

**Steve Vanderheiden**

*Atmospheric justice. A Political theory of climate change*

Oxford University Press, 2008

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This book has a twofold aim: on the one hand it intends to explore, from the perspective of applied ethics and political theory, justice and responsibility in climate change; on the other hand it seeks to draw attention to some theoretical problems that characterize existing theories of justice and responsibility in this context. Consequently, the argument develops on two levels: that of theory (ethical and political) and that of its application. After an introduction on climate science and policy, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 form the theoretical part of Vanderheiden's contribution. Chapter 2 scrutinizes, within a liberal egalitarian account, the notion of justice as a possible normative reference for tackling climate impacts. Chapter 3 extends the scope of justice internationally, as upheld by cosmopolitanism, in order to accommodate the particular supranational concerns caused by climate change. Chapter 4 justifies another extension of liberal theories of justice, namely to future generations, which are also highly likely to be hit by the climate impacts produced by their ancestors. The remaining chapters belong to the realm of applied theory, in so far as they examine the various facets of the notion of responsibility (Chapter 5), and some conditions for its proper attribution (Chapter 6), in the context of climate change. Finally, Chapter 7, in light of the arguments of the book, examines alternative schemes for allocating climate burdens, namely modified versions of the *equal shares* and *equal burdens* approaches.

*Atmospheric justice* is a valuable and authoritative addition to the growing literature on the ethics and politics of climate change. Its major strength is its thorough analysis of responsibility both in theoretical and empirical terms. It is, however, rather demanding reading, because Vanderheiden's arguments are sometimes grounded in necessarily abstract, yet sound, philosophical foundations. Nonetheless, they maintain policy-relevance, thanks to the author's ability to contextualize them in the domain of climate change. One drawback to the book is that it is mostly concentrated on distributive justice, despite its recurrent claims concerning the importance of procedural justice, which is addressed rather cursorily in the last few pages, without genuine theoretical treatment.

The book could be mainly of use to academics in the fields of political theory, applied ethics and climate policy, who may find resources in it to organize and systemize their understanding of the challenges raised by justice and responsibility in international climate change.