

Friederike Asche

Equity and the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement

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„Friederike Asche beschreibt die schädigenden Auswirkungen des Klimawandels als hochkomplexes moralisches Problem. Der Beitrag von Frau Asche sollte anderen ForscherInnen schnellstmöglich zugänglich gemacht werden.“
Corinna Mieth

„Friederike Asches Arbeit zählt zu den besten Masterarbeiten, die ich jemals gelesen habe.“
Klaus Steigleder

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Introduction

While writing this thesis Europe experienced one of the hottest summers since the beginning of weather prediction. Germany, for example, experienced temperatures up to 40 degrees Celsius. As a result, forest fires occurred, farmers were unable to feed their cattle due to crop failures, and lakes and other waters became too warm for there-living fish, that, consequently, died. This is not usual for a Western European country.

Of course, weather is not equal to climate. But slowly but steady extreme weather events occur regularly also in our degree of latitude. Summers like the one in 2018 are a sign that the climate changes, and that these changes will have severe consequences for people if we do not find solutions.¹

This is known not just since the summer of 2018. Scientists have warned of dangerous climate change since the 1970s, and in 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the first comprehensive international climate treaty to prevent dangerous consequences from climate change, was established.

Nevertheless, efficient solutions are rare so far. Indeed, with upcoming populist movements in the EU, the US president Donald Trump, who focuses on protectionism and a strong economy, and potentially undemocratic political leaders, such as the Turkish president Recep Erdogan or the Russian president Wladimir Putin, climate change scepticism and the relativization of its severeness are on the rise.

¹ See for example: Alissa J. Rubin, 'Scorching Summer in Europe Signals Long-Term Climate Changes', *The New York Times*, 7 August 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/04/world/europe/europe-heat-wave.html>; Stefan Schmitt, 'Zukunft Im Schwitzkasten. Der Heiße Sommer Führt Uns Die Folgen Des Klimawandels Vor Augen', *ZEIT ONLINE*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.zeit.de/2018/32/klimawandel-globale-erwaermung-hochsommer-duerre-wetter/komplettansicht>.

Therefore, it is very important for the rest of the global community to prioritize the work on adequate and fast solutions for tackling anthropogenic climate change. One of the many challenges in this context is that climate change is not only an environmental problem that could simply be solved by finding respective scientific solutions. It is, first of all, also an ethical problem.

With the begin of the Industrial Revolution around 1800 some countries started to produce more emissions than other countries. On the one hand, this excessive greenhouse gas production was and is directly linked to economic growth and prosperity. Therefore, it provides benefits for the respective countries. On the other hand, it also resulted in climate change and its harmful consequences for the whole global community. Furthermore, the first nations that will, and already do, suffer from a changing climate are those nations that have not developed into affluent states by emission productions. The claim that industrialised countries should, as a result, deal with the problem of climate change on their own, could be rejected by the fact that some emerging economies, such as China, are now or will become one of the largest greenhouse gas producers. This imbalance in causal responsibility for climate change and received benefits and damages from emitting greenhouse gases leads to challenging questions. Who should bear the burdens of tackling climate change, and how could an effective solution be implemented that is also morally adequate?²

With the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015 a promising attempt has been established to solve these challenges. Although the USA later declared

² Note that there lately evolved some discussion around the appropriateness of the terms “developing” and “developed countries”. (see for example: Tariq Khokhar, ‘Should We Continue to Use the Term “Developing World”?’, The World Bank | The Data Blog, 16 November 2015, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/should-we-continue-use-term-developing-world>.) Those two categories could easily be understood in that sense that they entail judgements about the status of a country. Of course, I do not want to imply that some countries are subordinate to others because of the status of their economic development. I am using these terms because I am also referring to a right to development. Therefore, I want to differentiate between states that own such a right but have not exercised it (developing countries) and others that used this right in the past in a way that now leads to severe harm (developed or industrialised countries). Although I know that these terms are problematic I use them because I consider this classification as useful for following my argumentation.

their intention to withdraw from this climate treaty, it attracted nearly universal participation and provides several innovative mechanisms in order to increase ambition and tackling the global challenge of climate change jointly.

One of such mechanisms is the Global Stocktake (GST), defined in article 14 of the Paris Agreement. It provides the Parties to the agreement for giving account on their progress and efforts to reaching the overall goals of the Paris Agreement every five years. In this context, two demands complicate the negotiations on the design of the GST. Assessment in the context of the GST should be executed not only collectively but also with respect to equity.

Finding a consensus on how the GST should be designed, consequently, constitutes a demanding task. At the same time, the GST offers a chance for the global community to develop a strong and effective mechanism that will increase the Parties' ambitions and will contribute decisively to the necessary process of fulfilling the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.

The main question of this thesis is, how the Global Stocktake could be designed in an equitable manner. Therefore, it is important to first consider the questions why climate change constitutes a moral problem and which moral responsibilities arise for different actors. I will deal with these topics in the first chapter by focusing on the theories of Henry Shue and Simon Caney. In the second chapter I will transfer these moral findings into the practical context of international climate policies and the Paris Agreement. I will suggest that groups of countries could be built based on moral parameters, and I will give a simplified example on how this could be realised. Finally, the third chapter will provide a proposal on how the Global Stocktake could be designed accordingly. Therefore, I will elaborate on how an, in terms of equity, ideal GST could be designed, which problems arise, and how they could be solved. My results will be summed up in the conclusion at the end of this thesis.

1. Climate change as a moral problem

1.1 Why is climate change morally relevant?

On the one hand, climate change constitutes an obvious moral problem. Today there is near consensus among scientists that climate change exists, that it is human caused, and that it will lead to severe harm among human beings and biosystems. Some of this harm already occurs today. The changing climate and biosystems lead to species extinctions, the polar ice melts with the result of sea level risings, extreme weather events like hurricanes, droughts or extreme precipitations, become more likely.³ This has consequences not only for flora and fauna, but also for human beings, especially those who live near the sea, in already very hot areas or are dependent on agriculture. As a matter of principle, human suffering constitutes a moral problem. Moral agents are not only obligated to refrain from harmful actions, except from cases of self-defence for example. Also, when a moral agent notices that another person suffers, he or she is also morally obligated to help him or her, presupposed the respective moral agent is able to help at no comparable costs.⁴ Consequently, since climate change makes people suffer, it

³ Cf., ‘Die Folgen Des Klimawandels (Ökosystem Erde)’, accessed 11 August 2018, <http://www.oekosystem-erde.de/html/klimawandel-02.html> (11 August 2018). I will not discuss the viewpoint that human caused climate change does not exist. By now there is enough evidence for an anthropogenic climate change for presupposing this premise.

⁴ Cf., Klaus Steigleder, ‘Deontologische Theorien Der Verantwortung’, in *Handbuch Verantwortung*, ed. L. Heidbrink, C. Langbehn, and J. Loh, Springer Reference Sozialwissenschaften (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017), p. 6.

seems obvious that those people must receive help for moral reasons. Furthermore, it seems very clear that those who caused climate change benefitted to a high degree from it by developing into wealthy nations and are at the same time least vulnerable to climate change. In other words, climate change harms those nations that did not contribute to it and that did not benefit from it, which makes the moral problem even more severe.⁵

On the other hand, climate change constitutes a very difficult and complex moral problem.

Firstly, climate change is a tragedy of the commons.⁶ It is caused by aggregated actions, so that there are no clearly identifiable individuals who are responsible for the current situation, which makes it again difficult to identify which agents are obligated to take actions. To react adequately to climate change, collective action is needed. Separated individual actions make no difference for the climate. Whether one single person lives a sustainable life or not has no consequences on the process of climate change. Only aggregated actions will lead to noticeable effects. This raises the very challenging moral question of how to allocate responsibilities among individuals when the actual actions of each of these individuals have no effect.

Secondly, climate change will most of all harm future generations. Rights of future generations are complicated to establish. Difficulties for example are that

⁵ See for example: Achala Abeysinghe and Saleemul Huq, 'Climate Justice for LDCs through Global Decisions', in *Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World*, ed. Clare Heyward and Dominic Roser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 189–207; Darrel Moellendorf, 'Climate Change and Global Justice', *WIREs Clim Change* 3 (2012): 131–43; Eric Neumayer, 'In Defense of Historical Accountability for Greenhouse Gas Emissions', *Ecological Economics* 33, no. 2 (2000): 185–92; Jouni Paavola and W. Neil Adger, 'Justice and Adaptation to Climate Change', Technical Report (Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, October 2002), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228813871/download>; Charles Kolstad et al., 'Social, Economic and Ethical Concepts and Methods', in *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. O. Edenhofer et al. (Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶ Cf., Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science, New Series* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243–48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1724745>.