

Ethical stability: integrity principles in the Anthropocene

Liese Coulter¹

¹*Cities Research Centre, Griffith University. 170 Kessels Rd, Nathan QLD 4111*

Abstract:

Unprecedented impacts on the carbon cycle from human activity have moved Earth from the stability of the Holocene era, to the Anthropocene. The consequent climate change will be characterised by an uneven series of environmental disruptions that will not quickly lead to a new stable state of human and environmental interactions. To address these anticipated issues of environmental instability, climate change has been explicitly acknowledged as a factor in some global agreements, such as the governing processes fostered through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that aim to manage human interactions with the carbon cycle. However, intergovernmental negotiations, such as the UNFCCC COP21 agreement in Paris, are still targeted squarely at achieving stability; only disagreeing on how to set, measure, and mark the goal. Over the coming decades, on-going changes in earth systems will constantly reshape the parameters of human-environmental interactions. This will lead to continuing systems' instability that may become a defining challenge, as many species adapted to a relatively stable Holocene environment face unremitting change. This calls into question the effectiveness of global governance and integrity systems that inherently aim to achieve stability after disruptions, and enable a return to some preferred earlier state. This paper suggests that the existing and accepted humanitarian principles incorporated in the UN Millennium Development Goals, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC), can support ethical integrity in government that remains responsive to change. Responses to climate events and consequent impacts have already resulted in hasty policy and legal changes where ethical considerations were not highly prioritised. This paper articulates widely accepted and strong principles that can support ethical stability as nations are faced with unprecedented domestic stressors that will reduce their capacity to fulfil already agreed responsibilities, at home and abroad.

Keywords: adaptive governance, climate change adaptation, humanitarian, ICRC, integrity, Millennium Development Goals.

BIOGRAPHY

Liese Coulter is a specialist in climate change adaptation. Building on a Master's Degree in Science Communication from the ANU, Liese is currently completing a PhD at the Cities Research Centre, Griffith University, where she also teaches in Science, Technology and Society subjects. Previously, she was Communication Manager for the CSIRO Climate Change Adaptation Flagship, and the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF). In 2015 Liese published

"Reflecting Climate Change Impacts in Governance and Integrity System Design" in the Ashgate title, *Ethical Values and the Integrity of the Climate Change Regime*.