



Edited by
Paul G. Harris

ETHICS AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Cosmopolitan Conceptions
of Climate Change



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Paul G. Harris

*Chair Professor of Global and Environmental Studies,
Hong Kong Institute of Education*



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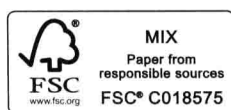
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Ethics and Global Environmental Policy

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Preface

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing humanity. Yet efforts by the world's governments to restrain the pollution that causes it have failed utterly. This may appear to be a harsh assessment given the great amount of work that has been done by diplomats, policymakers and officials over the last three decades and more. It may seem to ignore the innovations and policy changes that have occurred, often in response to initiatives by national governments and the international community. But everything that is happening to address climate change and its causes – and increasingly its consequences – is found wanting when we realize that global warming is continuing apace. Indeed, greenhouse gas pollution, particularly pollution emanating from the burning of coal and other fossil fuels, is *increasing* quite rapidly due to continued emissions from the rich world and accelerating emissions from the developing world – not to mention other worrying trends that will make the problem far worse in the future, such as the release from melting permafrost of methane, a very powerful greenhouse gas, which in turn leads to more warming, more melting and more methane in a potentially devastating 'positive feedback' loop. The feeble results of international negotiations among parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as evidenced by diplomatic conferences held in Copenhagen in 2009 and Cancun in 2010, as well as national policies that do far too little to cut greenhouse gases substantially, show that governments are not yet up to the task of responding effectively to climate change. Put another way, all efforts by governments to address global warming, while welcome and worthy of recognition, are simply far too little relative to the scale of the problem.

What is one to think, and what is one to do, in the face of feeble policies and actions by governments? If the current driving forces behind international negotiations and policies on climate change – most prominently the self-perceived national interests of states and the narrow priorities of influential industries – are preventing effective action, is there a better basis for responding to the problem? Who or what can fill the breach of failed state-oriented policies? In an attempt to answer these and similar questions, I have joined others in looking for alternative ways of conceiving of climate change. In particular, I have sought to look at it through the lens of cosmopolitanism (most prominently in another book, *World Ethics*

and *Climate Change* [Edinburgh University Press, 2010], which informs this one). From a cosmopolitan perspective, ethical obligations and responsibilities are not defined or delineated by national borders; human beings, rather than states, ought to be at the centre of moral calculations. This worldview points to climate-related policies and actions that are less 'international' and more 'global', thus encompassing actors other than just states, and specifically including individual human beings. A central aim of this book is to help establish some lessons for climate change policy that can come from conceiving of the problem from this perspective.

The idea for the book began as a panel on 'Cosmopolitan Diplomacy and the Climate Change Regime' at the 2009 general conference of the European Consortium for Political Research in Potsdam, Germany. Some of the participants in that panel have contributed to this volume, while others joined the project later. I am grateful to all of those who have been involved for sharing their thoughts and observations. Work in this book was substantially supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (General Research Fund Project No. HKIEd 340309). I wish to acknowledge gratefully the comments of anonymous reviewers, which have helped to strengthen the whole book and individual chapters. My thanks go to the kind and capable people at Edward Elgar for taking on this project and bringing it to readers. As always, I am especially grateful to K.K. Chan for a decade of daily support that makes the long process of completing each new book less arduous.

The potential value of cosmopolitanism for developing new policies to combat climate change is that it helps us break free of the myopic obsession with states and their governments, in the process highlighting the role of people (and other non-state actors) as causes of – and solutions to – the problem, not to mention highlighting the role of millions of people as its victims. One of the messages emanating from this book is that capable individuals everywhere have an ethical obligation to help in the fight to mitigate the causes and consequences of climate change. With this in mind, all of the editor's royalties from the sale of the book will be paid to Oxfam directly by the publisher. This is a small gesture toward partially fulfilling this obligation. It is also a recognition of a new reality: if all of us who are polluting the Earth's atmosphere and have the capability to change our ways do not do so, there will be a boundless need to help those most affected by the inevitable hardships and suffering that climate change will bring.

Paul G. Harris
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1. Introduction: cosmopolitanism and climate change policy

Paul G. Harris

Climate change is the most profound environmental problem facing the world – and possibly the most important problem of any kind in the long term. The latest science of climate change shows that massive cuts in emissions of greenhouse gas emissions will be needed by mid-century to avert extreme, possibly catastrophic, harm to Earth's climate system. Yet, despite ongoing and sometimes intense diplomatic efforts over two decades, governments of the world have been unable to agree to anything near the kind of regulation of pollution that would be required to undertake these cuts.¹ This was amply demonstrated by the much-anticipated December 2009 international climate change conference in Copenhagen, which failed to reach any formal or binding agreement on steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or to deal with the impacts of global warming. The Copenhagen conference, and the subsequent conference of the parties in Cancun a year later, revealed what may be a fundamental flaw in the international management of climate change, namely underlying norms and ethics that give overriding importance to states and their national interests, rather than to the people and groups who ultimately cause and are most affected by climate change.

A major manifestation of this problem is recurring debate over the historical responsibility of developed states for climate pollution. While those countries surely deserve blame if we think only in terms of states, this focus on state responsibility fails to account for rising greenhouse gas emissions among affluent people in the historically less responsible countries of the developing world. Given this growing misfit between historical national responsibility and current emissions, the emphasis on states rather than people may have to be overcome if the world is to take the extraordinary steps necessary to combat climate change aggressively in coming decades.

One major step toward this objective may be to look at climate change from a cosmopolitan perspective. Cosmopolitanism points toward politically viable alternatives to the status quo regime that are just, practical and – most importantly – potentially more efficacious than existing responses

to climate change. Cosmopolitan conceptions of who is to blame for climate change, and whose rights are most in need of protecting in this regard, may usefully supplement the statist approach to the problem so far. At the very least, cosmopolitanism conceptions of climate change help us to identify fundamental problems with existing responses to this problem. Indeed, if taken seriously, cosmopolitanism forces a reevaluation of the causes and consequences of climate change while offering constructive critiques of the status quo.

This collection of essays undertakes this cosmopolitan reevaluation of the world's responses to climate change as part of a larger effort to understand how ethics can inform environmental governance. The contributors' arguments and analyses draw upon philosophy and ethics to inform the politics and policy of climate change.

FEATURES OF COSMOPOLITANISM

In contrast to the state-centric norms that have guided and indeed defined the international system for centuries, cosmopolitans envision an alternative way of ordering the world.² Cosmopolitans want to 'disclose the ethical, cultural, and legal basis of political order in a world where political communities and states matter, but not only and exclusively'.³ States matter greatly, to be sure. But this is more of a practical matter than an ethical one for cosmopolitans. Thomas Pogge sums up three core elements of cosmopolitanism this way:⁴

First, *individualism*: the ultimate units of concern are *human beings*, or *persons* – rather than, say, family lines, tribes, ethnic, cultural, or religious communities, nations, or states. The latter may be units of concern only indirectly, in virtue of their individual members or citizens. Second, *universality*: the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to *every* living human being *equally* – not merely to some sub-set, such as men, aristocrats, Aryans, whites, or Muslims. Third, *generality*: this special status has global force. Persons are ultimate units of concern for *everyone* – not only for their compatriots, fellow religionists, or such like.

David Held has synthesized cosmopolitanism into a set of eight, universally shared, key principles: '(1) equal worth and dignity; (2) active agency; (3) personal responsibility and accountability; (4) consent; (5) collective decision-making about public matters through voting procedures; (6) inclusiveness and solidarity; (7) avoidance of serious harm; and (8) sustainability'.⁵ From these principles a 'cosmopolitan orientation' emerges: 'that each person is a subject of equal moral concern; that each person is capable of acting autonomously with respect to the range of choices before

them; and that, in deciding how to act or which institutions to create, claims of each person affected should be taken equally into account'.⁶ Importantly for climate change, the last two principles provide 'a framework for prioritizing urgent need and resource conservation. By distinguishing vital from non-vital needs, principle 7 creates an unambiguous starting point and guiding orientation for public decisions [and] clearly creates a moral framework for focusing public policy on those who are most vulnerable.'⁷ A 'prudential orientation' is set down by principle 8 'to ensure that public policy is consistent with global ecological balances and that it does not destroy irreplaceable and non-substitutable resources'.⁸

Some cosmopolitans take a consequentialist perspective, such as Peter Singer's utilitarianism, while others take a deontological perspective, such as Simon Caney's global political theory premised on human rights.⁹ Charles Jones describes three 'species' of cosmopolitanism: utilitarianism, human rights and Kantian ethics.¹⁰ He defines cosmopolitanism as a moral standpoint that is 'impartial, universal, individualist, and egalitarian. The fundamental idea is that each person affected by an institutional arrangement should be given equal consideration. Individuals are the basic units of moral concern, and the interests of individuals should be taken into account by the adoption of an impartial standpoint for evaluation.'¹¹ The nature of cosmopolitanism might be best appreciated by pointing to what it rules out: 'it rules out the assigning of ultimate rather than derivative value to collective entities like nations or states, and it also rules out positions that attach no moral value to some people, or weights the value people have differently according to characteristics such as ethnicity, race, or nationality'.¹² Another way of looking at cosmopolitanism, particularly in practice, is that it 'does not privilege the interests of insiders over outsiders'.¹³ In a fundamental way, what is crucial about the cosmopolitan perspective is its 'refusal to regard existing political structures as the source of ultimate value'.¹⁴

Two versions of cosmopolitanism are routinely identified: an ethical/moral/normative version, which focuses on the underlying moral arguments regarding how people, states and other actors should justify their actions in the world, and an institutional/legal/practical version, which aims to translate ethics into institutions and policies. Pogge distinguishes between moral and legal cosmopolitanism. Moral cosmopolitanism points to the moral relations among people; 'we are required to respect one another's status as ultimate units of moral concern – a requirement that imposes limits on our conduct and, in particular, on our efforts to construct institutional schemes'.¹⁵ Legal cosmopolitanism goes a step further by advocating creating institutions of global order, possibly in the form of a 'universal republic' in which 'all persons have equivalent legal rights

and duties'.¹⁶ This latter position may seem to be a bit extreme; moral cosmopolitanism certainly does not require institutionalization of a universal republic (or 'world government'). One variant of institutional cosmopolitanism asserts that 'the world's political structure should be reshaped so that states and other political units are brought under the authority of supranational agencies of some kind'.¹⁷ Institutional cosmopolitans sometimes call for major, even radical, changes to global institutions, but moral cosmopolitans frequently do not see this as being necessary.

An alternative (more realistic) version of institutional cosmopolitanism 'postulates fundamental principles of justice for an assessment of institutionalized global ground rules [while also being] compatible with a system of dispersed political sovereignty that falls short of a world state'.¹⁸ As Caney points out, some moral cosmopolitans 'reject a world state. They think that cosmopolitan moral claims are compatible with, or even require, states or some alternative to global political institutions'.¹⁹ Thus it is entirely possible and appropriate to advocate institutions well short of world government that contribute to global order generally, and particularly global justice within specific issue areas. What is more, as Darrell Moellendorf reminds us, 'very few people who have thought about these matters [i.e., whether an egalitarian world order would contain multiple states or a world-state] have considered the latter a real possibility, and with good reason'²⁰ – not least the practicality of governing the world's many billions of people and the threat such a world state might pose to human rights. However, it is also clear 'that the establishment and maintenance of justice requires a significant re-conceptualization of the principle of state sovereignty [and] a coordinated international response'.²¹

Cosmopolitanism includes two additional features according to Brock and Brighouse: identity and responsibility.²² The former refers, for example, to a person who is influenced by a variety of cultures or perhaps one who identifies with broader humanity rather than to a particular group or nation. The latter 'guides the individual outwards from obvious, local, obligations, and prohibits those obligations from crowding out obligations to distant others . . . It highlights the obligations we have to those whom we do not know, and with whom we are not intimate, but whose lives touch ours sufficiently that what we do can affect them'.²³ According to Robin Attfield,

Cosmopolitan ethicists maintain that ethical responsibilities apply everywhere and to all moral agents capable of shouldering them, and not only to members of one or another tradition or community, and that factors which provide reasons for action for any agent, whether individual or corporate, provide reasons for like action for any other agent who is similarly placed, whatever their community may be or believe. They also deny limits such as community

boundaries to the scope of responsibilities; responsibilities (they hold) do not dwindle because of spatial or temporal distance, or in the absence of reasons transcending particular facts or identities.²⁴

One might also think of both weak and strong forms of cosmopolitanism, the former saying that some obligations obtain beyond the society or the state, while the latter says that any principles (of justice, for example) that apply within the state also apply worldwide. As Brock and Brighouse see it, 'everyone has to be at least a weak cosmopolitan now if they are to maintain a defensible view, that is to say, it is hard to see how one can reject a view that all societies have *some* global responsibilities'.²⁵

Pogge addresses critics of 'weak' cosmopolitanism – 'the anodyne view that all human beings are of equal worth', which almost everyone, except 'a few racists and other bigots', accepts – and 'strong' cosmopolitanism – 'the view that all human agents ought to treat all others equally and, in particular, have no more, or less, reason to help any one needy person than any other', which it might be argued is falsely expansive – by proposing an 'intermediate' view of cosmopolitanism based on *negative* duties.²⁶ From this viewpoint, the fact that someone is a fellow national citizen 'makes no difference to our most important negative duties':²⁷ 'You do not have more moral reason not to murder a compatriot than you have not to murder a foreigner. And you do not moderate your condemnation of a rapist when you learn that his victim was not his compatriot.'²⁸ Intermediate cosmopolitanism 'asserts the fundamental negative duty of justice as one that every human being owes to every other'.²⁹ But just as duties of justice vary *within* communities – it is widely accepted that one can have a greater duty to family members than to the wider community – this does not mean that there are no duties whatsoever, in particular that there is no duty to avoid contributing to conditions that undermine the fundamental rights and needs of others within the community. Similarly, while we may favor compatriots in many ways, we ought not to support institutions that impose an unjust order on people living in other communities. According to Pogge, 'special relationships can *increase* what we owe our associates, but cannot *decrease* what we owe everyone else'.³⁰ The upshot is that, 'though we owe foreigners less than compatriots, we owe them something. We owe them negative duties, undiluted.'³¹

For cosmopolitans, 'the world is one domain in which there are some universal values and global responsibilities'.³² Cosmopolitan responsibility entails 'the recognition that since we live, in some sense, in one global community or society – whether or not most of us have much of a feeling for this – we do have duties to care in one way or another about what happens elsewhere in the world and to take action where appropriate'.³³ It is not

enough to identify with humanity to be a cosmopolitan; it is necessary to act (or be willing to act) accordingly. From this basis, it stands to reason that capable individuals are obliged to act even if they live in dissimilar communities (that is, rich or poor countries), and those who are more capable are more responsible to do so. James Garvey puts it this way: 'the better placed an individual is to do what is right, the greater the onus on him to do what is right.'³⁴

Cosmopolitans frequently justify their claim that justice ought to prevail globally using one or both of two arguments. One argument, sometimes building on John Rawls's domestic theory of justice, is that levels of international cooperation today are extensive enough to make international society sufficiently like domestic society to warrant applying justice principles that were previously the domain of domestic communities to world affairs.³⁵ Another argument, derived from the empirical realities of globalization and the interdependencies and cause-and-effect relationships it manifests, is that justice ought to prevail globally because people and communities, whether knowingly or not, intentionally or not, increasingly affect one another, sometimes in profound ways. Justice is demanded by this latter argument because globalization is in large part a process of redistribution of scarce resources away from those with the least to those with the most. David Weinstock describes a relatively new 'way of understanding the relationship between the global rich and the global poor[;] the fate of the global rich is not as causally independent of the plight of the global poor as had previously been thought . . . According to this view, globalization makes it the case that our obligations toward the global poor are obligations of *justice* rather than of *charity*. . .'.³⁶ Climate change could be the most profound manifestation of this latter argument.

COSMOPOLITAN JUSTICE

Most cosmopolitans accept, and often advocate, duties of *global* justice for states and frequently by individuals. Global justice is based upon a cosmopolitan world ethic premised on the rights, duties and ethical importance – and moral pre-eminence – of persons. According to Dower, the wish for global justice is motivated by three claims: (1) 'obligations are substantial or significant, rather than minimal or merely "charity"'; (2) global obligations should be premised on 'institutional arrangements which specify quite clearly which bodies have which duties to deliver justice'; and (3) obligations have their foundation in 'the human rights of others which are either violated by the global economic system or fail to be realized because of it'.³⁷ For cosmopolitans, 'the world is a community

of people and not a set of countries: that is, it is a community in which all have a claim to justice, just as they themselves owe justice to others'.³⁸

Onora O'Neill proposes a practical approach to determining who has moral standing: 'Questions about standing can be posed as context-specific *practical* questions, rather than as demands for comprehensive theoretical demarcations'.³⁹ Answers are found in part in the assumption that people 'are already building into our action, habits, practices and institutions'.⁴⁰ This suggests a 'more or less cosmopolitan' approach to principles of justice in given contexts.⁴¹ O'Neill's practical approach offers a *relational* account of moral standing:

Conjoined with the commonplace facts of action-at-a-distance in our present social world, this relational view points us to a *contingently* more or less cosmopolitan account of the proper scope of moral concern in some contexts. We assume that others are agents and subjects as soon as we act, or are involved in practices, or adopt policies or establish institutions in which we rely on assumptions about other's capacities to act and to experience and suffer. Today we constantly assume that countless others who are strange and distant can produce and consume, trade and negotiate, . . . pollute and or protect the environment . . . Hence, *if* we owe justice (or other forms of moral concern) to all whose capacities to act, experience and suffer we take for granted in acting, we will owe it to strangers as well as to familiars, and to distant strangers as well as to those who are near at hand . . . Today only those few who genuinely live the hermit life can consistently view the scope of moral concern which they must acknowledge in acting as anything but broad, and in some contexts more or less cosmopolitan.⁴²

This is a view of justice that takes *obligation* as being essential; 'obligations provide the more coherent and more comprehensive starting point for thinking about . . . the requirements of justice' than do rights because it is hard to know who has harmed which distant others.⁴³

Andrew Dobson makes a case for cosmopolitan obligation arising from the causal impacts of globalization in its many manifestations, including global environmental change.⁴⁴ What is especially important about his argument is that he goes beyond cosmopolitan morality and sentiment, which are important but apparently not sufficient to push enough people to act. Dobson describes 'thick cosmopolitanism', in particular the source of obligation for cosmopolitanism, in an attempt to identify what will motivate people (and other actors) not only to accept cosmopolitanism but to act accordingly. While he seems to accept that we are all members of a common humanity, he is unhappy with leaving things there: 'Recognizing the similarity in others of a common humanity might be enough to undergird the principles of cosmopolitanism, to get us to "be" cosmopolitans (principles), but it doesn't seem to be enough to motivate us to "be" cosmopolitan (political action)'.⁴⁵ Common humanity is one basis