The Ethics of Global Climate Change, edited by Denis Arnold
Cambridge University Press, 2011, 354 pp., £60 hb. ISBN 9781107000698

A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change, by Stephen M. Gardiner
Oxford University Press, 2011, 512 pp., £22.99 hb, £18.99 pb. ISBN 9780195379440 hb, 9780199985142 pb,

Climate Ethics: Essential Readings, edited by Stephen M. Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson & Henry Shue
Oxford University Press, 2010, 368 pp., £64 hb, £25 pb. ISBN 9780195399622 hb, 9780195399615 pb

Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future, edited by Allen Thompson & Jeremy Bendik-Keymer
MIT Press, 2012, 336 pp., $52 hb, $27 pb. ISBN 9780262017534 hb, 9780262517652 pb

Transnational climate cooperation is often viewed through realist lenses, by reference to states' interests. However, conceiving the interests of states as 'given,' static and coherent is analytically problematic. With regard to climate change (if not always), states' 'interests' are largely influenced by a social process. Through this social process, reflections on the ethics of climate change may actively participate to the definition of states' positions and consequently to the development of transnational climate law. The literature on climate ethics has developed faster over the last few years, in particular with four recent books targeting a multidisciplinary audience.

Climate Ethics: Essential Readings is a collection of 15 articles previously published between 1983 and 2010 in diverse forums (including philosophy, economy, international relations and international law) and three original chapters. It is edited by four of the most prominent researchers in the field of climate ethics: Stephen Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson and Henry Shue. The compilation helps to disseminate existing reflections and to spur the debate. In the preface, Gardiner notes the astonishing fact that no more than 100 philosophical articles are indexed on climate change or global warming, whereas more than 1,000 are indexed on euthanasia (at p. ix). This indicates that many issues remain understudied. The lack of ethical reflection is all the more problematic when we accept the notion put forward in various of the volume's chapters that 'climate change is fundamentally an ethical issue' (Gardiner at p. 3; also Jamieson at pp. 79 and 87; Robert Goodin at p. 231).

Several chapters discuss the application of justice between generations: do we have environmental duties toward the unborn? A remarkable chapter by Derek Parfit engages with the 'identity problem'. As he notes, 'it is not true that whichever policy we choose, the same particular people will exist two centuries later' (p. 113). Parfit concludes by suggesting that something is bad 'if those who live are worse off than those who might have lived' (p. 118). Other chapters describe climate change as an issue of global justice. Shue argues that 'three common-sense principles of fairness,' relating to contribution to the problem, the ability to pay or the demand for a guaranteed minimum for everyone, 'give rise to the same conclusions

about the allocation of the costs of protecting the environment' (p. 101): 'the costs should initially be borne by the wealthy industrialized states' (p. 111). In another chapter, Shue suggests that *luxury* emissions are the main issue to be addressed (p. 200) – an idea on which Paul Baer reflects in his chapter on 'greenhouse development rights' (p. 215). The book also includes an economic analysis (Nicholas Stern) and a human-rights analysis (Simon Caney), as well as discussions on adaptation, geo-engineering and individual responsibility.

The compilation also hints at the frustration of some of the authors as a consequence of the limited influence of ethical arguments on climate politics. For example, Peter Singer calls the decision of the United States (US) not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol[1] 'particularly odious from an ethical perspective' (p. 195). Jamieson recognizes that 'a moral argument will not change the world overnight. … No one will fall over, mortally wounded, in the face of an argument' (p. 85). The concern extends further into a fear that *too* rigorous ethical demands may backfire. Thus, Jamieson adds that 'the most important force driving the backlash is not concern about the weakness of the science but the realization that slowing global warming or responding to its effects may involve large economic costs and redistributions, as well as radical revisions in lifestyle' (p. 78). Some authors may mitigate their claims out of fear of looking just too unrealistic (e.g. Singer at p. 194). Yet, it is not clear how much ethics needs to concede to psychology. Scholars from the latter discipline, among other social scientists, would certainly have to contribute to the ethical debate as well.

Gardiner's own monograph, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, does not aim to determine what ought to be. It rather focuses on the preliminary step of analyzing the ethical problem. Gardiner uses the well-known metaphor of a 'perfect storm' by reference to Sebastian Junger's book about the Andrea Gail, a ship destroyed at sea by the rare convergence of three storms.[2] In Gardiner's work, the three storms are all obstacles to our ability to behave ethically (p. 7). The first or 'global storm' relates to the global distribution of the causes and effects of climate change. The second – which Gardiner considers the most challenging – is the 'intergenerational storm': it results from our capacity to affect future generations that cannot defend their interests. Thirdly, the 'theoretical storm' reflects that 'existing theories are extremely underdeveloped in many of the relevant areas, including intergenerational ethics, international justice, scientific uncertainty, and the human relationship to animals and the rest of nature' (p. 7).

Gardiner argues that the threat of 'moral corruption' is particularly acute with regard to climate change 'because of the severe nature of some of the asymmetries of power and because those who are damaged by them – the poor, future generations, animals, and the rest of nature – are poorly placed to defend themselves against it' (p. 304). Gardiner asserts that 'if the current generation engages in buck-passing, it will welcome ways to obscure what it is doing,' for instance through 'distraction, complacency, selective attention, unreasonable doubt, delusion, pandering, hypocrisy' (p. 45). He notes that '[i]n many normal contexts, the tendency towards the corruption of discourse faces a strong challenge from the likely victims of immoral behavior. But this is not the case in the intergenerational setting' (p. 46).

Gardiner must be praised for the remarkable clarity of his presentation. Moreover, his analysis of climate change is comprehensive and often impressive, and it is an essential reading for

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[1] Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto (Japan), 11 Dec. 1997, in force 16 Feb. 2005, available at: http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php.
[2] Sebastien Junger, *The Perfect Storm* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997)

anyone interested in the international law and politics of climate change. The book is, however, resolutely oriented toward an analysis of the 'predicament … of richer nations and peoples' (p. xi) more than that of humanity as a whole. Gardiner (as well as most other contributors to the climate ethics debate) is an exponent of a historical and social debate that is often limited to Western countries. When Gardiner writes that '[a] truly catastrophic abrupt climate change … could wipe out decades, or even centuries, of economic growth' (p. 176), he speaks mostly of the West; this could apply to some emerging economics, but generally not to most of the world's poor. Yet sea-level rise, desertification and more extreme events, among other consequences of climate change, mostly strike the poor and will continue to do so.

Gardiner hardly mentions the unavoidable trade-offs between development and climate change policies. By emphasizing mitigation, he overlooks the importance of addressing the immediate needs for an international support to countries whose very existence (small island developing states) or whose very development are at risk. Gardiner arguably does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that, while those who have been piloting the ship into the storm are quite safe within the comfortable cabin, others are on the deck, at the mercy of breaking waves that could sweep them away at any time. Even in a perfect climate storm it is unlikely that the ship will sink lock, stock and barrel. This begs the question whether the climate ethics debate should not rather concentrate on throwing a life-belt to men overboard or trying to find them a place within our cabin.

Denis Arnold's edited volume on *The Ethics of Global Climate Change*, in turn, flows from a conference on 'Energy and Responsibility.' It offers 'an interdisciplinary collection of mainly normative essays written by philosophers, scientists, legal scholars, and an economist' (p. 1). While it lacks a clear common thread and contains some repetitions, it nonetheless includes a great variety of contributions on the topic, thus helping the reader to take the pulse of some aspects of the climate ethics debate, in particular with regard to emissions rights.

At the outset, a chapter by Jamieson calls for the mobilization of 'a morally motivated global citizens' movement that acts as a highly committed political interest group' to promote new moral values (p. 36). This group would accordingly 'celebrate living lightly with dignity and elegance, relying on nature's own energy, rediscovering food and the pleasures of eating, the joys of living with nature and other people, and the satisfaction of effective political activism' (p. 36). Gardiner's chapter follows in a similar tone. He highlights in particular that the moral issues raised by climate change may not only follow from the inadequacy of existing ethical theories, but also from our lack of *motivation* to act in accordance with these theories: 'we might genuinely appreciate the moral severity of the problem, and so the justifying reasons, and yet still not be motivated to act' (p. 42).

This is followed by a chapter by John Nolt on 'the domination of posterity' and by three chapters on the distribution of emissions rights. Caney, in a chapter on 'climate Change, energy rights, and equality,' argues against a theory of justice specific to emissions rights, preferring the less arbitrary approach of developing 'a theory of justice that, *inter alia*, governs the emissions of greenhouse gases' (p. 103). At odds with Caney and Darrel Moellendorf, Luc Bovens presents a 'sustained, yet qualified, moral argument in support of grandfathering emission rights on Lockean grounds' (p. 126). Discussing disparate ethical issues, the other chapters compare our obligations toward future generations with parenting (Sarah Krakoff), provide a synthesis of the science of climate change (Robert Socolow and

Mary English), call for a radical reconsideration of our ways of life (Philip Cafaro), discuss the impact of different possible climate policies on American economics (Richard Morgenstern) and highlight the importance of adaptation in climate change governance (Neil Adger and Sophie Nicholson-Cole), before returning to ethical discussions on our role vis-à-vis the nonhuman (Clare Palmer) – all of this in a rather desultory way. In the conclusion, Shue calls for international, intergenerational and immediate rights-protecting institutions that would implement to 'do no harm' principle and be guided by fairness. He further insists that such actions must be immediate, as this is the only way to avoid the 'cruel dilemma': 'as time goes by, we are liable to be told … that we must choose between the "present poor" and the "future poor"' (p. 312).

Lastly, Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer's edited volume on *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change* aims at applying environmental virtue ethics to climate change. The editors suggest a 'humanist view of adaptation' consisting in 'adjusting our conception of who we are to appropriately fit the new global context' (p. 7). A central contribution by Jamieson submits that 'unless we develop new values and conceptions of responsibility, we will have enormous difficulty in motivating people to respond to this problem' (p. 197). On this basis, several contributions in the book seek to identify individual virtues that would be necessary for human flourishing. For instance, Thompson discusses the 'virtue of responsibility' in the context of climate change. Yet, Thompson's references to 'human flourishing' and 'natural goodness' (p. 218) may appear to the reader as unnecessary theoretical detours in ancient philosophy whose practical consequences are all but obvious – Jamieson himself shows little enthusiasm for 'such bold metaphysical claims' (p. 198).

Gardiner's contribution, in turn, suggests that 'global environmental change threatens the moral evaluation of our own lives, as well as of our generation, our communities, our nations, and humanity itself' (p. 256). Jason Kawall calls on us to rethink greed, while Bendik-Keymer submits that the 'sixth mass extinction is caused by us' (p. 263) and results from a set of cognitive, organizational, political and economic limits (pp. 275-6). Lastly, Kenneth Chockley insists that 'institutions … seem crucial for adapting to our rapidly changing environment' (p. 281) and calls for a greater collective us to 'take … control of our institution, our values, and our future' (p. 292).

The link with climate change adaptation, even understood very broadly, is less obvious in the other contributions of the book, which engage with the ethics of environmental restoration, resulting in a somewhat unbalanced compilation. Thus, Need Hettinger discusses the pros and cons of restoration, as opposed to protection. Similarly, Keulartz and Swart discuss the ethics of the relations between humans and animals, without clearly showing how this discussion applies to climate change adaptation. The reader wonders whether restoration at the global level would fall within the ambit of mitigation or relate to geoengineering, whereas at the local level, restoration seems the antithesis of adaptation (as adaptation supposes adjustments to new circumstances). Thus, Ronald Sandler highlights that 'in the age of global warming, the ecological future is less likely to resemble the ecological past' (p. 72), which makes restoration a highly futile attempt 'to remake the world – trying (yet again) to adapt it to us, rather than us to it' (p. 77). At the very least, as Andrew Light notes, 'climatic change … will challenge [restorationists'] practice' (p. 105).

Over the last two decades – Gardiner notes in the Preface to *Essential Readings* – 'little has changed' (p. x). One theme, however, has largely disappeared from the discussion: development. In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development declared that 'the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.'[3] The word 'development' appears only in the indexes of two of the four books under review, as respectively 'development threshold' (*Essential Readings*, 1 occurrence) and 'development challenge' (*The Ethics of Global Climate Change*, 1 occurrence). Yet, one comes to wonder how climate change could convincingly be addressed as an ethical issue in isolation from increasing global inequalities, or how fundamental inequalities resulting from decades or centuries of industrial activities in the West be omitted without compromising the discussion. The omission of development in the literature on climate ethics is arguably only the symptom of a growing communication gap between the West and the Third World – a gap that is likely to hinder any ambitious transnational agreement.

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[3] Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, UN Doc. A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I), 14 Jun. 1992, available at: http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm.