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Justice & Climate Transitions

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ABSTRACTS

Prof Simon Caney

Justice, Trusteeship and the Transition to a Low Carbon Economy: An Integrated Approach

I assess whether traditional forms of the ownership of sources of energy are adequate in a climate constrained world and explore ways in which the existing intellectual property rights regime can be reformed to generate both the necessary innovation into clean technology and also its transfer to the least advantaged.

Dr Conrad Kunze

Renewable Energy and new Public Ownership: What are the chances for an Economic Democratisation during the phase of Transition from the old to the new energy regime?

The transition to renewable energy is very much a political process that involves plenty of changes: crumbling industries and lost jobs on the one side and new jobs and new industries on the other side. What is more, it has been an amplifier for a shift in ownership patterns. While the pre-renewable energy regime in EU was and still often is very much monolithic and monopolistic, the renewable regime is sometimes connected to old and new forms of public ownership in cities and the countryside and it has caused a steep increase of cooperatives across western Europe. There is thus some reason to speak of a democratisation of energy production, even if still on a small scale. Still there are many uncertainties. How robust is this development, is it really happening? And what would be the advantage of public over private ownership in energy provision? Finally, how could a desirable democratisation of the transition be possible at larger scale within the given political structures?

The speech will sketch some answers based both on empirical research in Europe and political analyses of different national energy policies.

Prof Darrel Moellendorf

Can Dangerous Climate Change be Avoided?

This paper discusses the nature of dangerous climate change, the problems of coordinating international action in response to it, and the importance of researching methods to supplement mitigation, at least temporarily. I defend the antipoverty principle for purposes of identifying dangerous climate change and guiding climate change mitigation policy. I then distinguish that identificatory account of dangerous climate change from the stated aim of international negotiations, namely to avoid global mean temperature warming in excess of 2°C. I argue that climate change in excess of 2°C is not necessarily dangerous climate change. The subsequent section discusses the nature of the collective action problem that bedevils mitigation negotiations; I also evaluate the pledge and review policy approach in light of its capacity to solve the collective action problems of mitigation. Although the pledge and review mechanism possesses the virtues of making a broad agreement possible and of protecting poor states against diplomatic duress, it is unlikely to provide a robust resolution of the collective action problems that results in climate change. But there is no rival approach that seems likely to produce better results. Far from ideal, the pledge and review process is plausibly be the best one given the collective action problems. I also argue that limiting warming to 2°C is unlikely. The risks of climate change are likely to be considerable; and the uncertainty of catastrophic events are worrying. So, I argue that uncertainty in light of several kinds of abrupt climate perturbations discussed in the AR5, the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), merits precautionary supplements to mitigation efforts. I close by endorsing the merits of research into carbon capture and storage and solar radiation management by means of sulfur injections into the stratosphere. If dangerous climate change is to be avoided, considerable supplementing of mitigation may be required.

Prof Jeremy Moss

Justice and Climate Transitions

Ethics and in particular considerations of justice, plays a crucial role in determining what the responses to climate change should be and in how we should evaluate such responses. An area where this is particularly important is in relation to the considerations of justice involved in the transition to a low carbon society. In discussing these issues I will first consider what the scope and nature of climate transitions are. Second, why justice is an integral part of climate transitions. And, finally the important role that the ideas of legitimacy and justification play in assessing transitions.

Prof John O'Neill

Mapping climate disadvantage

There are two analytically distinct components to justice in the distribution of the impacts of climate change. The first is the distribution of exposure to hazards, that is the likelihood and severity of exposure to hazards such as flood, heatwave and drought. The second is the distribution of vulnerability: not all those who are exposed to such hazards will be equally vulnerable to their effects. This paper considers how vulnerability should be conceptualised and measured. Through consideration of recent joint empirical work on climate disadvantage in the UK the paper examines some of the questions the multi-dimensional nature of vulnerability and well-being raise for measuring and mapping climate injustice.

Dr Larry Reynolds

Power to the people? Cities, citizens and communities in the UK Energy Transition

'Everyone has a role to play in tackling climate change' proclaims the UK low Carbon Transition Plan. Such acknowledgements of the importance of public participation are a common feature of much energy transition policy. Yet within this apparent consensus, different versions of the public, of this 'everyone', are to be found. This paper explores the different ways the public (as communities, consumers and citizens) are constituted in the UK energy transition and its associated public policy debates.

Dr Fabian Schuppert

Risk avoidance through transition, legitimate expectations and issues of justice

If some of the most severe risks associated with anthropogenic climate change are to be avoided swift and radical social, economic, cultural and political transitions are necessary. However, whenever such rapid and far-reaching change is required, we should carefully consider how such change is going to affect issues of justice, not just in terms of distributing the burdens associated with climate transitions (which is part of what is commonly called climate justice), but also with regard to wider issues of social and global justice (and possibly even intergenerational justice). In this paper I will look at the issue of domestic energy transitions and investigate in which way or form our normative concern for risk avoidance and for protecting legitimate expectations to carry on with one's projects and ways of living need to be balanced, as well as how this balancing act can and possibly should impact existing inequalities in the social distribution of risk, vulnerability and power. I will end with a set of rough responses to some existing pressing policy questions, such as whether compensation is owed to employees in industries displaced by climate transitions.

Climate justice, energy demand and the right to energy

Climate justice raises particularly tricky tensions between increasingly important energy demand reduction objectives as part of climate mitigation and claims in various forms for a 'right to energy'. Rights-based talk has begun to incorporate energy into a set of 'second generation' rights that seek to demand the politically significant socio-economic or welfare demands of contemporary (global) citizenship. The 'right to energy', as articulated in both international and regional forms, seeks to assert that energy matters to the degree that it is more than just another commodity, and that the state and other actors involved in energy provisioning therefore have obligations that go beyond normal (uneven) market relations. That it is a specific matter of justice. However when simultaneously energy use and its carbon consequences are problematized as a fundamental matter of climate justice, the question becomes whether and how the notion of a just low carbon transition can reconcile these (broadly cast) competing justice claims. In this discussion I will particularly consider and problematize what it means to conceive of a right to energy, and how, in so doing, it is necessary to consider carefully what energy is for. Setting the right to energy alongside the more established provenance of the right to water, highlights that energy is not one thing (a constructed rather than a natural category); that its value and demand is derived – for multiple services – rather than more immediately vital or direct; and that (socio)natural flows are implicated in the situated geography of how (produced) energy matters to well-being. These characteristics complicate the practical formulation of a right to energy per se, and in a climate transition context suggest either an essential reformulation of what the 'right to' should be, or the abandonment of a rights based politics in any form.