

# Climate Change, Catastrophe, and the Circumstances of Justice

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## Abstract

In this paper, I present a theoretical framework that gives central place to catastrophe in thinking about what principles and policies ought to guide public action with respect to climate change. I begin with the claim that individuals of all generations share a rational interest in preserving the “the condition of moderate scarcity,” understanding it to be essential to the possibility of reasonably just social cooperation and political order. I define the enduring absence of this condition as a political catastrophe. From this, I argue for the first imperative of intergenerational justice, which stipulates that each generation should take all reasonable measures to insure future ones from scientifically plausible, reasonably likely risks of political catastrophe. Chief among these risks, I claim, is climate change. I thus propose a program of climate action that requires current generations to insure against politically catastrophic climate change via immediate mitigation and adaptation efforts; and to establish a compensatory insurance scheme to assist states in the event of climate-change related losses. Of course, this proposal, as well as the first imperative in general, suggests several potential objections, which I attempt to head off in the final part of the paper.