

An Evaluation of Dale Jamieson's Contribution to Climate Ethic

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Abstract

Humanity is in a state of debit and huge resource crises. Year after year, it consumes more resources than nature can provide. This over-consumption has a direct effect on the climate. Climate change is a major challenge of our time that has direct consequences on humans and nature; thus, there is a need for climate ethics. This research provides a critical evaluation of Jamieson's work, examining his key arguments, concepts, and ideas on climate ethics. The work focuses on Jamieson's accounts of moral responsibility, justice, and the human-nature relationship, as well as his critiques of conventional ethical theories and his proposals for new approaches to climate ethics. The work assesses the strengths and weaknesses of Jamieson's contributions, considering its implication for climate policy, individual action, and the broader ethical landscape. By critically examining Jamieson's contributions, this research deepens the understanding of the ethical dimensions of climate change and inform more effective responses to this global challenge.

Keywords: Climate Policy, Moral Responsibility, Moral Numbness, Climate Justice, Consequentialism, Sustainability

Introduction

Climate change presents us with a complex moral problem with huge challenge to our moral consciousness. It is one of the most pressing issues of our time, with far-reaching consequences for human societies, ecosystems, and the planet as a whole. As the scientific community continues to sound the alarm on the urgent need for action, philosophers have begun to grapple with the complex ethical dimensions of this global challenge. Among the key contributors to this emerging field of climate ethics is Dale Jamieson, a prominent philosopher who has spent decades exploring the moral and philosophical implications of human

relationships with the natural world. Jamieson's work has been instrumental in shaping the climate ethics landscape, offering nuanced analyses of moral responsibility, justice, and the human-nature relationship in the context of climate change. His critiques of conventional ethical theories and proposals for new approaches have sparked important debates and inspired new avenues of research.

Despite the significance of Jamieson's work, there are also gaps in it. This work addresses this gap by providing a critical analysis of Jamieson's contributions to climate ethics. Through a close examination of his key

arguments, concepts, and ideas, this research will assess the strengths and weaknesses of Jamieson's approach and consider its implications for climate policy and individual action. By evaluating Jamieson's contributions, this paper seeks to deepen our understanding of the ethical dimensions of climate change and inform more effective responses to this global challenge.

What is climate ethics?

Climate ethics is a field of study that explores the moral aspects of climate change (McKinnon, 34). Climate change is often studied and addressed by scientists, economists, and policymakers in value neutral ways. However, philosophers such as Stephen M. Gardiner and the scientific authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), argue that decisions related to climate change are moral issues and involve value judgment. Climate change involves difficult moral questions relating to global inequality and human development, who bears responsibility for past emissions, as well as the role of future generations, personal responsibility and many more (Henry, 34).

Climate change is a pressing issue that threatens the basic human rights of individuals and communities around the world. Climate change violates several human rights, including the right to life, health, food, water, and shelter (Henry, 37). Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities, indigenous peoples, and small island developing states. Adopting a rights-based approach to climate change that

recognizes the link between climate change and human rights would provide significant improvements.

A moral threshold approach to climate change that identifies the minimum standards to protect human rights is imperative. This approach involves identifying a set of moral principles that establish the minimum standards of protection required to ensure that human rights are not violated by climate change (Henry, 42). The moral threshold approach also involves identifying the duties and responsibilities of different actors in addressing climate change, including states, corporations, and individuals.

Here, the call to climate action is a collective call for all stakeholders. States can take action to address climate change, as they are the primary sources of greenhouse gas emissions. States can take measures to reduce their emissions and contribute to the global effort to limit the increase in global temperatures. Additionally, corporations have a responsibility to reduce their emissions and contribute to sustainable development (Henry, 42). Individuals can play a role by adopting sustainable lifestyles and advocating for policies that reduces carbon emission. It is also an open moral question whether or not acts of civil disobedience by individuals or groups aimed at raising awareness of the climate crisis can be justified.

There is overwhelming evidence that human activities are changing the climate system. The emission of greenhouse gases is resulting in increased temperatures, rising sea-levels, and severe weather events. Climatic changes raise a number of issues of

justice. These include (but are not limited to) the following:

- i. How do we assess the impacts of climate change?
- ii. What climate responsibilities do current generations have to future generations?
- iii. How should political actors take into account the risks and uncertainties involved in climate projections?
- iv. Who has what responsibilities to address climate change?
- v. Given that there is a limited "greenhouse gas budget" how should it be distributed?
- vi. What constraints should regulate and constrain climate policies?
- vii. Given high levels of noncompliance with climate responsibilities how should we make trade-offs between competing principles of climate justice? (McKinnon, 60-70).

These are the ethical questions raised by climate changes and these questions remain a huge ethical question that is even hinged on intergenerational justice.

Dale Jamieson's contribution to climate ethics

Dale Jamieson is a prominent philosopher who has made significant contributions to the field of climate ethics. Jamieson argues that individuals have a moral responsibility to address climate change. He critiques

traditional ethical theories (e.g., consequentialism, deontology) for being inadequate in addressing climate change. Jamieson proposes alternative approaches, such as "climate ethics" and "global environmental ethics," which prioritize collective action and global cooperation. He explores the ethical implications of human relationships with the natural world and argues for a more nuanced understanding of human agency and responsibility. Jamieson emphasizes the need for climate justice, highlighting the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations. Jamieson's work has influenced climate ethics, environmental philosophy, and sustainability studies. His ideas have shaped debates on individual and collective responsibility, climate justice, and the need for new ethical approaches to address climate change (Jamieson, *Climate Change, Responsibility, and Justice* 431-445).

The influence that Dale Jamieson has had on climate ethics is tremendous. Jamieson introduced the concept of "moral numbness" to describe how people can become desensitized to the moral implications of climate change. He argues that climate change is fundamentally a moral problem, requiring ethical analysis and response. Jamieson emphasizes the importance of considering intergenerational justice in climate ethics, highlighting the need to protect the interests of future generations. He examines the relationship between climate ethics and policy, arguing for a more nuanced and morally informed approach to climate decision-making. Jamieson applies virtue ethics to climate change, exploring how virtues like compassion and fairness

can inform climate action. His works capture the global justice implications of climate change, highlighting issues of distributive justice and human rights. Jamieson's work has significantly advanced the field of climate ethics, inspiring new areas of research and inquiry (Jamieson Climate change, responsibility, and justice.432).

In Dale Jamieson's *Reason in Age Dark Age*, he thoroughly explains that climate change is a continuing ongoing problem in society. He explains that today's civilization has done very little, next to nothing to resolve this problem, as it continues to escalate (16). Jamieson argues that climate change, and Global warming are bound to have numerous, paradoxical, indirect effects on human welfare (10). These effects include the rising of sea levels, increased frequency of droughts etc. According to Jamieson, we may not be able to limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius, the level that the international community has deemed safe. But three degrees of warming is still better than five, which is better than seven (10). So, even though we may not be able to prevent dangerous climate change, Jamieson believes that, we can still do a lot to contain the damage, and to "live more . . . successfully with the changes in climate" (11).

The last chapter of Jamieson's book *Reason in A Dark Time*, is a rather conventional enumeration of policies that would help: integrating adaptation with development, increasing terrestrial carbon sinks, full-cost energy accounting, putting a price on emissions, using regulations to force

technology adoption and diffusion, and supporting technology research. Jamieson suggests that trying a variety of approaches, piggybacking where possible on other policies, and settling for incremental progress is the best, rather than making the best the enemy of the good. He advises that we should "abandon the Promethean dream of a certain decisive solution," he furthers submits that, "we should instead engage with the messy world of temporary victories and local solutions" (105). This work submits that these are all very reasonable proposals, but they are hardly novel, and they are likely to face the very same obstacles that Jamieson so brilliantly shows have undermined previous efforts to address the climate change problem.

That Jamieson does not suggest anything radically new does not detract from the value of his book in helping us better understand the challenges of climate change. In discussing climate change economics, Jamieson says that "we should be both epistemologically and normatively humble." What is important is to "use the resources of economics gracefully, modestly, and in recognition of their limits" (149). Some scholars are of the view that Dale Jamieson's work: *Reason in a Dark Time* succeeds so well because Jamieson, with very few exceptions, practices what he preaches.

Dale Jameison's new approaches to climate ethics

Dale Jamieson proposes new approaches to climate ethics emphasizing the need for collective action and global cooperation to address climate change. His holds a global

environmental ethical approach that addresses the global scope and complexity of climate change prioritizing climate justice and the protection of vulnerable populations, including future generations. He develops an intergenerational ethics framework that considers the interests and rights of future generations. In the area of human-nature relationship, Dale Jamieson work explores the ethical implications of human relationships with the natural world, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of human agency and responsibility (Jamieson, *Climate Change and Global Justice*." In *Climate Change and Human Rights*, 15-30).

Jamieson developed a non-individualistic ethics, moving beyond individualistic ethics to consider the roles of institutions, systems, and structures in addressing climate change crises. His work place emphasis on care and compassion, highlighting the importance of care and compassion in responding to climate change, particularly in relation to vulnerable populations. His work is a perfect integration of science and ethics, integrating scientific and ethical analysis to develop a more comprehensive understanding of climate change and its implications. Dale Jamieson's work focuses on vulnerability and resilience in addressing climate change, particularly in relation to human and natural systems. Jamieson's work is hinged on a new moral paradigm, proposing a new moral paradigm that prioritizes the well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants, rather than just human interests. Basically, these new approaches aim is to address the limitations of traditional ethical theories and provide a more effective framework for addressing the complex ethical challenges posed by climate

change. (Jamieson, *Climate Change and Global Justice*." In *Climate Change and Human Rights*, 15-30).

In *A Theory of Environmental Ethics* published in 1986, Jamieson argues that there is a further step of moral extension that is ecocentrism which '... recognizes the moral primacy of the ecological wholes of which we are par.' (149). The problem both for biocentrism and ecocentrism is how to judge conflicts between different life forms (in biocentrism), and in different ecological systems. John Regan however has pointed out that there is a risk of eco-facism: individual sentient beings are sacrificed to the larger ecosystem (87). Jamieson points out that humans have an enormous impact on the earth. It matters what we decide to do or not to do. We humans can choose how to live and what we value. Thus, environmental ethics is more than an academic course. It helps to sort out how we should live and interact with nature. For him: 'The real final examination will not be a test at the end of the semester, but how we choose to live'(180).

Jamieson mentions some ways to estimate the impact of an individual on the earth. One of ways is the ecological footprint analysis as developed by Mathis Wackernagel and William Reese. These duos introduced a new environment accounting method, the ecological footprint to measure human demand on the biosphere. After the 1992 summit in Rio, the need to reduce human impact on the earth became undeniable and widely recognized. What they proposed was a method capable of making global ecological limits accessible by comparing

human demand on the biosphere to its regenerative capacity. It is line with such measurement that, Charles Hall and colleague measured what the consumption of natural resources of an average American citizen born in the 1990's will use in his or her entire life:

... 22 million pounds of liquid waste and 2.2 million pounds each of solid waste and atmospheric waste. He will have a lifetime consumption of 4,000 barrels of oil, 1.5million pounds of minerals, and 62,000 pounds of animal products that will entail the slaughter of 2,000 animals (189).

Charles Hall continues that: 'The planetary impacts of the highly consumptive lifestyles practiced in the industrialized world cannot be generalized: the fact is that the planet simply cannot stand many people who consume like Americans, and this raises important questions of justice' (190). And what are we going to do about it? Who is going to do something about it? Governments, intergovernmental organizations like the UN, non-governmental organization like Greenpeace, multinationals, technology, environmental scientists and philosophers, consumers? What are you going to do about it? From the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference, there was a concerted international effort to stop climate change. Yet greenhouse gas emissions increased, atmospheric concentrations grew, and global warming became an observable fact of life. In his book, *Reason in A Dark Time* Jamieson

explains what climate change is, why we have failed to stop it, and why it still matters what we can do. The book also treats the scientific, historical, economic, and political dimensions of climate change. Our failure to prevent or even to respond significantly to climate change, Jamieson argues, reflects the impoverishment of our systems of practical reason, the paralysis of our politics, and the limits of our cognitive and affective capacities (145). The climate change that is underway is remaking the world in such a way that familiar comforts, places, and ways of life will disappear in no distance years.

Jamieson avers that, climate change also threatens our sense of meaning, since it is difficult to believe that our individual actions matter. The challenges that climate change presents go beyond the resources of common-sense morality, it can be hard to view such everyday acts as driving and flying as presenting moral problems. Yet there is much that we can do to slow climate change, to adapt to it and restore a sense of agency while living meaningful lives in a changing world (170-71). Who should take on the burden of solving climate change? Dale Jamieson thinks the task is everyone's responsibility. He strongly believes that, it is everyone's responsibility to look out for climate change and work towards preventing the enormous effects it poses to us.

His talk titled "*Am I responsible for climate change?*" combined scientific analysis and philosophy concepts. Jamieson highlighted philosophical concepts of responsibility that can be divided into three different types causal, legal and moral. People should take on a more moral responsibility rather than

causal, he said. Even if they do not contribute significantly to carbon dioxide emissions, they should still work to fix the problem. This theory, he said, is called “interventional responsibility” (7).

Jamieson uses his personality to emphasize his responsibility in the prevention of a damaging climate change. He says that, despite the fact that he is not an average American, and because he is a vegetarian, does yoga, rides his bike and travels a good amount of time., he has more to contribute than his private lifestyle. It is however worth to note here that, despite his participation in the aforementioned activities, he admits he could “do better” in terms of his own carbon footprint. So, he said, he should be held responsible if he fails to contribute his quota to making sure that climate changes have no devastating effects on the environment that he is part of. Jamieson also discussed climate change history, stating that today’s society should not be surprised with the negative impacts of climate change because “It’s a big deal to look at climate change as an issue and think about how we can stop it” (76).

Dale Jameison's climate ethics: Strength, gaps and critique

Evaluating Dale Jamieson's contributions to climate ethics is important for several reasons. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Jamieson's work helps assess its impact and influence on climate policy and individual action. Evaluating Jamieson's contributions can identify areas for improvement and development in climate ethics, leading to more effective responses to climate change crises. Jamieson's work

has implications for climate policy and evaluating his contributions can inform policymakers and help create more effective and ethical climate policies. His emphasis on climate justice addresses the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations. In the case of human-nature relationship, Jamieson's work can deepen our understanding of this complex relationship. By evaluating Dale Jamieson's contributions, we can gain a deeper understanding of climate ethics, improve our responses to climate change, and work towards a more just and sustainable future.

There are gaps and critiques of Dale Jamieson's climate ethics. Critics argue that Jamieson's focus on individual moral responsibility for climate change overlooks the role of systemic and structural factors. Jamieson's work has been criticized for relying heavily on western philosophical traditions, neglecting non-western perspectives on climate ethics. Some scholars even argue that Jamieson's work does not adequately address issues of climate justice, equity, and vulnerability, particularly in the context of global climate policy. Jamieson's emphasis on moral and behavioral change has been criticized for neglecting the potential role of technological innovation in addressing climate change. Jamieson's skeptical view of human nature and the capacity for moral change has been challenged by some scholars as overly pessimistic and neglecting human potential for cooperation and collective action. Some scholars opined that Jamieson's work has focused primarily on mitigation, with less attention to the ethical dimensions of climate

change adaptation and resilience (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 387).

For some critics, Jamieson's work does not adequately consider the ethical implications of climate change for non-human species and ecosystems. His work did not adequately address the economic dimensions of climate change and the ethical implications of different economic approaches to climate policy. Jamieson's work tries to cover too many topics, resulting in a lack of depth and nuance in his analysis. For some environmentalists, Jamieson's work did not provide concrete policy recommendations or practical guidance for addressing climate change (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 401). These gaps and critiques highlight areas where Jamieson's work could be further developed, nuanced, or expanded upon.

Dale Jamieson's climate ethics and the future of environmentalism

Jamieson's work challenges individuals to reexamine their moral responsibility for climate change. His ideas on collective action, climate justice, and global environmental ethics can inform new approaches to climate policy. Jamieson's emphasis on vulnerability and resilience can lead to a more effective adaptation and mitigation strategies. His work encourages consideration of non-human perspectives in climate ethics, leading to a more inclusive and comprehensive approach and no doubt, future research can explore more on how to integrate Jamieson's ethical framework into climate policy and decision-making.

Researchers can develop new economic models that prioritize climate justice, sustainability and human well-being and can investigate how technological innovation can support climate ethics and sustainability (Jamieson, *Climate Change and Global Justice.*" In *Climate Change and Human Rights*, 15-30).

Environmental ethics will of course be informed by our scientific understanding of the environment. Whether it is the changes in our understanding of how ecosystems work, or changes in the evidence concerning the environmental crisis, it is clear that such change will inform and influence those thinkers writing on our environmental obligations (Routley, 62). Clearly, environmental ethics has a future as long as there are moral agents on earth with values at stake in their environment. With the aid of intergenerational ethics, environmental ethics has a future as it (intergenerational ethics) enables us to be responsible on how we use the earth's resources. By exploring Dale Jamieson's climate ethics and its implications and future directions, we can build upon Jamieson's work and advance our understanding of climate ethics, ultimately contributing to a more just and sustainable response to climate change.

Essentially, Dale Jamieson's climate ethics and the future of environmental ethics are linked in several ways: Jamieson's climate ethics provides a foundation for future environmental ethics, as it addresses the moral and philosophical implications of climate change. Also, his concept of moral numbness highlights the need for environmental ethics to address the

psychological and social barriers to climate action.

Jamieson's emphasis on intergenerational justice underscores the importance of considering the long-term consequences of environmental decisions. His work on climate ethics informs the development of Anthropocene ethics, which grapples with the ethical implications of human dominance over the planet. Jamieson's climate ethics expands the scope of environmental ethics to include global justice, human rights, and sustainability and his ideas on climate ethics influence the development of environmental ethics in areas like geoengineering, climate migration, and environmental justice. Jamieson's climate ethics informs the development of future environmental policy, emphasizing the need for morally informed decision-making and inspiring new approaches to environmental ethics, such as virtue ethics, care ethics, and postcolonial environmental ethics. By exploring these connections, we can better understand how Jamieson's climate ethics shapes the future of environmental ethics and informs our responses to emerging environmental challenges (Jamieson Climate change, Responsibility, and Justice⁴³²).

Conclusion

Climate change is a highly complex intergenerational problem. It is often tempting to conclude that solving such a problem lies within the purview of technicians (for example, climate scientists and engineers) and politicians. This work argued that climate change is also a distinctly ethical problem, and that

philosophy has a role to play in addressing it. However, philosophical consideration of an intergenerational problem like climate change brings with it various theoretical difficulties. Philosophers are beginning to address some of the difficulties proposed by climate change, and some have alluded to a "turn to virtue ethics" a moral responsibility and good human-nature relationship as discussed in this article. It is however our hope that this paper will offer such philosophers an additional reason to think that virtue ethics has something meaningful and useful to offer intergenerational ethical discussion: namely, its ability to engage in ethical discourse without suffering the force of the non-identity problem (a position in ethics that holds that, an act may still be wrong even if it is not wrong for anyone).

Conclusively, Dale Jamieson's work on climate ethics has made significant contributions to our understanding of the moral dimensions of climate change. His ideas on collective action, climate justice, and global environmental ethics have challenged individuals and societies to reexamine their responsibilities and obligations in the face of climate change. While Jamieson's work has been influential, it is not without its limitations and critiques. Future research can build upon his ideas, addressing gaps and challenges, and exploring new directions in climate ethics. Jamieson's work serves as a foundation for continued exploration and development of climate ethics, encouraging us to think critically and act responsibly in the face of this global challenge.

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