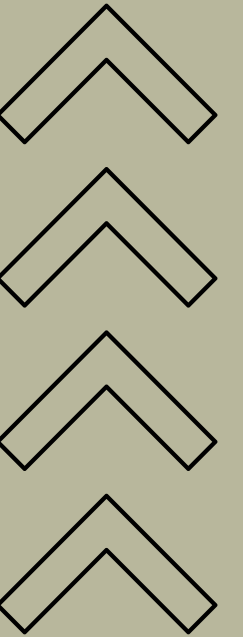


Issues in Moral Philosophy

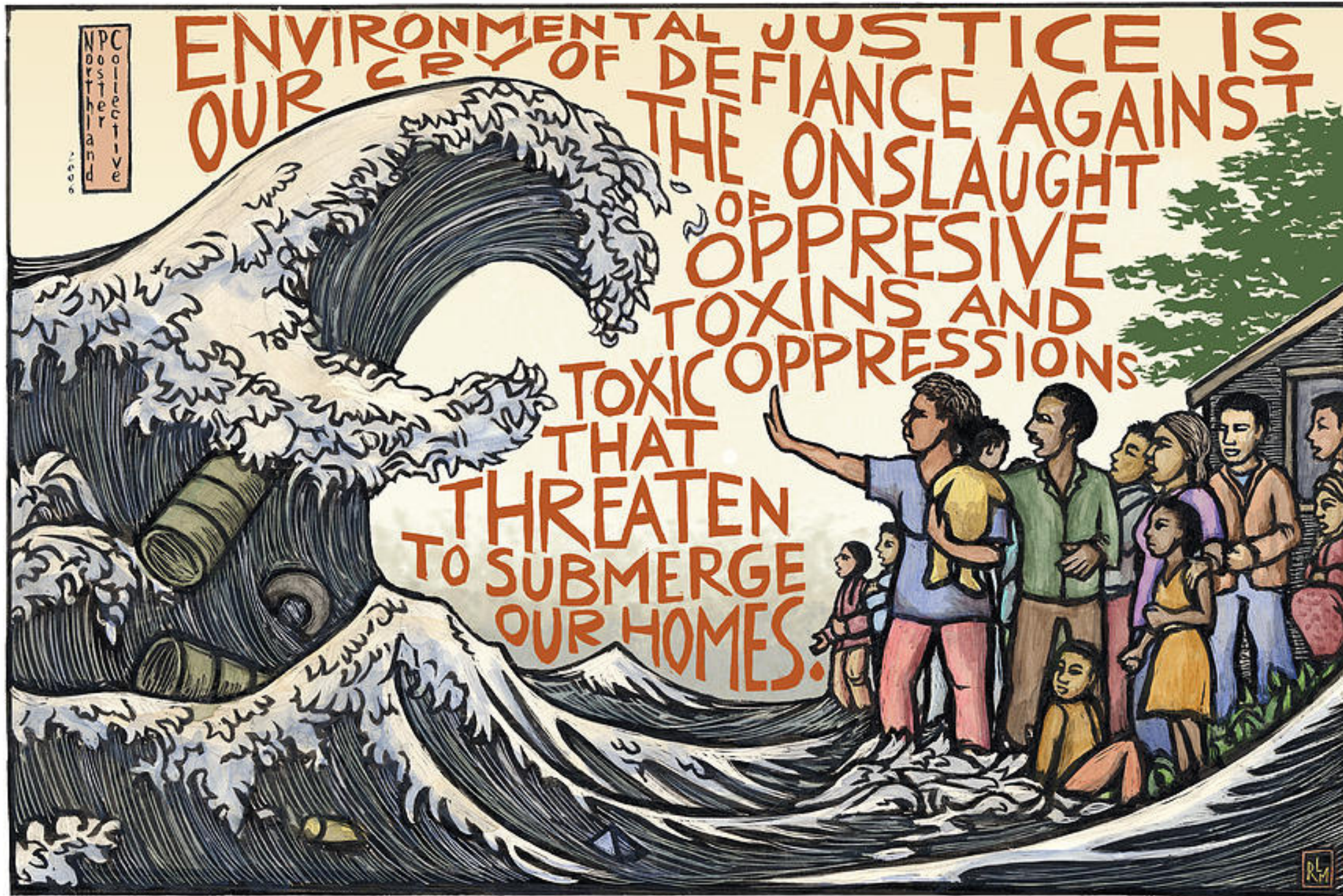
Lecture 4

Climate Justice and the Capability Approach

Dr Xintong Wei



The Impact of Climate Change



On people

- Extreme weather conditions
- Famine
- Water shortage
- War
- Poverty
- Loss of culture
- Trauma, psychological impact
- Displacement

On non-human animals and nature

- Loss of habitats
- Mass extinction
- Destruction of ecosystem

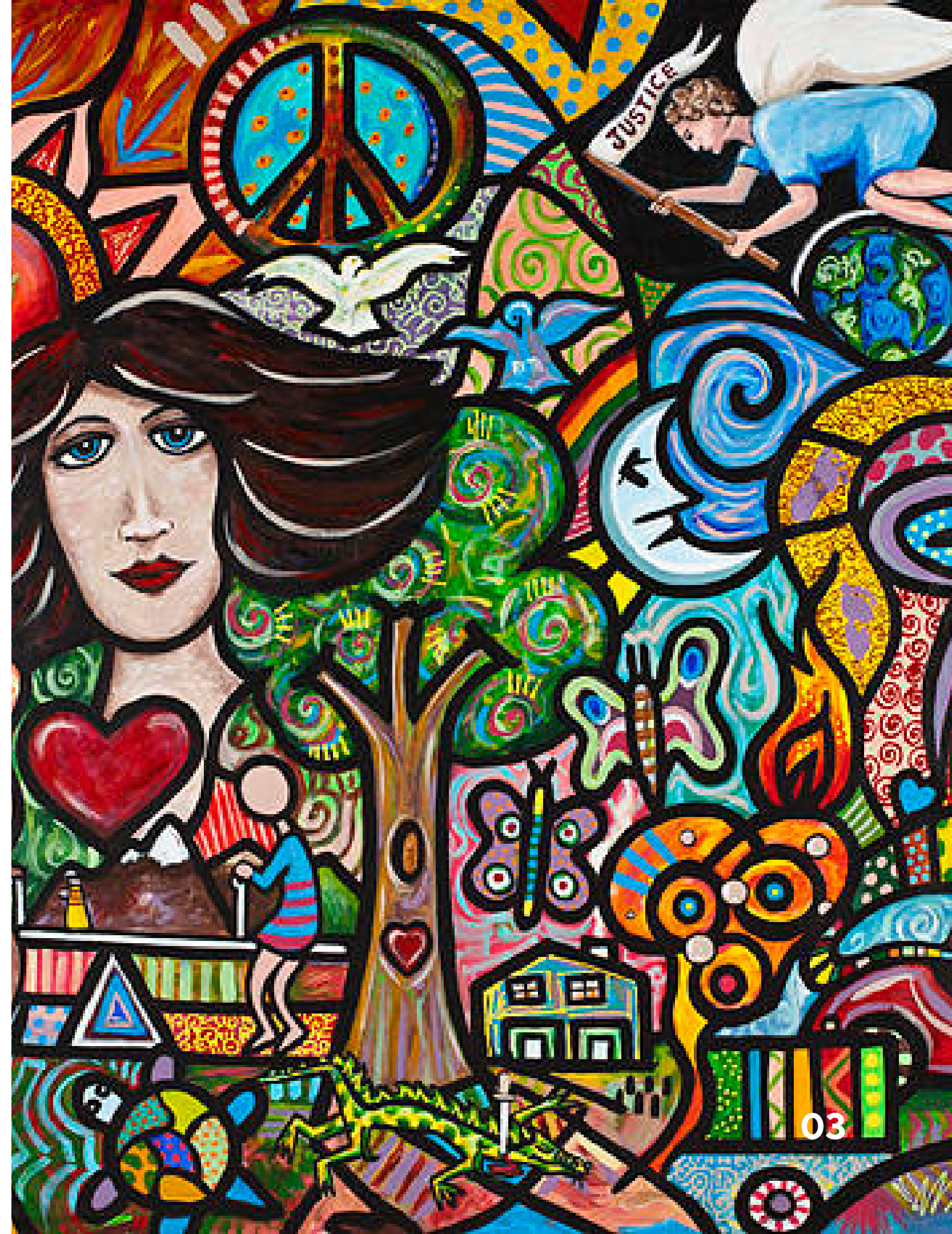
Climate, Gender, Race and Species

Climate change is about privilege

The richest 10 per cent of people in the world accounted for 52 per cent of carbon emissions from 1990 to 2015. The richest 1 per cent produced more than twice as much as the poorest half of the world. Developed countries rip the benefits of fossil fuel industries.

Climate harm is about lack of privilege

The devastating impact of climate change hurts those already disadvantaged worst of all: women, children, ethnic and racial minorities, the poor, the disabled and non-human animals.



Intersectionality

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality draws attention to the fact that social identity categories are interconnected.

Climate privilege and harm cannot be understood or addressed by considering only one social system .

We must identify the multiple factors that contribute to unique climate privilege/harm a group is subject to. Our understanding and responses will not be adequate unless we take into account of the intersectionality of climate injustice.

Any plausible theory of climate justice must reflect the impact of climate change and its intersectional nature.



Kimberle Crenshaw

Why should we care?

Basic morality!

Mill's no harm principle:

It is wrong to cause unnecessary harm and suffering to others.

Human rights:

Violation of human rights is always morally impermissible.

- Climate change causes serious harm and suffering.
- Climate change causes massive human rights violation.



What should we do?

There are three categories of actions we can take in response to the devastating harmful impact of climate change:

Mitigation

Cutting emissions and removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere

Adaptation

Building and adjusting infrastructures and institutions to help people to cope with negative impacts of climate change

Compensation

Compensating the damage done to those worst affected who suffer irreversable loss



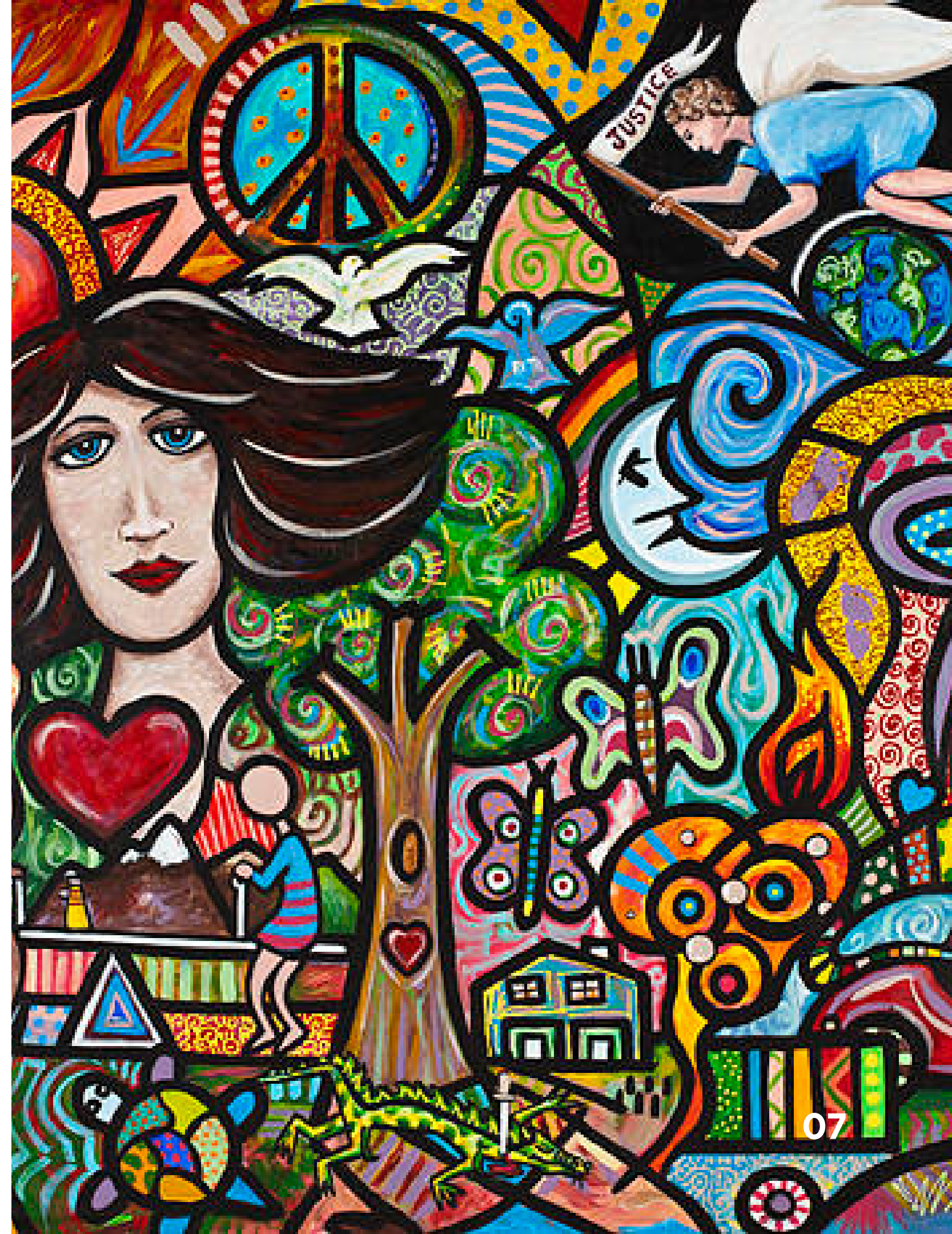
We should, however, be cautious about some proposed climate actions.

Geo-engineering and Risk

We should avoid technologies that have significant risk, e.g., solar radiation management

Reproductive Justice

Population control at the cost of violating women's reproductive rights is unjustified



But is there a moral duty to act?

None of our *individual* actions could mitigate, adapt to and compensate for the harmful consequences of climate change.

But this does not get us off the hook for we are capable of acting *collectively*.

The distinction between individual and collective action:

A collective action is an action performed by a collectivity, not the sum total of individual actions:

- Electing an official is a collective action performed by the electorate in an election.
- Playing Beethoven's 5th symphony is a collective action performed by the orchestra.

Just like there are moral principles governing individual actions, there are also moral principles governing collective actions.



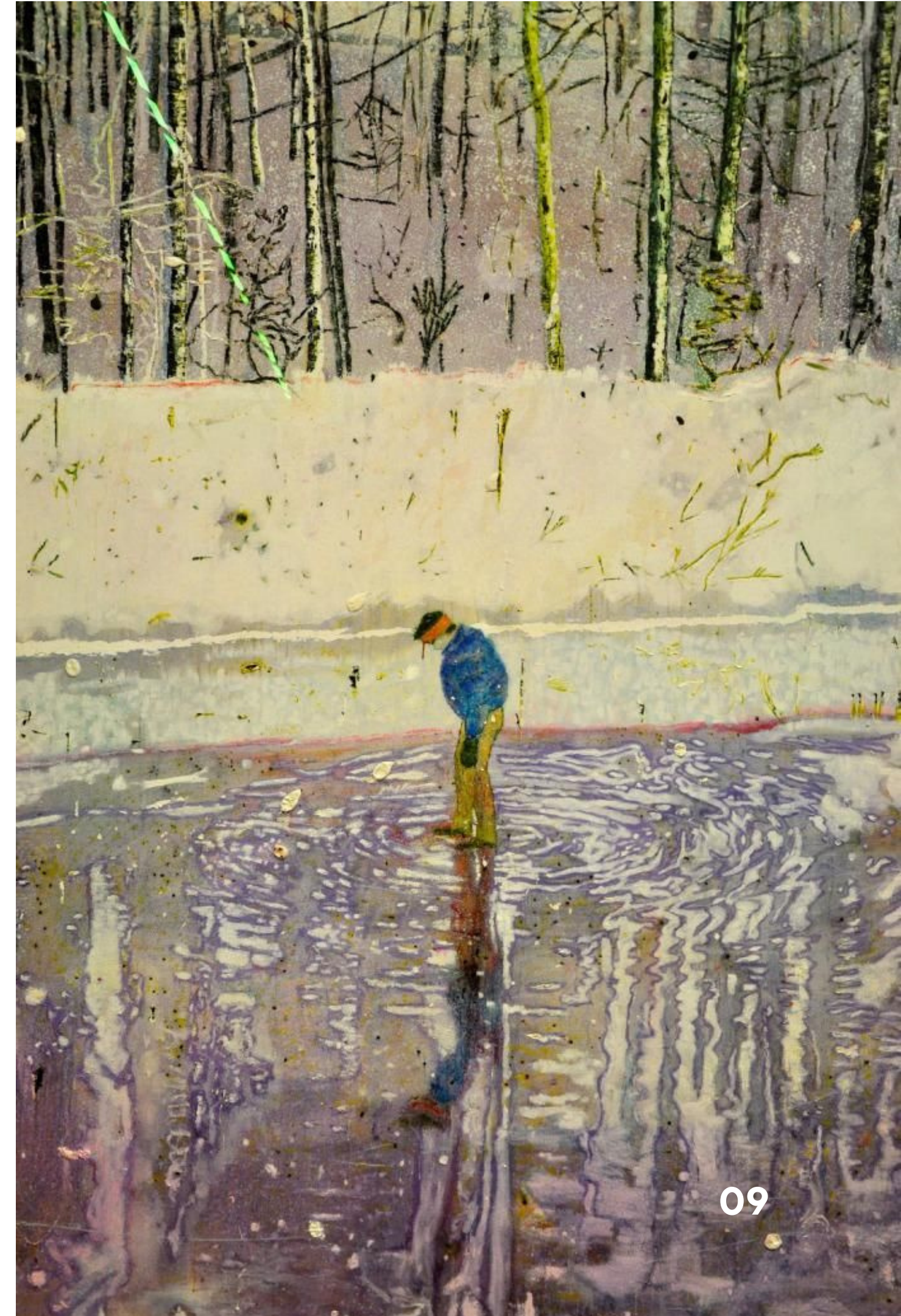
Case 1

On your way to work, you pass a pond in which a child is drowning. You could easily stop and save the child, although it would damage your clothes to do so.

In this case, you have a moral duty to save the child.

This is Peter Singer's classic case to motivate the following **principle of beneficence**:

An individual (moral agent) should prevent the serious suffering of others if she can do so at less than significant cost to herself.



Case 2

On your way to work, you and your colleague pass a pond in which a child is drowning. Neither of you can swim but there is a two-person rowing boat at the water's edge. If you both got in and rowed to the child, you would be in time to save her, although you would be late for work.

In this case, there is a collective action you could take with your colleague to save the child. You and your colleague have a moral duty to act collectively to save the child.

This motivates a **principle of collective beneficence**:

A group of human beings have a duty to prevent the serious suffering of others if they can do so at less than significant cost to each.



Uncertainty

Do we have a duty to prevent the serious suffering of others if it is uncertain whether our action will prevent the serious suffering of others or how serious the suffering will be?

- Technology invention might come to our rescue
- We do not fully understand what the carbon sinks of the world are up to. We only partially understand the effects of the oceans and the ice sheets on our climate.

Strictly speaking, climate change does not cause serious suffering but imposes a risk on future generations.

So, the principle of collective beneficence does not apply.



Response 1: The risk of harm is a harm.

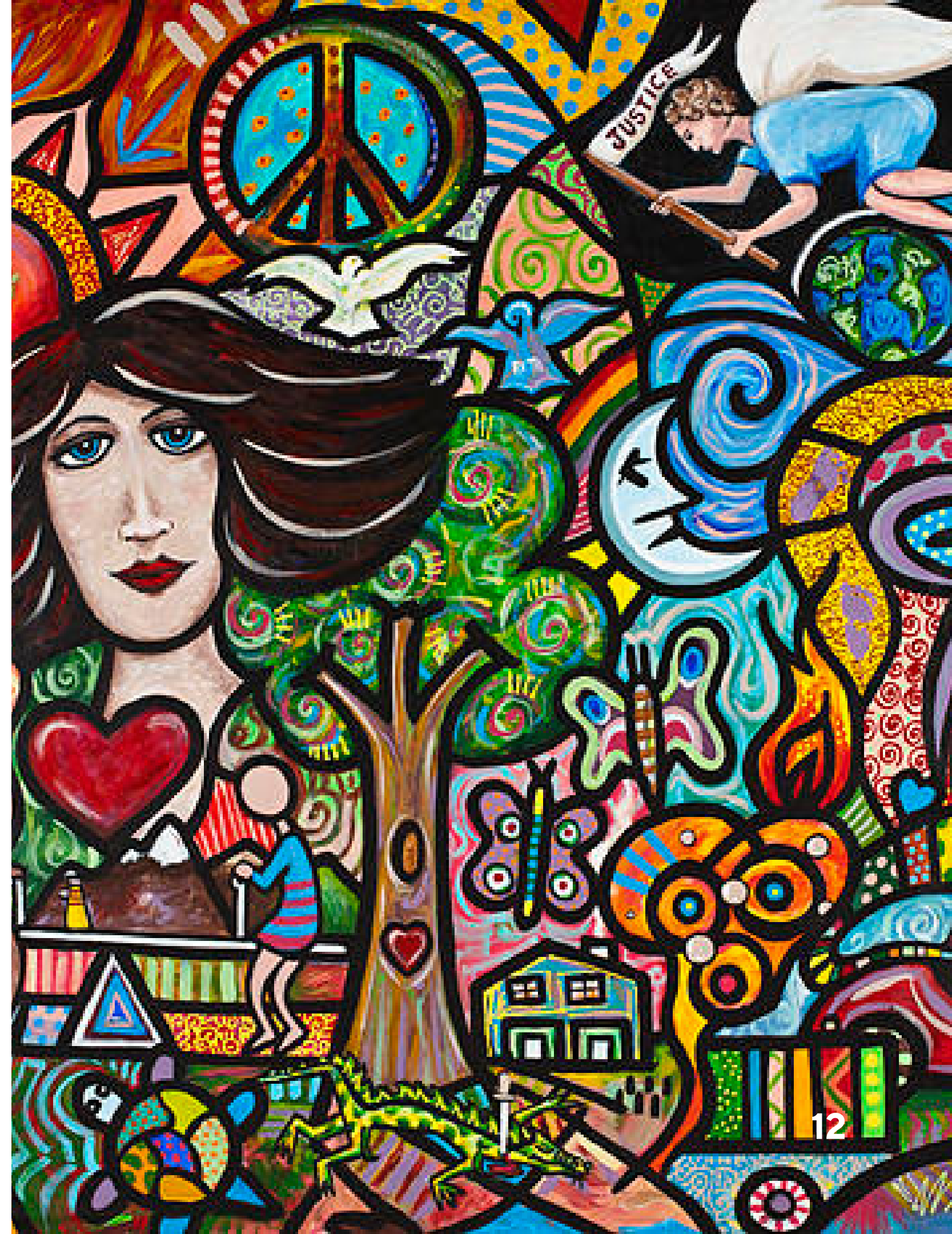
It is harmful for people to be exposed to toxic chemical waste even though they may not actually contract the diseases associated with such exposure.

It is a harm that is over and above the harm of contracting the diseases. How might we account for such harm?

- If the risk is known, it will cause further negative consequences.
- If the risk is unknown, it is still harmful because it undermines their interest to have a safe and secure environment which requires absence of exposure to serious risk outside their control.

Of course, not all risks constitute a harm. Such risks must be serious (the outcome is very bad) and significant (highly likely).

Worry: but the suffering caused by climate change is not equivalent to the suffering caused by the risk of climate change. Presumably, the former is the primary reason why we have a moral duty to act.



Response 2: Uncertainty does not matter.

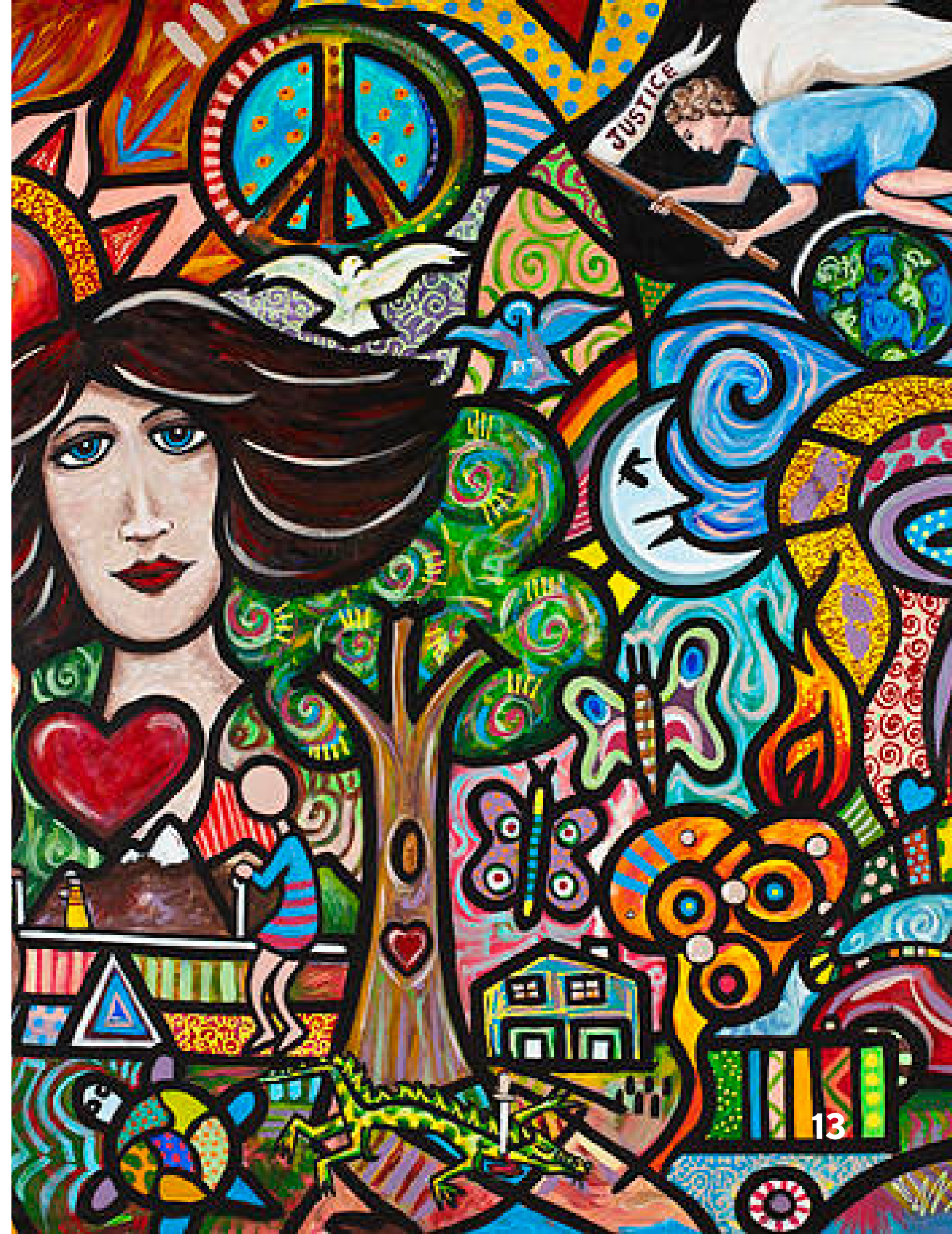
Even if we do not know anything about the impact of climate change, we still have a moral duty to act (assuming that it will cause great suffering). Furthermore, we might have an epistemic duty to educate ourselves about the impact.

When we are reasonably confident about the impact of climate change and the effectiveness of our action, there is a stronger reason to act.

Worry: But what if it turns out that climate change will not cause great suffering due to technology invention?

Response 3: Perspective principle of collective beneficence
This leads us to a revised principle with a built-in epistemic condition:

A group of human beings have a duty to prevent the **foreseeable, serious suffering of others from their epistemic perspective** if they can do so at less than significant cost to each.

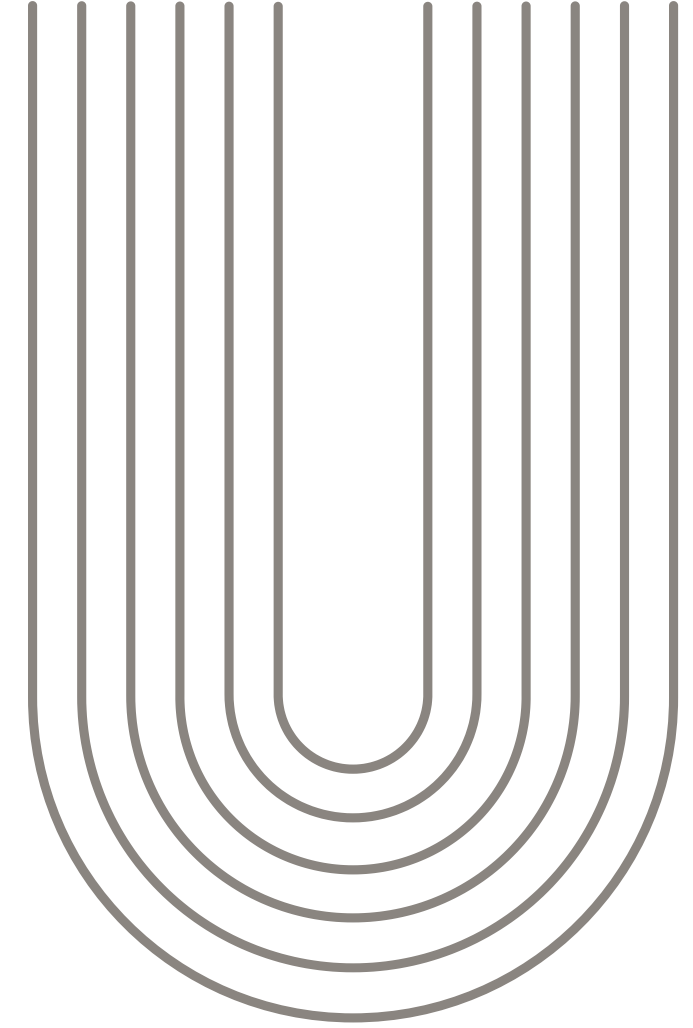


Convinced?



Discussion questions:

1. Do you think the notion of collective action make sense?
2. Can moral duty be extended to collective action?
3. What is your response to the objection against the collective duty for climate action from uncertainty?
4. We have considered the argument for a collective moral duty to act, but is there an individual moral duty to act?



Climate Justice

Since the cost of action to tackle climate change is at less than significant to each of us, it follows then, we have a moral duty to act collectively to mitigate, adapt to and compensate for the harmful impact of climate changes.

Two important questions arise:

1. How should we distribute the cost of climate actions? (The problem of distribution)
2. To what extent does justice require of us to tackle climate change? ((The problem of baseline)



Distributing the cost

Proposal 1: Carbon Egalitarianism

- It requires each state to emit only the sum of its population times the allowable per person emissions, based on a scientific agreement on an equal emissions allowance for each person on the planet.
- It requires each individual to emit no more than their carbon emission allowance and if one were to exceed their allowance, one must buy it from those with low emissions.

Problems:

- Historical responsibility
- Luxurious vs necessary emission
- Insensitive to different abilities to pay



Distributing the cost

Proposal 2: Polluters Pay

- It requires states that pollute more to bear more of the costs of climate change and greater responsibility in tackling its impacts.
- It requires individuals that emit more to bear more of the costs.

Problems:

- Historical responsibility
- Luxurious vs necessary emission
- Insensitive to different abilities to pay



Distributing the cost

Proposal 3: The Beneficiary Pay

- It requires states and individuals that have benefited more from climate change or will benefit more from tackling climate change to share greater responsibility in tackling its impacts.
- This is the case even if the able states and individuals have low carbon emissions.

Problems:

- Younger generations and states that are most affected by climate change will benefit more but it is unfair to ask them to pay more since they are the victims of climate change.
- Insensitive to different abilities to pay



Distributing the cost

Proposal 4: The Able Pay

- It requires wealthier states that have greater capacity to bear the costs to share greater responsibility in tackling its impacts.
- It requires individuals with more resources to do more
- This is the case even if the able states and individuals have low carbon emissions and will not benefit more from tackling climate change.

But justice is not just about distribution.



Beyond Distributive Justice

- There are institutional processes, structures and social relations which determine how social goods and burdens are distributed.
- Institutionalised oppression and domination often underline distributive injustice.
 - Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and exercising their capacities and to express their experiences.
 - Domination consists in institutional conditions which prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. We must shift the focus to procedural issues of participation in political decision making.
- A theory of climate justice focuses on distribution alone is inadequate. It must address procedural issues of participation in political decision making.



Iris Young
"Justice and the Politics of
Difference" (1990)

Beyond Distributive Justice

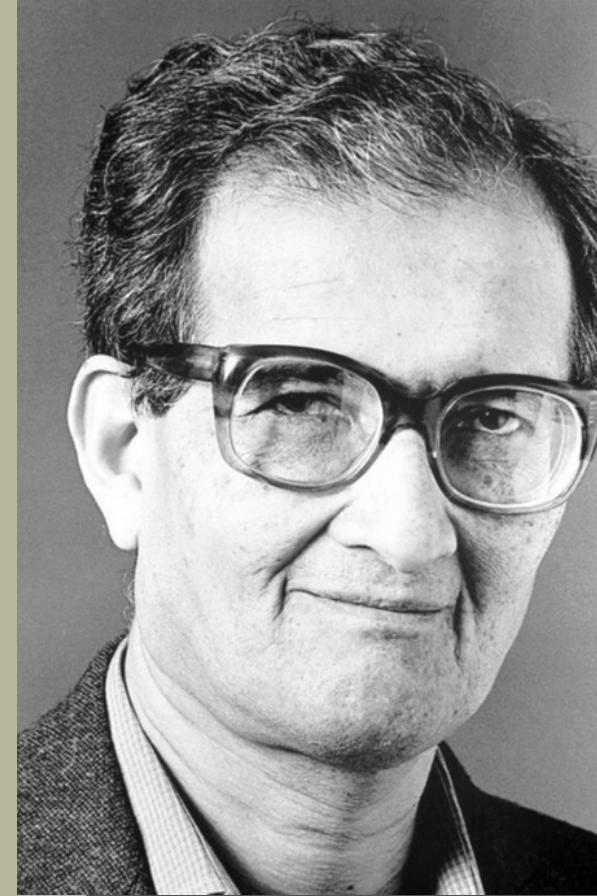
- Justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate equally in social life.
- There are economic structures that deny people the resources they need to participate equally in social life – maldistribution
- There are social/cultural structures that prevent people from interacting with equal social status – misrecognition.
- There are political structures that tell us who is included in and who excluded from the community entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition – misrepresentation.
- A theory of climate justice is inadequate if it fails to address the injustice of misrecognition and misrepresentation.



Nancy Fraser
"Reframing Justice in a
Globalizing World" (2005)

Baseline for Climate Justice

Everyone is entitled to some human capabilities necessary for a decent, flourishing human life.



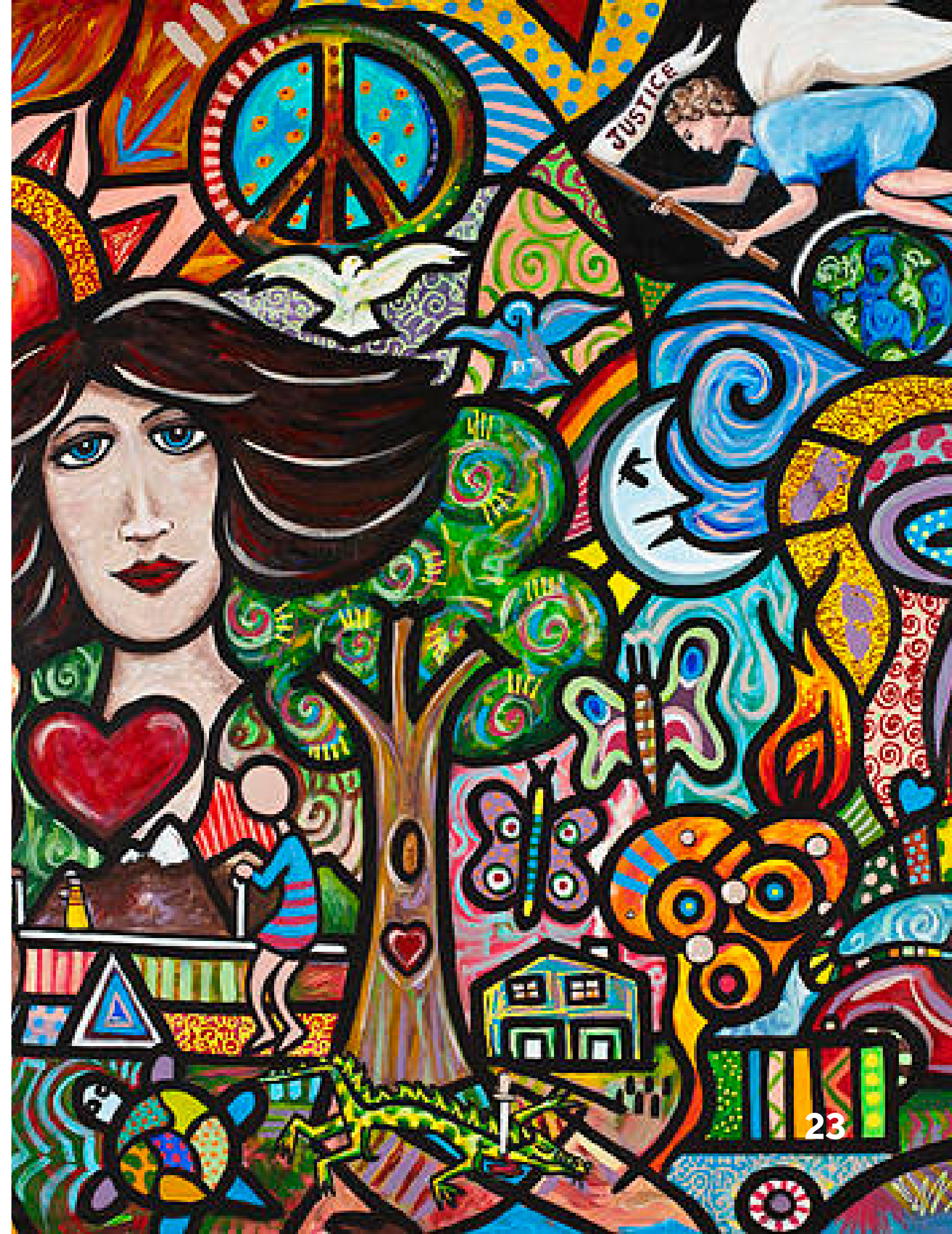
Amartya Sen originally defines capabilities as socially available opportunities (substantive freedoms) for valuable functioning and proposed them as a standard for measuring levels of development worldwide.



Martha Nussbaum developed Sen's idea by offering an explicit and wide-ranging (though not exhaustive) list of capabilities, which she offers as an account of human flourishing and a theory of social justice.

Capabilities

- Capabilities are substantive freedom to achieve functionings.
- Substantive freedom:
 - It is not a formal freedom but an effective, a real possibility to act on a choice.
 - The available choices are valuable, e.g., the 'freedom' to choose to be decapitated at dawn rather than now is not a real freedom.
 - take into account individual circumstances. What it takes to have the freedom to move around for an abled person is different from that for a disabled person.
- Functionings are states of beings and doings when a substantive freedom is achieved.
- Nussbaum identifies ten central capabilities necessary for a decent human life.
- Merits: multidimensional; flexible; focuses on individual agency; pays attention to diversity; separates and distinguishes between different aspects of what makes a human life worth living.



Capability Approach as a Theory of Justice

Individual capabilities are shaped and subject to conditions at various levels:

- Family. Partnership, household income & wealth, care responsibility.
- Local community. Social and natural environment, education, health, transport, labour market.
- National. Cultural influences, legal framework, social institutions.
- Global. International trade, migration, climate change.

As such, the Capability Approach provides a powerful theoretic framework for evaluating climate policies that affect individual capabilities at various levels.

It provides a baseline of justice that goes beyond mere distribution.

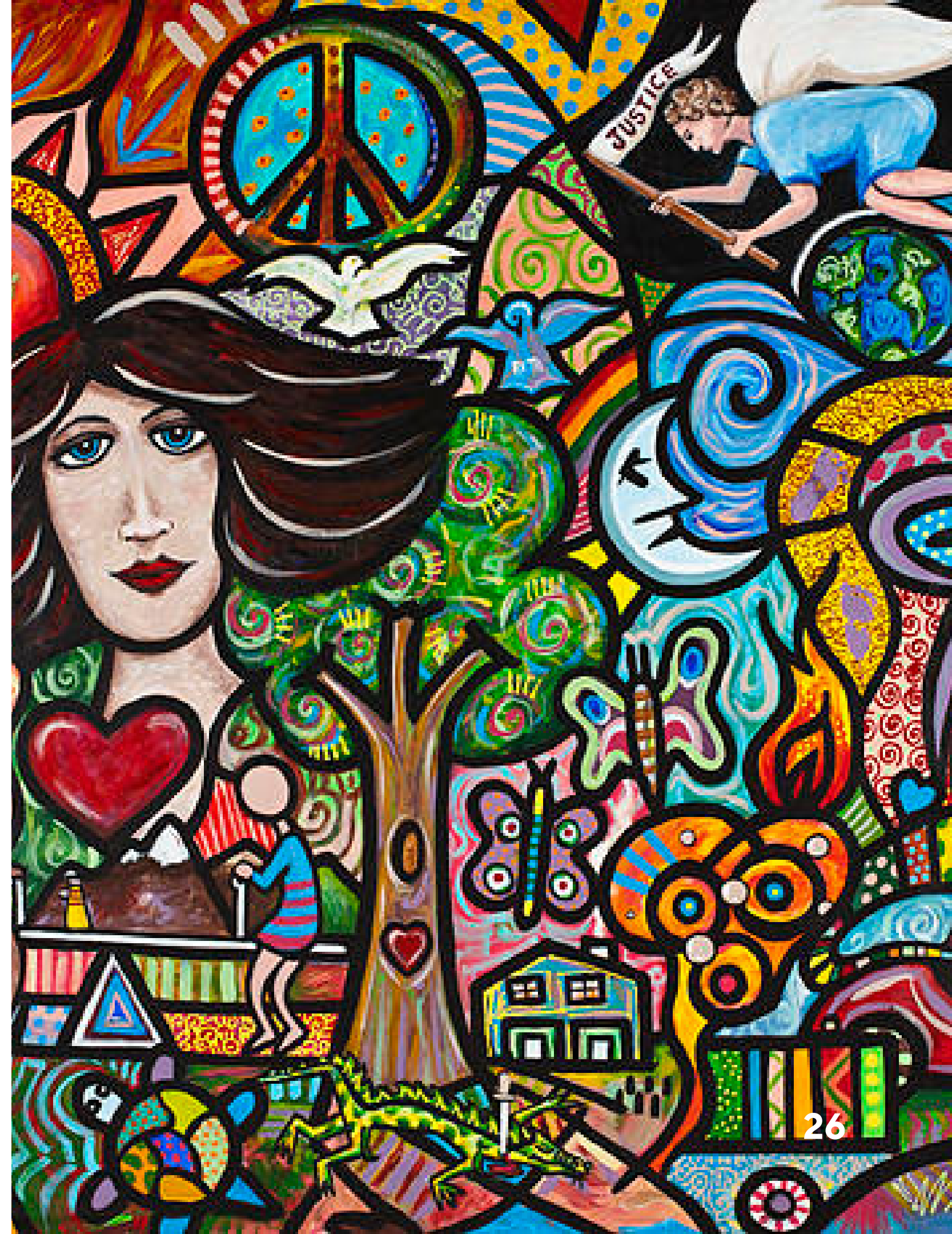


Concerns

- The Capability Approach is a framework which focuses on individual capabilities.
- However, one central concern of climate justice is that indigenous and island communities should be able preserve their territory, culture and social identity. Issues such as loss of lands, loss of local economic practices, migration and diaspora, threatens the very existence of such communities.
- The impacts of climate change on communities cannot be simply reduced to impacts on some grouping of individuals.
- On the Capability Approach, justice requires policies targeting communities only in so far as individual capabilities are shaped by communal practices. As such, it cannot fully address issues of climate justice at the community level.



- The Capability Approach is anthropocentric. On this approach, justice requires a stable and sustainable climate only because human capabilities depend on them.
- But arguably, one central concern of climate justice is the vulnerability and wellbeing of ecosystems. The capabilities of ecosystems to function matters independently of its role in serving human capabilities.
- Nussbaum (2006) extends her capability approach and argues that the capabilities of non-human animals to function well have moral significance independent of their value to human capabilities. Scholosberg (2012) suggests that the capability approach should be further extended to ecological systems such that the capacities of ecosystems to function well have moral significance independent to their value to human capabilities.



Convinced?



Discussion questions:

1. Who, in your view, should pay more for the cost of climate action?
2. Do you think other forms of justice should be as important as distributive justice?
3. What should be the baseline of climate justice? Do you think the capability approach provides a plausible and adequate baseline?