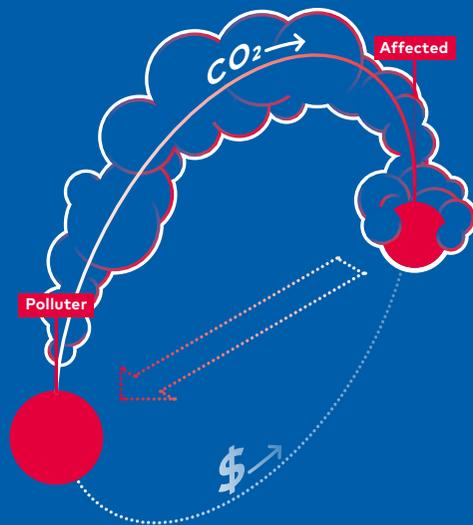




Fridays For Fairness

Planet in crisis /  
World order in crisis

Global climate justice



In 2018, when the then-15-year-old climate protection activist Greta Thunberg held up her sign with the slogan »School Strike for the Climate« in front of the Swedish parliament for the first time, a whole generation of young people joined her and, like her, went on strike every Friday. But why a school strike for the climate? Isn't a strike a classic means of labor struggle for social justice? The demands of the »Fridays for Future« movement drew the attention of the global public to one crucial point: climate change threatens all of us, but not everyone equally. A generation that still carelessly squanders the earth's resources and whose idea of the future is that it could only be better won't experience many of the consequences of climate change. These consequences, however, will be faced by the very generation that is now demanding justice for their future on this planet through strikes.

The fact that others will have to pay the bill for our unsustainable life is the central focus of research conducted by the climate philosopher Darrel Moellendorf. His normative concept of climate justice views the crisis of anthropogenic climate change as an ethical and political problem rather than merely a challenge that is ecologically or technically solvable. Intergenerational justice is just one aspect that adds new complexities to our concept of social justice in relation to climate change. Until now, social justice has only existed within a combination of legal institutions and policies: within states. Climate change challenges this limited justice. After all, it respects no national boundaries. Nevertheless, these borders are becoming increasingly significant. People living in the Ganges Delta or Manhattan share the same risk of being affected by floods caused by rising sea levels. What they do not share, however, is vulnerability to the damage caused by them. The Ganges Delta is characterized by a high level of poverty, and infrastructure to cope with disasters is weak and poorly protected. Although climate change affects everyone, it hits the weakest hardest.

When US citizens turn on their air conditioning or when Europeans drive cars powered by fossil fuels, these actions—our actions—have consequences. These consequences, in turn, connect us on a global scale with rural communities in Bangladesh, farmers in Ethiopia, and slum dwellers in Haiti. Out of this connection emerges a complex responsibility. Apparently, the question of who will pay for the costs of climate change—including the costs of adapting to it—is linked to global justice. Moellendorf thus starts from the assumption that the Earth's atmosphere—including its ability to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>—is a common good for which mankind bears a special responsibility.

But who is responsible? The CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere today was emitted by our grandparents. »If you pollute it, you have to pay for it«—that's the »polluter pays« principle. But people didn't know any better back then. And who should pay proportionally for the pollution of previous generations anyway? The state that made this possible or the individuals who still benefit from it today? Moreover, developing countries need to increase their greenhouse gas emissions in order to develop economically. Accordingly, the »ability-to-pay« principle suggests a different approach. Those states that can afford to support the weaker ones should step in financially. But who organizes and determines this responsibility and what should be its scope? Both principles have strengths and weaknesses that complicate the issue of climate justice.