

FONDAZIONE ENI ENRICO MATTEI

*A Political Philosophy of Climate
Change*

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Introduction

- Political philosophy includes ethics, but is not identical with it
- Why plunge into normative and other philosophical questions?

Introduction 2

- Because to assume a tacit agreement that more scientific evidence is enough to push people and states to take action is self-deception
- Human beings, a fortiori state institutions, hardly care for others, even less for future people if

Introduction

- this is costly in economic and mental terms (mitigation is!), and
- except they are given not just good reasons, but also emotional drivers for taking action

Introduction

- Mainstream literature ('climate ethics') mainly offers principles as to how to redress the wrongs of climate change
 - (it justifies obligations)
- Does not explore the motivations we (individuals and states) may find in ourselves for exerting justice towards the posterity

I. How to redress climate injustice 1

- (only two leading positions, abridged)
- (historical approach, retributive justice) Polluter-Pay-Principle (Kyoto)
- (pure normative, rights-based approach) the rights of future generations to life, health, subsistence in dignity shall not be harmed

I. How to redress climate injustice 2

- What does not qualify as normative principle justifying an obligation to mitigation:
 - enlightened egoism → generational nepotism, mere adaptation
 - reinterpretation of 'national interest' (energy policy towards self sufficiency)
 - Ecocentric philosophies
 - Religious foundations of ethics
 - 'thick' ethical theories
 - in the last three too many partisan assumptions required

2. Why worry about climate change 1

- (shifting to the motivational issues)
- We want to exert justice to posterity, but “what has posterity ever done for me?”
(Groucho Marx)
- What can give a meaning and a motivation to our care for future generations?

2. Why worry about climate change2

- (two plain and convergent motivations, yet independent from each other)
- I. The continuation of the transgenerational chain of caring parents (a matter of fact, not a normative) ought not to be made impossible
 - We simply need to project our nature of actual or 'permissive' parents into the future and to apply the Golden Rule against self-centred disrespect for the chain

2. Why worry about climate change 3

- II. A. (individual identity)
- we all strive not just to survive, but also to make our life meaningful
- This is hardly possible if we have to think that our actions/omissions can make the life of future others awful and meaningless

2. Why worry about climate change 4

- No identity as human beings and no authentic auto-biography without an elementary degree of solidarity and participation in the others' lot
 - 'others' in space and time, two faces of universalism

2. Why worry about climate change 5

- II B. (political or group identity)
- Also the political community (national or regional states) has its meaning and justification eroded, if it is no longer able to provide security
 - Or if its security policies (nuclear arsenals) generate even more insecurity

3. Communicating climate change: troubles 1

- Why such a gap between alarming scientific evidence and political inaction?
- Why the fear of future disasters does not compel people and states to unite and take serious, if costly action? Why the stop-and-go?

3. Communicating climate change: troubles 2

- A world government (Hobbes' Super-leviathan) not necessary, nor desirable (vs eco-authoritarianism)
- Enough would be a (irreversible and monitored) convergence of national and regional policies,
 - bringing about a degree of global governance of the problem
 - and making humankind a political actor (under common man-made lethal threats: CC and nuclear armament, the two 'global challenges')

3. Communicating climate change: troubles 3

- Exploring the gap:
- Time in physics and politics (no postponement)
- Abstract and prospective (no image, no symbol)
nature of the threat vs short-termism of
democratic policy making
 - Inability of democracy to rethink itself under global
challenges

3. Communicating climate change: troubles 4

- Reasonable fear undermined by indifference towards others (narcissism)
- Or by various denial mechanisms vs. disturbing (for our cognitive or emotional self-assurance) knowledge
- *NO CONCLUSION: philosophy unveils problems and links, does not make policy prescriptions*

Useful Literature

- *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2011
- F. Cerutti, *Two Global Challenges to Global Governance*, “Global Policy”, III,3, Sept. 2012, 314-323.
- _____, *Global Challenges for Leviathan: A Political Philosophy of Weapons and Climate Change*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2007.