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

- (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

- (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 change

- (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

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

- 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

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
