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## PubPol 580: Reading Notes for Class 12 (October 15, 2009)

Next Thursday we'll take up the ethics of responding to global climate change. Emmanuelle and I will switch rooms that day. Then in about three weeks we'll shuffle the composition of the two groups.

The concluding paragraph of the "minimum ethical criteria ..." reading is:

*All proposed second commitment period frameworks may not be able to comport with all requirements of distributive justice because allocations that are completely responsive to all the mandates of distributive justice may not be technically feasible during the second commitment period. Yet, no second commitment period allocation scheme is ethically supportable unless it establishes not only an emissions reductions pathway that will avoid dangerous climate change but also a pathway that will ultimately be comprised of just allocations among nations.*

Source: "Minimum Ethical Criteria for All Post-Kyoto Regime Proposals: What Does Ethics Require of a Copenhagen Outcome?" ClimateEthics.org, Dec 2008

The "may not" in the first sentence is understatement of a very high order. The second sentence would seem more appropriate for a lead sentence in a paper rather than the final sentence. It simply restates the problem without an indication that any progress toward a solution has been made in the course of the paper.

So I'd like to spend Thursday talking about which of the various ways to constitute "just allocations" that are listed about 2/3 of the way through the reading is most compelling. And we should add Singer's proposal to this list. Here's the list:

- a. *Ad hoc proposals*, including (1) proposals that divide total global emissions into equal shares between developed and developing nations, and; (2) proposals that proportion GHG allocation to a nation's GDP.
- b. *Equal per capita proposals* suggested by many developing nations have it that national allocations should be based upon the idea that all human beings should be entitled to an equal share of the atmospheric commons.
- c. *Status quo proposals* proposed by several developed nations that suggest that current emissions should be recognized as entitlements. For example, the United States has only been willing to negotiate emissions reductions from current levels. The justification presented for the position is that those who have first used natural resources have a right to continue to use it at levels that are based upon past use.
- d. *Mixed proposals* have suggested allocation rules combining equal per capita considerations, equal percentage cuts, status quo, and historical responsibility. (Brown 2002; Rose, 1998; Meuller 2001; Meuller 2002)
- e. *Polluter Pays and Proportionality Principles*. These principles would base allocations upon each nation's historical contribution to damages caused by climate change.
- f. *Satisfaction of basic needs*. This principle urges that the poorest nations should be first in line to receive allocations needed to meet the basic needs of their citizens, so that it is possible for them to fully participate in the world.

- g. *Comparable Burdens Principle*. This Principle would suggest allocations where each nation share the effort of reducing emissions to safe levels equally, for example, by allocating an equal percentage of its GDP to GHG reduction.
- h. *Ability to Pay Principle*. This principle would make the richer nations more responsible than the poorer nations because of their greater ability to pay to reduce emissions.
- i. *Rawlsian principle of justice*. This principle suggests that allocations should be determined such that follow the presumption on just allocations contained in the theories of John Rawls that in no case should the poorest nations be made worse off by any allocation scheme. Furthermore, some argue that it argues that just allocation schemes should give maximum rights to use the atmosphere to the poorest, least advantaged people. (Brown et al, 2006, Brown, 2002: Rose, 1998)
- j. *Singer's utilitarian principle*.

To decide which criterion one thinks is the right resolution of the upcoming international negotiations, one should first decide whether we're talking about what would happen in an ideal world (in which the most compelling philosophical argument would win) or what would happen in the actual world (where creating consensus requires compromises that wouldn't be necessary in an ideal world). I think it will a more productive discussion if we take the latter path and recognize that politics will matter. That doesn't mean capitulating to the interest-based claims of the major nations, but it does mean restraining our most idealist impulses—I'm not sure, for instance, that an appeal to "the oneness of humanity" is going to get us the traction we need.