between paradigm cases of individual injustice and what occurs in the climate change case (Jamieson 2007b, 2014).

Suppose that Jill has parked her bicycle on the porch of her house and then gone inside to make dinner. Jack, who has been looking for a bicycle to steal, sees Jill's bicycle on the porch, cuts the lock, and rides off. The following is an apt characterization of this example:

1. Jack intentionally steals Jill's bicycle.

In this example Jack intentionally acts in such a way as to knowingly harm another individual. Both the perpetrator and victim (Jack and Jill) are clearly identifiable, and they are closely related in time and space. This example is a clear candidate for moral evaluation, and most of us would resoundingly say that what Jack did was wrong.

Consider, however, what happens when we alter the example along various dimensions. We may still see the example as a candidate for moral evaluation, but its claim to be a paradigm weakens. Consider the following examples:

2. Jack is part of an unacquainted group of strangers, each of which, acting independently, takes one part of Jill's bicycle, resulting in the bicycle's disappearance.
3. Jack takes one part from each of a large number of bicycles, one of which belongs to Jill.
4. Jack and Jill live on different continents, and the loss of Jill's bicycle is the consequence of a causal chain that begins with Jack ordering a used bicycle at a shop.
5. Jack lives many centuries before Jill, and consumes materials that are essential to bicycle manufacturing; as a result, it will not be possible for Jill to have a bicycle.

In example (2) we transform the agent who harms Jill into an unstructured collective. In (3) we reduce the amount of harm that Jack causes Jill to a minimum. In (4) we disrupt the spatial contiguity between Jack and Jill and cancel Jack's bad intentions. In (5) we not only cancel Jack's bad intentions, but also disrupt the temporal contiguity between Jack and Jill. Each example is less of a paradigm injustice than example (1). Indeed, some people would not think that there is anything morally questionable about Jack's actions in (4) and (5). Examples (2) and (3) may still be seen as injustices, but less obviously so than in (1). People who see Jack's action as wrong in (2) and (3) are likely to see it as less wrong than in (1).

Now consider example (6), which incorporates all of the changes serially considered in examples (2)–(5).

6. Acting independently, Jack and a large number of unacquainted people set in motion a chain of events that causes a large number of future people who will live in another part of the world from ever having bicycles.

For many people this is just an abstract description of normal, everyday behavior. There is nothing unjust about it at all. For other people the perception persists that there is something morally questionable about this example. This is because what some people take to be at the center of a moral problem persists: some people have acted in a way that harms other people. However, most of what typically accompanies this core has disappeared. In example (6) it is difficult to identify the agents, the victims, and the causal nexus. Nor does it appear that anyone has intentionally deprived future people who will live in another part of the world from ever having bicycles. The fact that they will not have bicycles is just a consequence of Jack and others getting on with their lives.

The problem, I think, is that responsibility for climate change poses a very different kind of problem than those that we are typically used to treating as matters of individual justice. In particular, I think there are six important features that distinguish the climate change case. None of these features is unique to climate change, though each is more extreme in this case than in others, and no other problem that I can think of displays all these features.

The first feature that makes climate change different from most other problems concerns the magnifying power of technology. Simple acts such as starting a car or adjusting a thermostat have broader and more extensive reach than previous forms of transportation and thermoregulation such as walking and fire building. The growth and development of technology, especially with regard to the production and management of energy, is to a great extent responsible for this. While once people had the power to disrupt their local environments, now people have the power to alter the planetary conditions that allowed human life to evolve and that continue to sustain it.

The spatial reach of climate change, especially in relation to the acts that contribute to it, is a second feature that helps to differentiate this problem from others. Climate change is a global phenomenon that is insensitive to the locations of the emissions that contribute to it. The atmosphere does not care where greenhouse gas

(GHG) emissions occur. It responds in the same way whether they come from the poles, the equator, or somewhere in between. From the victim's perspective, it is as if millions of acts that occur very far from you, all over the world, are in some way associated with the pain in your foot.

A third difference between climate change and other problems concerns the temporal reach of GHGs. Imagine that after reaching an atmospheric concentration of 450 parts per million (ppm) sometime in the next decade, we immediately stop all carbon dioxide emissions. By the year 3000, neither atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide nor global mean surface temperature would have returned to their pre-industrial baselines, and sea levels would still be rising (Solomon et al. 2009). It is as if someone steps on your foot, politely says excuse me, and then walks away, while the pain in your foot persists for the rest of your life.

A fourth difference between climate change and most other problems we face is the systematicity of the forces that give rise to it. People pay an enormous amount of attention to computing carbon footprints and arguing over responsibility for emissions, yet the fact is that the manipulation of the global carbon cycle is intrinsic to the existing global economy. Whether we are producers, consumers, or just trying to get by, as long as carbon is the lifeblood of the global economy, no one has clean hands.

A fifth feature of climate change that makes it different from other problems is that it is the world's largest and most complex collective action problem. It is the largest since everyone is a climate change actor and virtually everyone will be affected by climate change. It is the most complex for many reasons, including the high degree of connectivity in the climate system, the nonlinear nature of many of the relationships, threshold effects, and buffers that exist in the system. What I want to emphasize here are the differences of scale that are involved in moving from human action to the climate system, and back to damages.

Consider a radically oversimplified story that begins with me emitting some molecules of carbon dioxide. These molecules may stay in the atmosphere for centuries or even longer, but what is most likely is that within five years they will dissolve into the ocean or be taken up by the biosphere. When carbon dioxide molecules dissolve in the ocean, they are usually replaced in the atmosphere by other molecules that radiate from the ocean. As the oceans warm, the velocity of these emissions increases, and it is likely that the original carbon will soon be returned to the atmosphere. However, a tiny fraction sinks to the ocean's depths and is eventually stored in carbonate rocks, where it may remain for tens of millions of years or more. The fate of carbon molecules in the terrestrial biosphere is even more various, but they are usually returned to the atmosphere within a decade or two (Archer and Brovkin 2008). The result of these exchanges is a perturbation of the carbon cycle, which produces a generalized warming, which affects the global climate system, which in turn affects the distribution, frequency, and intensity of various meteorological events. These events occur in specific environments and can result in anything from a heat wave or storm in an uninhabited part of the world to an insurance claim for a BMW damaged in a hailstorm to the collapse of a government. For my particular carbon emission to have a causal effect in producing these harms it must in some way be active at all of these levels, from increasing concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide to producing untoward meteorological events that actually result in harms. The influence of my emission must travel upward through various global systems that affect climate, and then downward, damaging something that we value. The sense of implausibility, ignorance, and downright confusion that such a scenario elicits can be illustrated by the following example.

I, along with many other people, toss an invisible smidgen of something into a blender. A man takes a drink of the resulting mixture. Am I responsible for the graininess of the texture, the chalkiness of the taste, the way it makes him feel after drinking it, his resulting

desire for a Budweiser? You might think that I am a smidgen responsible, since a smidgen is the amount that I tossed into the blender. But I am tempted to say that I am not responsible even for a smidgen of the result because there are so many thresholds, nonlinearities, and scalar differences that intervene between my action and the outcomes.

A sixth difference between anthropogenic climate change and the problems that we are used to confronting concerns the extent to which climate change is world-constituting. Climate change will radically repopulate the world because it is highly contingent on which particular individuals come into existence, and climate change will quickly affect on a very large scale who marries whom and what children are conceived. In introducing this concern Derek Parfit (1984, 361) rhetorically asks, “[H]ow many of us could truly claim, ‘Even if railways and motor cars had never been invented, I would still have been born?’” Similarly, the people of the future can ask (also rhetorically) whether they would have been born had the world not gone down the path of emitting more than 30 billion tons of carbon dioxide per year. It is this concern that should give us pause when we are tempted to say that climate change deprives future people of the climate that they would otherwise have. Had there not been climate change, they probably would not have come to exist.

The problems with which climate change confronts us are significantly different from textbook collective-action problems that have us trying to find solutions to an overgrazed commons or an over-exploited fishery. In the climate change case, the distance from my particular acts to the damages that occur is far greater in several dimensions than in the cases with which we are normally confronted.

Taken together, what these differences bring out is that together we are changing the composition of the atmosphere in a way that will cause the deaths of many people. As terrible as this fact is, it does not immediately translate to the robust conclusion that individuals who emit carbon are thereby killing other individuals in the way that Woody Guthrie’s banker robs his victims with a fountain pen.

STATES AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Rather than thinking of climate justice as involving relations between individuals, a more natural way may involve thinking about climate justice as involving justice between states. This thought is certainly at home in the context of the state-centric language of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). According to the FCCC, states having “common but differentiated responsibilities stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”²

Since the beginning of the climate change negotiations, there has been persistent conflict between developed and developing countries. Developing countries have historically contributed less to the total atmospheric build-up of GHGs than developed countries, and proportionately their per capita contributions have been even lower than their total emissions. From the perspective of countries like Brazil, China, and India, global limits on emissions without aggressive, mandatory reductions on the part of developed countries risk locking them into their relatively low per capita emissions, thus hampering their economic growth. These countries fear that developed countries will continue to evade significant reductions in emissions while at the same time pushing for the fulfillment of global targets, thus condemning them to bear most of the burden of GHG reductions. Without commitments to significant reductions by the United States in particular, Brazil, India and China have simply not been willing to agree to any targets for themselves.³

In addition to contributing less to climate change, poorer countries are also more vulnerable to its impacts. The vulnerability of poor countries has been widely recognized in a variety of international reports and declarations. The Johannesburg Declaration, issued on the tenth anniversary of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, declared that “the adverse effects of climate change are already evident, natural disasters are more frequent and more devastating, and developing countries more vulnerable.”⁴

There is good reason to see climate change as an injustice that rich countries inflict on poor countries. Most of the emitting has occurred in rich countries but most suffering related to climate change is likely to occur in poor countries, which have less technological and financial capacity to respond, and already suffer more today from climate variability and extreme events. For example, Honduras suffers more from hurricanes than Costa Rica, Ethiopia suffers more from drought than the United States, and probably no country is more affected by floods than Bangladesh. Bangladesh will suffer enormously from climate change, yet its contribution to the problem is minuscule: its total carbon dioxide emissions are less than 0.2 of 1 percent of the global total.⁵ On a per capita basis, Bangladesh's emissions are about one-twentieth of the global average and about one-fiftieth of American emissions.⁶ It is these sorts of considerations that lend plausibility to the view that anthropogenic climate change is an act of injustice inflicted on the poor countries of the south by the rich countries of the north.

Despite the plausibility of this view, there are some complications. Global climate change fails to display some of the central features of injustices between states, while it does display some novel ones that traditional global justice theories seem ill-equipped to deal with.

A first difference is that many people (and even some political leaders) in high-emitting countries at least claim ignorance about the effects of GHG emissions. Yet other countries admit to the climate change-related damages and undertake policies to reduce emissions or to aid those who suffer from climate change. But this is weird if climate change is to be understood on the model of an injustice between states. In the first case, it is as if one nation unjustly invades another but does not know that it has invaded it; in the second case, it is as if a country seeks to alleviate the harm it causes to another while continuing to cause it as a matter of policy.

A second difference is that paradigm injustices between states involve the intentional infliction of damages, and this is not the case

with climate change. GHG emissions are a by-product of a nation's economic and other activities, and climate change damages are a by-product of these (and other) emissions. Every nation would be happy if its economic and other activities continued while its attendant emissions ceased. The world's nations would also be happy if their emissions occurred but did not cause any damages to anyone or anything, anywhere, at anytime. When it comes to an unjust war, or to the imposition of an unfair trade deal by a state (or group of states) on another state (or group of states), the whole point is to deprive others of what is rightfully theirs. The point of emitting GHGs, on the other hand, is to become rich and enjoy life.

A third difference is that since the atmosphere does not attend to national boundaries, and a molecule of carbon has the same effect on climate wherever it is emitted, climate change is largely caused by rich people, wherever they live, and suffered by poor people, wherever they live. Thus the people who contribute most to climate change and will suffer the most from it are dispersed throughout all the countries of the world, though in different proportions. Rather than thinking of climate change as a problem caused by some nations and suffered by others, it can also be thought of as a problem with a half-billion or so major contributors dispersed, though unevenly distributed, throughout the globe (Chakravarty et al. 2009). The fact that the high-emitting 500 million as well as the potential victims of climate change are dispersed around the globe is awkward for those who want to assimilate climate change to a traditional problem of global justice. It is as if an invading army includes citizens from the victimized country, and the aggressor's victims include residents of both countries. Something like this may be true to some extent in some unjust wars. It may also be true that some citizens of poorer countries will collaborate in or benefit from the imposition of an unfair trade deal by a richer country, and that some citizens of the richer country may be made worse off by the imposition of that deal. Even if this is so, it is not nearly to the extent to which it will be true in the case of climate change.

A fourth difference concerns the nature of the risks and attendant temporal urgency that distinguishes climate change from ordinary problems of global justice. Most cases of global injustice involve one nation benefiting at the expense of another, and this can go on more or less indefinitely. However, the current level of GHG emissions by affluent people cannot go on indefinitely. While there is a sense in which justice delayed is justice denied, in the usual case justice can be denied for decades or centuries and then triumph (think of racism, sexism, or discrimination against homosexuals). The excessive emission of GHGs, on the other hand, threatens to undermine the conditions that make modern life possible even for the rich themselves.

Of course, in a world populated by weapons of mass destruction, a global injustice can also threaten the entire global system, but this possibility is remote compared to the possibility that GHG emissions will lead to global catastrophe. But let me be clear. The point is not that nuclear holocaust is less likely than catastrophic climate change, but rather that an ordinary case of global injustice is less likely to catastrophically damage both the perpetrator and the victim than is the case with climate change. Moreover, while military disasters are still in an important sense wholly in our hands, climate-related catastrophe engages an important third party—the ensemble of natural systems we customarily call “nature.” Even after all the lessons that we have been taught by the environmental movement there is still a tendency to think of nature as providing a “free lunch”—even by theorists of global justice. In this case, however, there is no free lunch: nature will collect the bill. Guests can languidly negotiate their respective shares of the check before the restaurant owner arrives at their table, but there is little negotiating to do once she arrives demanding payment (Jamieson and Di Paolo 2014).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

So here is where we are. While anthropogenic climate change has some of the features of an injustice between individuals and an injustice between states, it does not fully conform to either. To a great extent

this is because everyone contributes to climate change—individuals and firms, as well as nations—and everyone is at risk. Moreover, insofar as actions that contribute to climate change are wrong, the wrongness is in part because of the number of other people who perform these activities and the ways in which they are technologically mediated, not because of anything intrinsic to the actions themselves.

This discussion can be taken further. I have mentioned, but not considered in detail, the possibility that climate change is an injustice committed by states against individuals. Nor have I considered the possibility that the injustice of anthropogenic climate change consists in risk imposition rather than harm causation. There are in addition many other putative ethical questions related to climate change that I have not discussed at all (for example, rights to an atmospheric commons, participatory justice in the climate change negotiations, duties to tell the truth regarding scientific knowledge, obligations of beneficence, obligations regarding species preservation, and so on). Nor have I said anything about how an act that is wrong or one that is an ethical breach becomes an injustice.

Were we to continue in this vein, the very conception of climate justice might suffer death from a thousand cuts, revealed to all the world as a rhetorical trope of the sort particularly beloved in American political culture. Or perhaps a clever and concerted bout of theorizing would produce a conception of climate justice that can sit proudly next to other conceptions of justice. I will not try to resolve these questions here, but instead close with a rough characterization of what may be at the core of what people mean to communicate with talk of climate justice.

The philosopher J. L. Austin (1962, 63–77) pointed out that we are often tricked by language into thinking that a positive term (e.g., “justice”) is the one with the primary meaning, while the correlative negative term (e.g., “injustice”) is derivative. Yet in many cases it is the negative terms that have assertive content while the correlative positive terms gain their meaning from the failure of the negative terms to apply. Austin’s example was “real.” What it is for something

to be real is for it not to be the product of a dream, an illusion, a mirage, a hallucination, or so forth.

I propose that something like this is going on with the use of the term “climate justice.” A call for climate justice is typically a call to rectify an injustice that occurs in the broad space of anthropogenic climate change. This may involve adaptation to sea-level rise, increased frequency of drought and extreme events, or the failure to mitigate the occurrences of these events. The term “climate” in this context is a way of making clear that this is not a call to respond to all injustices but only those that occur in the space of anthropogenic climate change. From this perspective “climate justice” is unlikely to serve as a foundational concept, but is a convenient way of referring to some particular failures of justice. It is a useful concept, but one that is unlikely to rock our world, at least conceptually.

As I noted at the beginning, “climate justice” is also used in attempts to motivate people to take action on climate change. Even here I think the language has its limits. I doubt that the rhetoric of climate justice is the most effective language to deploy to engage with the moral sensibility required for effective action on climate change. Rather than the language of climate justice, I would bet on a language of empowerment that involves expressions such as “taking responsibility” and “rising to a challenge.” But this is just speculation.

Taking into account its limitations as a theoretical concept and my speculations about its rhetorical role, I happily end where I began: “Two Cheers for Climate Justice.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This essay reprises, revises, and extends material in Jamieson (2014).

NOTES

1. What if there is an agent who did not cause the suffering but can ameliorate it at little cost to herself? What if the cost would be very high? I cannot pursue these questions here.

2. https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf.
3. Fortunately, this standoff seems to be softening as recent agreements between the United States and China and the United States and Brazil indicate.
4. <http://www.un-documents.net/jburgdec.htm>.
5. <http://co2now.org/Know-GHGs/Emissions/>.
6. This is calculated from World Bank data available here: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC/countries/BD-8S-US?display=graph>.

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