



Climate Justice Principles

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Overview

- Political philosophy offers unique insights into the justice and injustice of alternative policy interventions
- We first look at some key concepts and questions
- We then survey six leading principles of climate justice
- We raise some problems with the influential cost-benefit approach
- And we defend two principles of climate justice – luck egalitarianism and prioritarianism



Concepts

- Three policy responses:
 - (1) Mitigation (reduction in greenhouse gases)
 - (2) Adaptation (reduction in negative impact of climate change)
 - (3) Compensation (making amends for CC loss and damage)
- While *nations* are in practice the focus of international distribution (e.g., through UNFCCC process), a fully just distribution would require that each *individual* bears fair share.
- Related to this is the distinction between *practical* principles of policy, and *fundamental* principles that provide theoretical basis.



Questions

- The first question of climate justice is ‘who should bear the costs of climate change’?
- Most principles of climate justice are concerned with this question, allocating the adaptation, compensation and especially mitigation burdens of climate change.
- A second question of climate justice is ‘how much mitigation is required’?
- While most political philosophers defer to empirical sciences on this question, some normative approaches answer it.



Principle 1: polluter pays

- Says those with high historical emissions should bear a larger share of the costs of climate change.
- Limitations: may seem unreasonable to hold countries liable for risks they were unaware of (e.g., pre-1990), and to hold current generation accountable for past generations' emissions.
- Could adjust principle so it applies only to recent emissions. But this shifts the burden decisively towards low and middle income countries. E.g., China has more post-1990 emissions than US.
- Furthermore, this shift intensifies as developed world decarbonizes.



Principle 2: Beneficiary pays

- This second historical principle says states should bear the costs of climate change in proportion to the benefits they have derived from greenhouse gas-emitting activity.
- Underlying idea: shouldn't profit from harm to others even if one is blameless (e.g., return mistaken bank transfer).
- Hence removes PP limitations – can cover pre-1990 emissions.
- But it faces the disaggregation problem: impossible to distinguish benefits that are derived from CC-inducing activity
- Could treat all wealth as from CC – then similar to ability to pay.



Principle 3: Grandfathering

- A third historical principle of climate justice maintains that those with high historical emissions thereby gain entitlements to high future emissions.
- General idea is agents can continue practices they wouldn't be allowed to initiate (e.g., low standards for old cars or buildings).
- Political philosophers have largely dismissed grandfathering as obviously unjust.
- Yet it's hard to argue that, e.g., Czechia (9 tonnes per capita) should immediately cut to the level of Hungary (4.7 tonnes).
- Has a place as a moderate and transitional principle.



Principle 4: Guaranteed minimum

- Requires that everyone is guaranteed enough for a decent life.
- Draws on distinction between subsistence emissions, to which everyone is entitled & luxury emissions, which can be given up.
- While widely accepted among political philosophers, the principle is limited in scope.
- We may think that people have entitlements to more than a decent life, especially where others have much more.

Principle 5: Emissions egalitarianism



- Proposes that everyone worldwide has an identical entitlement to make use of the atmosphere's absorptive capacity.
- It accordingly says that emission entitlements should be distributed equally on an individual basis.
- After all, why should Americans have more than Brazilians?
- Seems, however, to encourage pro-natalism. If population is instead indexed to base year, Americans get more after all.
- May lack a theoretical basis. Philosophical theories of equality distribute goods as a whole rather than one good (emissions).



Principle 6: Ability to pay

- The final principle distributes the burdens of climate change in proportion to the agent's ability to pay, i.e., rich pay more.
- Concerned with absolute levels of advantage, like the guaranteed minimum but more ambitious – not limited by a threshold.
- Yet it too may encourage pro-natalism – a bigger population will make your country poorer, triggering a reduced climate burden under the principle.



Cost-benefit analysis

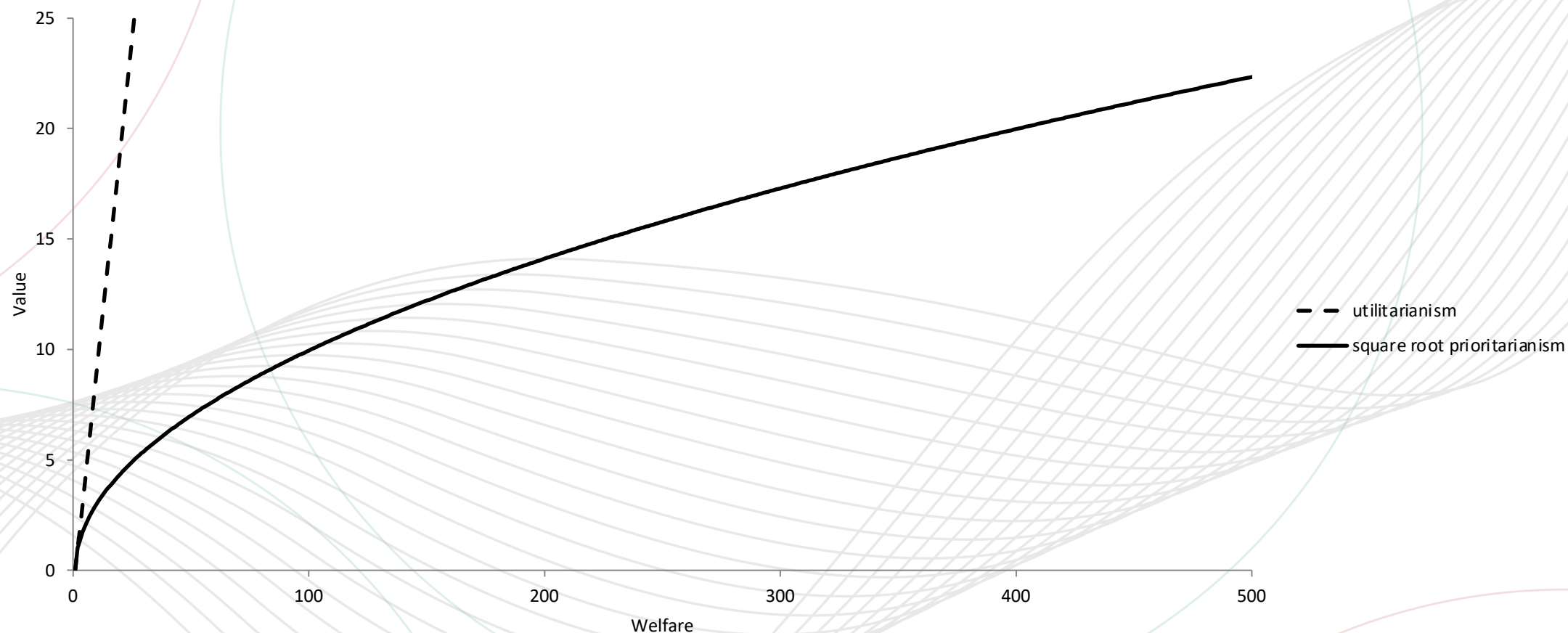
- This influential alternative to climate justice principles aims to maximise welfare, an applied version of utilitarianism.
- Three main problems:
 - (1) Economic welfare reflects market value, so the rich's interests get an unfairly higher weighting.
 - (2) Unacceptably high pure time discount rate – benefits for future people essentially count for less.
 - (3) Utilitarianism is insensitive to distributive justice – no priority for the worse off or those that make better climate choices.

Fundamental principle 1: prioritarianism



- A first fundamental principle, prioritarianism, says that all welfare counts, as utilitarianism does, but says that welfare for the worse off counts for more.
- A simple version of this view says that the value of a distribution is the sum of the square roots of individual utilities that it contains, $\sqrt{u_1} + \dots + \sqrt{u_n}$.

Sum of square root prioritarianism



Fundamental principle 2: luck egalitarianism



- A second fundamental principle, luck egalitarianism, says that those who have made more praiseworthy (e.g, lower emitting) choices are due more.
- Basic idea is that inequality is permissible only where it corresponds to differential exercises of individual responsibility rather than being the result of individual luck.
- We propose that it should be combined with prioritarianism as 'luck prioritarianism'. A distribution gets better, the more welfare it contains, the more welfare there is for the worse off, and the more welfare goes to those who have made good choices.