

Reimagining the Role of the Public in Geoengineering Governance through Confucianism

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Abstract

In response to the Royal Society report's claim that "the acceptability of geoengineering will be determined as much by social, legal, and political issues as by scientific and technical factors", a number of authors have suggested that the key is to engage the public in geoengineering governance. In effect, some have gone further to argue that the inclusion of the public in decision-making about geoengineering *is* an ethical requirement. Yet, although engaging the public in decision-making about geoengineering comes in various forms, the discussion in geoengineering governance and the ethics of geoengineering tends to understand it as *direct* public participation and informed consent, which, in turn, are based on the liberal-democratic assumptions. However, if this understanding of public engagement is indeed based on specific liberal-democratic assumptions, then its ethical relevance could be challenged by other ethical traditions that do not share those assumptions.

This paper aims to offer one such challenge from a Confucian perspective. I argue that the liberal-democratic assumptions that ground the ethical significance of direct public participation and informed consent are foreign to the Confucian value system, and thus the ethical relevance of this form of public engagement to a Confucian society can be questioned. However, it does not entail that the public is unimportant in geoengineering governance in a Confucian society. Drawing from recent research in Confucian political philosophy, I shall reimagine the role of the public in geoengineering governance.