

Notes to Guide Reading

Week 4, Section 4: Distributing the Costs of Climate Change

Bell, “Global Climate Justice, Historic Emissions, and Excusable Ignorance” (2011)

- Be able to explain the difference between “moral responsibility” and “moral liability” for the damage of one’s emissions.
- Bell makes several starting assumptions, including (1) mitigating the effects of climate change requires global cooperation, (2) this cooperation requires a mutually-acceptable, fair system of distribution of the costs of climate change, (3) emitters of GHGs were partially “excusably ignorant” until the 1990s, (4) ignorant emitters should not be blamed or punished for emissions, (5) we are only liable to blame or punishment (v. costs/compensation) when we know our actions may cause others harm, and (6) it is possible to establish the causal contribution of emitters
 - In addition to being able to explain in detail one of these assumptions, be prepared to explain whether or not you think the assumption you choose to explain is problematic.
 - This will require you to think about why Bell would make this assumption, and who his likely target audience is.
- Considering that Bell’s central claim is that excusably ignorant emitters should be held partially liable for the effects/costs of their emissions, be prepared to answer the following:
 - What are three reasons or pieces of evidence Bell uses to support the truth of his central claim?
 - What might the warrant for his argument be? This is to say that you should be able to articulate what you think the bedrock justification is for his argument in this section—and this will require you to identify some fundamental value or idea that Bell could rest his argument on.
- Finally, referencing the components of the rhetorical situation and our working list of principles of good writing, be able to explain two characteristics of good or bad writing that you see in Bell’s article.