



Ethics and Climate Change: The Greenhouse Effect

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Faced with the prospect of global warming, the anticipated rapid rise in global air temperatures due to the release of gases into the atmosphere, we have two choices of how to respond: adaptation or avoidance. With adaptation we keep burning fossil fuels, let global temperatures rise and make whatever changes this requires: move people from environmentally damaged areas, build sea walls, etc. With avoidance we stop warming from occurring, either by reducing our use of fossil fuels or by using technology such as carbon dioxide recovery after combustion to block the warming effect. Yet each strategy has its drawbacks — adaptation may not be able to occur fast enough to accommodate the expected temperature increases, but avoidance would be prohibitively expensive. An ethically acceptable goal must involve some mixture of adaptation and avoidance.

Written by a team of scientists, social scientists, humanists, legal and environmental scholars and corporate researchers, this book offers an ethical analysis of possible responses to the problem. Their analyses of the scientific and technological data and the ethical principles involved in determining whose interests should be considered point to a combination of adaptation and avoidance of greenhouse gas production. They offer assessments of personal, corporate, government and international responsibility and a series of recommendations to aid decision-makers in determining solutions and apportioning responsibility.



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