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THE KAROO HYDRAULIC FRACTURING DEBATE: ACCOUNTING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

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Abstract

The temporal complexities of anthropogenic Global Climate Change (GCC) force us to extend our moral deliberations beyond what appear to be straightforward, contemporary issues to include the interests of future generations. The Karoo hydraulic fracturing debate is a case in point. The ethical debate thus far has focused on the present-day environmental aspects of Shell's limited exploratory drilling proposal using hydraulic fracturing technology; but the shale-gas reserves that are believed to underlie the Karoo could assist in mitigating South Africa's significant carbon emissions, the main contributor to anthropogenic GCC. Thus, I argue that the *actual* ethical debate is whether to allow gas *exploration* over the Karoo or to disallow the entire possibility of *exploiting* any gas reserves that may have been found. A consequentialist weighing up of the respective potential harms to all of the morally-considerable interests involved, including future generations, makes clear that not only is allowing exploration of the Karoo the morally *correct* decision, but it is ethically *obligatory* to do so.