

Comments on Henry  
Shue's  
“A Pivotal Generation”

By  
Anja Karnein, Binghamton University (SUNY)

# Two different contexts for equity and fairness concerns

- ❖ 1. *Intergenerational* – between different generations

Henry: equity and fairness unequivocally demand action

“Easing our burdens by making theirs heavier is unfair, especially since future generations are entirely at our mercy.”

- ❖ 2. *Intragenerational* – within any given generation

Point 6 of Switzerland's *intended nationally determined contributions* starts by saying: “It is important to Switzerland that the global community shares the required efforts to combat global climate change in a fair and equitable manner.”

Point 6 ends by affirming that:

“Switzerland is committed to continue to contribute its fair share in reducing greenhouse gas emissions...”

This may be taken to suggest that Switzerland is committed to doing its fair share, but also no more.

But what if more were required given the noncompliance of some?

What if combatting climate change required having to shoulder a significantly unfair burden?

Henry's comments suggest:

given the enormous risks to future generations that runaway climate change poses,

and the possibly unique chance the current generation – the pivotal generation - has to mitigate this risk,

fairness and equity concerns *between* contemporaries, as important as they may be, have to wait or be addressed elsewhere.

In other words: We should ask **not** how *intragenerational* equity and fairness considerations limit each country's contributions but rather

how much a country ought to contribute given the *intergenerational* problem at hand, its ability to help, and the extent to which others are, in fact, contributing.

Any inequity and unfairness that may result *intragenerationally* from others not doing their fair shares should be addressed separately

What might this mean for less powerful states willing to take on more burdens? How should they approach the more powerful non-compliers?

Thank you!