

# Risky Ethics

## Week 7: Risk Offsetting

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### Overview.

We can wrong by unjustifiably imposing risk on others. One way to prevent such wrongdoing is to *offset* the risk we impose by acting to reduce the total risk by the amount we've increased it. In the context of the risks imposed by climate change, individuals might seek to offset their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a means of avoiding wrongdoing.

Christian Barry and Garrett Cullity argue that the justifiability of sets of acts consisting of a risk-imposition and a correlative risk-reduction are more complicated than currently thought (2022). By way of highlighting several baselines against which the riskiness of a set of actions must be judged, they argue that there is a morally significant difference between methods of offsetting GHGs. Brian Berkey questions the distinction they draw between sequestering and forestalling, instead highlighting the importance of taking advantage of other's intentions to commit wrongdoing (2023).

### Christian Barry and Garrett Cullity: Sequestering and Forestalling

1. What are the *Argument from Expected Harm* and John Broome's *Offsetting Response*?
2. What is the difference between offsetting by sequestering and by forestalling?
3. What are the five framing assumptions Barry and Cullity make at the beginning of their argument (pp.357-9)?
4. What is the connection between *Boating and Extracting*, the *Standard Baseline*, and *Condition 1*?
5. What is the concern that offsetting in cases like *Boating and Extracting* might be redistributing harm? What is Barry and Cullity's response? What does *Rowing* show?
6. How does *Business Opportunity* demonstrate that *Condition 1* is insufficient for risk-imposition permissibility? How does *Condition 2* and the *Moralized Baseline* capture our intuitions in *Business Opportunity*?
7. In the discussion of *Business Opportunity*, Barry and Cullity argue that independent obligations must be discharged independent of our offsetting obligations. Why might this be the case? Is this uncontroversial?
8. How does Barry and Cullity demonstrate that *Condition 2* does not replace *Condition 1*?

9. What do *Preemptive Joyride* and *Boating and Buying Off* demonstrate? What are your intuitions about the cases?
10. Why do Barry and Cullity believe that preventing someone else from imposing a risk does not provide you with justification for your risk imposition? What is the significance of Justified Ned?
11. What do the *Attributional Baseline* and *Condition 3* mean for the permissibility of forestalling?
12. Why do we need the *Combined Baseline* and *Condition 4*?
13. Drawing upon their four conditions, Barry and Cullity develop the *Principle of Aggregate Risk Imposition* (PARI). They claim that “there are no other necessary conditions: the four we have identified are jointly sufficient, as well as individually necessary, for risk imposition permissibility” (p.369). Do you find this plausible?
14. Barry and Cullity consider the problem of double-counting offsetting for a set of actions, what is their response to it?
15. Barry and Cullity consider a spectrum problem for differentiating sequestering and forestalling forms of offsetting. What is the problem and what is their response?

### **Brian Berkey’s Response**

16. What is the alternative consideration that Berkey draws our attention to in *Boating and Buying Off*?
17. Why does Berkey consider *Boating and Two Equally Costly Offsetting Options*? What does it show us? What would PARI say about the case? Berkey admits there may still be wrongdoing in this case, just less wrongdoing. What would explain this residual wrongdoing?
18. How does it compare to *Boating and Cheaply Buying Off*? How does this support Berkey’s claim?
19. How does *Boating and Three Potential Offsetting Options* pose a problem for PARI?
20. What is the “plausible general principle” that Berkey suggests (p.520)?
21. How does Berkey arrive at the conclusion that the cost of sequestering should be treated as a baseline? What should we do with this cost?
22. What implications does Berkey’s argument have for GHG offsetting, both sequestering and forestalling?