Introductory Note

Recent developments in climate policy have done little to suggest that the world is acting quickly enough to avoid a dangerous rise in global temperatures. Despite some important steps in national policy-making—including the commencement of Australia's carbon pricing mechanism and the piloting of subnational emissions trading in China—the polarized nature of the climate debate in the United States continues to obstruct progress. Moreover, a substantial gap remains between the current policies of various countries and the level of mitigation needed to stay within the internationally agreed limit of a 2 degrees Celsius rise in global temperature. To some observers, the United Nations climate change conference in Durban in 2011 offered hope for a long-term agreement that would be more inclusive than the Kyoto Protocol by securing the participation of major developing countries, such as India and China (which do not having binding mitigation commitments under the protocol), as well as developed countries, such as the United States (which failed to ratify the protocol). Yet, as it becomes increasingly clear that global emissions will need to peak within the next few years if we are to stem global warming, a dramatic change in short-term policies is also required.

In situations where urgent action is needed, it is often tempting to let considerations of fairness fall by the wayside. Yet, as the three contributions to this special section show, a fair approach to governing global efforts to address climate change remains crucial. As we observe with Seumas Miller in our coauthored article, only an agreement that both developed and developing countries perceive to be fair will stand any chance of keeping global temperature rise at a safe level. We argue that an inclusive and fair approach to sharing national efforts remains within reach, and we outline elements of a principled bargain. But as Steve Vanderheiden argues in his separate article, the realization of this principled approach requires the United States to exercise bold leadership in international climate politics, and he goes on to suggest the strategic means through which this leadership may be

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coaxed. Ensuring fairness in adapting to the increasingly apparent impacts of climate change is also vital. David Schlosberg's contribution emphasizes how an approach informed by the capabilities that humans need to function is necessary for advancing justice in local adaptation initiatives.

The three articles in this section arose out of recent collaborative work initiated by the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, an Australian Research Council Special Research Centre. A focal point for this collaboration was the international workshop "Designing Just Institutions for Global Climate Governance," held in Canberra in June 2011, which brought together researchers and practitioners working across government and civil society in order to strengthen dialogue between climate ethics and climate policy. A key perspective informing the workshop and the contributions to this section—and indeed one that is reflected in the aims of this journal—is that scholarship in ethics can and should do more than play an oppositional and critical role, which in some cases may entrench existing disagreements or fail to engage with the circumstances in which policy-making operates. Rather, ethical research also has an important constructive role in identifying fair and feasible ways of resolving those disagreements.

—Jonathan Pickering and Steve Vanderheiden

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