

# Just Burdens?

A Capabilitarian Approach to Fairly Sharing the Burdens  
of Climate Change

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Overview

The climate crisis will be the defining political, economic, and ethical challenge of the next decades. Political philosophers have started to show considerable interest in the ethical questions posed by climate change. However, their primary focus has been on the global dimension of climate change — the relationship between a wealthy global north that historically has caused most emissions, and the global south that has contributed least to the problem but will feel the consequences most strongly. Yet climate mitigation — the process of limiting emissions — is bound to have strong effects on the pre-existing internal inequalities experienced by individual nations in the global north. Climate mitigation will impact people's well-being; be it through price hikes in goods such as electricity, but also through some behavioral and social changes that seem necessary to limit climate change (Creutzig et al., 2022; Diesendorf, 2022; IPCC, 2022b). It seems clear that wealthy nations, and the people that make them up will have to experience burdens to mitigate climate change. Yet what is not clear is how these burdens should be distributed internally.

Philosophers of climate change have debated at great length the so-called 'Just-Burden-Question'. Simply stated, it asks how the burdens (and benefits) involved in preventing dangerous climate change should be distributed (Caney, 2018). In this thesis, I attempt to ask this same question but in the context of a wealthy nation that must lower its emissions. I ask how an unequal nation (or political community) can internally distribute the ability to emit greenhouse gases — and thus the associated losses or gains in well-being - in a *just* and *feasible* manner.

The standard approach in climate justice is to integrate climate change with other injustices, such as global inequality. By comparison approaches that isolate climate change from other distributional questions have fallen somewhat out of favor. I argue that these ‘integrationist’ approaches to the global distribution of ‘just-burdens’ become politically unfeasible when applied to individual political communities. They are either too minimalist, demanding merely the bare minimum, or they are maximalists by attempting to use climate mitigation as a vehicle for ambitious and uncertain social changes.

I thus propose a new distributive rule that isolates climate change from other questions yet is sensitive to relevant differences in people life circumstances. This distribution tries to equalize the individual burdens of climate change. I argue for a modified version of the equal-per-capita view that would entitle people to an equal-per-capita right to emit. Yet merely giving people equal emission-rights does not account for differences in people’s dependence on emissions. Some people, for example, in rural areas might require more emission-rights to live the same quality of life as the same person in an urban area. Some people would have far more, or fewer burdens, while producing the same amount of emissions. Thus, the distribution I advocate for is sensitive to this kind of dependence. I argue that the varying ability to convert emissions into well-being must be vital to our account of ‘just-burden’ question.

Before outlining and summarizing the argument I must first clarify what is meant by ‘burden’. In this thesis, I will be using the Capability Approach (CA) as the main normative method of assessing how people are impacted by addressing climate change. The CA will be introduced properly in the second chapter. For now, we merely need to note that the CA focuses on the ‘beings and doings, such as being well-nourished, educated, spiritually fulfilled, etc.

that are available to people. I evaluate burdens in terms of losses (or gains) to the beings and doings that they have the real freedom to realize: their so-called capabilities.

## 1.2. Summary

The second chapter introduces the burden-sharing question, which asks how we should divide the ability to emit greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Here we can identify two distinct approaches. Isolationism tries to treat this question separately from larger questions of justice (e.g., inequality, past injustices, etc.) and integrationism, which attempts to treat climate change as part of, rather than separate from, a larger theory of (global) justice. Both these approaches can be thought to come in sufficientarian form — meaning they focus on those who do not have enough of something; as well as an egalitarian form — where everyone must have equal amounts of something. I initially follow Simon Caney's (2012) argument against isolationism and for integrationism. Theories of justice — so the argument goes — do not concern themselves with a singular resource such as the ability to emit emissions, but rather should distribute a 'currency of justice' (i.e., capabilities).

In the third chapter, I argue that Caney's reasoning only seems to hold in the international context, and emphasize the relevance of political feasibility. I argue that the sufficientarian form of integrationism, which entitles everyone to some basic capabilities, seems to be too unequal in its effects to be politically feasible. If the wealthy can live emission-heavy lifestyles with their private jets, while those in the middle-class need to substantially cut back, it would reasonably and legitimately be divisive. This divisiveness could translate into political opposition, and social unrest and might ultimately make action against climate change politically unfeasible. I argue that something similar can be said about pursuing an ideal

egalitarianism as the only way to tackle climate change, since this makes action on climate change fully dependent upon risky political action. This seemingly makes the perfect the enemy of the good. I argue that it might not be worth the risk and that pursuing such maximalist goals could limit the political feasibility of acting on climate change. If too many people are opposed to radical departures of the status quo, we should be willing to separate climate change from other distributional questions. Instead, we should pursue maximalist goals separately from climate change since making climate action contingent on egalitarian goals would be too dangerous.

In the fourth chapter, I ask what distribution might be both just and politically feasible. To investigate this, I use a thought experiment of an island running out of wood as a stand-in for the ability to emit, which needs to find a way to fairly distribute the remaining wood. This is difficult since there is considerable inequality on the island, with a portion that thinks this is justified, and another group of islanders thinking this is highly unfair. I argue that the only promising candidate to guide the distribution of wood seems to be the equal-wood-per-capita view, which gives every islander the same amount of wood. However, the problem is that some people are more dependent on wood — they are worse at converting it into capabilities and thus would be unfairly disadvantaged. Yet, if everyone had the same conversion rates, giving everybody the same amount of wood would be a great compromise for those that think the pre-existing inequalities are just, as well as for those who think that the pre-existing inequalities are unjust. Those that think that the island is already perfectly just would need to distribute the wood this way to keep it just — it would be the only justice-preserving distribution. Those that think the pre-existing inequality is unjustified would at the very least see it as a major step in the

right direction as this distribution would be equality-enhancing. This advantage of the equal-per-capita distribution would, however, only make sense if and only if people had the same conversion rates — this assumption seems not to make sense when discussing emission-rights.

In the fifth chapter, I then try to ask what the thought experiment's result (equal-per-capita distribution, assuming people's conversion rates were uniform) would imply for distributing the ability to emit. Building on a distributive principle advocated for by Ingrid Robeyns (2017a) I argue that we can modify the distribution of emission rights in such a way that all people *prima facie* get the same. However, those who, through no fault of their own, require more emission rights would receive them so as to not unduly lower their capabilities.

The final chapter summarizes the argument and highlights some of the main limitations. I show that the approach lacks an account of how we can uncouple human well-being from emission heavy activities. It can only show how we should distribute emissions given the world as is, but not how we should transform the world to decouple well-being from emissions. Secondly, the account is highly idealized and there could thus be difficulties with translating it into an action-guiding framework. Lastly, some major steps of the argument are dependent on the notion of political feasibility — thus the argument merely holds on a *pro-tanto* basis and not in all circumstances. The argument only holds to the extent that other distributions are not politically feasible which might not always be the case. For example, in a society in which protest movements hold little power and the interest of the wealthy matter a great deal, an integrationist-sufficientarian distribution might be the most feasible distribution.



## 2. Isolationism and Integrationism

### 2.1. Introduction

One of the central questions in the political philosophy of climate change is the question of how we should share the costs of preventing it — the ‘Just Burden Question’ (Caney, 2018). Yet to answer this question, or any question about the justice of climate change, we must first ask how climate change fits into the larger considerations of justice. We can identify two camps in which any approach can fall: isolationism and integrationism. Isolationism attempts to ‘bracket off’ climate change from other considerations of justice such as poverty, structural inequality, migration, trade, etc. Isolationists argue it is best to treat climate change as a separate issue from these complex problems. Integrationists, as their name suggests, attempt to integrate climate change into our considerations of justice, rather than treat them separately. They argue that we should treat climate change in light of other inequalities and address it in “conjunction with other issues such as poverty, development and so on” (Caney, 2021).

In this chapter, I outline the distinction between integrationists and isolationists. I lay out and defend the integrationist critique of isolationism, which contends that matters of justice do not pertain to isolated parts of life, instead climate change should *prima facie* be seen as part of larger questions about justice. This is the dominant position taken up in the literature on climate change.

This chapter acts as a kind of foil. I try to show why philosophers prefer to think about justice as all encompassing and not just applying to isolated problems like climate change. The chapter(s) to follow will undermine the integrationist position. There, I

show that the integrationist approach faces problems when it gets applied to questions of domestic climate policy, rather than being applied on the international stage. In this chapter, we will follow the literature which generally deals with the global dimensions of the problem.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first outline the isolationist position. I show how isolationists arrive at their position and show that it can come in two main forms. One that tries to equally distribute the ability to emit greenhouse gases, and one that tries to ensure that people are allowed to emit enough to secure their subsistence. I then outline and defend Simon Caney's (2012) integrationist critique against the isolationist attempt to 'bracket off' climate change from other questions of social justice. I moreover outline the main features of the Capability Approach. Similarly, to isolationism, I identify two versions of integrationism — one egalitarian and one that focuses on sufficiency. I follow Caney in arguing that the egalitarian position seems too ambitious and that it appears more feasible to appeal to a 'moral minimum' that each person is owed. Thus, a just distribution of burdens ensures that climate policy does not push people below this minimum.

## **2.2. Isolationism**

Isolationism is a broad and sometimes implicit, methodological approach to thinking about climate change that "isolates the responsibilities associated with climate change from a consideration of other issues (like poverty, trade, and development)" (Caney, 2012, p. 259). Isolationists argue their case in a variety of ways, though one of the most common in which prominent thinkers such as Peter Singer (2016, Chapter 2), John Broome (2012), and, as we will see later, Ingrid Robeyns (2017a), defend isolationism is via some appeal to an equal right of access to a global commons. One of the first to propose this line of

argument is Steve Vanderheiden (2008) who argued that the allocation of global resources is morally arbitrary and that we should endorse an egalitarian global natural resource principle. We here think of the atmosphere as a sink (c.f. Singer, 2016, Chapter 2)) which can be ‘filled up’ with pollution through greenhouse gases. If we want to limit global average temperatures to a certain degree, say 1.5C or 2C warming above pre-industrial levels, we can then determine the amount of greenhouse gasses (mostly carbon) that we can still pollute before we reach a given temperature target. This is usually called our ‘carbon budget’ and can be thought of as a global natural commons.

The carbon that we can still emit before we risk reaching a given temperature target<sup>1</sup> can be thought of as a resource much like the ability to let one's cattle graze on a commonly shared pasture. It is this right — one's ‘emission-right’ - that must then be distributed amongst all relevant parties. As we will see shortly there are multiple approaches to distribution. However, the approach that can be thought of as the paragon of the isolationist view is the ‘equal-per-capita’ view where each person gets the same amount of emission-rights. To put it in John Broome's (2012, p. 70) words: ‘[i]t seems obvious that no one in the world has a stronger claim to this resource [i.e. permits to emit greenhouse gas] than anyone else, so it should be divided equally between people’

Robeyns (2017a) advocates for exactly such a rule on a prima facie basis (though as we will see in chapter 5, hers can be interpreted as a more refined version of the ‘equal-per-capita view’ ). If we were to divide the available ‘carbon budget’ equally between

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and temperature targets is probabilistic. A given carbon budget can only give us a chance of meeting a target. For example, a 50% chance of staying within the 1.5C target is ca. 460bn tones of CO<sub>2</sub>, which is ca. 11.5 years' worth of the emissions in 2020 (IPCC, 2022b, fig. SPM 2).

people who are currently living and future people before the year 2100<sup>2</sup> every person should be entitled to ca. 1.2. tons of Co2 she can emit per year (Piketty & Chancel, 2015). Since the average Dutch person uses ca. 11.1 tons of Co2, and the average Luxembourger around 20t they are going far beyond the ‘fair-share’ of emissions they have a rightful entailment to — their ‘emission-rights’ (EEA, 2022)<sup>3</sup>. This equal-per-capita view is intuitively appealing and easy to understand. To use an analogy, *prima facie*, the fairest way to share a large cake at a birthday party seems to be to cut it up equally amongst all guests.

Though the simple equal-per-capita views can be said to exemplify the isolationist position, there is considerable diversity in the isolationist camp. There, are for example, those who argue that the equal-per-capita view must incorporate past emissions, meaning that those in developing countries are owed more than those in Europe or North-America (e.g., Meyer & Roser, 2006; Torpman, 2021). This implies that those in developing countries would receive more emission-rights per capita than those in post-industrial nations. Others such as Singer (2016) argue for a ‘forward-looking’ approach that is insensitive to past emissions.

Moreover, not all isolationists argue that we should divide the carbon budget equally. Henry Shue (1993) and others (e.g. Baer et al., 2009; Page, 2007) argue that we should focus on the emissions

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<sup>2</sup> 2100, is chosen here because this is the usual timeline for climate action in the IPCC’s models. The assumption being that we will have become completely free of the use of fossil fuels globally by this time. However, Piketty & Chancel also allow for calculations for dividing emissions between people who live before 2050.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the discrepancy between the ethical ideal and the actual emission numbers is likely to be far greater than these numbers indicate. The EEA numbers do not count ‘import-emission’ from products from other countries, land-use or aviation and shipping. Moreover, the Piketty & Chancel numbers are 7 years old, and these 7 years have seen an average rise in yearly emissions which means that the emission-budget is smaller today than it was during the calculation of the 1.2t figure.

of those who are worst off materially. Shue argues that we must allow ‘subsistence emission’, i.e., those emissions that are needed to live a minimally decent life, while working to lower ‘luxury-emission’ such as of those who fly in private jets or go for joyrides in large SUVs. This approach can be understood as a special form of sufficientarianism, which is a distributive principle concerned with people having the ability to live a minimally decent life. Sufficientarians define a minimal sufficiency threshold (such as a set of basic capabilities) and make sure no one falls under this threshold.

Shue and others who follow the sufficientarian approach, are in some sense not ‘pure’ isolationists since they allow factors other than emissions to influence the allocation of emission-rights<sup>4</sup>. It would make little sense to define some abstract level of ‘inalienable level of sufficiency emission’, and to guarantee each person this set of emission-rights. It would make far more sense for an isolationist Sufficientarian principle to entitle people to the *emissions necessary for a dignified life*.

Talk of dignified life might make people suspect that we are no longer discussing isolationism as such — after all a dignified life requires more than just the right to emit. What makes this approach isolationist is that it would not entitle people to all resources they require to reach an overall sufficiency level, but only emissions. It thus views climate change *prima facie* separates from other projects such as poverty alleviation (Hayward, 2007). If a group of people found themselves in abject poverty, they

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<sup>4</sup> Caney (2018) suggests briefly that we might describe these approaches as ‘moderate integrationist’ approaches. I find this use of terminology somewhat misleading, since it does not seem inherently contradictory to bracket off climate change from other issues of justice while at the same time incorporating some information that seemingly is relevant for the distribution of emissions. Though it might be possible to make more fine-grained distinctions between different kind of isolationism/integrationism, I here think it is easier to stick with the dichotomy and to allow for diversity within them.

would be permitted to emit enough for subsistence activities such as keeping medicine cold, but nothing would prima facie entitle them to the medicine itself — or any other entitlements they might lack such as food. So, unlike the isolationist-egalitarian approach the sufficientarian approach is sensitive to some of the circumstances people find themselves in. After all someone might require more emissions for their subsistence than another, yet both can be thought of isolationist in a broad sense. We will explore this in greater detail in chapter 4.

To summarize, isolationism can come in many forms. Most notably in a ‘sufficientarian version’ in which people should be allowed to emit if it allows them to reach a certain level of sufficiency as well as to go above this threshold (as long as everyone can reach the threshold); and an ‘egalitarian version’ where everyone is entitled to an equal amount of emission-rights. For the reader's convenience, I will often abbreviate the isolationist-sufficientarian stance as ‘IS-S’, and the isolationist-egalitarian stance as ‘IS-E’. See the table below:

	Sufficientarian	Egalitarian
Isolationists	Isolationist-Sufficientarian/IS-S	Isolationist-Egalitarian/IS-E

What unites IS-S and IS-E is that they both attempt to treat climate change as separate from other distributional questions.

### 2.3. Integrationism

Having examined the isolationist case, let us now turn to the integrationist camp. In contrast to isolationism, integrationism can be said to be a negative theory. integrationism merely consists of a rejection of the isolationist case that we should ‘bracket off’ climate change. They argue we should integrate climate into a standard account of distributive justice. One of the earliest and strongest formulations of the integrationist case

is Simon Caney's (2012) article 'Just Emissions'. To this day it is the main reference point in the literature and the relevant debates are held in reference to this article (c.f., Baatz & Ott, 2017; Blomfield, 2019; Torpman, 2021).

In the article, Caney rejects the very notion that a singular resource such as access to the 'atmospheric sink' should be distributed by a theory of justice. He argues that a singular resource such as a portion of the carbon budget can never be the kind of thing that a theory of justice would distribute — its 'distribuendum'.

If we accept the argument that everyone should have equal access to all valuable global resources, it does not directly follow that we want to equally share the carbon budget. This is because there is nothing inherently special about emission-rights, compared to, say, fishing rights, or access to valuable minerals. If global resources were the thing that we would try to equally distribute — our 'equalisandum' - there is no reason to assume that people should be entitled to an equal amount of every single resource. Rather we would have to think about a bundle of these global resources. This is best illustrated by the analogy of the birthday party used above: isolationists argue that we should divide the birthday cake up equally, but Caney argues that this does not make sense if there are other foods available. Even if birthday cakes are very special<sup>5</sup> and everyone has good reasons to want a part of it each partygoer would be owed more than just the cake but should also have some right to other foods at the party.

We could possibly defend the equal-per-capita view of cake slices by arguing that everyone is owed equal amounts of each available

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<sup>5</sup> One might argue that birthday cakes are so incredibly special that everyone is owed exactly one — just like the right to vote or the duty to serve in one's country's army. Yet when it comes to emissions it makes no sense that we would want to treat it as this kind of special entity (see: Caney & Hepburn, 2011)

food at the party. However, we would reasonably assume that some people might want to lose weight and would rather have less cake, but more salad and others might be lactose intolerant or prefer chips to either cake or salad. Thus, even if we are committed egalitarian party organizers and believe that everyone at the party has an equal claim to the buffet it does not follow that we would give everyone an equal piece of cake.

What then should we be egalitarian (or sufficientarian) about? The distribuendum for Caney is ‘bundles of resources’ which include not only emission-rights, but also anything from financial resources to valuable minerals. In this writing I choose a different ‘currency of justice’. I will be using the Capability Approach (CA) as the main currency of justice<sup>6</sup>. Before continuing with the integrationist case, I must take a quick detour into some of the main features of the CA.

The CA is a broad and multidisciplinary approach to assessing human well-being, or the real freedom to realize wellbeing. This is usually seen as being guided by public values that play a role in these goals, such as development, or social justice. It is used to assess individual human wellbeing (or wellbeing-freedom), social arrangements or institutions, and policies and social changes in societies (Robeyns, 2017b, pp. 23–24).

The CA focuses on people’s well-being which is understood as either capabilities or functionings (Robeyns, 2017b; Sen, 1980, 1995). Capabilities are the real freedom to be able to achieve ‘functionings’ - the ‘beings and doings’ that one has reason

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<sup>6</sup> I employ the CA, not merely because this account would be confusing if it were done with multiple distribuendums; rather it is precisely because the CA has a rather detailed account of how a given resource relates to people’s overall capabilities which becomes relevant in chapter’s 4 and 5. Moreover the CA has become a promising approach to think about climate change (e.g. Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021; Helne & Hirvilammi, 2019; Robeyns, 2017a). Thus, framing the debate in capability terms allows us to more easily link the burden-sharing question to more applied debates in climate mitigation.



to value. Beings and doings can be states, such as *being* well-nourished, educated, or openly queer; these are the kind of people we might want to become or related activities, i.e. *doings*, we have reason to value, such as the ability to move around or participate in the social life in our community on an equal footing (Anderson, 2010). Functionings are capabilities that a person chooses to realize. So, a person might have the capability (i.e., real freedom) to be well-nourished. They have all the resources or commodities (i.e., food) necessary and they could easily eat it, but their chosen religious beliefs might mean that they want to fast. Thus, while they might not feed themselves on a holy day (functioning), they have the real freedom to do so (capability). For our purposes we are concerned with capabilities rather than dictating what functionings people should realize.

At the same time, a young woman who, for example,. through various practices and social norms feels forced to keep to a strict beauty standard might technically have the financial means and access to a healthy diet to be well-nourished but suffers from anorexia (Lavaque-Manty, 2001). Similarly, we can think of a black lawyer who cannot get a taxi to stop for her, although she could afford the ride. In these cases, it would be wrong to assume that one has the real freedom to realize a given functioning (e.g., being well-nourished, or being mobile). Thus, to know what capabilities people have, it is not enough to know how many resources (e.g., money) they possess. We need to know how well they can ‘convert’ these resources into the real freedom to realize some being or doing. This is usually understood in terms of a ‘conversion rate’. Some people will require more or less of a resources to have the same capabilities. We will encounter this in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5 but for now, it suffices to say that when we ask how well a person’s life is going, and what real

freedoms she possesses, resources are not a sufficient information basis.

The main upshot, of using the CA as a currency of justice is that knowing that some person has X-amount of cake, money, or the ability to emit greenhouse gases is simply insufficient information to judge how well that person's life is going. Returning to the example of the birthday cake we can see that for the CA, resources are always merely means to an end, and not ends in themselves (Robeyns, 2017b, p. 47). People might require different resources or commodities such as a salad, cake, or chips to be well-nourished party guests.

From a CA perspective, even if the only available food at the party were a cake it would not imply that we would distribute it equally. If we assume that our 'end' is the capability to be 'well-nourished'<sup>7</sup> it seems clear that some people will need more than others. A bodybuilder or pregnant person might need more than a 5-year-old child to be full (even if it is its birthday). Given that people tend to be diverse and have different abilities to employ resources (be they cake, or emission-rights) CA seems to be antithetical to an equal-per-capita isolationism. We might be able to employ parts of the CA to operationalize IS-S, since the sufficiency threshold can be defined along capability lines, and we can then allocate emission-rights in order for people to have enough emission-rights to realize a given threshold of capabilities. I will explore this in more detail later in the thesis (Section 4.3.) and chapter 5 will attempt to construct a capability version of the equal-per-capita distribution of emission-rights. For now, we need to regard the CA, being a currency of justice, as the evaluative space of peoples overall wellbeing, which includes both emission-rights (or cakes) and,

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<sup>7</sup> For the sake of the analogy let us assume that birthday cakes are nourishing.

many of the other resources and forces (e.g., social norms) that determine how well someone's life is going. The CA evaluates people's real freedoms and thus is focused on more than just emission-rights.

Caney's critique is not contingent on any particular currency of justice and is fully compatible with a capability account (2012, p. 284). Caney's point is that we should focus on the distribution of a currency of justice, such as capabilities, rather than on the distribution of emission-rights. Emission-rights are thus not the kind of thing that theories of justice should distribute.

Thus, isolationism, despite its intuitive appeal, is ultimately a flawed approach. Theories of justice should not distribute singular resources, but rather focus on things such as capabilities or functionings. There might, however, be specific pro-tanto reasons why we might want to use isolationism. Yet, the burden of proof would lie clearly on the isolationist to show how some other consideration overrules these questions of justice. One of these most important pro-tanto defenses that people give for isolationism is that it is a more politically feasible approach. This is also the basis on which I attack integrationism when applied to domestic questions, in the next chapter. One of the first to defend isolationism on grounds of political feasibility are Meyer & Roser (2006) who argue that separating climate from other questions makes it easier to arrive at a political consensus since we would not have to settle all distributive questions to arrive at a fair division of emission-rights. Given the urgent need to reach a consensus on climate change we should then be willing to separate climate from other questions.

Though it would be impossible to fully eliminate all possible reasons why we might want to treat climate change in isolation, Caney (2012) argues that there is no prima facie reason to assume that treating climate change separately would make it more feasible. He argues that making climate agreements becomes easier if countries can incorporate other questions such as trade agreements, loans, etc. In lieu of any strong reason showing why isolationism will be favorable, it seems that we should try to distribute the burdens of climate change within an integrationist theory of justice.

The question then becomes what kind of integrationist theory we should choose. In some sense any standard theory of justice can be said to be integrationist; from Rawls's writing on national and international distributive justice, cosmopolitan egalitarian theories, or, as is particularly relevant here, arguably, standard capability theories of justice (c.f. Nussbaum, 2001) which can be integrationist. The only real requirement that we need to set for the theory to be integrationist is that the theory respects what Caney calls the 'sustainability condition' (Caney, 2012, pp. 293—295). For our purposes, we can understand this as a condition to stay within an agreed upon carbon-budget<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, any theory of justice that respects the limited carbon-budget can be said to be integrationist. However, we might simply say that if a theory does not respect this 'sustainability condition', it is undermining itself. Simply put, an account of global justice that ignores the potential blowback from catastrophic levels of climate change would be incomplete and self-defeating. Every modern account of justice must be

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<sup>8</sup> Note that we could also easily include more criteria into this condition. Climate change is only a part of a larger collection of environmental problems that threaten humanity's safety (Steffen et al., 2015).

(implicitly) aware of the danger of undermining itself through environmental destruction.

Thus, in theory, all that we need to do is to settle on the best account of justice that can incorporate the concerns of climate change. However, it still might be that some approaches are better suited to address climate change than others. Some approaches to justice might have difficulties to respect the sustainability conditions. Caney (p.278) here thinks about two approaches: He firstly describes ‘maximalist’ approaches, which for him mean an ideal global egalitarian distribution (c.f. Caney, 2001). Caney specifically seems to think here of the kind of theories ideal theories such as those by Ronald Dworkin (2002), who endorses an ideal where everyone has a bundle of resources that is just as good as that of anybody else. Caney (2001, 2005), in other writing, has endorsed such ideals where every person on the globe has genuine equality of opportunity. We could however just as easily describe such an ideal maximalist approach in capabilityarian language. This would imply an equality of capabilities so that everyone had the same capabilities (i.e., the same set of beings and doings, available to them). We will address this approach in far more detail in the chapters to come, for now, all we need to note is that following this approach would require us to have an ideal social order in mind and push for a massive redistribution of wealth, and an end to relevant inequalities, including, but not limited to, those along the lines of race and sex.

The other approaches Caney describes are ‘minimalist’. Here we can think of sufficientarianism which creates a ‘moral minimum’ — a threshold for a minimally decent life under which no one may fall<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, to isolationism, we can thus identify

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<sup>9</sup> Caney actually speaks of ‘minimalist’ and ‘maximalist’ theories. These are established terms in International Relations and debates on global justice, however they not per se established in questions of distributive justice.

integrationist-egalitarianism (IN-E) and integrationist-sufficientarianism (IN-S). See the table below:

	Sufficientarian	Egalitarian
Integrationist	Integrationist-Sufficientarian/IN-S	Integrationist-Egalitarian/IN-E

Caney, despite other of his works (Caney, 2001, 2005) endorsing this kind of ideal, argues that when it comes to climate change the egalitarian (IN-E) approach faces too large issues of tractability or political feasibility. Simply put on a global level we would not be able to agree on an ideal distribution of all global resources. Even if we could agree to this ideal, it would be unlikely that we achieve such an ambitious (re-)distribution of global resources in the brief period in which we would need to drastically lower our emissions (see fn. 2). Thus, he concedes to Meyer & Roser (2006) that it might be too stringent a requirement to have settled and solved all questions of global distributive justice before being able to act on climate change. IN-E, regardless of its philosophical merits, is thus simply not a feasible way to think about climate justice globally.

Caney admits that IN-E seemingly is badly suited for a global distribution but rather than conceding to the isolationist camp on pragmatic grounds, he opts to support the IN-S approach. He argues that people should be entitled to a moral minimum, which includes the ability to emit. This (integrationist-)sufficientarian approach is also very common in writing on global justice, and within the Capability Approach (c.f. Nussbaum, 2001). A just distribution would then mean that everyone on the globe is entitled to a basic set of beings and doings, such as being well-nourished, mobile, etc. Inequalities above this line are then only justified insofar as no one falls below the moral minimum. For

now, this seems to be the best way to think about a just form of sharing the burdens of climate change.

#### 2.4. Summary

Let us quickly take stock. When it comes to the question of how the carbon budget should be divided, we can identify two broad camps. Isolationists attempt ‘bracket off’, climate from other issues while integrationists attempt to incorporate climate change into their larger theories of justice. Both isolationism and integrationism can be said to come in two primary forms: Those focusing on equality and those that focus on sufficiency. See the table below:

	Sufficientarian	Egalitarian
Isolationists	Isolationist-Sufficientarian/IS-S	Isolationist-Egalitarian/IS-E
Integrationist	Integrationist-Sufficientarian/IN-S	Integrationist-Egalitarian/IN-E

Isolationists face a strong critique by integrationists. Theories of justice do not concern themselves with the distribution of singular resources. We should rather distribute capabilities or similar ‘currencies of justice’. The burden of proof would thus have to lie with the isolationist to show why ‘bracketing-off’ is more advantageous, which is a seemingly difficult task.

When then choosing what integrationist theory to apply, we can distinguish two sets of theories: Ideal egalitarian theories (IN-E) which set out an ambitious (re-)distribution, or more minimal sufficientarian theories (IN-S) which try to set a floor under which no one may fall. The IN-E approach is too ambitious and thus faces problems of political feasibility. It subsequently seems reasonable that we settle on the more feasible IN-S version that ensures that everyone is at least entitled to a set of basic capabilities. I showed that the burden of proof for isolationists

is high, and without any special pro-tanto reasons in favor of isolationism we should seemingly follow Caney's reasoning and embrace integrationism — specifically IN-S.

In the following chapter, I try to provide just such a special reason. I argue that Caney's argument on political infeasibility only seems to hold internationally but when applied to a domestic context, it does not merely undermine the egalitarian IN-E theory but also seems to undermine the sufficientarian IN-S, approach. I argue that Caney's argument only seems to hold when we look at climate justice as an international phenomenon. Yet, despite climate change being a global problem the actions to mitigate it inevitably take place in a domestic context. I argue that when IN-S, and IN-E are applied within individual nations, rather than internationally, they seemingly fail to be politically feasible.



### 3. Is Integrationism Politically Feasible?

#### 3.1. Introduction: Domestic Climate Justice

In the last chapter, I defended Caney's (2012) argument for integrationism in favor of isolationism. Like most of the early thinkers on climate change, Caney's focus is primarily on climate change as a problem of global justice. This is in many ways understandable. Climate change is a global phenomenon, and its consequences will affect everyone, though those in the Global South who historically have contributed the least to the problem they are the most vulnerable to its effects (IPCC, 2022a). Thus, most of the relevant ethical debates address the kind of questions that play a role in the international negotiation within the 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change'. Philosophers here can ask all kinds of questions; from the role of past emissions and the ethics of geoengineering, to economic debates on how much value we should assign to future generations, etc.<sup>10</sup>

However, no matter what interpretation of climate justice one chooses, wealthy post-industrial nations will need to reduce their emissions drastically in an increasingly short span of time. This will have large effects on those living within these rich nations — especially given that the rich nations are experiencing historic levels of inequality (Piketty, 2020). Thus, while the burden-sharing question (i.e., how to distribute emission-rights) seems most pertinent on the global scale, it seems that we should also ask how we should think about climate justice within a single (wealthy) society, state, or polity<sup>11</sup>. This means shifting our

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<sup>10</sup> For comprehensive overviews of these debates see Caney (2012) and Gardiner et al., (2010).

<sup>11</sup> I use polity to be inclusive towards political communities other than the classical nations state. Much action against climate change has come out of city and regional

focus from examining how emissions should be allocated between different states, to asking how states internally should distribute the right to emit.

Green politics, social movements, and proposals such as the 'Green New Deal' have become a dominant force in the domestic politics of developed nations. It seems that political philosophy should be able to shed some light on how we should fairly fight climate change in these settings. Asking this important question means not merely asking how the disadvantaged living within the rich world should be treated, which is inherently valuable, it also has an instrumental reason. If wealthy nations can find ways to limit their emissions in ways that are both just and politically feasible, agreement on the international level will become a lot more likely.

Thus, let us start our analysis by assuming that there is an international agreement on how to divide up the global carbon budget. We can here be fully agnostic to what this agreement looks like. It can incorporate past emissions, or be 'forward looking'; similarly, it could be isolationist-egalitarian and entitle everyone to ca. 1.2 tons of Co2 per year, but it might as well be an integrationist distribution. The agreement could even be a somewhat ad-hoc distribution and simply have arisen due to the arbitrary bargaining powers of some nations<sup>12</sup>. All we require

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governments and most notably the European-Union. Thus, even though I refer to 'domestic' as opposed to international policy, this is best understood as broadly as possible. Regardless of the potential ethics for polities such as cities, for the most part it is best to think about the basic unit here as the signatories of climate agreements. These all are states, but also include the European Union which attempts to centralize climate policy.

<sup>12</sup> I mention this possibility only so that we could think about current climate policy. The way countries decide their climate targets are often inconsistent and do not follow a neat distribution. However, it seems that we should still be able to ask how a country like Australia or the U.S. should distribute the burdens of transition, without requiring an ideal global agreement.

to start our inquiry is that one of the parties (be it a state or a collection of states such as the EU), has received a specific section of the carbon budget that it is entitled to. Then we can ask how it should distribute the emission-rights it has internally.

In this chapter, I thus ask if Caney's (2012) defense of integrationism (especially IN-S) holds when applied to this division on a domestic scale. Though Caney at multiple points in the text (p. 262, 282) seems to refer to domestic questions, I argue that his defense of integrationism as politically feasible does not hold up if we ask the question on the domestic scale.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly, I outline my argument against an integrationist-sufficientarian (IN-S) distribution. Using the 'Unfair Burden' argument by Lukas Tank (2020), I show how a sufficiency approach might be too unfair. More importantly, I argue that it might *appear* to many citizens too unfair to be politically feasible. The effect of this distribution is too permissive toward excessive inequalities between the very rich and the middle classes. This could prompt people to protest and demand that the wealthy do their fair share to limit emissions. Thus, the same argument that Caney uses to exclude integrationist-egalitarianism (IN-E) can also be used against IN-S.

The second part of the chapter asks if it might be possible that, at least within a domestic context, the more maximalist IN-E distribution could be more politically feasible. Here we would pursue ideal egalitarian goals where there would be no excessive inequality in wealth or other dimensions anymore. Though realizing this ideal might be more likely realizable on a domestic scale than internationally, I argue that it makes the perfect the enemy of the good. I argue that climate change is such a potentially dangerous problem that it would be too risky to make climate action contingent on reaching maximalist political goals.

Since climate change is so dangerous, we must put great value on the political feasibility of a proposed approach. We must eliminate distributions that are not politically feasible. I argue that integrationism in both its forms (IN-E, IN-S) does not seem to be a politically feasible way of distributing emission-rights. If either IN-E, or IN-S are not politically feasible we should then eliminate them from consideration.

This chapter merely questions how applicable IN-E and IN-S are for domestic climate policy. Merely showing that integrationist approaches are politically unfeasible does not automatically vindicate isolationism nor does it suggest another more politically feasible approach. The following chapter will try to investigate what distribution seems most politically feasible, but here I simply try to demonstrate that neither IN-S, nor IN-E seem to be very politically feasible.

### **3.2. The Unfair Burden Argument Against Sufficiencyarianism**

As seen in the last chapter, the seemingly best distribution which is still politically feasible is an integrationist-sufficiencyarian (IN-S) approach. With some exceptions, these kinds of sufficiencyarian theories are preferred in writings on global climate justice and sustainable development. Moreover, it is the standard distributive rule used within the Capability Approach (e.g., Nussbaum, 2001; UNDP, 2020). More demanding sufficiencyarian approaches also have major applications in wealthy nations, since here, even people who are above some poverty threshold - and are by global standards wealthy - might lack things such as the ability to appear in public without shame and relational equality which is vital for democratic norms (Anderson, 2010).

A sufficiencyarian approach relies on an absolute notion of wellbeing, where we can identify a threshold level, such as a set of capabilities, under which no one should fall. Thus, for an IN-S distribution, a situation is just if and only if no one falls

under a specified threshold (e.g., everyone could have the real freedom to be well-nourished, educated, mobile, appear in public without shame, etc.). This is a necessary and sufficient condition<sup>13</sup>. So, for the IN-S distribution, a situation is just as long as the distribution of resources (including but not limited to emission-rights), and institutions is so that no one falls under a specified threshold of capabilities.

In what follows I argue that the sufficientarian approach might be necessary but not sufficient. I argue that an excessively unequal distribution of emission-rights above the sufficiency threshold will appear unfair — this in turn can endanger the political feasibility of the climate policy.

To argue this I modify an argument made by Lukas Tank (2020) who argues a carbon tax is unfair. He argues that this is true even if the policy were to ensure that no one would fall below a sufficiency threshold. Carbon taxes for Tank are unfair because effects unfairly distribute burdens above the sufficiency threshold. To illustrate this Tank compares the effects of a carbon tax on the Simpson characters Homer, who is neither poor nor very affluent, and Montgomery Burns who is very wealthy. A price on emitting carbon would hurt Homer, but not push him below some sufficiency threshold — it would not take away the emissions he needs for subsistence (IS-S) or put him below the sufficiency threshold in other ways (IN-S)<sup>14</sup>. Thus, the policy should not be a problem for the IN-S distribution. In contrast, Mr. Burns could

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<sup>13</sup> Sufficientarianism can be understood as either being a necessary and sufficient condition or simply necessary condition for a just society. The criticism of this chapter merely extends to the former version of the sufficientarian claim, while being largely sympathetic to the later conception. For a comprehensive overview see Shields (2020).

<sup>14</sup> Here, the distinction between IN-S and IS-S is somewhat blurry. A person who cannot afford to heat her house, might technically be able to pay the heating bill, but would have had to use money reserved for food or other necessities to pay for it. Thus, it is not easy to distinguish the two theories once someone falls under one of either thresholds.

afford to live his life more or less as he did before the tax was introduced, despite having a far more emission-heavy lifestyle.

Thus, the people who would primarily bear the burdens<sup>15</sup> would be those who are not extremely wealthy. Tank argues that this is an unfair distribution of burdens. He argues this by comparing the effects of carbon taxes against prominent principles in climate justice. He invokes, amongst others<sup>16</sup>, the Polluter-Pays-Principle (PPP) which claims that those who benefited from past emissions should be held liable for costs incurred in curbing or adapting to climate change. Since there is a correlation between (extreme) wealth and emissions Mr. Burns will be more likely to have emitted more in his past. Thus, he should be obliged to pay more than Homer, who most likely benefitted far less.

There are some strong limitations to using Tank's argument for our purposes. Firstly, the PPP and related principles are usually intended to function in an international context. It is legally and philosophically questionable if individual people should be held fully responsible for the (lack of) actions of their state<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the PPP is an isolationist principle since it brackets

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<sup>15</sup> Tank does not settle for a singular definition, he holds that we can think of burdens in terms of capabilities, happiness or preference-satisfaction.

<sup>16</sup> Tank also invokes the Beneficiary-Pays-Principle (BPP), which holds that those who benefited from past polluting should pay. The last one he explores is the Ability-to-Pay principle (i.e., those who can, should pay), which can be read as an integrationist approach, as opposed to the other principles.

<sup>17</sup> I cannot defend this skepticism fully here, but we can note that the responsibility to act on climate change is often seen to lie with states — especially given the international treaties within the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change. People who polluted in the past might moreover argue that they were ignorant of the consequences of climate change, simply acting in a rational way given the rules and incentives of the market, etc. Though there can be clear exceptions to this (e.g., investors in oil-companies that actively lobbied against climate regulation) it is generally difficult to assign clear blame within nations. Moreover, we might note that we simply have very little reliable historical data on the pollution of individual people. Thus, the PPP, and the related BPP (see above footnote) are seemingly difficult to apply to individuals. None of these considerations exclude moral reasons for personal responsibility for actions on climate change.

off climate change from other social ills. Using the PPP to criticize the IN-S would thus be a weak critique<sup>18</sup>.

Yet even if we reject Tanks' original reasoning, there might still be something rather insightful in the example he uses. It seems at least intuitively unfair that Mr. Burns can live his life as he did before, while Homer needs to cut back considerably. Homer might concede that he would need to cut down on some of his polluting activities to prevent dangerous levels of climate change. However, there is something seemingly unfair about the fact that Homer has to make sacrifices while Mr. Burns can continue to live his life as he did before.

It might be that this intuition might merely stem from an overall egalitarian belief and the question of emission-rights simply makes this egalitarian belief more salient. Thus, it could be possible that this perceived unfairness merely stems from us believing there is something inherently wrong with Mr. Burns having far more than Homer in general.

However, imagine that the inequality between Homer and Mr. Burns is fully justified by some conception of desert. Let us assume both started with the exact same opportunities in life, they had no inequality in resources or talent. Mr. Burns has spent his life being prudent and hard-working so that he can enjoy a lavish lifestyle. Homer, on the other hand, gambled his life-spending away or simply was lazy while lying on the couch, eating pink-frosted donuts. Thus, we could say that the initial inequality between Homer and Mr. Burns was justified; even in such a case, it is not clear that the unequal changes in lifestyles are fully justified. Mr. Burns' hard work might entitle him to a higher

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<sup>18</sup> Caney (2018) has criticized the PPP on integrationist grounds. Thus, unless there is a strong reason why the PPP version of isolationism is preferable, arguing against integrationism would merely surmount to a proclamation that because isolationism is correct integrationists are wrong.

standard of living or more resources before the carbon budget got divided, but it is not clear that it entitles him to a larger share of the carbon budget than Homer. It might be that we can make desert claims once emission-rights have been redistributed since Mr. Burns might work hard and use this to trade with others to get more emission-rights. Yet, *prima facie* Mr. Burns' s past desert does not seem to justify an unequal distribution of emissions above the sufficiency threshold at the time of the distribution. Mr. Burns has done nothing (and could do nothing) to *prima facie* be entitled to more emission rights than others.

The question of whether this intuitive unfairness can be grounded and justified in political philosophy is an interesting one and we will return to it again in the next chapter. However, for now, all we need to note is that the excessively unequal distribution of emission-rights can reasonably be described as unfair. It seems that a reasonable person could hold that those above the sufficiency threshold are not entitled to far more emissions than anyone else. What is arguably more important, is that the inequality in emission-rights may be widely perceived as unfair, since this seems to be an intuitive belief.

Within a domestic (as opposed to international) context, and especially in a democratic society, this perceived unfairness will play a major role in deciding if a policy can actually be implemented in a politically feasible way. If Homer needs to cut back, and can no longer go on his yearly far-off holiday, while Mr. Burns continues to fly with his private jet, Homer (and people in his position) could reasonably be outraged and oppose whatever policy and government brought this about. Broad opposition of this kind would make any climate policy far less politically feasible<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Here, we return again to the question of the global distribution of emission-rights between states. If international cooperative agreements are voluntary, the interest of certain groups becomes far more important than if there were a strictly enforced global



It might well be that we can say that there is something inherently bad about the disparity between Homer and Mr. Burn's carbon-footprint — or it might be simply inherently problematic that there is a difference in wealth between the two. Be this as it may, we can say that the disparity between their emissions is instrumentally problematic since it lowers the political feasibility of limiting climate change.

In the end of the chapter, I highlight why exactly we must place such a high value on political feasibility of climate mitigation, for now let us first ask what exactly it means to assert that something is politically (un)feasible. It is hard to establish the political feasibility, the institutional and public opposition or support of a specific distributional intervention. Arguing based on political feasibility is a common but precarious method of arguing in political philosophy<sup>20</sup>. No one (especially philosophers) can clearly establish what is and is not politically feasible<sup>21</sup>. The thought experiment of Homer and Mr. Burns seems to be evidence ground the suspicion that an IN-S approach will be perceived as unfair in a domestic context. The thought experiment can however, of course not prove this claim.

he other source of evidence we can utilize is actual opposition to climate policies — the most notable of which are the 2018 Yellow-Vest protests in France which started in reaction to an

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regime. If there were an enforced regime the danger would be social strife rather than a danger of not meeting climate targets.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Meyer & Roser (2006), for example advocate an isolationist account on political feasibility, Tank (2020) limits his discussion on carbon-taxes only to politically feasible forms of taxes, and Caney highlights that his principles are good because they are flexible which raises their political feasibility. Note that some of the debate refers to 'trackability' rather than political feasibility.

<sup>21</sup> There is a growing literature on how feasibility constraints can be employed in political philosophy (Erman & Möller, 2020; Lawford-Smith, 2013) however, these debates are in some sense in their infancy and do not give clear guidance as to how we should use the notion of political feasibility.

increase in petrol prices, intended to lower France's emissions. Interviews with protestors show that protestors were not per se against climate action but were in part motivated because they perceived the burdens of the policy to be unfair. Qualitative interviews by Driscoll (2021) and Mehleb et al., (2021) show that a large concern of protestors was not merely the concern of not being able to make ends meet but explicitly the feeling that the wealthy are not contributing their fair share. As one participant of Mehleb et al. (2021, Participant nr. I31) puts it: "We have to tax energy fairly; planes, boats, luxury consumption [...] we have to tackle the real polluters." The Yellow-Vest protests of course had a diverse set of motivations, and many were worried about not making ends meet (i.e., IN-S), or were simply upset about inequality in France in general. Yet, it seems reasonable that the reasons for protests were not fully exhausted by the concern of those below the sufficiency threshold<sup>22</sup>.

Another example of how perceived fairness heightens political feasibility is documented in Tony Judt's (2005) history of postwar Europe. On the British food rationing system implemented after the second world war, he wrote that "The British proved remarkably tolerant of their deprivations—in part because of a belief that these were, at least, shared fairly across the community" (p. 163), even though rationing itself is highly unpopular since it usually marks a loss in living standards for many. If a society is faced with an acute shortage in something (water, food, etc.) a system that seemingly treats everyone equally, or at the very least does not allow for excessive inequalities, seems to be more acceptable. This instrumental reason for more social equality, in face of deprivation, was also one of the reasons that policymakers used at the time to justify

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<sup>22</sup> Another section of the interviewed participants saw their struggle as one of abolishing capitalism (which could possibly be read as a version of IN-E).

rationing. As one contemporary commentator remarked: “One can surrender many goods cheerfully when he knows that others are doing without them in similar measure” (Anderson, 1943, p. 25).

It is difficult to draw a neat line between real-world social unrest and abstract political philosophy. Real-world events and political decisions are always embedded in their cultural and historical context and making claims on political feasibility will always be an act of speculation. We will return to the IN-S distribution in more detail in the next chapter. Yet, I hope to have shown that it is at least reasonable to doubt the IN-S is politically feasible in the context of an affluent nation<sup>23</sup>.

Let us quickly take stock. Caney (2012) advocates for an integrationist-sufficientarian (IN-S) approach since it is the most politically feasible. Sufficientarian approaches are indifferent to inequalities above the sufficiency threshold. However, I have argued that when it comes to domestic climate policy, fairness considerations above the sufficiency threshold undermine the political feasibility. Thus, while it might be necessary for a just distribution of emission-rights to respect the IN-S, in itself it does not seem sufficient.

The IN-S is seemingly not fair enough to be politically feasible for domestic climate policy. In the next section I ask if Caney’s other distribution, the more ambitious IN-E, might be more applicable in a domestic context.

### **3.3. The Urgency Argument Against Integrationist-Egalitarianism**

Having rejected the IS-S approach let us now turn to more ideal and maximalist, approaches. Caney (2012) rejects ideal egalitarian

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<sup>23</sup> Note that we could of course expand the argument and say that possibly on an international stage the IN-S would also be viewed as too unfair. Maybe Indian voters are unwilling to accept Elon Musk being able to shoot rockets into space, while they must conserve energy. This seems very possible but falls outside the scope of this writing.

distributions (IN-E) as being so ambitious as to be politically unfeasible. To reach an ideal integrationist account of justice we require a more or less clear idea of what this ideal looks like. On the global scale, negotiations with many diverse parties would likely not be able to settle on one singular ideal vision. Even if they could settle on one ideal, inequalities on a global scale are so large and involve so many people that realizing this ideal in the time span in which we would need to address climate change simply seems materially, and/or, logistically unreasonable<sup>24</sup>.

Yet there is a real possibility that we could realize the ambitious IN-E ideal on a domestic scale. Many theorists, most famously Rawls (1999, 2003) argue for a minimal conception of justice on the global stage while advocating for rather ambitious conceptions of justice on a domestic level. So, might it be that, on the domestic level, we should push for climate policy as part of a larger egalitarian political project?

In this section, I investigate this possibility. I firstly outline a sympathetic argument as to why we might want to see climate in light of other inequalities, especially in power and wealth. Yet, I argue that if there is a risk that combining ambitious social goals with climate action makes the latter less politically feasible, we should shy away from making these two contingent upon each other. I argue that climate change has certain characteristics—urgency, irreversibility, and the danger of undermining the background conditions of a just society — that would make it irresponsible to risk it for strong gains for those above the sufficiency threshold. I then conclude this chapter by

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<sup>24</sup> Considerations of this kind are seemingly vital, but I exclude them from consideration in the domestic context. They might be important but to be charitable we can assume that IN-E is logistically and technically reachable. The question that remains is if they are feasible in terms of political processes and opposition.

better specifying the role of political feasibility in the argument.

Many, especially in radical spaces, academia, and climate movements believe that climate change is caused, or at least intrinsically linked, with the mindset, history, structures, and practices of western capitalism (e.g., Löwy, 2015; Malm, 2016; Moore, 2016). Similarly, Green & Healy (2022) highlight how inequality ‘fuels’ climate change and how the economic interests of a small group of economic actors prevent effective climate policy. Fighting climate change, thus seems to require us to seriously engage with the various intersections of climate change and other social forces and to avoid what Nancy Frazer (2021) calls “the environmentalism of the rich” .

This is often the line of reasoning for eco-socialists or the ‘degrowth movement’ which calls for a “radical redistribution, reduction in the material size of the global economy, and a shift in common values towards care, solidarity, and autonomy”<sup>25</sup>. Acting on climate change should not merely make our society sustainable but should come with drastic redistributions of wealth, the means of production, and political power. Though it is hard to neatly translate the demands of social movements into theories of distributive justice, for our purposes we can think of these approaches as analogous to the IN-E<sup>26</sup>. Here we would envision an ideal such as equality of resources, or equality of capabilities and try to implement (climate) policies that would move us closer to this ideal.

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<sup>25</sup> This is taken from the organizations collectively managed website [degrowth.info/degrowth](http://degrowth.info/degrowth). For more comprehensive introductions into degrowth see D’Alisa et al., (2014) & Hicke1 (2020)

<sup>26</sup> Though the rhetoric of activists will often be quite maximalist, usually the actual policy proposals might be more in line with, say, sufficientarianism, rather than ideal distributions of thinkers such as Ronald Dworkin (1981) or G.A. Cohen (2009) which might be more emblematic of the IN-E.

One sympathetic interpretation of the IN-E for the domestic context would be that including other inequalities, such as wealth or access to housing, into our analysis will increase the popular support and thus the political feasibility of a policy. If people, see a real promise for more wealth and better living standards they might be more willing to accept losses (e.g., having to eat less meat). Moreover, since the wealthy would have to give up the most this might have a broader appeal.

A stronger version of this approach would argue that it would be impossible to solve the climate crisis within the capitalist system. Critics of capitalism might highlight that the capitalist profit motive and the interests of those capitalists involved in the fossil fuel industry are diametrically opposed to lowering our dependence on fossil fuels. Thus, so the argument goes, we must fight capitalism in order to prevent climate change. This means that combining ambitious goals of social justice with goals for climate could be more feasible than simply tackling climate change in isolation (IS-S/E) or with only the most modest political goals in mind (IN-S).

The argument that IN-E is more politically feasible is appealing in many ways. However, it is in some ways insensitive to the uncertainty of systematic political change. If we were to agree with the political goals of IN-E, and we knew for certain that insisting on our maximalist goals is perfectly politically feasible and will result in success, there could be no argument against pursuing IN-E.

If we however are somewhat uncertain that insisting on all our social justice goals and the goal of staying within our carbon budget, are fully compatible, then we seemingly would need to think about possible tradeoffs. Treating ambitious social justice goals and the preservation of the sustainability condition as one inseparable package means that the package as a whole might not

be as politically feasible as its constitutive parts. In the case that both are not feasible as a package we would need to know how to weigh our egalitarian ambitions against the need to prevent catastrophic levels of climate change. We would need to know how we value the sustainability condition against our aims of social justice.

One way to approach this problem is to engage in a rather complex moral calculus, where we would need to ask how far we would accept suffering now, in our society, to prevent suffering due to the consequences of climate change in other societies and future generations. Should we be willing to accept serious costs, poverty, slavery, or other social ills now, to allow future generations and other nations to live in a habitable world? Engaging in this kind of moral calculus is quite complicated and will depend on various attitudes, such as the value of future generations, how we value risk and uncertainty (both regarding the potential impact of climate change, and what strategies are going to pay off best politically to prevent it). Some philosophers, such as Henry Shue (2010), have tried to engage in these questions. However, for our purpose, this larger question seems to be setting the bar of evidence too high.

The IPCC's (2022b) working group on climate argues that 'decent living standards', which can be understood as a sufficientarian threshold (IN-S) are fully compatible with reaching our climate goals. If we can easily secure IN-S, the question we need to ask is how willing we should be to action on climate change, for attempts to realize the ideal distribution of IN-E. I argue that in a possible tradeoff between the actions on climate change and changes in capabilities above the IN-S we should *prima facie* give priority to action on climate change. I argue that this is in part because climate change has three interrelated characteristics that make it distinct from other questions of social justice. It is

urgent (qua time-sensitivity), effectively irreversible, and threatens the realization of justice:

a) Urgency

Firstly, climate change is an incredibly urgent, qua time-sensitive, issue. As the IPCC (2022a) report puts it: "Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all". Nearly all issues of social justice can be said to be urgent, however. Poverty, discrimination, and oppression are always urgent. Also, issues faced by those above a sufficiency threshold can be said to be morally urgent; but none of these social ills can be said to be urgent in the same time-sensitive manner as climate change.

An injustice might be said to be time-sensitive in the sense that it is worse, the longer it continues, since more people are affected by it for longer. But what makes climate change urgent is that those currently living are the only ones who can prevent it. A generation might fail to fairly distribute collective resources, create equality in the workplace, or stop racial or sexist discrimination, however, there could always be another generation that would have another opportunity to do so at a later point in time. The same cannot be said for climate change, here there is a distinct 'now-or-never' element where once meaningful action is delayed enough, it becomes largely ineffective.

On the whole, most other social ills do not share this quality, especially if we assume that everyone is at or above the sufficiency threshold<sup>27</sup>. All things equal, we would temporarily

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<sup>27</sup> Some exceptions here would be famines, where if relief does not come in time, it will have become ineffective. Yet there seem here to be no good examples with issues above a reasonable sufficiency line.



prioritize time-sensitive issues over those that could be solved at any time<sup>28</sup>.

#### b) Irreversibility

A second difference between most issues of social justice is the irreversibility of climate change. Once the window of opportunity is missed, there are no clear ways to reverse this state. Once carbon is emitted into the atmosphere it becomes incredibly difficult to bring it back. Even if we assume that it is possible to capture atmospheric carbon at scale, which is a controversial assumption in itself, reductions in earth's temperature would most likely only occur in ca. 1000 years (Solomon et al., 2009).

Moreover, in more pessimistic predictions global warming will cross certain climate tipping points. The climate system has a multitude of feedback loops. For example, warming makes forest fires more frequent and intense while also making them last longer and burn larger areas (Flannigan et al., 2006). This in turn releases more Co<sub>2</sub>, which again makes fires more intense, leading to higher emissions. These feedback loops are in danger of becoming self-perpetuating which would “ultimately pose a severe risk to [...] the habitability of the planet for humans” (Steffen et al., 2018).

Climate change can be said to be irreversible, at least in meaningful human timescales. Even low-emission scenarios are essentially irreversible, and in warmer scenarios humanity's ability to adapt to a drastically warmer climate would be in serious jeopardy.

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<sup>28</sup> For a handy analogy we could imagine that you prefer an artist A slightly over B. Both play in your home-town and the tickets cost the same and you have the money and want to see them both. If artist B is about to leave soon and artist A lives in your town and plays there every night, you would naturally visit artist B despite thinking that A is better. You might be frustrated in the first night since you are temporarily missing out on your preferred artists, but if you had missed B altogether you would have been more frustrated.

Many issues of social justice can be said to be ‘path-dependent’ and thus hard to reverse. For example, once a group of wealthy individuals has gained enough political power, it might be a lot harder to take this power away since they can control the barriers of entry (media, judiciary, etc.). Yet this seems to merely lower the possibility of reversing this development, rather than making it effectively impossible.

### c) Circumstances of justice

The last element that distinguishes climate change from other questions in social justice is the role that a stable climate plays as a background condition for the rules of justice — or in Rawlsian terminology the “circumstance of justice”. That is to say that certain pre-conditions are necessary for (some) theories of justice to apply. For Rawls (1999, §22), ‘moderate scarcity’ is a necessary condition for his theory to hold. The high-end projections of climate change could endanger this moderate scarcity. Intense levels of climate change create the danger of being so disastrous that they could undermine our ability to act on other dimensions of social justice (Steffen et al., 2018).

Rawls borrows his conception of the circumstances of justice from Hume, for whom the “circumstances of justice constitute necessary conditions for the adoption and maintenance of rules of justice: if any of these conditions fail to hold, rules of justice are ‘perfectly useless’ ” (Barry, 1978, p. 230). In extreme warming scenarios, it might be that the circumstances necessary for just liberal institutions break down.

A similar and possibly more applicable<sup>29</sup> conception of the background conditions of justice comes from the capabilityarian

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<sup>29</sup> Gardiner (2011) argues that Rawlsians have failed to effectively refine the concept of ‘circumstances of justice’ and it thus is not fully clear a) when the circumstances can be said to have broken down and b) how actions that endanger the circumstances should be

literature. Brenna Holland (2014) argues that in the Capability Approach we must understand environmental conditions as a ‘meta-capability’<sup>30</sup>. The natural environment, including a stable climate, is thus a necessary background condition to allow us to realize other central capabilities. This should give us reason to give special value to this ‘meta-capability’ of the natural environment.

Both the capabilitarian ‘meta-capability’ and Rawlsian ‘circumstance of justice’ are quite unclear on how we should treat the endangerment of background conditions of justice. They do not give us direct guidance as to how we should weigh a stable climate against goals in social justice such as the elimination of excessive inequality in wealth and political power. Yet it seems that endangering these circumstances is so morally costly that we should be willing to pay a considerable price to avoid undermining them.

The three categories provided here are on the whole insufficient to tell us precisely how willing we should be to trade suffering now to avert climate change, for the suffering of those affected by climate change in the future. Since global warming, quite literally, comes in degrees and we are not simply presented with the option of having a ‘+1C’ world, or a + ‘>4C’ world, it is hard to see how exactly when climate change becomes a completely distinct problem that has priority over all other considerations<sup>31</sup>. These categories are simply too vague to ask how far we would be

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weighed. However, his argument primarily relies on a critique of Rawls focus on domestic justice, rather than global problems, which limits the applicability for our purposes.

<sup>30</sup> Robeyns (2016) argues that this terminology is misleading since the environment itself could not be a capability.

<sup>31</sup> Moreover, we might add the caveat that if a single country were to exceed its given sustainability conditions, it would not per se endanger the stability of the global climate. It would only be if multiple countries were to do so, that emissions would rise into a seriously dangerous territory.

willing to accept suffering, dictatorship, or domination to avert climate change.

For this question, the categories do not seem sufficient. However, given that we only need to ask how strongly we should weigh changes *above* the IN-S sufficiency line, it seems that the three considerations suffice. Given the qualitative difference between climate change and ideal egalitarian goals, we should not be willing to sacrifice progress on climate change for the maximalist ambitions of the IN-E. Staying within the sustainability constraints might be a necessary condition for the IN-E, but it does not treat this condition, in any way, as a special element of its theory. I argued that certain characteristic of climate change merit us treating it as special and giving it priority over changes above the IN-S.

So, *if*, there is a reasonable chance that combining climate goals with ambitious egalitarian IN-E goals would endanger the realization of the former, we should not combine these goals. The IN-E treats climate as one of the components of its ambitions and does not give it a special place. We must thus try to separate these elements and not make climate action contingent on 'standard' goals of social justice.

This is because climate change has the three characteristics outlined above, but also because we can realize the political goals of the IN-E via other means. We can lower inequalities in wealth and income regardless of our actions on climate change. Socializing the means of production or creating strong taxes on capital can all be enacted fully independently of our actions on climate change. A pluralist society can find an agreement on climate change and then continue to fight about all other distributive questions. Thus, we should not endanger climate action by making it contingent on massive redistributive policies

— especially if these policies can be done in isolation from climate action.

Thus, even though more egalitarian goals might be technically (or materially) feasible on the domestic scale, we should be skeptical of making climate action contingent on the ambitions of the IN-E. If we are certain that enacting egalitarian policies is beneficial to our climate goals, we can combine them (though it is difficult to see what the benefit of this would be). However, I have argued that if there is a reasonable danger that making climate action contingent on ambitious climate goals, we should not be willing to endanger climate action. Too many people might reasonably be opposed to massive changes in a societies distribution that pursuing these changes could endanger the goals of climate mitigation. Since the IN-E cannot distinguish between reaching maximalist goals, and the need to stay within sustainability constraints, it seems ill-fitted. It endangers the political feasibility of staying within the sustainability constraints of the nation.

### **3.4. The Role of Political Feasibility**

Before concluding the discussion of this chapter let us quickly return to the notion of political feasibility. Both the argument against IN-S, as well as IN-E rest on the assumption that these are not politically feasibly in a pluralist democratic society. There can be reasonable but vastly divergent ideal distributions of capabilities and yet we are forced to find compromises in order to avert climate change. I argue that IN-S, and IN-E both are badly suited for this kind of political feasibility. This kind of argument is, by its very nature speculative and only holds on a pro-tanto basis. Thus, both arguments claim that we should not opt for IN-S or IN-E, to the extent that they are politically unfeasible and endanger action on climate change. IN-S is too unequal in its distribution and allows for excessive inequalities

which could be perceived as unfair. Its distribution is in some sense too unambitious. IN-E seems to face the opposite problem. It makes climate action contingent on very ambitious political goals, which could endanger the climate. Its inability to distinguish between the urgency of climate change and comparatively minor political gains let the perfect be the enemy of the good, so to speak.

I hope to have convinced the reader that it is reasonable to assume that both approaches are not fully politically feasible. But it must be noted that we can easily imagine that there can be political circumstances where IN-S or IN-E are very politically feasible approaches<sup>32</sup>. In societies where those with wealth hold the levers of power and civil society and demonstrators have little political influence, the ‘unfair-burden’ challenge against the IN-S will have little political influence. Similarly, we can imagine a government that has complete power and can feasibly follow its political ambitions to act on climate change and inequality in one fell swoop — it might even be that packing climate change into ambitious political goals is the only way this government would invest into climate action. Similarly, it might be that some commentators are correct in saying that there literally is no way of addressing climate change within the capitalist system. In these cases, there could be no real argument against IN-E (assuming we endorse its aims).

Given the arguments in section 3.3., we would seemingly choose whatever distribution (above the IN-S) seems to best fit these sustainability constraints. Either IN-S or IN-E may fit this condition. However, I hope to have shown that neither approach seems to be perfectly politically feasible. The next chapter will further illustrate why these approaches seem undesirable and will

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<sup>32</sup> We might say that this is true for ‘our world, and nearby possible worlds’ (Robeyns, 2022).

propose what is hopefully a more politically feasible distribution.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that neither the integrationist-sufficientarian distribution IN-S nor the integrationist-egalitarian distribution IN-E, seem politically feasible on a domestic scale.

In the first section, we explored IN-S. Borrowing parts of Lukas Tank's (2020) 'unfair-burden' challenge, I argued that IN-S would appear to people as being too unfair. The sufficientarian approach is indifferent to inequalities above the sufficiency threshold; however, I argued that when it comes to climate policy, it appears that people seem to be sensitive to inequalities above the sufficiency threshold. If the policy is perceived to be unfair, it will most likely prompt political opposition, which in turn lowers its political feasibility.

I next turned towards the other possible integrationist distribution, an ideal egalitarian distribution IN-E. Here we would attempt to use climate policy to reach an ideal egalitarian distribution. I argued that if there is a risk that pursuing such maximalist goals endangers actions on climate change, we should not pursue them. This is because climate change has specific characteristics (urgency, irreversibility, and endangering the background conditions of justice) that make it special, compared to ambitious social justice goals. Moreover, one can always realize IN-E via methods, other than climate policy (e.g., tax on capital).

I finished the section by highlighting that the arguments of the chapter are only pro-tanto arguments and that it is technically possible that either IN-E or IN-S perfectly politically feasible.

However, given the arguments in this chapter, it seems reasonable to assume that neither IN-E, nor IN-S is politically feasible.

The next chapter will use a thought experiment of an island running out of its stock of wood to further illustrate why the integrationist distributions (as well as the isolationists distributions) are seemingly undesirable in a pluralistic community. It furthermore proposes a distribution that prima facie seems to escape the problems of political feasibility outlined in this chapter.



## 4. The Easter Island Thought Experiment

### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have argued that integrationism, in both its forms (IN-S/E) does not appear to be politically feasible for a domestic context. If we accept Caney's critique of isolationism (IS-S/E), then none of the four possible distributive principles seems to be adequate to distribute emission rights within a single nation.

This chapter will use a thought experiment of an island with existing inequalities attempting to distribute its limited stock of wood (as an analogy to emission-rights). By doing so we can more clearly explore the four possible distributive principles we have been discussing so far. I will explore the four distributive principles, and by reiterating some of the points made in the previous two chapters, as well as expanding these points, show that neither of the three of the four possible distributions (IN-S, IN-E, and IS-S) would seem quite unappealing. The remaining IS-E or the equal-wood-per-capita distribution seems *prima facie* appealing as a compromise (especially if pared with an IN-S distribution as a minimal floor). However, IS-E does not account for peoples differing dependence on wood.

Thus, in the last section of this chapter, I explore a modified version of this rule, IS-E\*, which assumes that all islanders are identical in their dependence on wood. I argue that if this assumption were to hold, distributing wood equally per capita would be the best compromise. Those islanders who think the island is already a fair society would have to distribute it equally since any other distribution would create unfair and unjustified inequalities. Those who think that the preexisting inequalities

of the island are an injustice would accept the IS-E\* as a step in the right direction.

#### 4.2. The Easter Island

Imagine a remote Easter Island which constitutes a political community<sup>33</sup>. The people on the island have lived on the island for a long time and have distributed the island's resources quite unequally. We can assume that the islanders are ardent capabilities and thus like to consider capabilities and functionings as their 'currency of justice'. However, if we think about the distribution of the island in terms of capabilities it would still be highly unequal. The distribution can be thought of as more or less arbitrary since it does not have to track some well-defined 'patterned distribution'<sup>34</sup> such as sufficiency threshold, egalitarian distribution where everyone has the same capabilities, or any other distribution proposed by political philosophers. Note, however, that even though the distribution of resources and thus capabilities do not fit into some of the standard theories in distributive justice, this does not imply that at least some islanders see the status quo as unjust. Let us assume that while many islanders see the inequality as problematic, many think that the inequality is justified. This can be due to a genuine disagreement about what constitutes a just distribution, how the inequality is measured, or some notion of desert that can justify the inequality. This belief might however

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<sup>33</sup> This example is loosely based on Jared Diamond's account of the fall of the Polynesian indigenous civilization in the Easter Islands in his 2010 Book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. As well as inspired by Dworkin's (2002) thought experiment a group from a shipwreck land on an uninhabited island and attempt to distribute the islands resources fairly.

<sup>34</sup> The idea of a patterned distribution goes back to Nozick (1974). Note, however, that for our purposes we needn't assume that the island follows libertarian principles. The thought experiment is compatible with a welfare-state that redistributes some of the wealth, but simply falls short of mainstream distributive principles.

also quite simply be due to self-interest, ideology, or an attachment to the status quo.

One day the islanders discover that their wood, a resource they believed to be abundant and inexhaustive, was actually in danger of depletion. The islanders use wood for all kinds of activities, but the distribution of its use is essentially arbitrary since it was not a limited resource some used much of it while others used very little<sup>35</sup>. The rate of consumption of wood at the moment far exceeds the amount of wood they can sustainably log, which puts islands' survival in danger. The islanders come together and decide that they would need to start conserving wood and agree on an annual amount of wood they could use without endangering the sustainability of the island — their sustainability condition. Now that wood has suddenly become one of the scarce resources of the island, the islanders come together and ask how they can divide the wood in a fair and just manner.

The islanders realize that the distribution of wood will inevitably alter the distribution of overall resources which will, in turn, alter the current distribution of capabilities and functionings on the island. They ask themselves what distribution of wood would be fair — considering (i) the current general distribution of capabilities, and (ii) that the dependence on wood differs from person to person.

This dependence in the CA is generally expressed as a person's conversion rate — the rate at which she can convert resources into valuable beings and doings. These conversion rates are given by a person's 'conversion factors' (Sen, 1995, pp. 19—21) which denote factors that create a person's ability to convert

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<sup>35</sup> This arbitrariness is different than the non-patterned distribution of resources since no Islander or ideology could justify the prior distribution of wood. We for now assume that implies that the past pattern of consumption is morally arbitrary which excludes 'backward-looking' distributions that incorporate past debts.

resources or commodities into functionings. There could be environmental, social, or personal factors that make it that a person is better or worse at converting a resource. For example, a pregnant woman will need to eat more than a child to be well-nourished, or an islander on the stormy side of the island might require more wood to keep her house patched. This islander can thus be said to have a worse ability to convert into a capability (being protected from the elements). Thus, a person with a favorable conversion rate will be able to have far more capabilities than someone with a worse conversion rate, despite having the same amount of a resources/commodity, such as wood. This conversion rate can for now be thought of as arbitrarily distributed amongst the islanders and not being correlated with their overall levels of capabilities before the wood shortage<sup>36</sup>.

Thus, the islanders initially come up with two dimensions, they can distribute wood either according to some sufficientarian or egalitarian rule, and they can distribute in an isolationist or integrationist fashion. This gives them four basic distributive rules they could implement:

	Sufficientarian	Egalitarian
Isolationists	Isolationist-Sufficientarian/IS-S	Isolationist-Egalitarian/IS-E
Integrationist	Integrationist-Sufficientarian/IN-S	Integrationist-Egalitarian/IN-E

Given that we have explored these rules in the previous two chapters I will here only quickly examine what each distribution

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<sup>36</sup> Theine et al., (2022) found that the level wealth only statistically correlates with 18% of emissions, in Austrian household. Here factors such as level of rurality and age playing large roles. People in rural areas are, for example far more dependent on their car to get around than people living in cities. Thus, we can similarly assume that on the island peoples dependence on wood is largely arbitrary and does not neatly track their wealth, or overall capabilities.

would mean for the islanders. I reiterate and expand some of the reasoning that we have used in the last chapters to show why the islanders would approve or disapprove of a given distribution.

#### 4.3. Isolationist-Sufficientarianism

In an isolationist-sufficientarian approach (IS-S), we would define a set of basic capabilities that everyone should be entitled to. Then all who do not have enough wood to realize this set of capabilities would receive this wood. They could realize all the wood-specific capabilities — say repairing canoes to have the capability of ‘being mobile’ or building huts for ‘being sheltered’. No one would be deprived of wood they would require for subsistence.

Those who were close to, or below the sufficiency threshold, to begin with, would have no additional burden because of the distribution of wood — they essentially can live largely unaffected by the wood-rationing. Moreover, no one would fall below the sufficiency threshold because they could not access the stock of wood.

However, note that if someone was below the sufficiency threshold before the wood got redistributed, they would stay there since the intervention brackets off wood from the other resources they lack<sup>37</sup>. Thus, if they lacked in wood, fertile land, or were socially disadvantaged in some other way, the distribution of wood would do nothing to change this fact. They would still find themselves below the overall sufficiency line — they simply would not be lacking in wood. If these islanders would trade the wood for other resources, for which they have some more urgent need (e.g., food), they would overall not be able to reach the sufficiency threshold, since they would only receive wood to reach

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<sup>37</sup> Note, that before the distribution of wood, they would have to have been below the sufficiency threshold because of a lack of non-wood resources since wood was at the time seemingly not scarce and freely available to all islanders.

the threshold. Thus, selling off wood would put them below the threshold, since they would no longer have enough wood to reach the threshold when it comes to wood-specific capabilities. This is true even if they could sell the wood at a high price since they would still be missing some wood.

The IS-S, despite not directly caring about the distribution of overall capabilities, must be sensitive to people's conversion factors. Some islanders might need more wood to, say build huts, or move around in canoes, than others. Thus, they require more wood to realize some capabilities ( 'being sheltered from the elements' and 'being mobile' ). Since we formulate the sufficiency threshold along capability lines we would need to consider this conversion.

What would the islanders think of this approach? The IS-S approach falls victim to two challenges: Firstly, it is not clear why we should isolate the wood required for subsistence from other resources (c.f. Chapter 2). The arguments against integrationism in chapter 3, hold only against mixing climate goals with very ambitious social justice goals, which the alternative IN-S is not. A non-ambitious isolationist approach raises the question of why we should treat wood differently from other resources when it comes to the moral minimum. Simply put, the poorest islanders would protest that the wood they receive is not enough and demand that they should be able to reach sufficiency in all relevant capabilities, not just when it comes to wood-derived capabilities.

Early into the philosophical debates on climate change, Shue (1993) argued that people are owed the emissions they need for their subsistence. In response, Hayward (2007) and others argued that the idea of subsistence emissions (or in our case 'subsistence wood' ) confuses means and ends. Emission rights (or wood-rights) are only one of the things needed for reaching a sufficiency threshold and we should be concerned with not just

allowing people to meet a sufficiency threshold<sup>38</sup>. Thus, if we set a sufficiency threshold it should apply to all relevant capabilities, which would entitle us to more than just the wood we would require to reach those capabilities<sup>39</sup>.

Secondly, this approach must also contend with the ‘unfair burden challenge’ explored in the previous chapter (Sect. 3.2). Those who do not fall under the sufficiency threshold but have lost much of their access to wood would view the distribution as unfair<sup>40</sup>. If the richest 1% of islanders could hoard all the wood that does not contribute to someone meeting the sufficiency threshold, those who have lost much of their access to wood (but do not fall under the threshold) would presumably oppose this distribution. Thus, while any approach might have to at least go as far as the isolationist-sufficientarian (IS-S) approach, in itself it is not enough to account for a fair distribution of wood.

#### **4.4. Integrationist-Sufficientarianism**

An integrationist sufficientarian IN-S approach would identify a set of basic capabilities that constitutes a sufficient standard of life. We would be deeply concerned with the lack of people under the threshold, while largely being indifferent towards the distribution above this threshold. In Hayward’s (2007, p. 443) words “what should be secured as a minimum equal entitlement are the necessities of life that actually provide subsistence”. These entitlements might include, but are not limited to, wood, since

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<sup>38</sup> In Hayward’s original article formulated his critique in the language of human-rights, however we can just as easily understand his claim along capability terms.

<sup>39</sup> We might argue that Hayward’s argument becomes stronger when applied to a singular society. It might be hard for some people to see why they owe a responsibility to ensure that people on the other end of the globe can eat or have access to equality before the law, but it seems easier for them to see why they have a responsibility to help those in their own country.

<sup>40</sup> This assumes a low sufficiency threshold; in the section on IN-S I discuss the possibility of a high sufficiency threshold which can equally apply to the IS-S distribution.

people might lack resources other than wood. To reach a IN-S threshold of capabilities people will most likely require resources<sup>41</sup> other than wood.

To realize this goal by means of the distribution of wood alone, we would need to distribute the wood as follows: All those who currently find themselves below the sufficiency threshold would receive enough wood so they can realize their wood-specific functionings (i.e., IS-S). They would, however, also receive enough wood to trade with those above the sufficiency line; they would receive so much 'luxury wood' that they can trade enough with other islanders so that they can meet the sufficiency threshold<sup>42</sup>.

Just as with the IS-S, the IN-S approach would fall victim to the 'unfair burden challenge' (see Sect. 3.2). The excessively unequal distribution of wood above the threshold would reasonably be perceived as unfair which limits the political feasibility of the proposal. There seemingly is not good justification for this inequality and it is not clear why the already wealthy islanders should just be allowed to have most of the wood.

Let us, however, consider one possible retort by a sufficientarian (this retort could also be made to address the unfair burden challenge for the IS-S). She might convincingly argue that there is no reason to think that a sufficiency threshold would need to

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<sup>41</sup> An important aspect of the CA is that it is not only interested in resources, even if we incorporate conversion rates. A person might be rich but still face undue discrimination or harmful social norms and expectations. I here only invoke resources to keep the thought experiment simple but in theory people might be entitled to institutional and social changes, just as much as more resources.

<sup>42</sup> Obviously, we could also simply distribute wood along the IS-S and then give people whatever other resource they lack, by means of redistribution. This is technically perfectly compatible with the IN-S. However, what distinguishes it from an IS-S distribution with some additional redistribution on the side, is that for the IN-S distribution the distribution of non-wood resources would have to be contingent on the distribution of wood.



be an absolute moral minimum. Sufficiencyarians, especially in global justice, often focus on the bare minimum required for a dignified life. However, especially in the Capability Approach, the standard for what is required for a dignified life can be set very high, so that all on the island must be entitled to at least a high level of functioning. This would then give us two possible scenarios:

- (i) The IN-S sufficiency line is high but all islanders meeting this threshold would not be exhaustive of the wood-budget
- (ii) The sufficiency line is so high that all available wood would go towards meeting reaching the sufficiency threshold.

Both approaches seem problematic. In (i) the unequal distribution of wood above the sufficiency threshold is subject to the ‘unfair burden challenge’. There would be wood left that is seemingly arbitrarily distributed. Yet the relevance of this challenge might decrease the higher the threshold is set. As the sufficiency threshold is increased, we move closer to situation (ii), where there is no wood that does not go towards someone realizing basic capabilities.

In scenario (ii) we can avoid the unfair-burden challenge since there would be no wood being used that does not go towards meeting people's basic needs. Yet, this would again face the objection of being too ambitious since it would result in a similar outcome as IN-E and thus face similar criticism as that distribution.

Moreover, one might argue that setting the sufficiency threshold is arbitrary. It would not be arbitrary because the threshold is per se too high. High sufficiency thresholds can be formulated since we might reasonably conceive necessary parts of the good life that are quite demanding. Yet a sufficiency threshold that happens to be so demanding that everyone reaching it puts the

society exactly at the sustainability condition seems arbitrary. The threshold should demarcate a morally relevant distinction between those who do, and do not, have enough to, say, ‘live a dignified life’. There can be serious disagreement about what exact threshold demarcates the cutoff point for a dignified life. Yet setting this point because of an external constraint (i.e., the sustainability condition) bears no relationship to such a morally relevant cut-off point and can thus be said to be arbitrary (c.f. Nielsen, 2019; Shields, 2020). Thus, such a sufficientarian approach seems to lose what makes the sufficientarian thesis distinct and thus it becomes a weak substitute for egalitarian approaches.

The IN-S approach, even if the threshold is set relatively high, seems to fall short of a good way for the islanders to distribute wood. However, it might well be that we take the IN-S as a kind of floor that must be guaranteed by any fair distribution. It would be necessary but not sufficient for a fair distribution of wood — thus it might still be a component of a different distribution.

#### **4.5. Integrationist-Egalitarianism**

The integrationist-egalitarian, IN-E, approach can for our purposes be understood as the ‘Equality of Capabilities’ approach<sup>43</sup>. Here everyone would have equal capabilities, so that no one can be said to be better or worse off than anyone else.

Now given that the islanders are currently unequal, the ideal distribution of wood would have to be made in such a way that the result is an end-state of equality. In order for the distribution

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<sup>43</sup> Not that for Caney, the IN-E is exemplified as Dworkin’s (1981) equality of resources. Here, all people would have a bundle of resources, so that they would not envy any other person’s bundle of resources. Thus, there are no trades possible that would make it ‘more equal’. For our purposes this position and the egalitarian capability position can be thought of as identical, I refer to capabilities in order to ensure terminological consistency.

of wood alone to achieve this<sup>44</sup>, the wood would need to mostly be given to the island's poorest and middle-class in such a manner that they then can leverage their control of wood to trade it for the exact amount of resources to realize the ideal distribution. Assuming the island's wealthy were to value the wood highly, the trade would bring about a massive redistribution. After the trade, the island would be at, or as close as possible to the egalitarian ideal.

To realize this ideal, the distribution of wood, just as with IN-S, and IS-S would have to be sensitive to people's conversion factors - their ability to convert wood into functionings. This is because we defined the end state of equality in capabilities. If a person requires more wood to attain the same functioning, she will have to be owed more than the other person, so that everyone would be equally well off after the trade.

As argued in the previous chapter (Sect. 3.3.) this IN-E distribution might appear too drastic to be politically feasible. There might simply be too many islanders that think the current distribution of non-wood resources is perfectly just or justified, or for other reasons defend the status quo distribution. And the logistics of redistributing all non-wood resources might simply be too difficult or bring too many uncertainties. If we insist on lowering the inequality of the island by means of the wood distribution, we might be risking the island's survival needlessly. This seems especially risky since islanders can fight for more equality of non-wood resources separately from the question of how the wood should be distributed. We should thus seemingly be willing to disentangle wood from other resources.

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<sup>44</sup> See ft. 32. It might be that we want to redistribute the non-wood resources separately. This seems consistent with the IN-E but what is vital is that the distribution of wood and non-wood resources are dependent upon each other.

#### 4.6. Isolationist-Egalitarianism

The egalitarian-isolationist IS-E approach would treat wood separately from all other questions of inequality and simply imply that everyone is entitled to the same amount of wood as everyone else — the equal per-capita distribution of wood. This might face the theoretical critique of the Island's integrationists, who argue that we need to think about more than just one resource. However, given the difficulty of the other distributions, the IS-E might seem appealing. Presumably poorer islanders can leverage the wood they receive to trade with wealthy islanders to receive other resources. *Prima facie* this would seem to be equality enhancing, without falling into the maximalism of the IN-E.

Note, however, that islanders would receive the same amount of wood regardless of their different capabilities, resources at their disposal, or, most importantly, their ability to convert wood into valuable functions. This distribution, unlike the others, is unconcerned with the overall distribution of capabilities. It merely is concerned with the distribution of wood alone. Thus, the effects of the equal-per-capita wood distribution on the final distribution of capabilities are heavily contingent on how conversion rates (i.e., level of dependence on wood) are distributed amongst the islanders.

If we assume the poorest islanders need very little wood — that is to say they are very good at converting wood into functionings — and furthermore, the wealthiest islanders want far more wood than the equal shares allow them; if this were the case the effects of the IS-E would be strongly equality enhancing (possibly even coming close to IN-E). However, if the tables were turned and the poorest islanders are far worse at converting wood than the rich, and the rich happen to require less than the standard share of wood, then the IS-E distribution could have an inequality-enhancing effect on the overall distribution of capabilities.

We could imagine coupling the IS-E with some sufficientarian rule (e.g., IN-S) to ensure that the effects of the distribution could not become too bad. However, even here the arbitrary nature of the distribution of capabilities seems to be a real problem. The arbitrariness of the end state seems sufficiently problematic that we would eliminate the IS-E from consideration. However, it might be technically possible to control for this problem of differing dependence on wood. Thus, I next explore what the IS-E would look like if everyone had the same conversion rates.

#### 4.7. Isolationist-Egalitarian, Assuming Identical Conversion Rates

Let us ask what the IS-E (which could include the IN-S) would look like if everyone had the exact same conversion rate for wood. That is to say *if* there were no disabilities or other differences in people's life circumstances that would make anyone's conversion rate better or worse. This is of course, an unrealistic counterfactual and the next chapter will ask how to incorporate diversity, but for now the assumption serves to illustrate the point. Let us refer to this distribution where everyone has the same conversion rate as IS-E\*. I argue that this hypothetical distribution IS-E\* seems to be an incredibly strong candidate for the fair distribution of wood on the island.

Firstly, note that IS-E\* escapes the unfair-burden challenge laid out in chapter 3. Since everyone receives an equal amount of wood, those above the sufficiency threshold would not feel unfairly treated<sup>45</sup>. It moreover does not fall into the same problems as the

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<sup>45</sup> There are two possible challenges here: Firstly, those that do not want wood, might be envious since everyone who wanted wood got wood, but they did not want it so are only as good of as they were before. Note however, that we can allow for trade, so that they can get the resources they actually do want by selling their wood. The second challenge is that after the trade it might be that the previously wealthy islanders would have more wood since they traded some of their resources. This might appear illegitimate for some; however, this illegitimacy must then stem from an overall belief that the wealthy islander

IN-E, and thus might be described as a ‘golden middle way’. More importantly, it appears that the equal-per-capita IS-E\* view allows for a kind of ‘overlapping consensus’ between the different islanders.

I assumed at the beginning of the chapter that islanders differ considerably in what they consider the just distribution of capabilities on the island. Some believe that the island is already an example of a just society and that the inequalities in capabilities are fully justified. Others think that the island’s distribution is unjust, and that massive redistribution of resources would be required to allow for a just distribution of capabilities. I argue that both these factions would happily agree on the IS-E\* distribution.

Let us imagine an islander who believes that the island is already a fully ideally just state. They either dispute the existence of inequalities or believe these inequalities to be somehow justified. Now there are a large set of ideal theories of justice (or theories that can formulate an ideal) and we cannot address all of them. Moreover, many of these distributional theories do not use capabilities, but other currencies of justice, such as ‘basic goods’, or ‘bundles of resources’. Yet I hope to illustrate that for most mainstream theories of justice, if a person would believe that society were already at the ideal, any distribution other than IS-E\* would upset this state.

Imagine an islander subscribing to some version of egalitarianism. We can then, for our purposes describe this egalitarianism in terms of capabilities<sup>46</sup>. An islander subscribing to this

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never deserved his wealth. For those who think this it seems that the only fair distribution would have to be the IN-E.

<sup>46</sup> We can think of this distribution as being essentially overlapping with Dworkin’s (1981) equality of resources. According to Dworkin (2002) himself this would be fine since he argues that capabilities can better be formulated as a subset of his vision of resources. Essentially, we could understand the resourcist parallel of IS-E\* as saying

distribution would pursue the goals of IN-E and she would want all islanders to have the same capabilities. Though there might be material inequalities, these reflect people's choices and life plans. For an egalitarian capabilityarian people should have the same real freedom to be or do and be the things which they value. If someone believed that the island was already in this ideal before the distribution of wood (possibly her disagreement with islanders complaining about inequality has to do with the measurement of capabilities), then she would need to endorse IS-E\*. Any other distribution other than IS-E\* would result in an end-state that would no longer be ideal. If any person or group would have received more wood than others, the pre-existing equality in capabilities would be violated.

Dworkin and other so-called 'luck egalitarians' might argue that departing from sticky equality is justified due to some of the choices people make. An islander might have gambled her life savings away. If a person had done so before the distribution of wood, she might have been justifiably poor; however, her choice of gambling was done without the knowledge that wood would at some point have to be rationed. A person might gamble away all her wood once she had received it, but she would initially be owed the same amount as others — regardless of her past choices.

We can make the same argument for desert-based theories. Some believe that contributing, putting in extra effort, or being deserving of compensation (Lamont, 2017) serve as the basis for a desert claim. Yet, again it seems that there is nothing the

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that all islanders have the same internal resources and are already envy-free of each other's bundles of resources. Capabilityarians such as Williams (2002) disagree that we can compare the CA and Dworkin's approach, though for the very confined purpose of this thought experiment the differences between Dworkin and the CA can be said to be quite minor (c.f. Pierik & Robeyns, 2007) In either case, equality of resources, would similarly choose IS-E\* since it would make everyone equally well-off if no one had any prior disadvantages.

islanders could entitle them to more than the IS-E\* share of wood. They might be entitled to more of the non-wood resources (and thus capabilities) before the distribution of wood and could trade those resources for wood, but initially, they would merely be entitled to the IS-E\* share.

Let us consider an islander endorsing some version of utilitarianism such as that of Harsanyi (1975). Assume, however, that we would be measuring capabilities instead of utility<sup>47</sup>. We would thus be concerned with the sum of each islander's capabilities and assume that the island is already optimal that no redistribution would lead to an increase in the aggregate well-being. Assuming again that each person gains the same capabilities with one unit of wood, it might technically be possible that we could distribute in any way. Since we are merely concerned with the aggregate of people's capabilities it might technically be possible to give one person all the island's wood. This person would gain many capabilities while the rest have no wood and thus have far fewer capabilities. Since we are concerned with the aggregate of the islander's capabilities this state might be equal to an IS-E\* distribution.

However, it seems reasonable to assume a kind of decreasing marginal increase in capabilities — moreover, we can assume that IS-E\* implies that each islander's marginal decrease is the same<sup>48</sup>. Thus, for each additional unit of wood, the aggregate number of capabilities would uniformly decrease for islanders. So, there are only so many capabilities that any islander can gain

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<sup>47</sup> There are of course large differences between capabilities and utility. A slightly easier possibility is to simply assume that our measurements of utility conform to the IS-E\*. Thus, each unit of wood increases each person's utility equally and each person has the same decreasing marginal utility of wood. Yet, it seems that aggregation of overall well-being (be it capabilities or utility) can be done with either measure (Sen, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> For Sen (1985, p7) the conversion rate need not be linear so IN-E\* can be refined to mean that one has the exact same conversion rate in terms of a nonlinear function



from an additional unit of wood, and this varying conversion factor is equal for all islanders. If this is the case, then any other distribution other than the IS-E\* would lead to an improvable, or non-ideal distribution. If the prior distribution could not have been improved via a re-distribution of resources any non-IS-E\* distribution would bring us a sub-optimal aggregate. Thus, someone who believes that the island was already perfect, would advocate for no other rule other than IS-E\*. This seems to hold for other aggregating-based approaches <sup>49</sup>.

Let us lastly turn to a hypothetical Rawlsian islander. The islander endorses the Rawlsian (1999) difference principle. She would argue that some inequalities are justified but only under the condition that it is in the 'greatest benefit of the least advantaged in society'<sup>50</sup>. She thus tries to maximize the well-being of the least well-off islander. The islander might acknowledge that there are many inequalities on the island but argues that all these inequalities are here to benefit the least well-off islander. According to her, before the shortage of wood, there could have been no redistribution that would benefit the least well-off more.

For the distribution of wood to preserve this state, it again would need to be IS-E\*. Any distribution that would give those who already have more resources more wood, would be a form of

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<sup>49</sup>Most importantly here is Prioritarianism. Prioritarianism values priority-adjusted wellbeing, where those who are worst-off (e.g., have the fewest capabilities) are considered more important than those who are better off. Insofar as Prioritarians can be said to have an ideal it would be a situation of sticky equality, where no one could become any better off, and no transfer or similar policy could improve the aggregate of the priority-adjusted wellbeing. Such a situation again any distribution other than IS-E\* would create a situation where a transfer could create an overall improvement. Meyer & Roser (2006) make this argument in slightly more detail, but without reference to conversion.

<sup>50</sup> This, for Rawls is merely part of a larger theory, including the requirement to hold all offices open to all people. Though these considerations are not per se in question for the purpose of this thought experiment.

unjustified inequality since this would not per se be in the benefit of the least well off. Any distribution that would give those with fewer resources more wood than others would presumably hurt the worst-off islander in the long run. This is because all inequality before the distribution of wood was already in the interest of the worst-off. Any other distribution than IS-E\* would either make some else the new worst-off, or it would decrease inequalities which would hurt the worst-off. If the pre-existing inequality was already optimal for the worst-off, and any re-distribution would have hurt the worst-off, it seems reasonable that we should distribute wood so that there is no re-distribution which would be the case of IS-E\*, if allied to a just society.

I hope that the examples illustrate why someone who thinks the island is already ideal would prefer the IS-E\*. The canon of distributive justice is too large to meaningfully go through each possible theory in sufficient detail here. Yet it seems sufficiently reasonable that most mainstream theories of justice, with the possible exception of libertarianism,<sup>51</sup> would prima facie seem to defend the IS-E\* distribution. If we were already in a situation where everyone had all legitimate claims on resources satisfied, and there were a new resources (wood), and if everyone's claim on this resources were equal (no one can use wood better than anyone else and no one did anything to create the wood) then it seems that it would be unjust to distribute it any other way than equally. That would of course, only be true if before the discovery of the wood shortage the society was already perfectly just.

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<sup>51</sup> One outlier here might be libertarianism since in a Lockean defense of property rights past emissions could potentially justify inequalities in emission-rights (Bovens, 2011). However, if we purely assume a forward-looking approach, it seems difficult to see how a Lockean defense could justify inequalities in a scarce resource.

It might well be that people defend the current distribution of capabilities, not because they see it as the ideal society, but rather for reasons such as self-interest, or certain discriminatory beliefs. In these cases, other distributions would be favored. However, for what might be considered ‘legitimate’, or ‘reasonable’ reasons to believe that the island is a just society, the IS-E\* distribution seems to be the only viable distribution that would not move the society away from the ideal.

Let us now turn to the group of islanders who do not see the current distribution of capabilities as just or justified. This could be people who believe in ideal theories of justice, but argue that the island falls short of their ideal; it could however also be people who do not think it is necessary to pose an ideal of justice to remove injustice (e.g., Sen, 2009). Both groups would seemingly still endorse the IS-E\*. For those who believe in a strong ideal (e.g., IN-E), the IS-E\* would fall short of bringing them to this ideal distribution. However, it seems that it brings us close enough to an ideal notion of justice we hold — it is a step in the right direction. An IS-E\* distribution could be one component of a larger package of re-distributions that would lead to the ideal distribution (e.g., IN-E). Thinking back to the discussion in 4.5., a proponent could distribute wood along the IS-E\*, and then redistribute all other resources so that IN-E would be reached. IS-E\* would not fully get us to this ideal but it would bring us some way into the right direction, and one could always reach IN-E via other means. Given the importance of finding a consensus on how to distribute the wood (see: Sect. 3.3) they might accept the compromise on IS-E\*. They could then demand the redistribution of other resources, which might be more contentious, but it would be in their interest to distribute wood along the lines of IS-E\*, since they are one step closer to their ideal distribution.

For those islanders endorsing non-ideal theories of justice, the IS-E\* might not remove all social ills, however, it again would be a step in the right direction. Provided we at least have a situation of IN-S so that no one is below the sufficiency threshold, a non-ideal islander might endorse the IS-E, since, on the whole, the IS-E\* would be equality-enhancing when applied to an unequal society.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

This concludes our discussion of the Easter Island thought experiment and the discussion of the four — or rather 5 — possible distributive principles.

I have argued that the four initial distributive principles seemed to be untenable for the islanders. I argued that sufficientarian approaches, IN-S, and IS-S, fall under the unfair-burden challenge explored in chapter 3. They leave inequalities of wood above the sufficiency threshold, which might cause the distribution of wood to appear unfair. Thus, many islanders would oppose these approaches. On the other hand, the IN-E approach seemed too ambitious, and many islanders would reasonably oppose such drastic redistributions. Such disagreement is perfectly acceptable in normal problems of distributive justice, however, given that the island's survival is in danger it seems that we should not be willing to make the island's survival contingent on realizing very ambitious political goals.

The last possible distribution the equal-wood-per-capita view or IS-E, has the problem of being completely indifferent to the fact that people differ in their dependence on wood. Some people are better at converting wood into valuable functionings than others, but the IS-E has no means of capturing this.

Thus, in the last section, I proposed an alternative formulation. IS-E\* is just like the IS-E distribution, with the only difference

being that it assumes that everyone has the same conversion rate, and thus that all islanders are identical in their dependence on wood. Note that we can include a condition for first realizing the IN-S threshold. I argued that IS-E\* is conducive to an overlapping consensus between those who (justifiably) believe that the island's inequalities are justified, and those who want far more redistribution. Those who genuinely believe that the island is already just and that existing inequalities are justified would choose IS-E\*. Any other distribution would make an otherwise just society unjust, while IS-E\* would seemingly preserve an ideal state in most ideal theories of justice.

For those who believe that the island's inequalities in capabilities are unjust, the IS-E\* would at the very least be a step in the right direction. It is a compromise that they could most likely happily live with and then continue to separately fight for other political goals.

IS-E\* rests on the assumption that people are uniform in their dependence on wood. This is a slightly absurd assumption to make, and we know that when it comes to emissions people differ greatly in how dependent they are on emitting to realize a given function. Thus, the next chapter will explore how we could modify the distribution of emission-rights as to account for differences in conversion factors and approximate the IS-E\*.

The distributional rule I advocate there is not captured by the four-fold distinction introduced in chapter 2. It, however, can best be considered isolationist in the same way that IS-S is also isolationist. It might not be 'pure', in the sense that it only focuses on the distribution of emission in complete isolation from any other possible considerations. I argue that we must attempt to incorporate the diversity of peoples conversion factors in a way that can respect the existing diversity of peoples conversion rates, while still retaining the benefits of IS-E\*.



## 5. Refining the Equal-Per-Capita View

### 5.1. Outline

In the previous chapter, I argued that the seemingly best domestic distribution of emission-rights would be IS-E\*. That is, by assuming that everyone has the same conversion rate, we can justify an equal-per-capita distribution of wood - or rather - emission rights. This assumption is, however, highly implausible.

Amartya Sen's (1980) conception of the Capability Approach largely comes out of the problem that people differ greatly in their ability to put resources to use for achieving the lives they have reasons to value. And we know for certain that people differ in how dependent they are on emissions. For example, someone living on a remote island only accessible by plane, receiving food or basic healthcare will be associated with far more emissions than someone who can just stroll to a nearby supermarket or a nearby clinic. On the whole, in developed nations, those in rural and suburban areas tend to produce more emissions than those in urban areas (Glaeser & Kahn, 2010; Theine et al., 2022). This is because people in rural areas are more car-dependent, for example.

We thus need to find a way to modify the IS-E, so that its effects mimic those of the IS-E\*. To this end, I argue for a distribution that is advocated for by Ingrid Robeyns (2017a)<sup>52</sup>. In a short article mainly addressed to policymakers, she argues that *prima facie* we should follow the standard equal-per-capita view of emission-rights (IS-E). However, she argues that we can deviate from the IS-E, and give people additional emission-rights:

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<sup>52</sup> Note that Robeyns (2021) in a later article advocates for a different distribution which amount to ensuring an IS-S threshold and then distributing the remaining emissions on an equal-per-capita basis. Thus, while I try to elaborate on the distribution mentioned in the 2017 article, it should not be understood as faithfully capturing what she believes. Especially since the majority of the article does not *per se* deal with the burden-sharing question.

*“...only when an individual or group can convincingly show that they need more natural resources to lead the same quality of life and that this need for additional natural resources is something for which they cannot be held accountable, that one could consider the view that some persons or some groups should be entitled to more natural resources than others.”* (Robeyns, 2017a, p. 6)

Simply put, a person is entitled to more emission rights if and only if (i) she can show that she requires more in order to reach the same set of functionings, and if (ii) this need is something for which they cannot be held responsible for.

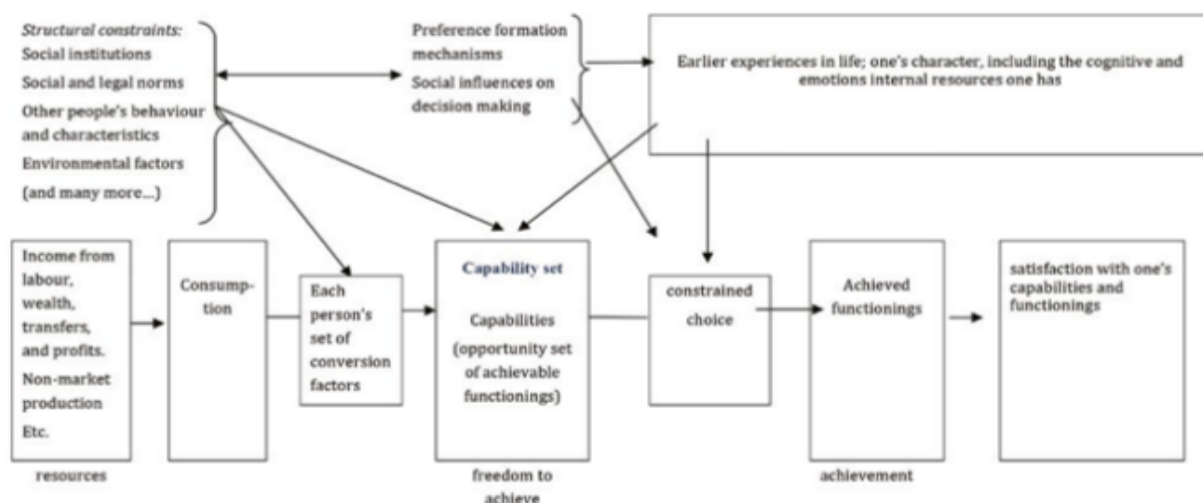
This chapter will refine and defend this distribution. I first describe conversion factors in more detail and illustrate how we can understand their relation to people's capabilities. In the next section, I use this to show how we can operationalize conversion factors to simulate the results of IS-E\* without having to assume that conversion factors are equal. In the last section, I briefly give an interpretation of why Robeyns seems to invoke responsibility, and what considerations might be important here. I will not advocate for any single interpretation of responsibility, however, yet rather point out that this is one of the considerations we would need to make when distributing emissions-rights.

## **5.2. Conversion Factors and Emission-rights**

As mentioned in the previous chapter and illustrated in the outline of this chapter, all of us can be said to have a certain conversion rate when it comes to how well we can convert emission-rights into valuable beings and doings. These conversion rates are given by a person's 'conversion factors' (Sen, 1995, pp. 19—21) which are factors that create a person's ability to convert resources or commodities into functionings. These conversion factors can be divided into environmental, social, and



personal factors (Robeyns, 2017b, pp. 45–47). For example, a person might have a commodity, such as a skirt. But if a skirt can be transformed into a person realizing the functioning of ‘being clothed’ will depend on the environment and weather (environment), the social circumstances, since a man may not wear one in many social spaces (social), these factors could limit one’s ability to realize functionings such as ‘appearing in public without shame’ or ‘being safe’. Lastly, one’s ability to wear a given skirt depends on one’s body type and habits (personal). Thus the mere fact that someone owns a skirt cannot tell us if they can be clothed (example adapted from Binder, 2019, pp. 109).



Robeyns (2017b, fig. 2.1) A stylized visualization of the core concepts of capability theories

It is clear that using emission-rights, such as via burning fossil fuels, contributes greatly to the well-being of people in wealthy, as well as developing nations. We use emission-rights to heat and cool our homes, use contemporary forms of transportation, build new homes, and feed ourselves (IPCC, 2022b; Wood & Roelich, 2019).

Much of the process of weaning ourselves off fossil fuels and a carbon-intensive economy involves changes in industrial processes. This being said around 40-70% of emissions reduction can be realized via, what the IPCC (2022b) calls demand-side interventions. This includes actions that presumably have little impact on people's well-being such as insulating homes, but also actions that would greatly alter people's daily life such as limiting flying, switching from driving cars to cycling and taking public transport, and most importantly switching from a meat-intensive diet to a largely plant-based diet.

The question of how to decarbonize our economies, to facilitate changes to the electricity supply and other supply-side processes as well as demand-side changes is the most important challenge of the next decades. Here the CA can help us conceptualize how best to retain well-being while we switch to a sustainable society. However, for the purposes of this writing, we will limit our investigation to what would happen to people's well-being if they suddenly had less ability to emit.

We must thus ask how emissions contribute to people's capabilities. In the abstract, this is a quite simple connection: depending on our various conversion factors, we can determine how much a person needs to emit to realize a set of capabilities. A person living off-grid, whose house is heated by solar panels will require essentially no emissions to be 'well-housed', while a person with an old gas boiler might need to emit a lot more to reach the same level of well-being.

Yet how do we conceptualize some of the behavior changes that would be a necessary part of climate mitigation? Imagine a person, Ms. Lavish, who lives in the city but drives a bit SUV, eats lots of meat, and likes to go to far-off holiday resorts. Ms. Lavish might have a high-emission lifestyle but notice that she could quite easily live a low-emission lifestyle. She might enjoy the

taste of meat, but to realize the capability of being well-nourished she could just as easily switch to a more sustainable and healthier diet that contains far less meat and dairy (Einarsson et al., 2019). This switch, as Voget-Kleschin (2015) argues, might be something Ms. Lavish would not enjoy but the switch would not per se lower her capabilities. The substitution of meat with tofu, for the CA, is more or less straightforward. All we need to assume is that Ms. Lavish has access to a plant-based diet that can nourish her<sup>53</sup>. Thus, seemingly Ms. Lavish could be just as well off if she ate more plant-based foods and thus does not seem to require the emissions she is using to retain her current quality of life.

The example of the plant-based diet is possibly controversial but tells us very little as to how conversion factors determine people's capabilities. To illustrate this let us turn to her car. Ms. Lavish drives her large SUV to attain her capability of 'being mobile'. There might be other capabilities she simultaneously derives from owning her SUV but let us assume that her only concern is mobility<sup>54</sup>.

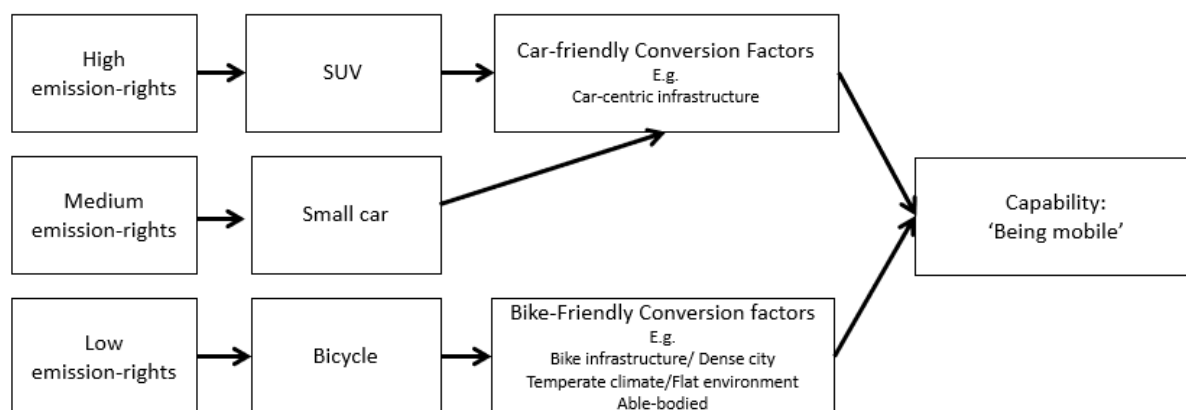
Now if Ms. Lavish were to live in a car-dependent suburb without any other forms of infrastructure she would not be able to be mobile without using many emission-rights. She might be able (if she owned one) to switch to a smaller vehicle or an electric

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<sup>53</sup> Note here, that a larger question here would be in how far we consider her personal and cultural conversion factors. Some cultures might be said to have adapted to eating meat in some rituals, or Mrs. Lavish might argue that her meat consumption is part of her habit and that she thus has a hard time converting tofu into being nourished. Due to the complexity of incorporating these social, cultural and institutional factors I leave them out of this analysis, but a full capability theory would require a clear understanding of the role of these influences.

<sup>54</sup> Car-ownership to a large part is dependent on more than just the function of getting from here to there (Moody et al., 2021). For a more detailed discussion of the role of cars as a cultural or positional good in the capability approach see Robeyns (2017a).

vehicle<sup>55</sup>. If she were to live in a dense city with good biking infrastructure and would be able-bodied then, however, it seems that she would be able to be mobile while using a bicycle instead of a car.



As shown in the figure above, this would mean that she could realize the same capability in different ways<sup>56</sup>. If Ms. Lavish were to live in a suburban area with no good public transport or bike infrastructure, she would be requiring more emission-rights. The same would be true if she were to have a disability or be at an age where she could not walk/bike far but could drive a car. Yet, if Ms. Lavish had bike-friendly conversion factors it would — at least for the metrics of the CA — not hurt her well-being to switch to a more sustainable mode of transport.

Thus, conversion factors, such as the infrastructure, determine how well emissions translate into the capabilities that people have. If someone has factors available that allow them to realize

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<sup>55</sup> This again would require additional conversion factors, namely a charging network to allow her to actually use her car.

<sup>56</sup> Martha Nussbaum (2001) refers to this aspect of the CA as 'multiple realizability'. For her allows the CA to be non-paternalist since each culture can decide to realize capabilities in different ways.

a capability with fewer resources, we can consider their conversion rate as low. It might be that this person chooses to realize a capability in an emission-intensive way. However, as long as she can realize the capability more sustainably, it would not per se lower her capabilities to limit the emitting activity. Altering conversion factors, such as replacing fossil-fuel infrastructure, will be the main way in which we can ensure high well-being while decarbonizing our economies. However, for our purposes, we can use conversion factors, as they are, to determine the relevance of people's claims to emission-rights. We now, ask how these conversion factors, which determine a person's conversion rate, impact the fair distribution of emissions.

### **5.3. Incorporating Diversity**

In the previous section, we have seen that people have a variety of conversion factors that allow them to convert emission-rights into valuable beings and doings, at different rates. It seems highly unlikely that people are uniform in their conversion rate of emissions-rights to capabilities. Factors such as people's age, insulation of people's homes, and how urban/rural people are, all seem to influence how dependent they are on producing emissions (c.f. Theine et al., 2022).

Thus, we need to find a way to consider conversion rates, so that we can approach the distribution of IS-E\*. For this, imagine two people, Max, and Moritz. They can both be said to be living pretty much the exact same life, but Max lives in a city apartment that is well insulated and uses low-carbon electricity to stay warm in winter. Moritz lives in an old and large house, which is badly insulated and needs to be heated with an inefficient oil burner. To achieve the functioning 'being sheltered from the elements', Moritz requires far more emission-rights than Max. Moritz's conversion factors, i.e., his badly insulated house and

inefficient boiler, make his conversion rate rather unfavorable. Thus, Moritz can be said to “*convincingly show that [he] need[s] more natural resources to lead the same quality of life*” (Robeyns, 2017a, p. 6).

Let us, for now, assume that the society for which we are trying to distribute emission rights consists only of these two people and that the only valuable activity one can use emission-rights for is warming one's house. Here Moritz' s conversion rate would preliminarily entitle him to more emission rights than he would have received in the equal-per-capita distribution (IS-E). The question we must ask is then ‘how much more’ should he get and where should these emission rights come from. Since we are assuming that emission-rights are a finite resource compatible with the sustainability condition, the additional emission would need to be ones that Max gives up.

I argue that the conversion rate gives us the exact measurement that can arbitrate between the competing claims of Max and Moritz. Let us try to express this more formally to capture what the resulting distribution would look like<sup>57</sup>.

Let  $x_i$  be the emissions-rights of person ‘i’ — in our case Moritz,  $c_i$  represents this person's conversion rate. Then  $f_i$  represents the functioning gained from emission-causing activities — i.e., i' s living in a warm house, which is a function of i' s ability to convert the emission-rights so that  $f_i(c_i x_i)$  this then gives us that person.

If Moritz (i) should then not unfairly be disadvantaged vis a vis Max (j), it seems that he should be entitled to the same level of functioning so that:

$$f_i(c_i x_i) = f_j(c_j x_j)$$

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<sup>57</sup> I here adapt the terminology used in Sen' s (1985) ‘Commodities and Capabilities’ .

This, equalizing of their potential functionings, however, does not per se distribute those functionings directly but rather the capability (i.e., the real freedom to realize the functioning). If they both had the identical conversion rate (IS-E\*), they would receive equal emission-rights ( $x_j = x_i$ ). If their conversion rates differ it gives them the same capability of realizing a given functioning. Thus, they would be entitled to the amount of emission-rights they would require for realizing their functioning. The allocation of emission-rights would however be constrained by the overall sustainability condition so that:

$$(x_i + x_j) \leq x_{total}$$

Where  $x_{total}$  represents the total carbon budget that is compatible with the overall sustainability condition. Max and Moritz are thus entitled to enough emissions to lead the same quality of life vis a vis living in a warm house. They could do with these emission-rights as they please but they both should be entitled to a warm house. Thus, their conversion rates determine the emission-rights that are allocated towards either of them.

This example is of course only a simplistic illustration. We use emissions in many parts of our lives not just to attain a singular functioning. Moreover, a single functioning is determined by more than a single resource such as emission-rights<sup>58</sup>. It would be empirically and bureaucratically difficult to ascertain and calculate every one's conversion rates in a precise manner. It thus becomes both theoretically and practically difficult to isolate emission-specific from general functionings beyond broad categories such as heating, electricity, and transport. I will address the question of practical applicability in the conclusion;

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<sup>58</sup> Sen speaks of a vector of commodities being transformed into a functioning. Thus, we would need to hold other resources or commodities that a person possesses (e.g., wealth, housing, education, etc.) equal to determine the impact of emission-rights on the actual level of functioning.

however not that this alone can already be quite useful to guide or justify policy. For example, since people in rural generally are more dependent on cars to be mobile, houses tend to be single-family homes which are more energy-intensive (Glaeser & Kahn, 2010; Theine et al., 2022). Thus, people in rural areas should seemingly be compensated for their heightened dependence on emissions.

This approach would be isolationist since it primarily distributes emissions and is not per se concerned with the overall distribution of capabilities (though we might want to couple it with an IN-S floor). Yet it would incorporate the information of conversion factors (which might be in part influenced by the overall capabilities people have) in order to determine the appropriate distribution of emissions. This including of conversion factors does not imply that it is no longer an isolationist distribution, but rather (just like the IS-S) that it is a more refined form of isolationism.

In the next section I briefly discuss the potential role of personal responsibility, but before doing so let us quickly take stock of the more refined version of the IS-E\* equal-per-capita distribution of emission-rights. Following Robeyns (2017a) I tried to show how we can incorporate people's conversion factors to more fairly allocate emission-rights. People with advantageous conversion factors, those who can easily realize capabilities without having to emit much, are obliged to let those who have less advantageous conversion rates have more emission-rights. Those who, for example, need to burn fossil fuels to stay warm in winter should be allowed to do so. Those who can live with fewer emissions must do so to allow those with worse conversion factors to realize the same capabilities. Thus, an able-bodied city-dweller who can take public transport should do so, to allow those living in rural areas to drive.



The distributional rule I advocate is not captured by the four-fold distinction introduced in chapter 2. It, however, can best be considered isolationist in the same sense that IS-S is also isolationist. It might not be ‘pure’, in the sense that it only focuses on the distribution of emission in complete isolation from any other possible considerations. Just as with IS-S we consider conversion factors as morally relevant. With IS-S it was because the emissions were necessary (but not sufficient) to live a dignified life; here we focus on conversion factors to ensure that no one faces an undue burden. This still, however makes it an isolationist, as opposed to integrationist distribution since it still attempts to bracket off climate change from other considerations of justice.

#### **5.4. Incorporating responsibility**

In the previous section, we incorporated the first element of Robeyn’s (2017a) distributive principle. One can receive more emission-rights if one’s conversion rate is unfavorable, however, in the second element she, however, clarifies that this is only if “*this need for additional natural resources is something for which they cannot be held accountable*” (p.6). It is not immediately obvious why a notion of responsibility would be necessary for an account of the just distribution of emission-rights.

Most debates around personal responsibility and climate change would for the most part be exhausted by the above framework. Mrs. Lavish would, for example, not be entitled to the emission rights to fly to her far-off holiday if a more local destination will realize the same capabilities (see: Robeyns, 2021). This is because someone else’s claim on emission-rights seems to be more morally relevant, such as a devout Muslim partaking in the Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca). Mrs. Lavish does not require the emission rights to realize her capability (e.g., being well-rested) while

a devout Muslim can be said to have a more disadvantageous conversion rate. The Muslim requires more emission-rights to realize her religious capabilities (e.g., being spiritually fulfilled), so Ms. Lavish will have to make the kind of cut-backs that we usually associate with the ‘personal responsibility’ questions that people associate with climate change.

However, Robeyns (2017a) here seems to be speaking of accountability for one's *dependence* on more resources. That is to say, one conversion factor(s). What form might such responsibility for one's conversion factor look like? To give us an idea of what this might mean let us turn to a concrete example in Australia:

In part, due to climate change, Australia has seen increased heat waves. This increases the need for cooling, which is largely powered by burning coal and thus these heatwaves are exacerbating climate change. Even without any climate policy, such as a carbon tax, poor Australians have much difficulty during the hot season (Schetzer, 2021). Especially indigenous communities struggle to keep cool due to badly insulated housing and campers, bad infrastructure, and high electricity prices (Allam et al., 2019).

It seems reasonable to say that a person living in a hot area requires more emission-rights since they need them to stay cool. Someone living in a more temperate part of the country, or a better-insulated house simply does not require as much energy (thus emission-rights) as some of these poor or indigenous communities.

However, not all claims for more emission-rights for cooling seem legitimate. For example, wealthy Australians in Sydney prefer painting their roofs black, since a black roof used to be a status symbol in settler time (BBC World Service, 2021). Since black roofs absorb more sunlight, this heats their homes and the

surrounding area, which leads to higher demand for cooling, and thus a higher use of emission-rights.

The resident of a black-roofed house requires more emission-rights to realize the same functioning as someone in a more temperate climate or a white roof. However, *prima facie* the reason for this conversion rate seems to be something they can be held accountable for. While it seems quite clear that the indigenous residents, living in badly insulated trailers and badly insulated homes seem entitled to more emission rights (since their conversion rates are disadvantageous), it seems that intuitively we should not be obliged to compensate the black-roofed residents.

The analytic resources of the Capability Approach, have a hard time capturing this intuition. The CA can capture different levels of dependence on a resource. However, what the CA lacks is a way of distinguishing if this dependence is morally relevant (Pierik & Robeyns, 2007; Sen, 1995, pp. 73—85; 148—150). So, the framework of the CA can tell us that both the indigenous communities, as well as the wealthy Sydneyites, have disadvantageous conversion factors and that both would require more emission rights than someone in a more temperate climate. The CA, however, lacks the analytic tools to tell us if this dependence is morally relevant.

I here do not propose one singular or correct understanding of a standard of how to demarcate morally relevant, from irrelevant forms of conversion factors. There are many conceptions of moral accountability and luck in philosophy. We could try to demarcate clear lines between the kind of conversion factors for which we hold people responsible, and those for which we think people should not be held responsible (see: Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018). To do this in sufficient detail would, however, would make the purview of this writing too large. Moreover, we might argue that such considerations are best left to forms of public deliberation.

Here I only briefly outline some of the considerations we might want to take into account if we consider the place for 'accountability' in our normative thinking about conversion factors.

To illustrate the possible considerations let us examine the example of rural versus urban emissions. As noted above, people in rural areas must emit more to realize some of the same functionings as people in cities (Glaeser & Kahn, 2010; Theine et al., 2022). They can be said to have disadvantageous conversion factors and they would be *prima facie* be compensated. Now, moreover, it is often assumed that one's birthplace is something that is morally arbitrary (Caney, 2005, p. 122). One should not be disadvantaged because of the place one is born in, thus rural peoples' conversion factors should be considered, and they thus should be compensated with emission-rights.

Now, a city dweller might think differently about this issue. She might argue that she should not have to make cutbacks in her life, in order to allow the rural population to be compensated. In her eyes being born in a rural area might be not something for which one could hold anyone accountable. However, once one grown-up one's place of residence becomes a choice<sup>59</sup>. Since the rural person has the real possibility of moving to the city, there is no longer any duty to compensate. The rural person, at least according to the urbanite, should be held accountable for her extra demand on emission-rights.

Thus, the main question we need to ask is how a person's claim of having disadvantageous conversion factors compares against comparable claims of those who would need to give some of their emission-rights to compensate that person. There are of course

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<sup>59</sup> For example, Ayer (1972) emphasizes the possibility of acting otherwise as the grounds for holding people responsible.

many questions we can here ask in addition. For example, requiring the rural person to move into the city would not deprive her of certain space-based capabilities such as ‘feeling at home’ (c.f. Robeyns, 2020)<sup>60</sup>.

I will not attempt to adjudicate which reasoning here should win out. Rather I simply wish to point out that a democratic society must take some stance on if and how it distinguishes morally relevant, from irrelevant conversion factors.

### 5.5. Summary

Thus, the distribution for which I argue is a modification of the equal-per-capita view (IS-E) which incorporates peoples’ dependence on emitting greenhouse gases. The distribution would ensure that there would be no undue burdens born by people. It would imply losses for people with emission-intensive lifestyles — a frequent flyer would be entitled to far less flying than before<sup>61</sup>. This loss might be justified and an inevitable cost of meeting the sustainability conditions of the society. What, the approach, however, does is that it ensures that no one experiences an *unduly* loss in capabilities. Those who (though no fault of their own) are more dependent on emissions should not face a loss because of this fact.

Let us quickly take stock of the chapter. People can be said to have a conversion rate, which is given by a variety of conversion factors. These conversion rates show how well people can realize capabilities with a given amount of emission-rights. If a person has the real freedom to be mobile without using many emissions she would have a beneficial conversion rate, but there could be

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<sup>60</sup> It seems clear that if a person were forcibly moved this would be a gross injustice and deprive her of many capabilities, while the freedom to migrate can be seen as a vital capability (Assaduzzaman et al., 2020). It is however, unclear what these considerations imply that we must substitute someone staying in the place they grew up.

<sup>61</sup> This person could be said to have had more capabilities to begin with, and now through being able to fly less would have lost at least some of his capabilities.

many reasons (e.g., living in a rural area, or a badly insulated house) that would make it harder to convert emission rates into capabilities.

To ensure then, that no one experiences an undue loss in capabilities we need to incorporate people's conversion factors into the distribution of equal emission-rights. Thus, the distribution of emission rights would need to be mediated a person's conversion rate so that no person has fewer capabilities due to their emission rate.

I then lastly, following Robeyns (2017a) considered the role of personal responsibility. I showed that we could attempt (if we chose to do so) to distinguish between to distinguish between conversion factors that we should consider in our calculus or those for which a person should be held responsible for.

The isolationist distribution I advocated for dodges many of the problems of political feasibility outlined in chapter 3 and reaps the benefits of IS-E\* outlined in chapter 4 — thus it seems to be a fine distribution that allows for both a broad consensus amongst parties that disagree with each other. In other words, it navigates the difficult tension between justice and political feasibility that climate change mitigation faces in nations marred by deep inequalities.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Overview

This concludes the argument of this writing. I asked how an unequal society can fairly and feasibly share the burdens of limiting its emissions. I argued that other standard approaches in the literature do not seem to be politically feasible. They are either too minimalist and are indifferent to excessive inequalities, or they are too maximalist and thus make climate action contingent on reaching ambitious political goals. The answer I advocated for is a kind of compromised middle way. I advocate (provided all have reached IN-S) emissions-rights should be distributed via a heavily modified version of the equal-per-capita (IS-E) view that is sensitive to people's conversion rates for emissions<sup>62</sup>. In this distribution every person is entitled to the emission-rights so that her loss (or gain) in capabilities is not due to her relative ability to convert emissions into capabilities. Thus, assuming one cannot be held responsible for given conversion factors, one should not be unduly disadvantaged. This I argue constitutes a fair distribution of climate burdens in an otherwise unequal society.

In this conclusion I will quickly summarize the different chapters and the argument as a whole. Then I quickly want to highlight some of the limitations of the chosen approach, and future avenues for this kind of research.

### 6.2. Summary

In this thesis, I asked the question, of how wealthy and unequal nations should distribute the burdens of climate change internally in a fair but feasible manner. The answer I provided in the last

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chapter was a modified version of the equal-per-capita view. I argued that everyone should prima facie be entitled to the same emission rights as everyone else, but that those who can easily realize the same quality of life while using fewer emission-rights must be obligated to do so. This view could moreover be modified with a responsibility proviso that only some inequalities in the dependence on emitting activities are compensated.

In the second chapter, I addressed the question posed by two competing camps: isolationists, and integrationists. Isolationists attempt to bracket off climate change and distribute its parts of the available carbon budget (i.e., emission-rights) without considering background inequalities. Integrationists argue that theories of justice should not be applied to singular dimensions of people's lives. Rather we should think in terms of currencies of justice, such as capabilities or functionings, and distribute emission-rights to reach some preferred distribution of, say, capabilities. I showed how both integrationism, and isolationism can be understood to have two versions. One focused on equality and one on sufficiency. This would then give us four possible distributions:

	Sufficientarian	Egalitarian
Isolationists	Isolationist-Sufficientarian/IS-S	Isolationist-Egalitarian/IS-E
Integrationist	Integrationist-Sufficientarian/IN-S	Integrationist-Egalitarian/IN-E

I defended and outlined Simon Caney's (2012) argument against isolationism. Prima facie, isolationism is the wrong way to go about approaching climate change and we should be thinking about the overall distribution of resources, or capabilities — not just emission-rights. Thus, the burden is on the isolationists to show



that we would have a limited reason for embracing isolationism, rather than integrationism.

In the third chapter, I attempted to provide part of this reasoning. I argued that Caney's reasoning only extends to questions between various nations but does not seem to hold when applied to a single nation with pre-existing inequalities. I showed that both possible interpretations of integrationism faced problems when applied domestically.

I argued that the sufficientarian approach, which allows everyone enough for a decent life does not seem to suffice when applied domestically. Adapting an argument by Lukas Tank (2020) I argued that people above the sufficiency threshold would not accept losing too much if some — especially the very rich — would not equally have cutbacks in their quality of life. Thus, a sufficiency threshold does not seem to suffice for a feasible way to share the burdens of climate change domestically.

I argued that the idea integrationist-egalitarian distribution was also seemingly not politically feasible since it involves considerable risk. I argued that the dangers posed by climate change are of such a kind that we should not be willing to risk gains above a sufficiency threshold *if* they were to endanger progress on climate change. Thus, both versions of integrationism, are problematic to the extent that they limit the political feasibility of lowering a country's emissions. The sufficientarian version is too accepting of inequalities, while the egalitarian version is not conducive to less maximalist compromises.

The first chapter eliminated the two possible isolationists approaches, and the third chapter eliminated the two possible integrationist approaches from consideration. Thus, there seemingly is no good candidate for a fair distribution in the face of climate change. To find one, in the fourth chapter, I employed

a thought experiment of an unequal island trying to distribute its limited supply of wood. I then went through the four distributive principles. None of them seemed to be well suited for the islander's purpose. The only promising candidate seems to be the equal-wood-per-capita view or IS-E. However, the problem with it is that it is completely insensitive to people's varying dependence on wood — their conversion rates. I argued that if we had a distribution of wood, where everyone's conversion rate was equal this distribution - IS-E\* - would be an incredibly strong candidate for the islanders. I argued that those who think that the island was already just would want to advocate for no other distribution, other than IS-E\*. Those, who thought the island should be more equal would be happy about IS-E\* since it would be equality-enhancing, and even though it might fall short of bringing the island to some ideal distribution it would be a step in the right direction.

In the last step of the argument, in chapter 5, I then asked how we could operationalize and translate IS-E\*. Assuming that every person has the same conversion rate and is thus equally dependent on emitting is an unreasonable assumption to make. I outlined how a conversion rate comes about. I then showed that we can use the conversion rate to ensure that no one is unduly lacking emission-rights. Those, who are dependent on emission-rights should be entitled to some of the emission-rights of the people who can realize capabilities while using fewer emissions. I last noted that (following Robeyns 2017a) we could incorporate a notion of responsibility. This would allow us to differentiate between those conversion factors that we are responsible for and those for which we cannot be held responsible for.

The distribution for which I have advocated would ensure that the burdens of climate change are equally distributed within a political community. All citizens would be entitled to the same

beings and doings, derived from emitting greenhouse gases (provided they cannot be held responsible for this need). Thus no one would be unduly burdened by the need to prevent climate change.

### **6.3. Limitations and Open Questions**

Given the complexity of climate change and the relative lack of literature on domestic climate justice, the present argument cannot capture all possible questions we might want to ask. I here only, highlight three of the most important limitations of the argument and suggest future research avenues.

The most obvious limitation of the argument provided here is that the account provided only looks at how to distribute a fixed stock of the carbon budget. The Easter Island thought experiment in chapter three presumed a fixed yearly stock of wood that would need to be distributed. The goal of climate mitigation, however, is not merely to fairly distribute a given finite resource, but how to become independent of that resource altogether. Especially when it comes to domestic climate policy, we must ask how to uncouple human well-being from the use of fossil fuels. Any account a domestic climate justice is incomplete without this.

There seem strong grounds to assume that the Capability Approach is well-suited to address more complex issues of climate mitigation policy. In the last chapter, I suggested that altering conversion factors (e.g., building bike infrastructure, retrofitting houses, etc.) seems to be the best way to conceptualize this decoupling. Yet, far more comprehensive research would be required to flesh this out in detail. This would not only allow us to say more about ensuring high well-being. We could then also construct a more comprehensive view of how burdens should be shared, not just now, but between now and the time when we have become independent from fossil fuels.

The second limitation concerns the actual applicability of the theory. Despite the focus on political feasibility as a vital consideration, many aspects of this argument are somewhat removed from the everyday reality of climate mitigation in wealthy nations. The focus on distributing emission-rights and the abstract nature of the discussion limit the action-guiding potential of this research. Allocating abstract resources such as emission-rights can be thought of as a “pre-institutional” ideal (c.f. Robeyns, 2021). That is to say, we should try to conform to this ideal, and possibly get as close as possible to it, but this does not per se come with any clear guidance as to who should implement it — we have not identified a clear duty-bearer. Nor does the pre-institutional ideal tell us how we can implement and translate the ideal into, say, governmental policy.

Policymakers do not give out emission-rights, on the domestic scale. There are a few who think that the government should handle our personal carbon allowances (Fawcett, 2010; Fuso Nerini et al., 2021). Though we might imagine certain policies that can mimic the effects of giving a person X-amounts of emission rights. For example, frequent flyer taxes would ensure that it becomes harder for the wealthy to fly as much as they wish without unduly hurting the poor. This of course falls short of the fine-grain ideal laid out here, but no real-world policy can ever be perfect.

Most importantly, we might want to investigate the role of carbon taxes. A high price on carbon, coupled with a generous rebate system that prioritizes those with low(er) income and those who, through no fault of their own, require more emissions to realize the same capabilities (e.g., people in rural areas). Such a scheme would most likely fall short of the ideal laid out in chapter 5, but it could be sufficiently close enough to be worth advocating for. Such a progressive carbon tax could have enough of an equality-enhancing effect and would not unduly burden people so

that it could be a politically feasible way to do climate policy in an age of historic inequality. These possibilities would need to be investigated in far greater detail.

The last limitation I want to highlight here is a limitation I already remarked on in chapter 3, it however bears reiterating. The dismissal of mainstream distributive principles, such as sufficientarian distributions (IS/N-S) or an ideal egalitarian distribution of capabilities (IN-E), rests on the assumption that they are not politically feasible. If this assumption holds it seems that the modified version of IS-E I have argued for is the most preferable. However, it might well be the political circumstances, in a given country are more conducive to other distributions. This might take the form of one of the discussed (e.g., IN-S) however, it could also come in all kinds of different forms. Most importantly, this political feasibility, will not just depend on the resulting distribution but also depend on the policy tool which is used<sup>63</sup>.

Thus, philosophizing itself is unable to guide the way to a just pathway towards a sustainable world Yet I hope to have shown that it can help in ever so slightly illuminating what justice can mean for those that fight for climate justice in the rich world.

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<sup>63</sup> Mildenerger et al., (2022) for example found that carbon taxes are perceived negatively. This, most notably is true even if people receive more money back in the form of rebates, than they lose due to the tax. Thus, despite people having more money at the end they still perceive the policy as negatively impacting their life.

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