Re[Framing] Climate Change

by

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Introduction

Climate change is an inevitability and it is now a global crisis. The effects of climate change will be felt, if they are not already, by every population and ecosystem across the globe. Climate change is almost entirely caused by anthropogenic activities, driven by the combustion of fossil fuels that powered the industrial revolution and that continues to feed our growing energy consumption today. Climate change will threaten billions of people in the coming decades, whether due to water or food scarcity, extreme weather events, or spread of tropical disease. However, the international response to this most monumental of challenges is simultaneously fractured and hegemonic, as partisan as any political election and as economically driven as most college application processes.

There are many uncertainties in climate change science that revolve around the predicted strength of environmental effects, rather than the accepted fact that the greenhouse gas emissions have lead to warmer temperatures, skewed patterns of rainfall, the acidification of the oceans, and atypical climate events. The vast majority of historical fossil fuel combustion has been effected by world’s most affluent countries, which are mostly in the West but include Japan, Australia, and New Zealand as well, to industrialize cheaply to achieve great wealth. It is generally accepted that the global South will encounter serious difficulties in places that are already economically depressed and have been
historically oppressed. In other words, the countries that will be hardest hit by climate change are those that are least equipped to mitigate its effects.

In the face of these known dangers and already-occurring disasters, why is there such a lack of effort to stop them? It is unfortunate but inevitable that some people do not consider the environment to have intrinsic value, and therefore its steady decline is neither a source of anxiety nor a motivation to act. But do these people not consider the gradual and sometimes instantaneous deterioration in other people’s quality of life to be of immediate concern? What’s more, many of the people who choose to not stop climate change are benefiting economically from this decision, and these people have the power to sway international agreements. In this way, nations are complicit in allowing climate change to continue.

Stephen Gardiner, an environmental ethicist, writes, “The source of climate change is located deep in the infrastructure of current human civilizations.”¹ His statement captures the fact that cultures founded on fossil fuel consumption will have to alter their ways of life to stop climate change, but it fails to bring attention to the fact that the vast majority of the world’s nations emit next to nothing in comparison with the most affluent nations. It is this latter reality, coupled with the disproportionate burden poorer countries will face as they encounter climatic changes, that I find so troubling. In this thesis, I will try to examine why the more advantaged nations of the world do not feel a sense of moral responsibility to help those less fortunate, particularly when they have

disproportionately caused the problem. I aim to show that international climate change (in)action is effectively a recolonization of the global South, abetted by the mediated nature of responsibility to mitigate climate change and the inadequacy of global institutions’ respect for difference.

I will first give a brief overview of the basic science of climate change—what causes it, what the effects will be—and the history of international agreements to address the problem. In the second chapter, I will discuss ethical approaches to and moral responsibilities for climate change, and then will focus on the role mediated responsibilities play in international action. A mediated responsibility is one for which there is a factor that separates the action from the impact it makes, thus rendering it less acute. Responsibilities for climate change are mediated in many ways, but I will focus on temporal and spatial remoteness and, in the third chapter, the creation the non-West as an Other. I will then explore the history and theory of the process of othering and the colonial parallels between affluent and poor countries in international climate change agreements. Finally, I will discuss ways of ideating and incorporating difference, especially difference within an already differentiated group (e.g. women within a country with little international power). I end by suggesting that value systems in the West need to be reorganized in order to embrace difference and to let go of ideals of consumerism and economic status.
Methodology

I hope to prove throughout the course of this thesis that climate change is more than just a phenomenon of science, but that it has socioeconomic implications, is politically unjust, and that it raises moral issues of responsibility. Understanding that climate change is more than one type of problem provides different ways of thinking about it, as well as providing grounds for specific critiques of the current cycle of inaction. In order to examine climate change from many angles, I use an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates science, environmental ethics, feminist and postcolonial philosophy, and political theory. Each of these disciplines provides a new perspective on climate change, and they work together throughout this thesis to maintain an awareness of the complexity of the issues raised by climate change. Their applicability to climate change is a testament to the wide-ranging nature of this environmental crisis.

I have not seen an interdisciplinary approach to climate change of the kind I have attempted. This could be because the field of climate change theory is still being articulated in individual disciplines, or perhaps the task is too daunting for those who know better.
A Note on the Terms Used

I am aware that throughout this thesis I will be looking at climate change ethics through a lens that is undoubtedly marked by my relationship to the United States, but I hope to use this lens to expose the way in which the United States ignores inconvenient responsibilities. The injustice of international climate change dynamics is what initially made me want to write this thesis. This said, I will eventually appeal to some West-centric notions of progress, such as the categorization of countries as “developing” or “developed.”

I am aware that the term “developing” is a product of European and American ideals and that it implies a telos of industrial growth, capitalism, and democracy. I am also aware that typecasting all countries without these ideals as one is both counterproductive in international agreements (China recently surpassed the United States in emissions) and denies autonomy by assuming that “developed” countries know better or are better. However, I will be using these terms because they are recurrent qualifiers in international climate change discourse. In my discussion of climate change ethics, the term “developing” will signify those countries that have historically not developed their infrastructures or economies using fossil fuels.

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I find it most useful throughout this thesis to talk about nations rather than individuals. Objections could be made to this presupposition on the grounds that it forgets the individual’s plight, especially the most disadvantaged
individuals in the poorest of countries. However, binding international climate agreements are the only way to ensure global participation due to international economic competition, and climate summits are the stage upon which these relationships and oppressions are made most evident. The individual’s lived experience is extremely valuable and should be used to strengthen a country’s testimony on the international stage as well as to promote peaceful uprisings; I think it would be naive, however, to ignore the significance of international climate agreements. I will endeavor to include both, but most evidence will be presented on a nation-based scale. President George H. W. Bush’s insistence before the 1992 climate summit in Rio that America’s fossil-fuel intensive culture should remain unchanged at the expense of the disadvantaged of the world is an excellent example of the clarity that comes from looking at international agreements.

It will also be important to note that in my chapters on othering and difference I take the term “groups” to be most analogous to countries. Climate change must be addressed on the international level, with representing countries rather than affinity groups. Although this may have a few adverse effects (like the ignorance of struggling classes within a wealthy country or of wealthy classes within a poor country), the point again is that action on climate change will only realistically be effective if dictated by international agreements. This is compounded by the fact that wealthier countries tend to be to blame for the current climate situation and the continuation of heavy fossil fuel use (with the exceptions of China and India, which are historically undeveloped countries
but which have recently had huge emissions). It is unlikely that one single
country will opt to give up fossil fuels without the participation of others, due to
global competition for production; the United States is particularly sensitive to
this issue because of its cultural and historical dependence on being “number
one.” A topic for further discussion would be the fact that corporations are the
major forces against mitigation, because they drive market pressures more so
than any individual actor, and generally do not cede to public opinion. However,
the only way to control corporations is for countries to enforce regulations.
I. A Climate Change Overview

Science

Global temperature on Earth has shifted immensely from era to era; there have been large freezes and periods without any ice at all. In this way, climatic shifts are not uncommon. The climate change that is at issue in this thesis, however, is distinct from any other in the history of Earth’s climate. This is anthropogenic climate change, caused by the combustion of fossil fuels, which leads to the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). These GHGs remain in the atmosphere for centuries, causing an increase in global temperature and pushing the boundaries of carbon dioxide absorption in the ocean. The changes seen now are occurring at an unprecedented rate and are attributable to human actions from the Industrial Revolution to the present.

The United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Meteorological Organization created the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 to periodically review scientific knowledge on climate change. The IPCC reviews information from thousands of scientists, who send in their work voluntarily and are not paid. There are three Working Groups; Group 1 assesses the science of climate change, Group 2 assesses socioeconomic and ecological vulnerabilities, and Group 3 assesses the costs and benefits of
greenhouse gas mitigation.\textsuperscript{2} The Working Groups use fixed scales of confidence and likelihood in their reports. For example, the term “very high confidence” used in relation to a potential outcome means there is at least a nine out of ten chance of it being correct while “medium confidence” means a five out of ten chance; “very likely” denotes 90 to 99\% probability and “likely” means 66 to 90\% probability.\textsuperscript{3} This intergovernmental scientific review therefore is supposed to act as an objective authority on climate change, to which every participating government subscribes in order to facilitate international climate agreements. The effectiveness of the resulting international climate agreements will be discussed later.

The Industrial Revolution created a foundation of intensive fossil fuel use upon which much of production is based today. The greenhouse effect refers to the process by which large amounts of greenhouse gases are trapped in the Earth’s atmosphere, causing an increase in global temperature. This is due to both increased GHG emissions and destruction of GHG “sinks.” Carbon dioxide sinks, for example, exist in the form of forests that absorb large amounts of it; razing forests for timber or for agricultural use effectively destroys the carbon sink and leads to more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than there would have originally been. Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are most attributable

\textsuperscript{2} Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Working Groups/Task Force," http://www.ipcc.ch/working_groups/working_groups.shtml.

to combustion of fossil fuels. Figure 1 is a graph made by the IPCC’s Working Group 1 that illustrates the enormous rise in atmospheric GHGs beginning in 1750 and rising to a level unprecedented in at least 10,000 years.  

The studies assessed by the IPCC to make this graph used data from ice core samples that revealed atmospheric concentrations of GHGs from up to 650,000 years ago. Methane levels have not reached current levels in at least 650,000 years.

Figure 1
Figure 1 shows a sudden and exponential increase in GHGs after the fossil fuel consumption that began with industrialization. The anthropogenic greenhouse gas of greatest concern is carbon dioxide, due to its long lifespan relative to methane and nitrous oxide. While three quarters of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere will be reabsorbed within a century, the remaining quarter will stay in the atmosphere and affect the climate for several centuries.\(^5\)

Atmospheric levels have increased from 280 parts per million (ppm) in 1850 to 379 ppm in 2005.\(^6\) NASA scientist James Hansen spoke to the American Geophysical Union conference in San Francisco in 2007 with new findings. He explained that the Earth had warmed approximately \(0.2^{\circ}\) Celsius in each of the three previous decades.\(^7\) The 383 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in 2007 had already warmed the temperature enough to cause the Arctic sea ice and Greenland ice sheet to melt at an unprecedented rate and had the potential to cause atypically strong natural disasters. He warns of the potential for “super El Ninos,” which could affect precipitation patterns globally.\(^8\)

The effects of global temperature increase that Hansen and other scientists observed were happening at a much faster rate than was predicted earlier, when the safe limit of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was determined to be 550 ppm. In light of the effects seen when the atmospheric concentration

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was only 388 ppm, Hansen said, “[this] is already too high to maintain the climate to which humanity, wildlife, and the rest of the biosphere are adapted,” suggesting a target of 350 ppm of atmospheric CO2. This number has now become the focal point for many concerned organizations, most notably 350.org, an international awareness group founded by environmental activist and writer Bill McKibben.

Effects

The term *global warming* is no longer used in discussion of anthropogenic climatic changes. To label this impending crisis as such is to deny the multifaceted nature of this enormous problem. The earth is not only experiencing a warming trend, but a myriad of wide-ranging phenomena, such as skewed wind systems and shifting oceanic currents. The warm North Atlantic Current could be moving away from Northwestern Europe, causing a cooling effect that could lead to much harsher winters. However, the phrase *global warming* does what *climate change* does not: it attaches itself to the inhabitants of the world. Climate change as a phrase is somewhat removed from humanity, and therefore imposes itself less upon the consciousnesses of policymakers, or allows them to put the issue further aside while focusing on more tangible anthropocentric events. Frank Luntz, a Republican strategist, wrote in a memo, “while global warming has catastrophic communications attached to it, climate

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9 Hansen et al., "Target Atmospheric CO2: Where Should Humanity Aim?."
change sounds a more controllable and less emotional challenge.”¹⁰ Climate change works in favor of those who would rather not focus on the phenomenon as a whole.

In the past few years, governments have indeed been able to busy themselves with weather events of unusual intensities instead of the broader situation. The past decade has seen tremendous and deadly natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 and the 2010 floods in Pakistan, both exacerbated by warmer oceanic temperatures. Warmer water fuels hurricanes and leads to more atmospheric water vapor, which strengthened the monsoons that flooded one fifth of Pakistan and affected twenty million people.¹¹ Hotter temperatures intensified the recent famine in Somalia, which was due to both drought and human intervention. These events are all linked directly to climate change and are examples of future situations that will occur due to weather changes resulting from unmitigated GHG emissions. These are some of the many predicted effects of climate change that very often pose the greatest threat to communities least equipped to survive due to poverty or location.

The IPCC considers human migration due to climate disasters to be one of the most pressing threats posed by climate change. The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) reports, “In 2008 alone, 20 million people were displaced by

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climate-related sudden-onset natural disasters such as floods and storms, including 800,000 people displaced in the Irrawaddy Delta region by Cyclone Nargis." EJF predicts that 10 million Africans have been displaced over the past two decades from environmental events, mainly due to desertification. They have also predicted that the number of environmental refugees by 2050 will be 200 million, 150 million of which will be displaced by climate change-related disasters. \(^{13}\)

The most widely cited effect of climate change is the rising global atmospheric temperature. Rising temperatures are the cause for greatest concern because warmer temperatures in general lead to stronger and more frequent climate events. There are three studies of global temperature that are cited most frequently: the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), and the Met Office Hadley Centre/Climatic Research Unit. While the studies have very slight discrepancies due to factors such as uncertainty and lack of temperature stations in large areas of the Arctic, they are overwhelmingly in agreement that the Earth has warmed at least .6°C since the late 19\(^{th}\) century. Figure 2 below shows the extremely similar results found by these three most respected teams studying this phenomenon. \(^{14}\)


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{14}\) National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), "Global Climate Change: Key Indicators," http://climate.nasa.gov/keyIndicators/#globalTemp.
Global average surface temperature is projected to rise by 1-3.5°C by 2100 depending on the amount and quality of greenhouse gas reduction policy that is undertaken.\textsuperscript{15} Increases in temperature could cause a greater frequency of the El Nino phenomenon, which occurs periodically in the Southern Oscillation of atmospheric pressure and accounts for unusually warm waters, heavy rains, and lax winds in the tropical eastern Pacific.\textsuperscript{16} Increased El Nino occurrences


could cause erratic weather conditions, such as drier and hotter seasons, hurricanes, or flooding, affecting hundreds of millions of people.

Rising water levels and subsequent flooding are some of the most underplayed and deadly aspects of global warming. The IPCC has predicted that “many millions more people are projected to be flooded every year due to sea-level rise by the 2080s,” and that the majority of this flooding will occur in the mega-deltas of Asia and Africa, as well as on small islands.17 This places a huge proportion of the burden to stop atmospheric warming on the shoulders of developing countries, which are less equipped to deal with mass displacement of coastal regions. The number of destructive inland floods has doubled in the past two decades in relation to the decades between 1950 and 1980. Bangladesh is one of the most flood-prone countries in the world; over 70% of the country was flooded in 1998.18

Rising global temperatures are already causing glaciers to melt at an unsustainable rate. This means that populations that rely on snowmelt for their water supply face the dangers of both short-term flooding and long-term drought. Glaciers in the Andes provide water for tens of millions of people in Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, who will be at a loss when the glaciers disappear in the next few decades. The Hindu Kush-Himalaya ice mass is getting smaller, which will adversely affect the millions of people who depend upon its runoff for

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18 Ibid., Section 3.2, 178.
freshwater. \textsuperscript{19} Access to freshwater is essential to human survival and is now considered a universal human right by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. \textsuperscript{20} The IPCC states with very high confidence (at least nine out of ten chance of being correct) that increasing temperature, sea level rise, and increasing precipitation variability will affect freshwater systems. \textsuperscript{21} Over one-sixth of the world population lives in an area that depends on snowmelt or glacier melt, and the amount of snowfall and extent of glacier cover will vary depending on both temperature and precipitation variations. Higher temperatures also lead to melting glaciers and polar ice sheets; with less ice to reflect sunlight away from Earth (known as the albedo effect) there will be fewer cooling agents.

The increase of the global average temperature will also cause variations in worldwide climate zones, as colder regions grow warmer and warming agents like the North Atlantic Current are diverted. Attached to increased heat waves and changing heat zones is the rearrangement of temperature-sensitive diseases. The IPCC warns with “high confidence” that an increase in global average temperature will lead to a serious increase in death and disease related to heat waves, fire, drought, and extreme weather events, like hurricanes, caused by warmer temperatures. \textsuperscript{22} There is also a strongly predicted increase in malnutrition and diarrheal disease, most of which will affect children in areas

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., Section 3.4, 187.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., Section 3.1, 175.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., Section 3, 175.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., Sections 8.2, 8.4.
already susceptible to those hardships. Changing climate zones will also account for the spread of malaria in regions previously unconcerned with the disease.  

*Uncertainties*

Global climate is extremely hard to predict. This difficulty lends itself to climate skeptics as fodder for arguments against implementation of mitigation policies. Public perception of climate is also an easily utilized tool for fostering doubt; cold winters and temporary cold spells make it difficult to convince the public of a warming trend, which in turn disinclines policymakers to enact expensive policies. Uncertainty about climate change is magnified by the fact that even climate scientists are in disagreement. As is visible in Figure 2, even the most distinguished scientific organizations in the world have a hard time reaching an exact consensus.

Scientists use climate models to predict climatic shifts and atmospheric and environmental effects of climate change. However, as Hansen writes, “the atmosphere and ocean exhibit coupled nonlinear chaotic variability that cascades to all time scales.” Oceanic and atmospheric warming trends are not parallel, and some oceanic changes, such as we have already seen with the slowing or diversion of the warm North Atlantic Current, could actually cause a net cooling effect. Because of these indefinite studies, climate skeptics have been able to assert that scientists’ predictions are an overestimation of reality.

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23 Ibid.
24 Hansen et al., "Target Atmospheric Co2: Where Should Humanity Aim?," 15. 15.
though general climatic variability makes it difficult for climate models to make
definite predictions, Hansen warns that uncertainties can fall on either side of
warming: “it is at least as likely that models underestimate effects of human-
made GHGs as overestimate them.”25

*Climate Agreements and International (In)Action: Adaptation, Mitigation, and the Management Approach*

An ongoing debate over how to choose a method for approaching climate
change is impeding decisive action. The two major pathways are those of
adaptation or mitigation. Adaptation is defined as “adjustments in ecological-
social-economic systems in response to actual or expected climate stimuli, their
effects or impacts,”26 whereas mitigation consists in reductions in GHG
emissions that are proactive rather than reactive.

Many economists favor adaptation over mitigation because adaptive
strategies respond only when necessary. Some point to the management
approach as a sufficient response to climate change. Based on economic
analyses, “management techniques are mainly drawn from neoclassical
economic theory and are directed toward manipulating behavior by controlling
economic incentives through taxes, regulations, and subsidies.”27 Dealing with

25 Ibid., 16.
26 Dale Jamieson, "Adaptation, Mitigation, and Justice," in *Climate Ethics: Essential
Readings*, ed. Simon Caney Stephen M. Gardiner, Dale Jamieson, and Henry Shue
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 265.
27 Dale Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming," in *Climate Ethics:
Essential Readings*, ed. Simon Caney Stephen M. Gardiner, Dale Jamieson, and
Henry Shue (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79.
climate change as if it were a global market is dangerous, especially in light of our apparent inability to predict the global economy now. Why should we be able to do it in the face of something as unpredictable as climate change?

Many developed countries, especially the United States, favor adaptation over mitigation. Their enthusiasm is derived partly from valuing economic efficiency and partly from the fact that the majority of atypical climate events will happen in developing countries. As Dale Jamieson points out, adaptation becomes a situation in which the polluted pays, rather than the polluter.28 There will be more frequent instances of poor countries facing huge losses due to tsunamis, hurricanes, or drought, after which they will need to rely on foreign aid for rebuilding. The acceptance of foreign aid, as well as the need to ask for it, is an assault to the country's autonomy and sense of worth, and there have been countless instances in which the promised aid never came.29

With climate change manifesting itself so quickly in record heat waves and droughts in the continental United States, it is clear that adaptation alone is not sufficient for dealing with the challenges to come. Mitigation strategies are essential to halting any effects that can possibly be stopped after years of ignoring evidence that the climate is changing due to human actions. Mitigation ensures that the polluter, not the polluted, pays, and in the next chapter I will examine debates about how to determine how much each polluter owes. I will now review the brief history of climate summits and international agreements.

29 Ibid. Jamieson looks to Hurricane Mitch in Honduras as an example; a year after more than $72 million was pledged to the World Food Program, less than a third of it had arrived.
The staunch refusal of the United States and many other wealthy nations to take substantive action will be crucial to the rest of this thesis.

Climate change has only been in the conscience of the average American since Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* won two Academy Awards in 2006. Part of what has made climate change awareness difficult to spread is the fact that it is a relatively new object of scientific study, called by different names and attributed to disputed causes. It has been known as the *greenhouse effect* and *global warming* in addition to *climate change, global wierding*, and *climate chaos*.\(^{30}\)

There have been many public debates over whether climate change is anthropogenic or the result of natural climatic cycles. As new data appears supporting an anthropogenic basis of change, advocates for climate mitigation have had to race to spread information on a phenomenon that is unfolding just as fast as information becomes available. Another, more important, reason for the lack of climate change awareness in the United States is the fractured governmental reception of testimony by climate scientists and the accompanying disbelief in the reality of climate change. Climate skepticism is almost entirely maintained by the energy industries that depend on unmitigated fossil fuel use and the politicians they influence. Plenty of the blame falls on the shoulders of U.S. exceptionalism, lack of education, and corporate greed.

In 1988 climate change entered the political fray in the United States. That year, NASA scientist Dr. Jim Hansen testified before the U.S. Senate

Commission on Energy and Natural Resources that "the earth is warmer in 1988 than at any time in the history of instrumental measurements."\(^3^1\) In his testimony, he provided empirical evidence for the reality of climate change, stating, "Global warming is such that we can ascribe with a high degree of confidence a cause and effect relationship between the greenhouse effect and the observed warming."\(^3^2\) His testimony included graphs depicting three different climate simulations over time: high GHG emissions, moderate GHG emissions, and decreased GHG emissions. The moderate simulation has since proved to be very accurate, even predicting a volcanic eruption in 1995, while Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991.\(^3^3\)

Climate change entered the international conscious in 1988 as well, with the creation of the IPCC. Before that, in 1985, the Vienna Convention initiated international cooperation on protection of the ozone layer. The 1987 Montreal Protocol was successful in setting international limits on chemicals endangering the ozone layer, and as a result the vast majority of ozone-depleting chemicals are no longer in use. International climate change agreements have seen less cooperation and success. The same strategies that worked for preventing ozone depletion have been only partially helpful in negotiating climate policies, not least because the elimination and replacement of ozone-depleting chemicals was easily and cheaply accomplishable.

\(^{31}\) The Greenhouse Effect: Impacts on Global Temperature and Regional Heat Waves, 1988, 35.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{33}\) Hansen et al., "Global Temperature Change," 14289.
The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was first negotiated in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. It functioned as so many succeeding international conventions have, as a step in the right direction without sufficient levels of stringency or intergovernmental compulsion. US opposition to binding commitments in Rio seriously obstructed efforts to make emission reduction commitments binding. However, the UNFCCC was able to establish “the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities,’” which enunciates the greater duty that developed countries have towards developing nations.34

The Kyoto Protocol is an agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the distinction that it contains binding obligations to countries that ratify it. At the time of the formation of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, over 170 countries and several hundred non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were present to hear the eventual effects of unregulated fossil fuel use. They were told that due to the melting of ice caps in Antarctica and in the Arctic Ocean the earth would face a sea level rise of 15 to 95 centimeters by the year 2100, leading to disastrous flooding and even submersion of coastal communities across the globe.35

In December of 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was undertaken at the third Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, attended by the European Union

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member states, the United States and Japan as well as other Non-EU OECD countries, Russia, OPEC countries, and “a majority of developing countries (including China and India).”\textsuperscript{36} In effect the Protocol binds participants to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 5% against 1990 levels over the five-year period from 2008-2012.\textsuperscript{37}

Support for the Protocol was far from unanimous. Oberthür and Ott, in their study of the Kyoto Protocol, mark the EU as “the major industrialized leader in promoting international climate policy in the 1990s.”\textsuperscript{38} However, the Southern European countries of Portugal, Spain and Greece, and Ireland were much more loath to lower emissions; these are poorer countries than the majority of their EU counterparts. This points to a key complication in the world of climate change policy: wealthier, pre-industrialized countries project climate change regulations onto countries that do not have the economic luxury to of avoiding cheap fossil fuel energy without international aid.

Among those countries that do have the economic luxury and global responsibility to reduce CO\textsubscript{2} emissions, seven have put up a resistant front at the Conference of the Parties in Kyoto, dubbed “industrialized laggards” by Oberthür and Ott.\textsuperscript{39} These countries, given the acronym JUSSCANNZ, included Japan, the United States, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand, with the occasional participation of Iceland and South Korea. That these countries

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 17.
should stand against ameliorating climate change in the face of their obvious contribution to its severity is a testament to the greed of the corporations that largely control them. All of the JUSSCANNZ countries eventually ratified the Protocol, with the single exception of the United States. In fact, the United States accounted for the largest percentage of worldwide emissions in 1990 with 36.1% of total CO₂ emissions. However, under Republican precedent set by President Bush Sr., the U.S. never saw fit to admit its moral responsibility as both a role model to other countries and a culprit in this crisis. The EU was the second largest consumer of fossil fuels in the world in 1990 with 24.2% of CO₂ emissions. A key difference between these two world leaders is that the EU has so far initiated some emission reduction efforts by ratifying the Protocol.

While the Protocol set up the first target numbers for greenhouse gas emissions, it was rendered less effective by many factors, not least of which was the United States’ refusal to ratify it. The Protocol was not binding and carried no penalties for countries that did not meet their promised levels of emissions, which disincentivized swift and stringent action. The goals of the Protocol are short-sighted in that they do not offer commitment agreements for the period after 2012. Subsequent international meetings have aimed to create more concrete and mandatory goals.

The 2007 UN Conference on Climate Change in Bali established the Bali Road Map, a course of action for continuing the guidelines of the Kyoto Protocol. It aimed to function as a precursor to the UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen in
2009, at which a binding agreement was to be reached.\textsuperscript{40} The Bali Conference therefore did not contribute very substantially to an international climate change agreement, but was still important in that it helped the dialogue continue. Climate change scientists and environmental and public health advocates had high hopes for the 2009 conference in Copenhagen, but they were disappointed when no binding agreements were reached.

The classic ethical comparison to make when dealing with environmental issues that impact many people is the tragedy of the commons paradox. Each citizen knows there is a finite supply of some resource, yet when given the opportunity to conserve or to use that resource, most will chose to use the resource to further their own interests. The Kyoto Protocol, and subsequent agreements, are excellent examples of global applications of the tragedy of the commons. Without binding agreements or penalties, international agreements will continue to emit GHGs and hope that other countries choose to reduce.

Robert Falkner of the London School of Economics writes, “even if international agreement on a global deal remains elusive, the continuous push for such an outcome helps to maintain political momentum in international negotiations.”\textsuperscript{41} This view is both helpful and dangerous, because it serves to render even an unproductive international meeting, in which many of the major GHG contributors block any threats to their economies, an encouraging step in


\textsuperscript{41} Falkner, Stephan, and Vogler, "International Climate Policy after Copenhagen: Towards a ‘Building Blocks’ Approach."
the right direction. The danger lies in the possibility that the movement to reduce emissions will become cyclical and ineffective.

This has been a somewhat shallow explanation of the significance of climate change and its biological and sociological impacts. There is much I have not covered in this chapter, and there will be more that I will not cover in the next chapters. To touch on all of the scientific aspects in detail is a project for another day. I have aimed to show in this chapter the enormous disparity between the impacts of climate change and their causes, and to hopefully incite some indignation towards those who impede progress in mitigation for economic reasons. More often than not, we will see, those are the very actors who have the least to lose, either because they live in a relatively protected geographical area or because they will be able to afford the costs of potential damage; they occupy a class that has seen few obstacles to their own security. In the next chapter I will discuss some ethical issues of climate change, and will further examine issues of moral responsibility.
II. Ethics and Climate Change

“In today we face the possibility that the global environment may be destroyed, yet no one will be responsible.”

-Dale Jamieson

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the causes and effects of climate change, as well as the history of international climate change action. In this chapter I seek to examine ethical issues of responsibility that arise in the process of dealing with climate change on an international level. Climate change is a unique ethical phenomenon because its effects are local in neither time nor space, nor are they attributable to any one individual.

Dale Jamieson makes the important distinction that what are perceived as scientific problems posed by climate change are in fact moral problems. The unpredictable and unevenly distributed harmful effects of climate change are not only the result of years of fossil fuel use and unchecked development, but raise moral issues that need to be addressed. He writes, “science has alerted us to a problem, but the problem also concerns our values...These are problems of ethics and politics as well as problems of science.”  

It is essential that mitigating climate change be perceived as a moral problem, as well as a problem of technology and international relations, because this perception shifts the focus

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42 Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming," 84.
43 Ibid., 79.
from the abstract environmental phenomena to human responsibility. Jamieson writes:

One of the most important benefits of viewing global environmental problems as moral problems is that this brings them into the domain of dialogue, discussion, and participation. Rather than being management problems that governments or experts can solve for us, when seen as ethical problems, they become problems for all of us to address, both as political actors and as everyday moral agents.\textsuperscript{44}

I will now look at some of the commonly cited approaches to ethical problems posed by climate change, such as responsibility for past emissions, contractarianism, and complete egalitarianism. I will then move to the notion of mediated responsibility and the many obstacles it poses to mitigation.

\textbf{Approaches}

The most pressing questions that arise when considering moral responsibilities to act involve who should act and to what extent. How responsible is a given nation to enact mitigation policies? Climate change is caused by greenhouse gas emissions, and because carbon dioxide can stay in the atmosphere for several centuries, the effects that are currently manifesting themselves in the form of record-breaking heat and atypical climate events are

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 84.
caused by past emissions. Considering that many developed countries have been burning fossil fuels and emitting greenhouse gases since the Industrial Revolution, some argue that developed nations have the greatest responsibility to reduce emissions. There is controversy, however, about whether developed countries must take historical emissions into account when determining the level of mitigation that they are morally required to undertake.

Some approaches to the question of how to determine responsibility for past emissions rely on an historical approach, in which the country in question is responsible for undertaking mitigation efforts that reflect the net amount of emissions they have ever produced. This is the basis of the “polluter pays” method, in which the developed nations are responsible for cleaning up what they have released into the atmosphere. Many developed countries complain that this saddles them with too large a burden and instead support a time-slice principle. On this view, developed countries should determine the amount of mitigation efforts needed based on current emissions. This position operates mainly on the idea that developed countries did not know that emitting GHGs could have adverse effects. This, however, is not a sufficient justification for denying historical responsibility, because developed countries have known about the possible effects of GHG emission for decades.

Contractarianism is frequently cited but also not useful in determining who should be responsible because it is not applicable to two of the most

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46 Ibid., 34.
pressing problems raised by climate change—intergenerational justice and the hegemonic maintenance of current structures of global power. Under the contract view, no agent incapable of participating in an agreement is morally relevant.\textsuperscript{47} This has evident implications for future generations, who cannot interact with current generations and to whom no equality of resources is therefore provided. However, it can also deny moral consideration to agents living currently without political or international representation and who are disadvantaged to the point that they cannot uphold an agreement that would involve sacrificing anything. This is clearly an undesirable conclusion, because any suitable solution to these issues should above all account for those least equipped to face climate change.

Complete egalitarianism is another approach to climate change, for instrumental reasons both well-meaning and not. As Henry Shue notes, “complete egalitarianism—the belief that all good things ought to be shared equally among all people—can be a powerfully attractive view.”\textsuperscript{48} Altruists seeking a global solution could see this kind of egalitarianism as promoting the interests of all countries equally, leaving no countries behind. Shue argues against it, however, because in a climate change context, complete egalitarianism would result in a continuance of global power inequalities. Rich countries, as the beneficiaries of unchecked fossil fuel use, would have the same emissions limits in a complete egalitarian context as poor countries that lack fully developed infrastructures.

\textsuperscript{47} Jamieson, "When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists," 316.
\textsuperscript{48} Henry Shue, "Global Environment and International Inequality," ibid., 102.
Some policymakers in affluent countries like the United States support complete egalitarianism in a thinly-veiled attempt to ensure that power structures remain as they are now. Egalitarian theories that appeal to an ideal of “complete egalitarianism,” whereby inequalities of any sort are disallowed, are thus inadequate for addressing problems of existing international inequality. Rich countries should have lower emissions limits than poor countries that would otherwise be denied the opportunity to use fossil fuels for growth in the way rich countries did. Many more practical egalitarian theories do not appeal to complete egalitarianism, focusing instead on a specific paradigm of equality, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

This notion of equal treatment for all is found in another important climate change issue: that of allowing developing countries to continue emitting as a way of compensating for inequalities in fossil fuel use. This simultaneously seems a fair compromise and has troubling implications. Poor countries want to use fossil fuels to develop in the same way that rich countries did, but this will lead to a worsening of the climate problem that is most likely going to disproportionately affect developing nations. Further, it will lead to the development of energy infrastructure that is reliant on fossil fuels, which will become more expensive and less available over time. There is promising evidence that developing countries could choose to build and develop with emissions-free energy plants through improved technology—in India, cell phones became ubiquitous before the country could put up telephone wires.
Mediated Responsibilities

Responsibility for climate change is thus easily interpreted as morally ambiguous, in large part due to the lack of a clear relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and effects. Robin Attfield explores the ways in which climate change entails mediated responsibilities, “where there is one or another kind of distance or gap between action and foreseeable impacts.”49 The difficulty of mediated responsibilities is that by distancing the agent from the impact, the responsibility to act can seem diminished. Mediation can occur temporally or spatially, where the agent of mediation is a large time or space gap between action/inaction and impact; these are issues that will be further addressed later. It is extremely important to understand the extent to which responsibilities in a climate change context are mediated, and the negative impact this has on the possibility of mitigation.

Uncertainty is a mediating factor in determining responsibility for climate change because the impact of action/inaction is probably but not definitely known. Climate deniers often use uncertainty as a justification for inaction, arguing that a costly transition to emissions-free energy sources from inexpensive fossil fuels is not justified by the uncertain findings of climate scientists worldwide. As Stephen Gardiner argues, this objection usually conflates economic uncertainty with scientific uncertainty; the former implies

unsure knowledge of the probability that climate change will happen while the latter is the unsure knowledge of the specific details of climate change effects.\textsuperscript{50} Climate change is inevitable. The extent to which it will affect atmospheric and oceanic phenomena is not completely certain, due more to the fact that it has always been difficult to predict weather events than to a lack of scientific certainty that it will happen.\textsuperscript{51} James Hansen plans to make this explicit in his Edinburgh Medal Address: “Our parents didn’t know that they were causing a problem for future generations but we can only pretend we don’t know because the science is now crystal clear.”\textsuperscript{52} Diminished responsibility from scientific uncertainty is therefore an illegitimate justification.

Because climate change is such a complexly manifested problem, further mediation occurs by the diffusion of causes and impacts.\textsuperscript{53} Because emissions enter the atmosphere and spread across the planet, billions of people are affected slightly by each polluting agent. Attfield refers to the “drop in the ocean” approach to responsibility for actions that cause a minute impact on the climate as a whole, such as driving a car to the grocery store or spraying one aerosol can. This approach, exemplified in the tragedy of the commons, might permit such minute emissions, even though they contribute to the harm of billions of other people. Attfield uses theory by Derek Parfit to argue, however, that this kind of

\textsuperscript{50} Gardiner, "Ethics and Global Climate Change," 7.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{53} Attfield, "Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming, and the Scope of Ethics," 227.
justification does not hold if the action in question constitutes part of a set of actions that cumulatively cause harm.\textsuperscript{54} Parfit makes an exception for acts that are unavoidable yet contribute to climate change, such as breathing or raising cattle. There is much more to be said about individual responsibility, but in the next two sections I will instead focus on the ways in which temporal and spatial remoteness function as mediating factors.

This rejection of “drop in the ocean” justifications for diminished responsibility is advantageous in a climate change context because it renders individual agents responsible for individual actions. However, Attfield does not use these theories to further an ethic of corporate responsibility for emissions. He addresses the need for international action by governments, but does not extend the critique of mediated responsibility to them or to international corporations, especially fossil fuel producers. However, the terms of climate change ethics must be framed so as to hold accountable those powerful groups that have every incentive not to act.

\textit{Temporal Distance}

The challenges posed by climate change and the reluctance of current generations to mitigate it are amplified by the mediated nature of atmospheric effects. NASA scientist James Hansen reports that molecules of carbon stay in the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 228.
environment for five to two hundred years, but notes that geophysical scientist David Archer has warned that some amount will never go away or will stay for at least 1,000 years from the time of emission. The weather events the world has recently experienced, in the form of atypically frequent and powerful hurricanes in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, melting ice caps in the Himalayas and Mount Kilimanjaro, atypically frequent tsunamis in Pacific island nations, and unprecedented flooding in Pakistan, are the results of emissions from the past decades, not emissions from the past five years.

Because of the delay between the emission of greenhouse gases and environmental consequences, the temporal disconnect of climate change is a prime example of the mediating factor of responsibility that Attfield addresses. As evidenced earlier, a problem arises when delayed impacts lead to mediated responsibilities, which individuals and institutions find easier to ignore. In his article *A Perfect Moral Storm*, Gardiner argues that the incentives to not act greatly outweigh the incentives to begin mitigation on a serious scale because of the moral distance between generations. Lack of individual incentives to make difficult choices coupled with institutional inadequacy for facilitating those choices is the starting point for a cyclical problem: each generation will face the question of whether or not to act, and each will be affected by the same paucity of incentives to act that the previous generation had.

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55 Hansen et al., "Target Atmospheric Co2: Where Should Humanity Aim?.
57 Ibid., 404.
Further, the fact that the current generation must act to avoid the harm of the future generations makes it impossible to form a solidarity between the two. Gardiner notes that, “in principle, spatially fragmented agents may actually become unified and so able really to act as a single agent; but temporally fragmented agents cannot actually become unified, and so may at best only act as if they were a single agent.”58 What he does not expand upon is the fact that there are more than two agents at work here; the current generation is responsible for preventing future generations from being harmed, but the current generation is also in the position of mitigating climate change caused by past generations. The position of the current generation—as the decider of the fate of future generations and the unhappy recipient of the burdens left by the past generations—contributes to the sense of helplessness and fosters the complacency that makes action even harder.

Do we have an obligation to future generations? This is an ethical issue that many philosophers have debated in other contexts, but in a climate change context that question holds immense weight. Many international actors want to say that we do not have an obligation to stop the processes of climate change because it would pose an undue economic burden on the world economies. These actors use a cost-to-benefit ratio when analyzing the net impact of mitigation efforts. Economist William Nordhaus replies to them, “elementary cost-benefit and business economics teach that this is an incorrect criterion for

58 Ibid.
selecting investments or policies.” He argues that a net benefits analysis is in fact what should be used because it will favor the measure with the most positive outcomes rather than the measure with the best ratio of benefits to cost. Economists should be subtracting cost from benefits rather than dividing benefits by cost to determine the net impact of mitigation versus no action.

Moral philosophers have aimed to clarify the problems posed by moral distance and to provide solutions that are feasible. Gardiner writes that moral distance is compounded by causal asymmetry, the fact that earlier generations can act in ways that will harm future generations, but the future generations cannot in turn harm their predecessors. This phenomenon is the foundation for proponents of the contract view, who argue that because future generations are not capable of benefitting earlier generations, they are not moral equals. This thinking is flawed because it would assume that small children or severely handicapped individuals also are not moral equals because they cannot take action that benefits the current generation.

Some moral philosophers adhere to person-affecting intuition, which asserts that acts are only bad if they are bad for some specific person. Derek Parfit offers an objection to person-affecting intuition with respect to future generations in the form of a puzzle called the nonidentity problem.

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The nonidentity problem rests on the fact that a specific person’s identity is entirely dependent upon when exactly that person was conceived, because a specific sperm out of hundreds of millions of sperm could fertilize a specific egg at one exact moment, whereas a delay of even a few seconds could lead to a different sperm fertilizing the egg. It also assumes that life is worth living. From here, Parfit is able to argue that even if an act A will lead to harm for a future person, to choose a less harmful act B instead would most likely lead to a variation in the time at which the future person would have been conceived. Because even a five-minute difference could produce a completely different person, act B effectively would deny existence to that person who would have experienced harm as a result of act A.62 Because it is assumed that life is worth living, the person would be better off living and suffering than not living at all.

The person-affecting intuition is therefore shattered by the nonidentity problem; how can an act be wrong for someone if it allows that person to exist? Further, if an act is not wrong because it is bad for someone, by what other criteria do we determine that an act is wrong? This is extremely troublesome for those who are searching for a moral mandate to mitigate climate change because, as Robert Huseby writes:

If emissions are not reduced, then, those future generations that exist, say, three hundred years from now, and who are badly off because of policies implemented centuries earlier, cannot, for this reason, claim to have been harmed, because in the alternative

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world in which emissions are reduced, these people do not exist.

Thus, continued pollution at the present level is a necessary condition for these people’s existence.  

Parfit’s example of depletion mirrors the situation we now face when deciding whether or not to mitigate climate change or keep emitting at current levels. In this example, a community can decide to deplete or conserve some kinds of resources, and depletion will increase the standard of living for two hundred years, after which it will significantly decrease living conditions. Because life is still worth living even after living conditions worsen, and because choosing conservation would undoubtedly alter the course of who will be conceived, the future generations of those who chose depletion will owe their existence to that choice. They therefore cannot say they have been harmed. This example is analogous to the choice between emitting at current levels or trying to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions.

Parfit, in his essay *Energy Policy and the Further Future*, tries to break through his own theory and struggles to create a moral obstacle to continued emissions. One example he uses is a situation in which he drunkenly crashes his car and in the process his friend’s leg is lost. One year later, his friend’s loss prevents him from being drafted into the army to fight a war in which he would have surely died. Even though he has technically saved his friend’s life, he is still

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morally to blame. Parfit writes that this is because “in assigning blame, we must consider not actual but predictable effects...We can deserve blame for doing what we believe may be worse for others.”

This statement, however, does not make our continued emissions harmful to future generations, because they owe their existence to it. It is, instead, Parfit’s own intuition, no more binding than the person-affecting intuition. He concludes, somewhat resignedly, that because of the nonidentity problem, there is not yet a theory that would allow moral responsibility to prevent harm to future generations.

Brian Barry uses sustainability to argue for a comparative notion of intergenerational justice that argues that future generations should not be worse off than current generations. He examines the extent to which our actions should avoid harm to future generations, wherein harm consists in a depletion of some entity X that should be maintained indefinitely. To do so he uses the idea that justice involves distributive considerations rather than right or wrong distinctions and that “justice and injustice can be predicated only of relations among creatures who are regarded as moral equals in the sense that they weigh equally in moral scales.”

Something can be wrong without it being necessarily unjust, and justice is only found in a relationship between moral equals. From these two points he argues first that intergenerational justice must therefore deal with distributive considerations and second that all humans beings are moral equals; he does not ground the notion of moral equality in any time...

65 Ibid., 116.
period, and is therefore able to extend moral equality to humans of all time
periods, including future generations.\(^67\)

Barry's aim is to strengthen ideas of intergenerational justice by using
sustainability as a support. Sustainability, he argues, entails “that there is some X
whose value should be maintained, insofar as it lies within our power to do so,
into the indefinite future.”\(^68\) He is careful to avoid reliance on notions of X that
use the current time as a basis for value judgments. For example, X is not found
in want-satisfaction, because wants are dependent on what is or what is
expected to be around. Neither is X found in living a good life, because this
method assumes that we can choose what the good life consists in for others
based on values derived from current generations.\(^69\) Barry settles on equality of
opportunity, but opportunity for him implies a multiplicity of possible good lives,
none of which ignore basic needs such as food, shelter, education, healthcare, or
water, and therefore “conditions must be such as to sustain a range of possible
conceptions of the good life.”\(^70\) Barry therefore marries sustainability with
intergenerational justice without appealing to the norms of the current
generation.

Sustainability, which concerns itself with the future existence of some
thing worth existing, seems arbitrary without being attached to something that
gives it significance. Justice, as Barry demonstrated, implies distributive

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 52.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 53.
Barry is able to conceive of sustainability as a distributive consideration by linking it to intergenerational justice while preserving the emphasis on moral equality without temporality. This removes whatever felt arbitrary about sustainability’s maintained existence of something, namely that it would be a something determined by temporally rooted values. Barry’s response to the issue of intergenerational ethics is straightforward: “unless people in the future can be held responsible for the situation that they find themselves in, they should not be worse off than we are.”

Spatial Remoteness

Responsibility is mediated by space in several ways. On one hand, the effects of climate change are disparate. Effects are not local in space—greenhouse gas emissions leave a specific location and enter the atmosphere, where they circulate across the planet. They then contribute to warming or to weirding of an area that is geographically remote from the site of emission. If emissions stayed exactly above their sources, like a raincloud, determining responsibility for them would be a much easier task. Because atmospheric functionings affect phenomena like temperature, rainfall, or ocean temperature, there is a further distancing of the emissions from their impacts. For example, if a woman in New York City drives a car to Philadelphia, the carbon dioxide that her car emits enters the air, where it contributes to the warming of the

71 Ibid., 54.
atmosphere, which, even with mild warming, eventually leads to the melting of the Greenland Ice Cap and a subsequent sea-level rise of up to twenty feet.\textsuperscript{72}

With even two feet of warming, many Pacific island nations, such as the Maldives and Kiribati, would be submerged, as well as cities at sea level across the globe.

The woman in her car does not see the displacement of Maldivian citizens when she chooses to drive, and she will not be put on trial for causing them this harm. The responsibility to act is felt less intensely when the victims are out of sight, but they are still morally relevant.\textsuperscript{73}

There is also a disconnect between the locations of mitigating forces and their effects, particularly if the mitigation comes from a country with less international power. For example, Ethiopia, like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, has seen rainfall levels decrease over the past thirty years, and Ethiopians have noted a shortening of the rainy season by three months.\textsuperscript{74} This is partly due to deforestation, as well as the general warming trend caused by anthropogenic climate change; Ethiopia itself did not produce the emissions that have caused this warming, but it has sought to remedy the warming caused by deforestation by planting up to forty million trees in one year. The problem is that this kind of action is dwarfed by the emissions of other countries, and the United States’ emissions will overwhelm the benefit of planting trees in Ethiopia.


\textsuperscript{73} James Garvey, \textit{The Ethics of Climate Change : Right and Wrong in a Warming World}, Think Now (London ; New York: Continuum, 2008), 83.

\textsuperscript{74} Michael S. Northcott, \textit{A Moral Climate : The Ethics of Global Warming} (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 158.
One aspect of climate change cannot be overlooked; rather, it should motivate and guide international action: effects are predicted to parallel the current hierarchy of international power. This means that poor countries will suffer more from climate events than rich countries even as they are less capable of dealing with the subsequent expenses. The IPCC is very certain that climate change will increase droughts in Africa, where one third of people live in a drought-prone region. Many countries that will be affected cannot afford to invest in mitigation efforts because they can barely support the current generation, or their governments are corrupt or in turmoil. Without participation by affluent countries, these poorer countries will be trapped in a vicious cycle of not being able to afford mitigation, being hit by a climate-caused, atypical draught or other weather event, and then spending so much to rebuild after the event that mitigation funds are further unavailable. What is more troubling is the fact that these atypical weather events will be caused by past and present emissions from rich countries, who are far more capable of paying for mitigation efforts.

This again brings up an issue that is foundational to this thesis: international climate change action is demonstrably essential, yet many factors impede its progress, notably the mediated nature of responsibility to act, temporally and spatially. This is important, but one other factor is not sufficiently examined. What I aim to illustrate is the fact that international

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climate change dynamics mirror colonial mentalities; in addition to the mediated responsibilities posed by climate change, there is an active oppression that is obstructing action, and this oppression is based on the moral devaluation of poor and less powerful countries and communities.

The question of responsibility for climate change arises at a time in which global inequalities are so great that it would be nearly impossible for a small, developing country to change the way wealthy, developed countries (mostly in the West) act in international climate change agreements. The devaluation of the lives of citizens in small and poor countries lets historically fossil fuel-intensive countries like the United States ignore responsibility for those lives. Value is currently given to citizens and countries according to the amount of money they control, and this is highly problematic. The solution must begin with a consideration of all other countries as moral equals; as I will discuss in detail later, the West must acknowledge its privilege and specificity amongst almost two hundred less advantaged countries for it to see that its interests constitute a small portion of global interests.

There are further incentives for Western countries to not act because of a vested interest in fossil fuel use and the desire to maintain current international power structures. The vast majority of the West’s energy infrastructure relies on fossil fuels, and fossil fuel corporations spend millions making sure that politicians vote against renewable energy. Further, acknowledging other countries as moral equals in a climate change context would threaten the current international hierarchy of power. This reconsideration of the moral status of the
world’s citizens with respect to climate change is dangerous to the dominant West because it could spark an international movement for increased international justice in other areas of oppression.\textsuperscript{76}

\begin{center}
\textit{International (In)Action as Oppression}
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Iris Young, in her book \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference}, lays out five criteria of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Her goal is to conceive of a framework for liberation from oppression that is difference-positive, meaning that group difference, as well as difference within groups, is respected. She works against a paradigm of liberation in which groups are destroyed to make room for free individuals who are not identifiable, and therefore not able to be oppressed, by any one stereotypical marker. She argues instead that “social justice...requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression.”\textsuperscript{77}

Her five criteria of oppression follow her difference-positive framework; each criterion stands alone as its own entity, but any combination is recognized and respected. Possessing any one criterion signifies oppression, but oppression comes in different forms and is experienced differently by each group or individual. By examining these five faces of oppression, I seek to make clear the

\textsuperscript{76} Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption," 402.

oppression of most non-Western countries in international climate change conversations. 78

1) Exploitation is based on Marxist theory, the aim of which is to reveal “how class structure can exist in the absence of legally and normatively sanctioned class distinctions.” 79 Young argues that there are race- and gender-specific exploitations insofar as there are jobs typically occupied by women (caretaker, provider of sexual and emotional comfort, clerical work) and members of certain racialized groups (domestic help, busboy, hotel maid) in which there is a “transfer of energies whereby the servers enhance the status of the served.” 80 The work that the server performs, therefore, is not sufficiently rewarding to enhance the server’s own status, and further, it renders the server less important by strengthening the status of the served.

2) Young’s notion of marginalization is also tied to economic production, in that marginalized individuals are excluded from participation in the labor force. Young argues, “marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression” because it disallows an entire group from “useful participation in social life and thus potentially...severe material deprivation and even extermination.” 81 These groups of marginals are usually racialized, but the elderly, the disabled, and other people who have trouble gaining employment

79 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 48.
80 Ibid., 52.
81 Ibid., 53.
are also subjected to marginalization. This is dangerous because it renders some
groups of people dependent on other groups for welfare, which leads to
inequality in terms of autonomy. There is an assumption that because the
marginal is provided welfare, she or he must comply with arbitrarily mandated,
bureaucratic regulations; this means that the marginal loses equal citizenship
rights to a certain extent. As Young states, “dependency in our society thus
implies, as it has in all liberal societies, a sufficient warrant to suspend basic
rights to privacy, respect, and individual choice.”

Further, capitalist values and
notions of success ensure that members of society who do not participate in
economic growth are excluded from being important to society.

Marginalization is particularly apparent in a climate change context
because it deals with individuals or groups that are neither allowed to
participate in the global economy nor equipped with the resources for doing so.
The capitalist core of marginalizing agents values economic productivity over
cultural or other productivities. Therefore, groups or countries that contribute
less to economic production, by no fault of their own, are left aside and ignored
or made dependent on some more powerful country for welfare. Countries that
are small or poor are ignored in international climate talks and, further, they are
entirely dependent on wealthier nations both to choose to mitigate climate
change and to provide financial support in the face of future climate events. This
dependence subordinates developing and small countries to more affluent

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82 Ibid., 54.
nations, stifles autonomous economic productivity and fossil fuel use, and effectively renders them colonies of the developed world.

Marginalization also harms the most disadvantaged groups in all countries, and is exponentially more harmful in poor countries. For example, those who live in hurricane-prone regions of the United States are dependent on the state government for protection from storms, but poorer hurricane zones receive less attention or action than more affluent zones. However, in the United States, even though marginals experience material deprivation and are rendered dependent on aid from others, the experience of the marginal in a poorer country is exponentially more oppressive. This is partially due to the smaller amount of resources available to help marginal groups, but is also tied to the inferior status of the country itself in relation to wealthier nations. When a small or poor country is marginalized according to capitalist conceptions of value, the marginal groups within that country are cast even further outside of the realm of consideration. If Tanzania is excluded from international climate priorities as set by the West, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, and children in Tanzania face even more obstacles to autonomy.

3) For Young, the notion of powerlessness is tied to working relations. She demarcates a hierarchy in which capitalists are at the top, profiting as they do from the work of professionals and nonprofessionals. Professionals occupy a liminal space, benefiting from the energies of non-professionals yet taking orders from capitalists. Young defines the powerless status of the nonprofessional in relation to the professional: “the powerless lack the
authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have.”\textsuperscript{83} This is due partly to the fact that professionals typically undergo expensive schooling, have greater workplace autonomy, and benefit from what Young terms “respectability.”\textsuperscript{84} By this, she means the general aesthetic of success that receives respect or deference; she also notes that women and people of color have to prove their respectability before it is given, whereas working-class white men often are respected until their class is revealed.\textsuperscript{84} Powerlessness is thus the lack of respectability that nonprofessionals experience, which white men inherently possess and all others must work to achieve. What is more, the way a woman or a non-white man gains respectability is by succeeding according to the white man’s paradigm. This is a problematic that will be explored in the next chapter.

Powerlessness manifests itself in a climate change context by the lack of respect and deference accorded to small and developing countries, as well as to the individual nonprofessionals in these countries. Poor and developing countries do not frequently make demands of rich countries, and when they do, for example former Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed’s frequent public pleas for climate mitigation, their requests are ignored.

4) Cultural imperialism for Young is “to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other.”\textsuperscript{85} The United States perpetrates cultural imperialism insofar as it expects

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
the welfare of the entire world to suffer in order for American fossil fuel use to continue as is. American culture, which is carbon-intensive and based on entitled ideals of environmental exploitation and expansion, both renders smaller countries' perspectives invisible in international climate talks and at the same time works to maintain current low levels of fossil fuel use in countries with energy needs for development. By vying to maintain current emissions levels until 2020, the U.S. hopes to remain the frontrunner in the globalized, capitalist world that it helped create.

That is how developed countries project their values onto the world without acknowledging less powerful countries’ values, but cultural imperialism also entails a simultaneous othering of those countries. In order to justify ignoring developing countries, developed countries represent them as the Other, making them less than equal. Othering was a key mechanism of colonialism, because in the process of creating an Other, the dominant strips the Other of her or his full personhood, facilitating oppression and subordination. The Other then encounters greater obstacles to autonomy, because she or he must defy the dominant’s stereotypes and overcome cultural oppression to take a place of status in the dominant’s world. The next chapter will treat cultural imperialism and the obstacles it poses to taking action on climate change in greater detail.

5) Oppression by violence consists in acts that are unprovoked and directed towards members of a group simply because of hatred for that group. Young's articulation of violence as a form of oppression is “less the particular
acts themselves...than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable.” Violence is therefore a social practice that oppresses groups by the fear of future attacks. The violence in climate change is mediated by space and time; current emissions will cause future warming across the globe and, eventually, wars fought over water resources or due to famine. The aggressor in this case, the developed West, does not see the violence it has caused, and the victims cannot know who is most responsible.

It is not difficult to find each of these five criteria of oppression in current climate change politics and practices. It is imperative that their presence be known, yet many of these aspects of climate change are not commonly discussed. Each is significant in its own way; Young writes that “applying these five criteria to the situation of groups makes it possible to compare oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another.” Exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness deal with structural inequalities in terms of economic oppression. They chronicle different outcomes and causes of distributive inequalities, which are readily apparent in the interaction between poor and rich countries in a climate change context. Because capitalism is so pervasive throughout the wealthy countries, economic production is prioritized instead of equality of resources.

When discussing these criteria of oppression, there is a tension between the nation and the individual. I want to speak in more general terms, to illustrate the neocolonialism of the West and to maintain an emphasis on the fact that the

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86 Ibid., 61.
87 Ibid., 64.
major emitters are the ones who are not acting, but doing so ignores the plight of
the individual in any country who experiences any of these oppressions. Even in
the United States, there are still marginals such as the disabled and the elderly,
as well as the powerless and those who have been treated with unprovoked,
culturally sanctioned violence. There are discrepancies between the way the
residents of New Orleans’ lower ninth ward and the residents of New York City
have been attended to in the aftermath of hurricanes; the awareness and
concern for New York City during Hurricane Irene of 2011 far surpassed what
was done for New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina. Some areas of New Orleans
were evacuated much too late to be effective. These individual stories are
powerful, but I will continue to focus on international oppressions. As I examine
further obstacles to climate change action, this tension between the nation and
the individual will appear again. Neither are satisfactory by themselves; the
individual experience gives weight and applicability to the issues, and the
national is the stage on which climate change action will occur. Neither can be
dismissed, because both are necessary to change the way climate change is
conceived.
III. Responsibility Mediated by Othering

“The American way of life is not up for negotiation.”
- President George H.W. Bush

In the last chapter, I examined issues of moral responsibility that arise in a climate change context, and the ways in which responsibilities to act are mediated both spatially and temporally. I also applied Iris Young’s five criteria of oppression to climate change, and had no trouble demonstrating that international climate change (in)action has caused and will continue to cause the oppression of billions of people worldwide who are among the poorest and least able to effect change. I now aim to explore the ways in which the process of othering allows these forms of oppression to occur, as elucidated by the theories of several invaluable philosophers. In the following chapter I will look at how difference has been ideated and the subsequent role it plays in international climate change action.

The Other has been a social construct for as long as societies have conceived of themselves as belonging to one particular group out of many. Groups take many forms, and it has taken a long time for philosophers to conceive of groups in more than national, racial, or gendered terms. Aristotle writes, “the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities...we should

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regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.” The accidental, for Aristotle, encompasses all of the characteristics of an entity that are not essential to its being. Man is the essential, and woman is something less perfect. This positing of the female as a defective male continues today in many traditions; Simone de Beauvoir writes about Orthodox Jews who pray, “‘blessed be God...that He did not make me a woman’...while their wives pray, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will.’”

Of interest to this thesis are the ways in which othering, the process by which an Other is formed, maintained, and represented, is used to uphold white/Western male hegemony, specifically in climate change discourse. A greater understanding of these theories of the Other will inform our thoughts on a system of oppression billions of world citizens face today: international climate change action. I will explore the development of theories of othering in a small sampling of work by scholars who reframed the issue and made room for further critiques of it. In this chapter and the next I attempt to work through ways difference has been theorized and utilized, exploited and suppressed. I aim to demonstrate the importance of working within a framework that does not forget to account for anyone.

In this section, I will first discuss modernist, phenomenological approaches to othering found in the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon. Then I will investigate the more nuanced and more recent work of

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90 Ibid., xxii.
feminist and postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who situate the process of othering in a globalized world. Finally, I will look at Ien Ang’s defense of the heterogeneity of experience within a group. Examining the theories of these scholars will provide insight into the othering that is perpetuated in climate change discourse and that inhibits decisive international action.

Beauvoir and Fanon: L’expérience vécu d’un Autre

Simone de Beauvoir, in her introduction to *The Second Sex*, lays out a critique of social and gender constructs that hold man as the norm and woman as the accidental, if not the abnormal. She argues against male hegemony by contrasting her experience as a woman with that of man: she is continuously defined by the fact that she is not male, and her position in society is no more than her function in accordance with male desires or expectations. She extends the othering directed at women to black and Jewish communities based on the presence of one factor that distinguishes each of the three as Other, be it blackness or Jewishness or being female. She maintains as the basis for her critique the idea that “a [white, non-Jewish] man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the [white, non-Jewish] human male.”91 He is, as Beauvoir explains, the essential, the subject of society. He does not define himself in relation to another group, but as the One.

91 Ibid., xv.
Beauvoir makes sure to specify that the Other neither establishes itself as Other nor defines the One: “the Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One. But if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view.”

Beauvoir captures the fact that the Other is reduced to such a characterization entirely because it is the Subject who defines and represents the Other, rather than the Other representing him or herself. Beauvoir’s use of the passive “is posed”—*il est posé*—shows that the Other is positioned by the One, physically and metaphysically.

The second sentence needs some unpacking. The idea that the Other has the possibility to “regain” the status of the One suggests that, at some previous juncture, the culture of oppression did not define the Other as such. Beauvoir goes on to talk about populations whose oppression happened in one historical event, as in a religious war or the kidnapping of a population for slave labor, leading to two options, according to Beauvoir: another historical event, such as a rebellion or overthrow of government, or submission to the oppressor. However, Beauvoir makes the distinction that women have not been able to oppose the Subject because they have not formed a group that is cohesive enough to do so and therefore submission has been the only option available to them. In submission, the Other internalizes inferiority; Beauvoir notes later that “men say

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92 Ibid., xviii.
‘women,’ and women use the same word in referring to themselves.” The most effective oppression occurs when the oppressed internalize feelings of inferiority as a result of the dominant subject’s representation of social standing.

Beauvoir’s explanation of women’s inability to form a solidarity mirrors the spatial and temporal remoteness that mediates responsibility for climate change. Because many of the most endangered citizens are spatially remote from each other (even the Maldives, though one archipelago, is composed of almost 1,200 small islands) or will inhabit the earth centuries from now, it is nearly impossible for them to come together to overthrow the tyranny of stagnant international agreements.

Beauvoir goes on to give a brief history of woman as Other in male discourse, exposing the hegemony behind the “separate but equal” clause championed by white men who attempt to appear egalitarian. “That profitable formula,” as Beauvoir puts it, results in a system in which the subject constructs a separate sphere for the Other. After describing the idea of “separate but equal” and expanding it to social contexts that are not based on gender, American Jim Crow laws in particular, Beauvoir speaks of the man who maintains that “every woman student who goes into medicine or law robs us of a job” without ever questioning his own entitlement. In the act of creating a system of purely rhetorical equality, two groups of unequal power are

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95 Ibid., xxiii.
96 Ibid., xxiv.
established, the oppressor group having defined the oppressed group as Other and having stifled any actual equality.

Society is thus divided into two groups, both constructed by the oppressor group—the object/Other group, and the subject group, who effectively controls the two groups but has offered the “equal” clause as an attempt to appear egalitarian. As a result of this, the crossing over of a member of the oppressed group into a position the oppressor group considers powerful (in this case a woman taking the role of doctor/lawyer) functions as a threat to the established social positioning of the two groups. This threat is borne in the possible transmission of an object of the oppressor’s created bipartite culture into the subject group. The resentment the subject group expresses at the movement of the object group into spheres previously reserved for the oppressors reveals the insincerity of a promise of equality in separation, where separation means both physical and metaphysical polarization. Movement, both physical and societal, becomes an act of rebellion and a symbol of power.

Beauvoir writes, “many men will affirm as if in good faith that women are the equals of man and that they have nothing to clamor for, while at the same time they will say that women can never be the equals of man.” The façade of faux egalitarianism is shattered when the dominant group interprets the movement of the object group as a breach of its superiority, revealing the discrimination and hegemony inherent in a “separate but equal” society. For

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97 Ibid., xxvi.
Beauvoir, moving into a position of power in the white man’s world is the ultimate manifestation of equality and rebellion.

In the drafting of the Kyoto Protocol, legislators used the idea of a “separate but equal” measure to ensure that each country contributed to the effort to reduce emissions in a way that was supposedly egalitarian; countries with lower economic development were given looser emissions standards in an attempt to equalize the opportunity for development in relation to that of countries with high economic development. However, the Protocol failed to be an egalitarian solution in three major ways. First, it set emissions goals at levels that still would allow for an increase in temperature large enough to flood some small Pacific island nations and cause harsher droughts in already dry areas. Second, the Protocol assumes that giving “developing” countries more time to use fossil fuels is a legitimate, equalizing move, when in reality this would be an empty equality. It would cause further warming and would render these countries more dependent on fossil fuels instead of carbon-neutral energy. Third, none of the commitments were binding, including those of the developed countries. This means Western countries had no real incentive to adhere to their commitments (the failure of the United States to ratify the Protocol further ensured that the Western countries would not sacrifice fossil fuel consumption in exchange for the protection of billions of citizens in the global South). Further, the movement of developing countries into positions of economic capacity previously occupied by Western countries constitutes a threat to current hierarchies.
Beauvoir notes that a white man would never feel the need to write a novel on the experience of the white man, because all stories are already stories of the white man. The white man is at home in society; the mere act of stepping outside does not pose for the white man the kind of social anxiety that it poses for the white woman or the black man or woman. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes of the inescapability of blackness and of the internalized racism in European societies. The most present and pressing fact of blackness is that which is so immediately recognizable. With blackness comes a type of identity that is omnipresent and undeniable, as opposed to the “Jewishness of the Jew,” which as Fanon says “can go unnoticed. His acts and behavior are the determining factors.”⁹⁸ This presents a sort of existential dilemma for the black man, because he has been pre-defined by the white man yet denied the right to define himself by his actions. Fanon writes that the black man must watch his actions for fear of relaying some latent cannibalistic or backwards personality to his viewers. This reveals a sort of panopticon that has been imposed upon the black man; Fanon describes this when he says “I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness...deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism...and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Ya bon banania.*”⁹⁹

The black man is thus trapped in the white man’s gaze, which delegitimizes and exotifies him. Whereas Beauvoir conceived of a method of subverting the power of the dominant by moving into the white man’s sphere of

⁹⁹ Ibid., 92.
power, Fanon shows that even if a black man becomes a man of high professional status in the white man’s society, his blackness will pervade his status: “[the] black physician will never know how close he is to being discredited.”¹⁰⁰ Fanon explains that because he is marginalized by his race, a medical mistake could mean the loss of legitimacy for every black doctor to come to France. This is Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist anguish in its most exemplary form. On each black man’s shoulders rests the reputation of every black man.

For Fanon, subverting the power of the dominant involves a purging of internalized European racisms, “for the myth of the bad nigger is part of the collective unconscious.”¹⁰¹ The collective unconscious, for Fanon, is not inherent but culturally imposed; even the black man has internalized this racism by experiencing a culture that praises all that is white, light, and pure. In order to purge himself of his unconscious racism, Fanon turns to Aimée Césaire, the hero of negritude, who declares, “No matter how white one paints the base of the tree, the strength of the bark screams underneath.”¹⁰² Césaire advocates for the killing of the inner white man, which is the collective, unconscious racism, and replacing it with a reconstruction of blackness.

Moving into a position of power within the sphere of the dominant means appealing to the values of the Subject, so there is a question as to whether the Other can retain his or her identity in the process. Are the accidentals or abnormals, such as woman or black, pushed aside in the process of achieving

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 97.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 72.
¹⁰² Ibid., 175.
power? Does power even necessitate acknowledging the dominant, or is there a way to achieve autonomy and power without appealing to the norms of the Subject? These are questions with which many philosophers after Beauvoir and Fanon have struggled.  

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Modernism came under fire by a movement of thinkers who wanted to distance themselves from the Western centrism of both its thinkers and its subjects of inquiry. One critique comes from transnational feminist thinkers. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, in the introduction to the collection of essays titled *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, explain that postmodern thought grew out of a discontentment with modernity’s fixation on clear-cut dichotomies, objectivity, and unity. Kaplan and Grewal write, “in many locations in the United States and Europe, theory often tends to be a homogenizing move by many First World women and men. That is, theory seems unable to deal with alterity at all or falls into a kind of relativism.”

Theory influenced by the principles of modernism oversimplifies an entity as subjective and complex as human experience, defining it in relation to the West. Thinkers such as Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak helped expand notions of otherness from explanations of oppression that essentialize all blacks or women as a unified group to a global heterogeneity of subjectivity.

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103 I would like to thank Kari Weil for helping me elucidate these questions.

Edward Said, in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, illustrated the hegemony inherent in representations of the Middle East that exotify and delegitimize it, thereby justifying Western feelings of superiority. The issue of representation is fundamental to postcolonial, postmodernist, and feminist theory. Questions of who represents whom, with what language, and to what audience cannot be overlooked in the quest of deconstructing power roles within cultural narratives. Power dynamics are revealed in studying the representation of culture, whether represented to itself, to others, by itself, or by others; the makers of cultural narrative often have more power in a nation than its leaders, for better or for worse. Of interest to postcolonial and feminist scholars is the way in which representation of a marginalized group, either by the colonizer or the colonized, reinforces white, male, and Western hegemony. Some scholars, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have also questioned whether it is even possible for a colonized, non-Western culture to represent itself without appealing to Western values or methods of expression. Further, Spivak is interested in the groups that are outside of what she calls the “culture of imperialism,” the indent of colonialism left on a group in the form of language, identity, or values.

First I will explore the issue of cultural representation by agents of Western hegemony. After the subject has deemed the object of its gaze an Other,

105 "If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."- Andrew Fletcher (1655-1716), quoted by Khachig Tölölyan.
the subject’s representation of the Other is reiterated and preserved. The Other is re-presented by the subject in a faulty translation of cultural values and realities. Edward Said was interested in the representation of groups in the Middle East unable to represent themselves to the West. Western representations have the power to define what was called the Orient in ways that perpetrate colonial stereotypes of backwardness and exoticism, reinforcing Western self-conceptions of superiority and causing people living in the Middle East to internalize Western colonial myths.

Said posited that Orientalism has three meanings, “all of them interdependent.” Firstly, it means the study of the Orient, including Islam and the Middle East. Secondly, it signifies “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” This way of thinking places ‘the Orient’ outside of the realm of what colonizing forces considered civilization as it should be, based as it was on a scale of progress with economic power as its telos. Thirdly, Said conceived of Orientalism as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”

Whereas in the second definition Said sets up Orientalism as a kind of othering, in the third definition that othering is utilized to control cultural narrative about “the Orient”

by speaking for it. The Orient is not allowed a voice with which to explain its subjective experience.

Said’s tripartite notion of Orientalism is different from Beauvoir or Fanon’s categorization of the Other as a race or gender in the Western world; the Other here does not interact with the West other than being represented by a select few who conquer and return to represent what they have observed in relation to the West and Western values. Sankaran Krishna, in his book *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century*, writes, “Western knowledge about Oriental societies, especially of Islam, was indissociable from the fact of Western conquest and colonization of such societies, and of its belief in the innate superiority of its own civilization and religion over those whom it conquered and administered.”¹⁰⁷ These feelings of innate superiority continue today to be a rationale for continued American military action in the Middle East; Islamophobia and inaccurate fear-mongering by politicians, as well as news reports of misogyny, has maintained a religious and social superiority that allows the United States to preserve white male supremacy.

Othering, for Said, becomes something incredibly powerful, intrinsically linked to the interpretation and subsequent dissemination of non-Western culture in terms of Western values, all the while justifying colonization of an exotified and simplified culture. Said writes, “Human societies, at least the more

advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with “other” cultures. When the Other cannot represent itself, the subject represents it, exotifying and trivializing it to justify its domination. Said’s tripartite definition of Orientalism can be extended to marginalized groups worldwide and the important role cultural representation plays in hegemonic structures.

Said’s emphasis on the corporate institution in his third definition of Orientalism is extremely applicable to current international agreements on climate change. In Orientalism, the corporate institution re-presents the Orient in order to dominate it, by using the cultural imperialism that Iris Young found was a criterion of oppression. In this way, othering is a tool for maintaining a worldview such as that of President Bush, Sr.: the values of the dominant supercede those of the Other, precisely because the Other is not morally relevant the dominant. Because the dominant controls the cultural representation of the Other, the Other is never allowed to share in the moral status of the dominant.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also concerned with the hegemony of cultural representation. For Spivak, othering entails silencing, compounded by the fact that the language of the dominant makes it impossible to articulate or experience the life of the Other. Spivak recognizes that the paradox of postcolonial cultural narrative is that despite identifying itself as a culture recently liberated from a force of imperialism, cultural narrative maintains connections to the imperial. Krishna writes, “for Spivak, postcoloniality is a

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condition that recognizes the privilege of being conversant with the culture of imperialism, knows it as an instance of one's own colonization, and yet cannot disown it.” The class of people who derive their power from being able to speak the language and understand the customs of the colonizer strive for independence but will never be able to remove themselves from what she terms the culture of imperialism, the structural, social, and hegemonic functionings in a decolonized state.

In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak discusses the inability of the class she calls the subaltern to make itself heard or represent itself to its colonizers or to its fellow citizens of the colonized state. In Marxist theory, the subaltern refers to the proletariat, the disenfranchised groups that are not represented or supported in capitalist discourse and action, similar to the notion of marginalization that Young uses as a criterion for oppression. Therefore, Spivak's postcolonial *subaltern* is outside of the culture of imperialism and is thus inaudible to its postcolonial state. The subaltern is not the Other; Spivak’s argument is more nuanced than a Subject/Other dichotomy. The act of speaking and being heard implies a transaction of listening for speaking, a dialogical relationship. While the Other is defined as such by the Subject and is therefore listened to, albeit with little intelligibility, the subaltern is neither heard nor represented by the Other, and is not even conceived of by the Subject.

Spivak uses the example of *sati* in India to illustrate the concept of the subaltern; communities that practice *sati* are deemed abusive to the widows by

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both the West and by Hindu leaders in India. The subaltern (sati practitioners) is legitimised by neither the subject (the West), nor the subject’s constructed Other (Hindu leaders). Spivak reveals how the British reaction to hearing of sati led to a re-presentation of the tradition in Victorian terms and subsequent construction of the Hindu woman as a pathetic creature: “There is no more dangerous pastime than transposing proper names into common nouns, translating them, and using them as sociological evidence.”110 By making the word sati a proper noun, the British man recreates the Hindu woman as a simplified, “third-world woman,” tamed into Victorian submission and rendered an easy subject of psychoanalysis. Spivak comes to the conclusion at the end of the essay that the subaltern cannot speak because it is denied access to the transaction of speaking and listening undertaken by members of the culture of imperialism.

In a climate change context, the culture of imperialism is also the culture of capitalist industrialism; communities and countries that are economically less powerful than the West can only represent themselves in the language of capitalist values. Developing countries, such as China and India, see the suggestion of emissions reduction as a threat to their chances to succeed in accordance with capitalist industrialism. Meanwhile, countries without enough wealth to influence international politics, such as the small Pacific island nations and many concerned African nations such as Tanzania, are not being heard

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because they do not speak the language of capitalism. They are only brought to
the attention of international governments when more powerful countries tell
their stories.

In her essay *Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, Spivak
iterates the significance of cultural narrative in hegemonic functions. She writes,
“the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be
ignored.” She talks about the ‘worlding’ of the Third World, the process by
which Third World cultures are brought into the First World’s consciousness
and at the same time broken down and marginalized by the West. Worlding, for
Spivak, consists in an induction into the Western conscious of a country by
means of epistemic violence perpetrated by a Western colonizer. Spivak argues:

> To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with
> rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted,
> and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of
> ‘the Third World’ as a signifier that allows us to forget that
> ‘worlding’, even as it expands the empire of the literary
> discipline.¹¹²

Cultural representation then is a violent force that has the power to
dismantle non-Western practices and ways of thought. Literature serves as an
indicator of this kind of epistemic violence, by which the ways of understanding
of the non-West are destroyed, leaving room only for Western ways of thinking.

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¹¹¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of
¹¹² Ibid.
In other words, any effort to represent a culture as “Third World” or Other acts, inadvertently or not, from a position of imperialist justifications of domination.

The Other, for Spivak, is inextricably linked to the subject, which exercises cultural control even while its physical violence has halted. Spivak elucidates this notion when she says, “no perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self.”\textsuperscript{113} It is the idea that imperialism has always already tamed the Other that is so ominous. Western representation of the non-West springs from an imperialist history that defines the Other even before the Other thinks of defining herself; this is the same conundrum with which Beauvoir and Fanon struggle. Spivak says in the footnote to this sentence that this is the point of her essay \textit{Can the Subaltern Speak?}. A cultural narrative of the Other written by the Subject will always appeal to imperialist notions, with or without intent to uphold Western hegemony, and will never include the subaltern.

Krishna discusses what he calls “tarrying with the double negative” in Spivak’s work.\textsuperscript{114} The double negative is this: one cannot not want to be a part of the subject. Where there is oppression and discrepancy between what it is morally responsible to do and what is actually done, there is a class of individuals in a position of exploitation, marginalization, or cultural imperialism.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 253.
This class cannot but want to gain the status of the dominant class. This is manifested internationally in many ways; a poor country cannot not want to be a developed country, developed by Western standards because the West is dominant, which requires fossil fuels. In another way, a poor country cannot not want to participate in international agreements set by the more powerful countries, because the alternative would leave them in an even worse state. Even though agreements are not moving in the direction smaller and less powerful nations would like (i.e. they fail to take strong enough measures and set proposed emissions at a level that will still cause small countries exceptional harms), there is no choice but to acquiesce to international agreements and act under a framework set by white, Western countries.

The Heterogeneity of Oppression

The othering that we have seen thus far has been primarily a tool utilized by the white, Western man to justify and maintain systems of hegemony. Spivak introduces the concept that othering is multilateral, that some Others are more removed from the consciousness of the dominant, and that their greater marginalization gives them a different experience. I will now turn to some postmodern feminists who take issue with the homogenization of the experience of the Other. The othering that I will examine comes not from the white male, but from the white, Western woman. In other words, some of the very sources that
seek equality for women are unintentionally maintaining the Western patriarchy against which they protest.

Othering is not always perpetrated by agents that wish to dominate. In her book *Feminism Without Borders*, Chandra Mohanty argues that by putting all Third World women in the same category, some Western feminists deny those women a multiplicity of experiences, situations, and agendas, thereby accidentally constructing them as an Other in terms of Western values. She asserts that Western feminists act under a “privileged premise” when they assume that all Third World feminists share the same experience of oppression and should be treated the same.\(^\text{115}\) While Mohanty herself essentializes “the Western woman” in her critique of the creation of a “Third World woman,” it seems that the point she wants to make is that some Western feminists use a sort of benevolent othering to further political goals.

In its attempt to help, benevolent othering makes assumptions about groups and essentializes them so that there appears to be a broader political base of people who need help. Mohanty explains the reproduction of the non-West by some Western feminists as the “‘Third World Difference’—that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all of the women in these countries.”\(^\text{116}\) Extending perceptions of the non-West as misogynistic or paternalistic to all Third World countries essentially strips women in these countries of a certain intellectual or personal complexity. Third World women

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116 Ibid., 19.
are often represented as a singular, homogeneous group on the basis of their freedom of mobility or dress, their religion, or some other societal rule, despite other fundamental differences. Mohanty argues against creating a homogeneous group of women based on one kind of oppression or experience. “Such reductive cross-cultural comparisons result in the colonization of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests that women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilize.”\(^\text{117}\)

Many scholars want to go beyond an essentialized notion of “women” as the category of individuals around which feminist theory is based. They want to show that differences between members of the group challenge any singular concept of sexism or the role of women in society. Ien Ang discusses one solution, the politics of difference:

The so-called politics of difference recognises the need to go beyond the notion of an encompassing sisterhood and acknowledges that feminism needs to take account of the fact that not all women are white, Western and middle class and take into consideration the experiences of ‘other’ women as well.\(^\text{118}\)

The phenomenological treatment of othering we saw in Beauvoir and Fanon sets up a strict dichotomy of Subject and Object, the dominant and the Other. Said brings into consideration the hegemony of cultural representation and Spivak introduces a way of thinking about alterity that accounts for more

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 30.
than just a two-sided relationship. The concept of the subaltern paved the way for discussions about varying intensities of othering and the possibility that Others do not share equal experiences. Importantly, Spivak also analyzes the hegemony of the culture of imperialism, in which the Other cannot not want to participate in the culture of the dominant, having been marked linguistically and culturally by colonization and imperialism. Scholars like Mohanty, Grewal, Kaplan, and Ang expose the way dissimilarities within a marginalized group lead to othering on another scale.

It is not a coincidence that the othering evident in climate change discourse mirrors patterns of colonization. Said’s notion of Orientalism not only applies to the cultural domination of the Middle East by the West in the decades after the decolonization of African and Asian countries, but it serves as current-day evidence for the reason that the catastrophic floods in Pakistan were not enough to motivate binding climate agreements at the 2010 Copenhagen summit. The One and the Other are, in a climate change context, replaced with the Developed and the Developing, their status determined by capitalist industrial values. International climate change decisions recall the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. The individual citizen without political power is effectively the subaltern in this case.

The importance of Mohanty and Ang’s work is to remind us that we need to be talking about a plurality of experiences when we talk about the third world. The next chapter will analyze how notions of difference apply to the climate change crisis. The idea of a politics of difference, when applied to the
international climate change crisis, becomes a means of determining an ethical approach to international action that accounts for all countries and their individual needs.
IV. Incorporating Differences within Difference

“If othering involves attributing to the objectified other a difference that serves to legitimate her oppression, saming denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to the laws of phallic specularity.”

-Naomi Schor

Saming, as Naomi Schor articulates, is just as problematic as othering in that it denies an Other the right to define herself and therefore appropriates a substantial amount of her autonomy. Difference is central to both mechanisms, but its meaning changes; in othering, difference is projected onto the Other, as a form of affirmation of the dominant group and without recourse to the Other’s lived reality. In saming, difference within a group of Others poses a threat to the dominant group and is therefore smothered in the attribution of one characteristic to the entire group to serve as its signifier. In order to break this hegemonic process, difference must not be denied, but incorporated in a way that will make room for respect for the lived experiences of all members. This proves harder in practice than in theory, in part because it necessitates the dismantling of a form of colonialism that has become artfully synonymous with liberty for many in the West: capitalism. In a climate change context, this could mean the elimination of the fossil fuel industry for the benefit of those

undermined by its continuation; it could also mean the enforcement of
time to keep climate change somewhat in check.\footnote{120}

Thinking about difference and how to incorporate it is a difficult issue,
complicated by the need to recognize and appreciate all things even while
focusing on one; talking about one form of difference is easily misconstrued by
the eager eye to be the deliberate ignorance of another. In order to further
understand how to create a framework for thinking about difference, I will
attempt to elucidate the mechanism of saming and the issues that arise when
difference is denied.\footnote{121} I will also look at some proposed means of embracing
difference, such as the egalitarian models of smoothing out differences in
socioeconomic status and the communitarian model of unity, as well as their
critiques. I will then look at the idea of a politics of difference as another means
of incorporating difference in a way that is productive and useful, and will end
by modifying it to make it more internationally applicable.

\textit{Saming and Essentialism: Mechanisms and Critiques}

In her essay \textit{This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with
Irigaray}, Naomi Schor explains a method of saming that uses the debate between

\footnote{120} We have already committed ourselves to warming of almost 1° C. Jim Hansen,
who was recently awarded the Edinburgh Medal, warns that without a yearly 6% reduction in CO\textsubscript{2} emissions, we will face a state of emergency: Carrell, "Nasa Scientist: Climate Change Is a Moral Issue on a Par with Slavery."

\footnote{121} Even though I discuss philosophers who frequently contribute to the feminist
theories, I hope to make clear that their theories are applicable to relations between
nations as well as between individuals.
essentialism and antiessentialism to provide a foundation for her discussion of
the opposition between Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray’s philosophies.
Schor explains that essentialism, the notion that things have essences without
which they could not be what they are, in the context of feminism means “that
woman can be specified by one or a number of inborn attributes that define
across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being and in the absence
of which she ceases to be categorized as woman.” Essentialism has the power
to cross cultures and history without acknowledging resulting differences, which
is what makes it “the prime idiom of intellectual terrorism and the privileged
instrument of political orthodoxy.” It is easy to see that many feminists
consider essentialism oppressive: it denies difference and conflates all women
according to the essentializer’s perception, it fails to make room for anatomical
atypicalities or temporal/cultural specificity, and it uses the same logic that has
lead to the oppression of countless groups that have been so categorized.

Schor sees the stagnant discussion of occurrences of essentialism as a
tired one, writing with approval about the emergence of “a recognition of the
excesses perpetrated in the name of antiessentialism, of the urgency of
rethinking the very terms of a conflict that all parties would agree has ceased to
be productive.” It is no longer helpful to debate whether a certain writer is
essentializing the experiences of women, because to a certain extent
essentialism is unavoidable. What will be productive, Shor argues, is the

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122 Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," 59.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
recognition that “if we are to move beyond the increasingly sterile conflict over essentialism, we must begin by deessentializing essentialism, for, no more than deconstruction, *essentialism is not one.*”\(^{125}\)

Schor outlines four critiques of essentialism, each of which finds fault with a different aspect of it. The liberationist critique, first made by Simone de Beauvoir, is based on a constructionist idea of culture as a societal construct. This critique takes issue with essentialist arguments that ignore the role society plays in naming categories of people. Beauvoir’s famous declaration, *on ne naît pas femme, on le devient*, expresses this constructionist view.\(^{126}\) Just as the liberationist critique disagrees with the failure of essentialism to take society into account, the linguistic critique disagrees with essentialist arguments that fail to take the role of language into account. Prompted by Jacques Lacan’s work, “the essentialist, in this perspective, is a naive realist who refuses to recognize that the loss of the referent is the condition of man’s entry into language.”\(^{127}\) The essentialist, in the linguistic critique, fails to realize that man does not have to define himself in relation to something else, the way women and other minorities do; she or he “refuses to accept the phallocentric ordering of the symbolic,” the way in which language is masculinized in accordance with patriarchal hegemony.

The feminist critique is the only one, Schor explains, to have come from within the feminist movement, from diversity within the women’s movement.

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\(^{125}\) Ibid., 60.

\(^{126}\) Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

\(^{127}\) Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," 61.
Essentialism for these feminists smothers difference within the movement. The seductively simple category of Woman is, in fact, a means of suppressing “very real lived differences” and also functions in accordance with binary opposition; Schor writes that feminist antiessentialism and deconstruction share in the critique that “essentialism inheres in binary opposition, hence its displacement of woman-as-different-from-man by the notion of internally differentiated and historically instantiated women.” Schor is particularly interested in the feminist critique because of its attention to differences within a group that is already Other; it is concerned with upholding subjectivities rather than stifling those very real lived differences. In this way, antiessentialism is a valuable tool for unearthing differences within a group, and in its application to other disadvantaged groups it also proves very important. Antiessentialism goes too far, however, when feminist theory is rendered solely a battleground of identifiers or when feminists lose the political leverage afforded to large groups. Schor, however, is less interested in the debate between essentialism and antiessentialism than in examining how Beauvoir and Irigaray managed to come to two very different conclusions by starting with the same concept.

Beauvoir and Irigaray begin their works by introducing the problem of the female’s exclusion from the realm of the male and the resulting oppression experienced by women. They move from this beginning to conclusions that are at opposite ends of the debate between essentialism and antiessentialism. Beauvoir, in her antiessentialist approach, aims to assert woman’s presence in

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128 Ibid., 62.
the male-dominated world as an equal; Irigaray seeks not to find equal ground with men but to dismiss patriarchal power systems altogether, choosing instead to found a celebration of woman that is independent of man. “Whereas for Beauvoir the goal is for women to share fully in the privileges of the transcendent subject, for Irigaray the goal is for women to achieve subjectivity without merging tracelessly into the putative indifference of the shifter.”\(^\text{129}\) In this way, Schor argues, Beauvoir and Irigaray discuss othering and saming, respectively, betraying the difficulty of avoiding using a logic of saming when discussing othering (as Beauvoir does), and appealing to othering when discussing saming. She writes, “each position has its own inescapable logic, and that inescapability is the law of the same/other. If all difference is attributed to othering then one risks saming, and conversely: if all denial of difference is viewed as resulting in saming then one risks othering.”\(^\text{130}\) She goes on to say that while it is easy to criticize Beauvoir for trying to erase difference between the sexes and to criticize Irigaray for promoting difference at the cost of essentializing, these critiques fail to take the difficulty of the articulation into account.

Irigaray’s proposed means of subverting patriarchy involves using what she calls *mimesis* to mimic the discourse of the dominant and to expose its hegemony. Schor shows the multileveled nature of the notion of mimesis, explaining its mechanism that evolves from parroting the dominant into a celebration of difference. Mimesis first echoes the patriarchal discourse and then

\(^\text{129}\) Ibid., 64.
\(^\text{130}\) Ibid., 65-66.
becomes a mocking voice, making room finally for a “joyful reappropriation of
the attributes of the other that is not in any way to be confused with a mere
reversal of the existing phallocentric distribution of power.”¹³¹ Irigaray does not
seek an overthrown patriarchy, but “an emergence of the feminine, and the
feminine can only emerge from within or beneath...femininity.”¹³²

Extending Irigaray’s argument to all oppressed groups leads to another
way of thinking about differences that occur within othered groups. Rather than
an occupation of the hegemony by the historically oppressed, Irigaray’s model
promotes the celebration of differences that come from within the broad
category of the oppressed. It is an important distinction because if difference is
delegitimized within a disadvantaged group, the denial of difference functions as
a further obstacle to achieving equality with the dominant. In the political world,
in order for a disadvantaged group to become recognized and, eventually,
respected, it must assert itself as separate from its essentialized category.
Irigaray proposes this happen by the oppressed group performing a caricature
of itself in the dominant group’s terms, eventually making room for the
emergence of a group that does not appeal to the dominant’s value system and
celebrates itself independently of the status quo. Iris Young’s articulation of a
politics of difference reflects this model in that it recognizes and supports
difference in terms that do not uphold the dominant as a referent.

¹³¹ Ibid., 67.
¹³² Ibid.
Egalitarianism: Acknowledging Expensive Needs in a Climate Change Context

Luce Irigaray’s support for mimesis emphasizes the action of the individual in the face of institutionalized, cultural norms that work to oppress her or him. Egalitarians de-emphasize this bottom-up approach as they argue for an institutional change that will encourage the individual to flourish. They do this by appealing to the concept of equality, thereby seeking to surpass difference in the attempt to uphold an ideal of parity in at least one sense of the word, but they disagree as to which should guide our actions. Does equality mean equal opportunity, income, or access to welfare? Or is it more firmly attached to capability, social status, or autonomy? Most importantly, what does it mean to be egalitarian in a climate change context, and what would an egalitarian approach to climate change look like?

John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, argues that governments should be responsible for promoting equality of what he calls “social primary goods,” including liberty, opportunity, political power, income, and wealth. His Difference Principle encompasses income and wealth, and stipulates that a just society works to augment the wealth and income of the least-advantaged citizens. This view allows for inequalities, as long as they benefit the worst-off, and also depends on the distribution of resources.\(^\text{133}\) Distribution of resources plays a critical role in egalitarian debates. Some egalitarians, such as Rawls and Bernard Williams, assert that distribution is essential to a just society. Others,

like Robert Nozick and Ronald Dworkin, argue against distribution that does not take into account voluntary and involuntary circumstances on the part of the recipient of resources.

Nozick denies distribution on two grounds: first, that need is not a criterion for distribution and second, that egalitarians usually make the mistake of viewing citizens as consumers instead of producers. Nozick denies that need is a criterion for distribution by presenting the example that barbering need does not justify distribution of barbering services, therefore need alone is not sufficient. His assertion helps remind us that egalitarians disagree as to what equality should consist in. Some egalitarians try to level the inequalities that accompany capitalist structures that aim to reward what is considered valuable production and effort. Nozick is not of this mind. He argues instead that egalitarians “tend to reason as if all of a society’s resources exist in a ‘big social pot’” and that distribution of this pot is the only imaginable conclusion.\(^\text{134}\) He wants to claim part of the pot for the producer of each resource and, it follows, by his denial of need as the criterion for resource distribution, to allow the more productive of society to have a greater share of the pot. However, Nozick does not seem to address the fact that capitalism only rewards certain types of production and does so in a way that is incongruous with the effort or difficulty required of them.

For example, an immigrant farm worker in California who bends to pick vegetables for ten hours a day in the sun has a much more difficult job than that

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 127.
of a CEO who spends a stressful yet painless ten hours a day making executive
decisions about how to process those vegetables efficiently. Yet one worker is
paid at minimum wage or less and the other receives millions of dollars. Nozick
seems to want to classify the farm worker as a consumer of goods, and the CEO
as a producer, because of his insistence that egalitarians consider “such things as
the motivations and rights of those who do produce these goods.” He is
operating under a capitalist framework that considers the CEO's work to be
more valuable or productive. Every citizen with a job, however, should be
considered a producer of economic interactions, at the very least in the process
of working to pay for everyday expenses. The farm worker, however, most likely
occupies the class of the working poor and, because of his or her minimum wage
income, needs assistance supporting a family. Rawls’ difference principle
supports government distribution of resources to the farm worker based on
extreme need, but Nozick does not. While it is clear that he is not committed to
furthering egalitarian goals in a practical sense, his critique of distributive
policies based on need raises important questions in specifying a distributive
egalitarianism.

Ronald Dworkin, in response to Nozick, specifies an objection to the
equality of primary social goods based on need by considering those with
expensive needs. He objects to welfare equality based on a currency of
something like overall happiness, on the grounds that people could choose to
require more resources to be happy, by changing to more expensive tastes, for

\[135\] Ibid.
example. He argues that equality of welfare would mandate giving more resources to individuals with more expensive tastes than they can afford. Jonathan Wolff writes of Dworkin’s view that “equality should, other things being equal, allow those who work hard to reap the rewards, while those who chose to do less should bear the consequences of their choices.”

Again, the same objection can be raised to Dworkin’s view as to Norzick’s: in a capitalist society, certain kinds of work, which usually require extensive education and which are much more readily available to members of a certain socioeconomic status, earn more money than other kinds of work, which may in fact be more difficult. The farm worker certainly numbers among “those who work hard,” but his rewards are not commensurate with effort. Dworkin is wary of a system of equality that would give resources independently of an individual’s production.

This seems uncharitable, yet it leads to the conclusion that a distributive ideal of equality should call on government to compensate for bad luck, like being born into poverty, disability, or oppression, but not for expensive tastes, which are voluntary. The amount of distribution should take into account the situation in which each citizen lives, especially the extent to which that situation is a result of the individual’s voluntary choices. Responsibility becomes a two-fold tenet of equality, on the part of both the individual to “work hard” and the government to offer supplementary resources when working hard does not reap sufficient rewards. G.A. Cohen clarifies that this does not mean nothing is owed “to starving people as such, whether they be within our own state or outside it,  

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Ibid., 128.
but, so [Dworkin] insists, our duty to them is one of human compassion, not one that derives from a principle of equality.”¹³⁷ Individuals who suffer without being productive members of society deserve our compassion, and those who work hard but have expensive, involuntary needs deserve to be given resources, according to Dworkin.

This does not change according to governmental shifts; Cohen writes, “it would be a mistake to think that globalization of authority, or the nascent forms of it that we now witness, represent a challenge to his view.”¹³⁸ This leads to the conclusion that in a climate change context all citizens who will be harmed disproportionate to their ability to pay in comparison to their wealthy counterparts qualify as having expensive needs. These needs, which will be imposed on them involuntarily and which will not be insurable, would be met in this view of egalitarianism. What is unsure is who is responsible for meeting them—the governments of many developing nations cannot afford to meet the expensive needs many of their citizens will have, increasing the necessity for international action. Corporations will not be held responsible because they are, allegedly, detached from government and therefore unaccountable according to this view. The individual is not overtly responsible for the government’s failure to act, for Dworkin, but is responsible for trying to fix a situation, being as he or she is a citizen of a collective.¹³⁹ While it is essential that a model of equality be expandable from the national to the international level, it is not yet clear how

¹³⁸ Ibid.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 17.
Dworkin’s view would manifest itself in addressing the issue of who should distribute resources to those who suffer because of climate change.

_The Politics of Difference_

Other egalitarian models are predicated upon a currency of social equality and do not see distribution of resources to be the most effective way of promoting equality. They hold that the recognition of group identity will lead to a socially egalitarian society in which group differences are ignored. There are some critiques of social egalitarianism based on the fact that in the process of ignoring group difference, oppression is upheld. Iris Young refers to egalitarian theory that chooses to forgo group difference in the name of equality as “an ideal of assimilation.”\(^{140}\) She seeks instead a recognition-based egalitarianism, in which confirmation and support of group identity are prioritized.

Young outlines three oppressive consequences of insisting that equality rejects group difference. Firstly, ignoring group difference means ignoring that certain groups are in inherently unequal situations and have completely different experiences than more privileged groups. This is highlighted by the fact that “the privileged groups implicitly define the standards according to which all will be measured,” regardless of bad, ‘brute’ luck in terms of socioeconomic positioning, disability, or societal racism.\(^{141}\) Arguments for equal treatment across the world in terms of global warming, or even arguments for equal

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\(^{140}\) Young, _Justice and the Politics of Difference_, 157.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 164.
responsibility for the mitigation of climate effects, deny the difference in economic and political power levels between countries.

Young’s second objection is that disallowing group differences “allows privileged groups to ignore their own group specificity,” thereby effectively protecting the elite from ever having to care about less advantaged groups. This is an essential point, because this phenomenon is precisely what makes change so hard in an unequal society. If the dominant group continues to define other groups in relation to itself, it is faced with neither the possibility of being different nor the responsibility to address the wrongs it has perpetrated in its illusion of being the norm.

The third objection raised addresses the devaluation of difference that becomes internalized by members of a group.142 Because group differences are supposed to be non-existent, those that do exist are perceived as unwelcome, resulting in attempts to suppress difference that can lead to a loss of self-esteem. The denial of difference despite lived realities and the internal devaluation of it uphold the hierarchy that previously existed. Young’s three critiques are made only in relation to the type of egalitarianism that calls for the active ignorance of group difference. They also assume that in this version of egalitarianism, once group difference is erased, citizens will adhere to the status quo, with all its extant inequalities and favor towards the dominant culture.

Further, Young writes, “in a political struggle where oppressed groups insist on the positive value of their specific culture and experience, it becomes

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142 Ibid.
increasingly difficult for dominant groups to parade their norms as neutral and universal, and to construct the values and behavior of the oppressed as deviant.”

This is the case in the Maldives. Two degrees C of warming will annihilate portions of the Maldives’ low-lying islands; any more will sink the entire country. The recently ousted president, Mohamed Nasheed, testified to the Environmental Justice Foundation in 2009, arguing that the country does not want to “trade in a paradise for a climate refugee camp.” Maldivians are adamant that they do not want to be forced to leave. Their cultural values, stated so positively and clearly, deserve to be taken seriously. They cannot be thought of as petulant or uncooperative by Western countries and fossil fuel industry lobbyists because their statement reflects the truth that they deserve to be respected. The climate change debate should not be solved in reference to Western ideals, but in reference to the interests of all countries. Countries that use enormous amounts of fossil fuels should be reminded to recognize their own difference and to address their histories of putting production ahead of (Other) human life.

143 Ibid., 166.
Redistribution vs. Recognition

Iris Young’s conception of a politics of difference is a reaction to the egalitarian ideals that fail to make room for difference. She reacts to simplistic equality clauses that focus on ignoring group difference on the grounds that they leads to a false sense of unity under the guise of being difference-blind, while the lived experiences of different groups remain specific. Young argues that “the achievement of formal equality does not eliminate social differences, and rhetorical commitment to the sameness of persons makes it impossible even to name how those differences presently structure privilege and oppression.”

These paradigms mask the hegemony of the dominant group and fail to realize that sometimes inequality, in the form of difference-positive policy such as affirmative action, is necessary for a more equal state.

Young’s conception of the politics of difference is similar to egalitarianism based on recognition, but she argues for more than recognition; she is not interested in societies of different groups, but in a society in which all groups recognize and accept each other’s difference. No attempts should be made to assimilate into any specific group, and each group should be respected and given political space in which its voices are heard. She uses the idea of a “heterogeneous public” to express what the ideal political decision-making body would resemble. In the heterogeneous public, group differences are celebrated and represented, not always in proportion to their group size: Native Americans,

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145 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 164.
she argues, would constitute too small a number of representatives, but the specificity and intensity of their historical and current oppression are great enough that they merit more representation in relation to, say, white, middle-class men.

What differentiates a heterogeneous public from cultural pluralism, moreover, is that the public adheres to principles of social justice.\footnote{Ibid., 190.} It is important to note that when Young refers to groups in the politics of difference, she is talking about affinity groups, who share a general experience of life, rather than ideological groups, who share political beliefs. This idea is thorny, however, when thinking about how to allow for representation of groups who want to voice concerns about climate change. By this distinction, American environmentalists have less political clout than women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa who spend hours each day carrying water, during which they are drastically more vulnerable to rape or other assault. These women and girls will find that their lives will revolve even more fully around the search for water when dry areas get drier as a result of climate change, resulting in greater vulnerability. Because Young’s notion of the heterogeneous public uses affinity and identity as its foundation for representation, broader and potentially more powerful applications—for example to all endangered countries by virtue of a common interest—are denied. Here we return to the paradox of essentialism noted in Schor’s article: when misused, essentialism leads to oppression, but without it, a certain amount of political power is lost.
Nancy Fraser takes issue with Young’s conception of a politics of difference precisely because she sees tension between redistribution and recognition paradigms that are not accurately addressed by the unspecific wording of the politics of difference. She explains the tension between these two branches of egalitarianism—on one hand, egalitarian theories based on redistribution of resources, and on the other, egalitarianism based on equality of recognition. Proponents of redistribution argue that recognition is ineffective and impractical for bringing about experienced change, due to the actualities of oppression that exist in life today and their historical foundations. Proponents of recognition argue, as Fraser says, that the redistribution of resources as equality upholds “an outmoded materialism that can neither articulate nor challenge key experiences of injustice.” Fraser espouses a politics of difference that aims to sidestep the debate between recognition and redistribution by fostering a respect for and support of group difference. Fraser argues that the two are not mutually exclusive, a view that will be elaborated later.

Fraser looks at tensions in Young’s theories, and finds that they are based in her treatment two sorts of oppression, which are not delineated: culturally-rooted and economically-rooted oppression, addressed by recognition and redistribution, respectively. She argues that the politics of difference set out

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147 Nancy Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, no. 2-3 (2001): 22.
by Young favors culturally-rooted oppression and must be reconceptualized in order to make room for a global application of justice, especially in terms of economic inequality. In critiquing Young's book Fraser argues that while a politics of difference works well in the face of culturally-rooted oppression, it can be an obstacle to ameliorating economically-rooted oppression. She sees the deemphasizing of the cultural as one important step toward improving Young's politics of difference and rendering it more applicable on an international scale. For Fraser, upholding group difference impedes the radical redistribution of labor that Young prescribes for economic oppression; in the process of maintaining group difference based on affinity, Fraser argues, the possibility of an economic revolution fueled by the rejection of one's economic group status is pushed aside. Fraser seeks to make room for conceptions of a politics of difference that allow redistribution to share in its importance, rather than giving unequal weight to recognition. Fraser's is an important critique because it addresses the need to create a framework of justice that encompasses both redistribution and recognition.

It is true that both paradigms contain essential elements for overcoming oppression. It is imperative that group difference is acknowledged, with the effect that the dominant group is forced to realize itself as only one group out of many and to question what previously it held as manifest entitlement. On a practical level, it is also necessary for resources to be redistributed in accordance with responsibility to disadvantaged groups. In a climate change context, redistribution is essential for making sure that already struggling
countries are not saddled with the financial stress of accounting for the huge costs of dealing with climate events. Certain countries, as we have already seen, should be considered as having expensive needs in Dworkin’s sense, and wealthier countries have a responsibility to care for them. The Maldives has expensive needs, in this case the need to not be flooded out of their homes, which will require massive industrial and infrastructural changes. Recognition, then, is also important so that groups are not ignored in the process of creating climate change policy.

Fraser proposes an all-inclusive solution: “the task is to integrate the egalitarian ideals of the socialist paradigm with whatever is genuinely emancipatory in the paradigm of recognition.”¹⁴⁹ She seeks, in other words, to reconcile redistribution with recognition by using their shared goal of emancipation from oppression. She accomplishes this by reframing the recognition paradigm to encompass social status, with an emphasis on social partnerships. She emphasizes the importance of considering fellow citizens as peers, which does not allow for othering or a denial of agency.

The status model, as Fraser terms it, seeks equality in social interactions rather than identity-based group equality. Misrecognition in this model, rather than denying identity as it does in the recognition paradigm, occurs when institutions construct unequal social partnerships in which some actors are considered “inferior, excluded, wholly other or simply invisible, hence as less

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 180.
than full partners in social interaction.” By reframing the recognition paradigm to account for social status rather than identity, it can prioritize the equality of autonomy and pinpoint the makers of social inequalities.

The status model seeks emancipation for individuals who are considered less-than-peers by institutionalized norms; “they aim, that is, to de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it.” This is the most promising part of this model—it allows for institutions to be held morally accountable for misrecognizing the equal agency of every individual. This stands in contrast to Dworkin’s insistence that our duty to starving people derives from a principle of compassion, not equality; we are, under Fraser’s status model, morally obligated to help them because some institution, be it climate change inaction or lack of opportunity to prosper, has denied their equality of autonomy.

As has been noted throughout the course of the past chapters, international climate change (in)action, lead by the United States, has created inequalities in social status across the globe. These inequalities vary depending on the experience and location of the individual—women in sub-Saharan Africa and citizens of the Maldives are at greater disadvantages in the face of climate change than farmers in a cooling United Kingdom—but the lack of protection against them reveals the misrecognition of the individuals who suffer them. Climate change will harm billions of people, yet no comprehensive, stringent action has been mandated by an international coalition to mitigate it. This is due

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150. Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?,” 24.
151. Ibid., 25.
in very large part to the lobbying, bribing, and clever propagandizing of the fossil fuel industry to ensure that Western nations’ citizens see fossil fuel consumption as the norm, and clean energy as unnecessary.

Fraser’s attempt to synthesize redistribution and recognition paradigms was met with criticism by Young and other scholars who argue that Fraser fails to break free of her own preferred paradigm of redistribution when considering equality. They argue that equality does not exclude recognition; “it seems that for both political and social forms of misrecognition, equality is, directly or indirectly, the appropriate remedy.”\textsuperscript{152} However, the very attempt to use the common thread between the two paradigms—the goal of liberation from oppression—to posit something like an equality of social status leads to promising results that assign moral responsibility to institutions that fail to set up equal partnerships between agents.

The lack of substantial climate change mitigation on the part of the highest emitters constitutes an institutionalized inequality, in which women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, face disproportionate hurdles to surviving such sweeping environmental changes. Further, women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa should be classified as having expensive, involuntary needs, such as the need to not spend even more hours each day searching for water instead of going to school or working towards financial autonomy. This seems indisputable, yet the United States and other wealthy countries continue to utilize, and even to protect, fossil fuel-intensive modes of production.

Conclusions

I hope to have demonstrated that the process of othering works as a mediating factor of responsibility, and that the international community needs to respect difference by applying egalitarian concepts of involuntary needs to disadvantaged and endangered countries. These two concepts are essential to a new understanding of international climate change justice and how we can foster a more equitable approach to taking action. It is imperative that the hegemonic process of othering and the role it plays in international climate agreements be made clear in order to work against it. Equally as imperative is the understanding that climate change is a scientific phenomenon that poses moral problems, and is also an issue of politics, sociology, economics, and more. Recognizing that climate change is a phenomenon with a multiplicity of implications reframes the way in which we can go forward in thinking about it.

As a further consideration, I would like to take note of Dale Jamieson’s proposal that climate change is also a problem of values. He suggests that we must find new values in order to make society work toward mitigation. Jamieson does not specify who “we” is, but I would argue that, based on his attention to the global inequalities and oppressions related to climate change, he means the countries that have consumed an excessive amount of fossil fuels for development. He preempts objections by those who “may think that a search for new values is excessively individualistic and that what is needed are collective
and institutional solutions” by arguing that this objection “overlooks the fact that our values permeate our institutions and practices.” He does not offer a value or set of values that should be taken up, but cautions that whatever values are espoused should favor integrity and character rather than being based on calculating probable outcomes. The latter value, he argues, results in an attempt to be economical, thereby determining that individual action is not significant enough to change.

It seems to me that one value or set of values that “developed” nations need to address climate change must include humility. This would entail a respect for difference in a way that appreciates unfamiliar cultures and circumstances as equally valuable, and that goes so far as to instill a sense of moral obligation to support disadvantaged groups. By this set of values we would also recognize our own specificity amongst a multiplicity of lived experiences, and place ourselves in a global context such that aspects of our lifestyles that are harmful to other groups should be stopped. Consumerism and economic production would not supersede humility and responsibility. In a climate change context this means that affluent countries, which are used to a certain, unsustainable level of comfort and luxury, will have to recognize that their fossil fuel intensive practices are harmful to other nations. Americans can consume the way we consume because the United States has counted on being able to exploit the atmosphere; the new value system will prevent this.

153 Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming," 84.
154 Ibid.
Constructing and internalizing a new set of values is not something that can be done quickly, and I am not suggesting we wait until values have changed to take up mitigation efforts. I also do not suggest that reassigning our value system will be easy; as Stephen Gardiner notes, the mediated nature of responsibilities for climate change “makes us extremely vulnerable to moral corruption.” However, if we make systemic changes to our value systems to foster a sustainable, global sense of responsibility to all groups, especially to disadvantaged groups, we can combat historical and operating oppressions in more than just the field of climate change.


———. "Working Groups/Task Force." [http://www.ipcc.ch/working_groups/working_groups.shtml](http://www.ipcc.ch/working_groups/working_groups.shtml).


(NASA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration. "Global Climate Change: Key Indicators." [http://climate.nasa.gov/keyIndicators/#globalTemp](http://climate.nasa.gov/keyIndicators/#globalTemp).


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