
Causal Structure of Climate Change and Distribution of Backward-Looking Responsibility

Ilias Voiron*^{1,2}

¹Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 - Faculté de Philosophie – Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3, Université Lyon 3, IRPHIL – France

²Department of Geosciences [Fribourg] – Suisse

Résumé

In this paper, my aim is to suggest a way of distributing backward-looking moral responsibility for climate change if we conceive of climate change as a case of complex causal overdetermination, i.e., a case where no emitter's emissions are necessary nor sufficient to make a difference to the outcome.

It may seem at first sight that if one's greenhouse gas emissions are neither necessary nor sufficient to cause any marginal harm, then one is not morally responsible for it. What I want to show, on the contrary, is that *even* if we describe climate change as a case of complex overdetermination, then emitters are not off the hook. They can indeed be held morally responsible for contributing to climate change, *even if* their emissions are counterfactually neither necessary nor sufficient to cause climate change-related harms and, thus, even if they do not make any morally relevant difference to such harms.

The main reason for this is that distribution of responsibility – especially in cases of causal overdetermination – should avoid the so-called "pie fallacy" (Kaiserman 2021): if responsibility is not a fixed quantity that should be distributed between the agents at stake and is therefore not to be shared like a pie, then several agents can be causally and morally *fully*, if not *solely*, responsible for the same causally overdetermined outcome. This is so because every emitter's emissions are necessary elements of at least one set of greenhouse gases which is sufficient to cause climate change-induced harm.

The upshot is that even if climate change-related harms are causally overdetermined, no greenhouse gas emitter is off the hook under the pretext that their emissions are counterfactually not causally responsible for any climate change-related harm.

Mots-Clés: Climate change, moral responsibility, pie fallacy

*Intervenant