

Course Syllabus

Université Paris-Saclay, Université de Cergy-Pontoise, Institut d'Études Politique (IEP)
Saint Germain en Laye
Academic Year 2023

CLIMATE JUSTICE SEMINAR

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Lectures: Fridays, 12:45-15:45

Office Hours: By appointment

I. COURSE OBJECTIVES

The recent discourse around climate change—including debates about the Anthropocene and our economic model, green deal legislation and the winding down of the use of fossil fuels, costly real-world impacts of climate disasters ('loss and damage finance facility'), the dramatic increase in the number of climate refugees, the depletion of natural resources, the dire state of space pollution, the dire warnings of the IPCC 1.5°C report, to name a few—increasingly make evident that climate change is much more than a technological problem of carbon mitigation and adaptation.

Climate change is arguably the significant problem confronting humanity today, but we have done little to avoid this looming catastrophe. More than ever, climate change presents significant policy and ethical dilemmas. In the face of great adversity, several questions have arisen: When confronted with global warming, might we reach an optimal decision in which all human beings may not be equal, rational, or perfectly governed? In other words, would a policy demanding significant sacrifices to the most vulnerable nations and the poorer citizens be profoundly unjust and violate fundamental rights? How do we balance the rights and responsibilities of the developed and developing world? Is it fair for our generation to exploit the future by taking modest benefits while passing on potentially catastrophic costs? Or, instead of engaging in inaction or self-deception when the basic fabric of life on the planet is at stake, how do we wake up from this nightmare and demand more of our institutions (public and private), our leaders, and ourselves?

In addressing these questions, we assume the recent climatic changes are symptoms of more profound structural challenges; as such, we address climate change as fundamentally a problem of social and environmental justice. We, therefore, combine the study of justice and ethics, inequality, and structural conflict with a deep dive into climate policy, international diplomacy, and moral leadership. Our goal is to develop knowledge, skills, and strategies that will enable you to examine high-stakes moral dilemmas in climate change policy, understand their complexity and consider meaningful action to remedy them.

II. COURSE DESIGN

In this class, we use “case-in-point” learning and group work. These various methods help us focus on how problems are seen; on how the power to act is legitimized and exercised; on how purposes and ultimate ends are balanced; and on which actions are taken and why. And

the decisions taken (or not taken) turn on a mix of values and virtues -- views on how one should make hard decisions and exercise genuine moral agency in facing climate justice and action.

The course is designed according to the following framework: (i) Setting the frame; (ii) Principles of climate justice and who is to bear the costs; (iii) Issue of intergenerational ethics in climate change; (iv) Moral agency and leadership – who are the influencers of choice and decision-making?; and (v) What form for a renewed global partnership for climate action.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Prerequisites. There are no other formal prerequisites.

Attendance: Complete and on-time attendance. Only medical and family emergencies are permitted.

Assessment and Grade Distribution. There are three ways to demonstrate mastery of the course material: 1°) Participating in class discussion, 2°) Drafting weekly memos, and 3°) participating in the end-of-term Policy Analysis Exercise. Expectations are as follows:

Class Participation (30% of Grade)

We aspire to engage and high-quality class discussions. The conversation on climate justice and action will be engaging if participants are willing to take risky or unpopular points of view; participate in debates, and role plays; use logic, precision, and evidence in arguments; apply course materials appropriately; and are constructively critical. Everyone must be well prepared for each class.

The Memo Write-ups (40% of Grade)

During the term, you are expected to draft a weekly policy memo related to the topic discussed in class. The memo will be two pages at maximum. Detailed instructions will be provided on how to craft such a memo. Once your memos are drafted, your recommendations are presented and debated in class.

End-of-term Policy Analysis Exercise (30%, in groups or individually): As a final project, participants will develop an analysis of a recent international crisis and incorporate the lessons derived from the course reading (short paper of 5000 words maximum).

ADDENDUM:

Addendum 1: It is impossible to teach a course examining climate justice and action that does not regularly touch upon issues that will be challenging for some students. Part of our task is to learn how to discuss these topics productively. A non-negotiable norm will be to create a safe space to tackle these matters. Safe, however, does not mean avoiding difficult, troubling, upsetting, unsettling, and sometimes emotionally charged topics. Great care will be taken to confront these issues responsibly.

Addendum 2: A student needing academic adjustments or accommodations must speak with the professor at the beginning of the course. Failure to do so may result in the inability to respond promptly.

IV. SCHEDULE AND READINGS

The readings will be sent electronically before class.

Session 1:

Existential Threats, Global Shifts, Tipping Points in Climate Change

(Friday, 20 January, 12:45-15:45)

We review the evidence on the magnitude and causes of climate change and discuss the consequences on society. We provide background to the notion of climate justice. We review practical ethical considerations related to climate change and try to understand if the environmental crisis leads to an ethical failure. We ask if normative ‘moral frameworks’ (e.g., utilitarian, libertarian, Aristotelian, and Kantian/Rawlsian) could guide responses to adverse ethical situations created by climate change.

Case study: Greenland and the Paris Agreement (HKS Case 2201.0)

Readings:

- Elke Weber, “The Influencers of Choice and Decision Making”, in *Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence*, Wisdom Publications, 2018, pp. 177-201
- Stephen Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption,” *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, pp. 620-630.
- “Why Climate Change is an Ethical Problem,” *The Washington Post*, 9 January 2016

Session 2:

Testing the Ethic: Fair Distribution of Costs and Benefits in the Heart of Climate Justice

(Friday, 03 February, 12:45-15:45)

We review the current debates on how the world’s most affluent nations are seen as passing on the cost of climate change to the poorer and weaker citizens. We examine how to fairly distribute the benefits and burdens of moving to the green transition, especially the role of international development aid in alleviating climate risks. We confront not just a debate on priorities (such as, which comes first, climate or economic rights?) but fundamental disagreements about the role of international cooperation for the most vulnerable countries.

Case study: Royal Dutch/Shell in Nigeria (A), HBS Case 9-399-126

Readings:

- “Ethical Theory,” in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, Wiley Blackwell, 2014, pp. 23-70
- Stephen Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm,” *The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 19-48 (30 pages)
- “The Ethics of Climate Change, A primer,” *The Washington Post*, 9 January 2016

Session 3:

The Intergenerational Buck-Passing: An Ethical Storm Ahead?

(Friday, 17 February, 12:45-15:45)

In this session, we discuss the several severe challenges to the idea that it makes moral sense to think in terms of generations about climate change. Problems arise if the present

generation is tempted to pass the costs of climate change on to future generations. From a climate justice perspective, we assess the pros and cons of thinking about intergenerational ethics and discuss how it can impact climate action over time.

Case study: Space Debris Pollution: Irreversible Damage for Future Generations?

Readings:

- Stephen Gardiner, The Real Tragedy of the Commons, in Global Ethics pp. 447-480
- Ethics & International Affairs, Tackling Climate Change: Why Us Now? February 2019 (<https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2019/tackling-climate-change-why-us-now/>)
- Kessler Syndrome and the Space Debris Problem, Mike Wall, July 14, 2022, (<https://www.space.com/kessler-syndrome-space-debris>)

Session 4:

The Influencers of Choices: What Leadership is Required?

(Friday, 31 March, 12:45-15:45)

We discuss the difficulties of managing common pool resources, achieving transboundary pollution control, making tradeoffs between economic development needs and environmental resource protection, and harmonizing environmental protection standards. At their core, these problems must be addressed through international or multi-lateral negotiations. We ask questions on the problems of representation and voting, issue linkage, balancing science and politics, and timing and enforcement in climate negotiations. We argue that we need to demand more of our institutions and leaders, but we need to understand what is required.

Case study: Negotiating Toward the Paris Accord: WWF and the Role of Forests in the 2015 Climate Agreement

Readings:

- After Virtue, Alasdair Macintyre, The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism (Chapter 1)
- Lawrence Susskind, Breaking Robert's Rules: Consensus-Building Techniques for Group Decision Making, 2006
- Colby, A., & Damon, W. Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment. Free Press. Pages 4, 27, 29-32 (2014)

Session 5:

From Motivation to Action: Solutions for a More Sustainable World

(Friday 31 March, 12:45-15:45)

In past sessions, we have discussed ethics, climate justice, decision-making, and motivation to face climate change. Now we are into an exploration of action. We argue that climate action is not only a matter of public policy. More than ever, the business has a role to play. However, in recent years, business has increasingly been viewed as a significant cause of social, environmental, and economic problems. Companies are widely perceived to prosper at the broader community's expense. A big part of the problem lies with companies, which remain trapped in an outdated approach to value creation that has emerged over the past few decades. We discuss the capacity of the corporate world to engage in strategic ethics and create value for society.

Case: Danone S.A.: Becoming A Mission-Driven Company (HBS Case Study 9-722-354)

Readings:

- Peter Senge, The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations, Sloan Management Review, Fall 1990
- Creating Shared Value: How to reinvent capitalism-and unleash a wave of innovation and growth, Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, 2017
- Getting Serious about Stakeholder Capitalism, Hubert Joly, Harvard Business Review, May 13, 2021
- Ethan B. Kapstein, The Corporate Ethics Crusade, 1 September 2001