



My carbon / your carbon

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A characteristic approach to mitigating climate change is to calculate emissions of greenhouse gases (e.g. carbon dioxide), attribute those emissions among some Parties, and then seek agreement on limiting emissions by each Party. We thus distinguish “my carbon” from “your carbon”. “My carbon” and “your carbon” are a matter of the system boundaries selected. We have a single Earth system and we subdivide it into subsystems for the sake of accounting, or management, or responsibility. Once in the atmosphere the carbon becomes “our carbon”. In fact, both the atmosphere and the economy are now integrated on a global scale and “my carbon” is not independent of “your carbon”. Efforts to control “my carbon” may affect “your carbon” and the net effect on “our carbon” may depend on how we have chosen to subdivide the system and whether the sum of the subsystems is indeed equal to the full system. We take a systems perspective and discuss how the mitigation outcome might be impacted by the manner in which we choose to subdivide the system.