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Research Agenda

I am currently interested in two research topics: one is related to compensation the other to climate engineering. I start with the former.

Given observed and projected impacts of climate change, the serious threats that these pose to lives and livelihoods of millions of people and the asymmetrical contributions to the climate change problem, compensation becomes an important issue. The claim that people threatened or harmed by climate change are entitled to some form of remedy (that can itself be critically investigated and further specified) raises at least the following four general research questions: who should provide compensation, what means qualify as compensation, how should compensatory means be governed and who is entitled to compensation / how should compensation be distributed? Although the climate justice literature already provides some (preliminary) answers to the first question, there has been very little debate of the other three questions. In my judgment, the fourth question regarding the distribution of compensatory means is especially difficult to resolve. It would be important to discuss, among others, who counts as a climate change victim and which allocation procedures would be sufficiently fair and feasible. Related to these research questions is the recent debate about loss and damage. At present, the term “loss and damage” is defined and used in different ways. It is thus not clear what it actually means and how it is related to the issues previously mentioned. In this respect, possible research questions are as follows: what loss and damage is about, whether it is a synonym for compensation, how it relate to adaptation and rectification strategies, what role it should play in future climate negotiations and agreements respectively as well as how it should be institutionalized.

Serious climate change threats not only prompt questions regarding compensation but also regarding so called Climate Engineering (CE) technologies. Both deploying and researching these technologies may be associated with unintended negative side-effect. On the one hand, there is considerable disagreement about the severity of these possible effects compared to the intended positive effects of (having the possibility of) reducing the global mean surface temperature. On the other hand, there is agreement that CE technologies are imperfect substitutes for the reduction of GHG emissions and it is mandatory to minimize its negative effects – for otherwise these technologies will hardly improve the status quo. As a consequence, not all kinds of research and deployment of CE technologies are morally permissible (but only those that sufficiently minimize associated risks). Research should thus investigate under what conditions the research as well as the deployment of (which) CE technologies are morally permissible or even mandatory.

Finally, both topics – compensation and CE – are also related. On the one hand, it may be required to supplement the deployment of (some) CE technologies with a compensatory scheme that addresses its negative side effects. On the other hand, it is debatable whether CE technologies are suitable and permissible means to compensate climate-related threats and damages. By investigating both aspects, research should clarify what role CE can and should play within a compensatory scheme and vice versa.