Justice and Prudence in a time of Planetary Emergency

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Ethical Responsibility—both by national and religious communities—requires dealing with the upsurge of human numbers and powers since the Industrial Revolution.

- As Hans Jonas states in *The Imperative of Responsibility* the expanded range of human action and impact requires a corresponding extension of our sense of moral responsibility.
1800 CE   Human Population 1 billion
1927 CE     2 billion
Earth at Night 1998
Two classic Moral Frameworks for Understanding Climate Change

• Two Frameworks draw on classic Western discussions of moral virtues and principles of ethics

• 1/ Climate Justice Framework
• 2/ Climate Prudence Framework
Two Contemporary Frameworks derived from Classic Moral Discussions about Justice and Prudence Concerns

- Classic discussions on **Justice** by Aristotle and Aquinas (and Kant and Walzer and Rawls) ground a contemporary concretization of concern for “An Honest Economics Framework” committed to “Just Ecological Pricing” that incorporates into the market price the full costs of the hidden external costs of future social and ecological damage.

- Classic discussions of **Prudence** by Aristotle and Aquinas and most Contemporary Ecological Ethicists stress the “**Prudence Principle**” that is emphasized by by ecologists stressing we need to act now to mitigate global climate change. The Prudence Principle, I argue, is at the core of nation/states’ emphases on the top national priority as **buying insurance regarding National Security** against all threats.
Two More Frameworks drawn from Contemporary Political and Economic Discourses: these have moral implications

• 3/ National Security Framework— political and practical discourse about highest national threats and thus accordingly highest national priorities and commitments—a discourse of justification for high national spending and policy action

• 4/ Honest Economics Framework— Free markets promote growth and freedom when they are honest. But markets get distorted through oft hidden subsidies to one industry but not others and through market pricing that does not reflect the full costs of the use of a good or service. Pollution cases are the paradigm case of hidden costs passed on by the seller and buyer to other third parties who now or in the future will be forced to bear damage and genuine costs. These are called hidden externalities.
First Framework Climate Justice Framework has three spheres of concern:

• **First sphere of concern**: The vast expansion of the range and impact of human power today demands an expansion of our sense of strict justice owed ecologically to all Earth’s ecosystems and species and temporally to all future generations both human and animal. Here the injustice centers in failures in stewardship and fundamental care.
2nd Sphere of Concern: International Justice Issues

Recognition of vast disparities between and across nations of responsibility for climate change and vast disparities between rich nations who can afford mitigation and adaptation efforts and poor developing nations who cannot and remain most vulnerable. Justice obligations to peoples of other nations and the community of nations. This injustice centers in a failure of basic distributive justice.
Third Sphere of Concern: Justice owed to One’s own People

- Recognition that in America today some extremely powerful corporate and political elites care nothing for the common good of America or the global community. They push hard and selfishly for short-term advantage and ignore looming real threat. They place their economic gain or political desire for election advantage ahead of the basic wellbeing and common good. This slows our national engagement with climate concerns and increases the harm to all of our globe’s people. This injustice centers in a failure of civic leadership and the breakdown of any notion of responsible patriotism. The photo to the left if one of California’s drought lowered key reservoirs.
wealthy nations that industrialized early on like the United States, Great Britain and Germany are hugely responsible for Climate change buildup while many developing countries have contributed only very modest levels of atmospheric Carbon dioxide buildup. The United States stands well above Great Britain and Germany in overall impact and in current per capita carbon emission.
ABC Chart of Global share of cumulative emissions

(b) 1751–2010 Cumulative Emissions

- USA: 26.8%
- China: 9.8%
- India: 2.8%
- Russia: 7.3%
- Japan: 4.1%
- Germany: 6.3%
- UK: 5.6%
- Rest of Europe: 18.0%
- Rest of World: 13.9%
- CanAus: 3.1%
- Ships/Air: 2.3%
ABC Global Share of Emissions 2010

(a) 2010 Annual Emissions

- China: 23.9%
- USA: 17.2%
- India: 6.4%
- Russia: 4.8%
- Japan: 3.7%
- Germany: 2.4%
- UK: 1.6%
- Rest of Europe: 8.8%
- Rest of World: 25.0%
- Ships/Air: 2.7%
Union of Concerned Scientists

Each Country's Share of 2011 Total Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Consumption of Energy

- China: 27%
- United States: 17%
- Rest of World: 20%
- Other countries: 5% each for India, Russia, Japan, and Korea, South, Germany, and France, and 2% each for Saudi Arabia, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, United Kingdom, and Canada.

Data: EIA.gov
Graph: Union of Concerned Scientists
ABC 1751-2009 Cumulative Emissions per capita ABC
Beijing smog
2011 Country Rank
Total Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Consumption of Energy
(Million Metric Tons)

China
United States
Russia
India
Japan
Germany
Iran
Korea, South
Canada
Saudi Arabia
United Kingdom
Brazil
Mexico
South Africa
Indonesia
Italy
Australia
France
Spain
Poland
Second Moral Framework: Climate Prudence Framework

• To many of us today, the appeal to justice rings loud while the appeal to prudence sounds timid, filled with moderation, and self-serving. It sounds like our mother or father calling to us to “be careful”

• But for Aristotle and Aquinas prudence was a central virtue and mark of the moral life and moral decisions about right and timely action.
Aristotle and Aquinas on Prudence

- Aristotle holds that the prudent person “takes good counsel” and Aquinas holds that the prudent person “considers things afar off.”

- Aquinas calls the “the prudence that is directed to the common good to be political prudence.”

- Because prudence is focused on wise deliberation regarding human judgment about action, Aquinas states that prudence “requires the memory of many things.” “Prudence consists in a right estimate of matters of action.”

- Prudence deals with deliberation about right action regarding future potentials. A key part of prudence is “foresight” for it “implies the notion of something distant, to which that which occurs in the present has to be directed.”
Modern Case Study: Churchill’s Condemnation of England’s Negligent Slowness in Responding to Hitler’s threat

• 1936 Hitler was rearming and engaged in building up a mighty air force.

• The British prime minister Stanley Baldwin had promised vigilance but delayed building up Britain's air force out of concern that such military spending would cut into economic growth and his popularity.

• Winston Churchill who knew the scale of the rising German threat rose in Parliament to give a speech condemning Baldwin’s slowness to respond in the face of Britain's grave threat. He condemned the failure to act in timely fashion before the rising threat using biblical terms by dubbing these lost years as the “Years that the Locust Hath Eaten.”
Years the Locust Hath Eaten! (Joel 2:25)

• **12 Nov 1936**: Churchill before Parliament condemns the Baldwin Government for failing to rearm Britain as she faces an increasingly threatening Nazi power.

• Churchill condemned the moral negligence of failing to react effectively against rising dangers and threats.
The Evil of procrastination

• “Owing to past neglect, in the face of the plainest warnings, we have now entered upon a period of danger . . . .”

• “The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences.”

(Churchill)
US Bishops’ Pastoral Letter stresses the need for prudent decision-making to protect the common good. Ecologists stress the Prudence Principle even as do the Bishops.
3/ The National Security Framework

• The virtue of Prudence translated into the current discourse of national communities is concretized in discussions and claims about national security. The need to mitigate National security threats is commonly held to be the major justification for rapid and immense mobilization of resources, money and human power. Threat reduction against potentially hostile foreign military threats has long been the primary policy justification for massive military spending for “national defense.”
Reinhold Niebuhr’s view: individuals can be moved by moral concerns but nations are moved most forcefully by economic and security interests. Niebuhr’s view has been grounded in a deep “realism” about the drivers of national decision-making and action.
Niebuhr’s Thesis: Individuals have capacities of greater moral sensitivity than do large groups or nations

• Individual persons “may be moral in the sense that they are able to consider interests other than their own in determining problems of conduct, and are capable, on occasion, of preferring the advantages of others to one’s own.”
Case Study: President Bush’s Position on Climate Change

• June 11, 2001 Kyoto Protocol is fatally flawed. He notes there are many “scientific uncertainties” about climate change. We need “sound science” to base “sound policy” on. Imprudent now to take steps that would cause “negative economic impact” and job loss.
Vigilance against potential military threats but nonchalance regarding climate change or ecological threats. What is the proper threshold to warrant mobilized national action?
Case Study: Vice-President Cheney on the proper threshold of action in face of major threat is err on the side of caution

- **The Cheney Doctrine**: “If there's a 1% chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response. It's not about our analysis ... It's about our response.”
World War II US Military Spending

- In 1943-44 US military spending to defeat Germany and Japan reached 41% of our GDP

- When nations face serious threats they tend to be willing to spend serious funds on “national defense” in time of national emergency. Why not in times of ecological emergency?
Case Study of President Eisenhower’s warning
President Eisenhower’s warning

• In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. .... As we peer into society's future, we – you and I, and our government – must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without asking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.
Copenhagen Accord
Obama at Copenhagen
Lima Conference Disappoints Dec. 2014

New York Times

December 1, 2014

Optimism Faces Grave Realities at Climate Talks

Envoys Gather in Lima

Deal on Greenhouse Gas Sought Amid More Warming Alarms

By Coral Davenport

Washington — After more than two decades of trying but failing to forge a global pact to halt climate change, United Nations negotiators gathering in South America this week are expressing a new optimism that they may finally achieve the elusive deal.

Even with a deal to stop the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, scientists warn, the world will become increasingly unpleasant. Without a deal, they say, the world could eventually become uninhabitable for humans.

For the next two weeks, thousands of delegates from around
Republicans Vow to Fight the E.P.A.
Asymmetry of Threat Response between action in face of military threat and massive delay in face of ecological threat: These are the decades the “locust hath eaten.”
US Military Budget for 2013: We have institutionalized high US military spending.
US longstanding Military Superpower

• But while US military spending remains quite high, our economy has also grown significantly so that our overall military spending has dropped as a percent of our overall Gross Domestic Product. The $640 billion figure also does not include many other budgets that really are also military defense related such as the Veterans Administration’s hospitals and also the recent war budgets for Afghanistan and Iraq that were separate budgets.
U.S. National Defense Spending
Percent of U.S. GDP

Data source: BEA
cfr.org/cgs
Pentagon now Judges Climate Change as National Security Concern

• 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap— “Destruction and devastation from hurricanes can sow the seeds for instability. Droughts and crop failures can leave millions of people without any lifeline, and trigger waves of mass migration” Secretary Chuck Hagel
If Climate Change is the most serious National Security Threat today, then we should be willing to commit major spending in any way that reduces our carbon footprint and helps the global effort
Two Options: First Option is to Reallocate National Defense budget to include spending on defense against climate change threat

**First Option:**  Reallocate half the military budget as rapidly as possible to address needs for massive funding to push US to cut carbon emissions by mobilizing “with wartime speed” a shift to solar, geothermal and wind production—new transit modes
Second Option: Raise national defense spending back to earlier levels of 4% of GDP and keep current military spending levels but add new ecological defense funds of spending at say half our current military spending say $320 billion per year. To push the shift to solar and wind power and away from fossil fuels. This could be a Global Marshall Plan to help other nations cope with climate change and also switch to solar and wind power.

- Second Option: Increase taxes so as to allocate 2 percent of GDP to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts at home and in support of the same efforts in other countries—
- Military budget next year will be about 2.3% of GDP—a historic low figure
**Fourth Moral Framework**: Just Pricing Framework – this builds from justice framework by concretizing justice concerns with an eye for “Just Market Pricing” to highlight true costs of fossil fuel consumption patterns.

- We pay much too little today for coal and oil and gas and this functions to incentivize “business as usual” practices.
- We must monetize the “hidden external costs” of fossil fuels via green taxation schemes so that the “polluter pays.”
- Such taxes on fossil fuels would follow a European model and would help mobilize a shift to redesign of transit systems and a shift solar and wind power research and production.