

Review: Climate Change: Justice and Future Generations

By Edward A. Page

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Page, Edward A. *Climate Change, Justice and Future Generations*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006. 209pp. ISBN: 978-1-84376-184-6. \$US 95 Hardcover.

The presentation of a new report on climate change by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a renowned international group of climate scientists, in January 2007, has once again drawn attention to the challenge facing humankind in relation to energy consumption and the reduction in carbon emissions. The panel reports with 90 percent certainty that global climatic change is due to human activity and that immediate measures are essential to mitigate the problem. Focusing on what has been a major environmental issue for scientists and is now a pressing international political issue, Page's book is timely. It highlights the ethical dimensions of the problem with emphasis on two themes: that there should be "a nuanced understanding of ethics" in the formulation of policies to manage climate change, and that the notion of distributive justice, i.e. how benefits and burdens should be fairly distributed spatially and temporally, should be integral.

Opening with a discussion on weather, climate, recent extreme events and the remit of the IPCC, attention is drawn to the injustice of human-induced climate change in relation to future generations. This is reminiscent of sustainable development theory of which climate change is an inevitable part and is also a component of the wider issue of the domestication of carbon (Mannion, 2006). There follows a survey of the historical development of the science of climate change and a synopsis of IPCC findings of relevance to intergenerational relationships, e.g. the uncertainties which surround the certainty of climate change, as well as the problems of estimating future socio-economic and cultural impacts. Issues such as the scope, dimension and currency of justice and the notion of sufficiency are examined in relation to future generations, e.g. the identification of benefits and burdens. There is no defining formula, an unsurprising outcome in view of the complex factors involved.

The question of intergenerational justice is also examined. Until recently, it could be argued that future generations largely benefited from the activities of their ancestors, especially through technology. Most technology is, however, reliant on carbon-based energy. Consequently, a threshold has been reached in the development continuum which acknowledges that advancement comes at an environmental price, a price which is likely to compromise future generations. Any mitigation policies will require sacrifice to benefit posterity. Thus each generation benefits from innovations and sacrifices of past generations, but no generation benefits from its successors. So why bother? This is what Page describes as the "non-reciprocity problem" and discusses various models wherein concern for posterity is fundamental. Another general issue relates to the non-identity problem. This focuses on measures taken by one generation which may harm the next, but which allow the next generation to come into existence and survive. Page effectively marries the issues raised by climate change science with analytical philosophy to provide a perspective on why or why not measures should be taken to reduce climate change and the risks/harm it poses for future generations.

This is not an "easy read"; it is probably an easier read for philosophers than for scientists but it should be a valuable, if expensive, book for politicians and policy makers who seek to change the world and manage its climate.

Mannion, Antoinette M. *Carbon and Its Domestication*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006.

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