

Current Debates in Climate Justice

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A SUMMARY BY ANNALENA SCHMID

Debates on climate justice have evolved over time, incorporating diverse perspectives and actors, as well as being a placeholder for multiple claims and practices. The term “climate justice” seems to carry a degree of ambiguity. When analysing current discussions regarding climate justice, several questions arise: What is being debated? How? By whom? And in what context?

Various causes and drivers shape these debates, leading to differing impacts and effects. Thus, governance approaches and policies addressing climate justice vary widely as well. Underlying these discussions are different principles of justice – based on equity, needs, or merit – which influence the different perspectives. To advance climate justice, actors employ a range of strategies both within and beyond legal frameworks. Current climate justice debates are not only influenced by philosophical, academic arguments, they are also shaped by other actors such as local communities, activists, politics, and the media.

These circumstances are also reflected in the four articles discussed. Moellendorf (2015) starts with a remark that “climate change gives rise to many concern of justice” (p. 173) and explains the distinction between justice (who is owed what) and responsibility (who must provide that which is owed). Moellendorf (2015) goes on in discussing the interplay between justice and vulnerability. He states that vulnerability in the case of climate change consists of two main factors: exposure to risks and a lack of resources for protecting against these risks.

Whilst Moellendorf (2015) gives a more general overview about different concepts related to climate justice, Foerster (2019) focuses more on the legal perspective within the debates about climate justice. He explores different

strategies for climate action focusing on legal cases where corporations are sued due to previous actions and secondly discusses corporate responsibility to manage climate-related risks. Gordon (2024) highlights the importance of “infrastructures of care” and the ability of climate justice to create such infrastructures of care. Additionally, the author analyses the intersectionality of climate justice, gender and race. Lastly, Palmer (2011) brings in another, not so often debated perspective, and sheds light on the discussion of climate justice with regard to the nonhuman world and their moral concerns.

The panel discussion also echoed these diverse perspectives on climate justice. While Joie Chowdhury from the Centre for International Environmental Law and Johannes Wendland (Hilfswerk der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirche Schweiz) showed that climate litigation can be a powerful strategy, they also highlighted that more than that is necessary to fight effectively against the climate crisis. Central is a coordinated effort of different actors from politics, society or activists.

In the same direction goes Racoon, activist from WaldStattRepression, who also mentions that law can be a powerful tool for justice, but also for oppression and to stiff protests and public participation. Above that, legal procedures are too slow in a crisis like the climate crisis and in their point of view, more radical actions are needed. They also emphasised the need to protect the term climate justice from being greenwashed, as they see it as a powerful term that reflects the intersectionality of the issue and should maintain its radicality.

Angela Martin from the University of Fribourg introduces another perspective by examining the issue through an ethical lens, particularly

focusing on the role of animals as both contributors to and victims of climate change. As a result, climate justice must extend to nonhuman species as well. The discussion also briefly explores the possibility of granting rights to animals and other nonhuman species, referencing legal cases that have addressed this issue.

Her colleague Simon Kräuchi approaches the topic with a philosophical lens. He speaks about the different types of justice – historical and distributive justice – as well as the different measures connected to it: the Polluter Pays Principle and Beneficiary Pays Principle for historical injustices and the Ability to Pay Principle and Common Responsibility Principle with regard to distributive justice issues. Later, he also points out that climate change is also interlinked with systemic injustices, for example colonialism. The analysis of such connections is an expanding field within academics

but still receives not enough attention.

After having read and heard extensively about current debates in climate justice, this summary will end with some concluding remarks. Climate justice is a multifaceted topic with various angles. The discussion panel as well as the literature we looked at put a focus on three main perspectives: ethical/philosophical; legal; political engagement/activism. However, what was missing is the economic perspective. As Angela Martin rightfully remarked, the economic system needs to change in order to move towards a just and climate-friendly future. For a holistic understanding of the concept of climate justice, this perspective should not be forgotten. Additionally, it would also be interesting to hear from politicians their point of view about the topic and how climate justice could be institutionalized on the government level.

Foerster, A. (2019). Climate Justice and Corporations. *King's Law Journal*, 30(2), 305–322. doi.org/10.1080/09615768.2019.1645447
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 Moellendorf, D. (2015). Climate Change Justice. *Philosophy Compass*, 10(3), 173–186. doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12201

Palmer, C. (2011). Does nature matter? The place of the nonhuman in the ethics of climate change. In D. G. Arnold (Ed.), *The Ethics of Global Climate Change* (1st ed., pp. 272–291). Cambridge University Press. doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511732294.014