Reversing Environmental Degradation: Justice, Fairness, Responsibility and Meaning

Much environmental thought and action aims to deal with unintended and harmful by-products of human life and activity. Dominant concerns are greenhouse gases and the harmful consequences of human induced climate change. 'Dealing with' them is a multidimensional affair. Assuming that climate change is seriously harmful, yet a consequence of practices that otherwise confer important benefits, and whose reduction or replacement is costly and onerous, there are issues of distributive justice. How should emission entitlements be distributed against a background of measures to bring an overall reduction? Given the painfully slow process governments are making in reducing overall emissions who has the responsibility to act to speed up the process of reduction; what is the appropriate distribution of that particular burden?

Another dimension comes into view when we consider the diversity of often conflicting and incommensurable values at play in the concrete contexts and practices producing the harmful consequences and the measures envisaged to reduce those consequences. Ensuring that these values are recognised means going beyond distributional issues and considering the just procedures required to ensure stakeholder voices are heard. Indeed, a comprehensive understanding of the norms and values at play in the processes that generate problematic by-products (including, but not limited to greenhouse gases) is required if successful policies aimed at reduction and sustainability are to be expected. This in turn requires investigation into the meaning of everyday practices and the 'waste' they produce to those whose practices they are. A more global perspective remains necessary, of course, but it needs to remain connected with the context-specific and quotidian. This is important for global projects aimed at neutralising harmful consequences yet likely to have their own by-products that risk seriously harmful consequences – for some. In these kinds of cases distributive and recognitional justice, and the need to understanding the meaning of concrete ways of life to those who live them, come together.

In the first paper of this issue David Morrow takes up the issue of distributive justice in the context of a capped global emissions budget. His focus is 'fairness', a much-discussed criterion for distributing environmental benefits and burdens (see for example, Doering et al., 2016), including those associated with climate change. He argues that when understood in terms of a single, flexible conception that minimises contestable assumptions, fairness requires that abatement burdens be borne mainly by developed countries. Put simply like that this might not seem a very surprising conclusion. Getting there, however, involves rebutting important claims in the climate justice literature: fairness is too ambiguous when applied to the emissions budget; a comprehensive, robust theory of global justice is required to decide fairness in this context; and justice here sanctions some degree of 'grandfathering' (allocating a larger share to

Environmental Values **26** (2017): 663–668.
 doi: 10.3197/096327117X15046905490326

developed countries in line with their history of greater emissions; see Knight, 2014). Morrow's strategy is to defend a 'proportional claims account' making distributive fairness a matter of allocating shares in proportion to the strength of 'fairness relevant claims' – claims based on need, desert or entitlement. That this leaves unanswered questions about how to assess the relative strength of claims of need, desert and entitlement, and what are the best precise theories of these, is a large part of Morrow's point. We do not need to answer these questions, for on no plausible account of them do desert, need or entitlement point in different directions in the context of the emissions budget (grandfathering being an implausible basis in this context); and substantive conclusions can be derived without further specifying the elements of the proportional claims account. Philosophers might remain frustrated by this but, if Morrow is right, then however the finer details pan out, the proportional claims account delivers 'all that negotiators need to know about fairness: the fairest allocation they will be able to manage is one that gives as much of the emissions budget to the global poor as political constraints allow' (p 688). As he points out however, fairness is not everything and other desiderata (efficient mitigation strategies, for example) may pull in other directions. Fairness alone fails to determine the 'best all things considered' international agreement.

One of Morrow's assumptions is that societies rather than individuals are the morally appropriate claimants regarding the emissions budget, with nation states being 'imperfect proxies' for them. This assumption is highly defensible, but what should we make of the poor job such states have made of adequate agreements to take on climate change? Does it mean other agents have responsibilities to step up? This is the point of departure for Eric Godoy's paper, the second of this issue. He argues that although it is still important to think in terms of collective responsibility and agency, the situation calls for non-governmental responsibility and agency. His paper explores how best to understand this with reference to the movement for institutional divestment of fossil fuel endowments which encompasses an increasing number of colleges or universities. Godoy argues that, although other accounts have their merits, Iris Marion Young's model of socially connected responsibility is particularly helpful in establishing collective responsibilities. On this model responsibility is shared by those socially connected to structural injustice through which harm arises from often apparently innocent everyday routines. For example, in the case of clothing industry reliance on sweatshop labour, all those socially connected, including consumers, share a responsibility to improve conditions that can be exercised only collectively; only by acting with others to transform the structural injustice. Godoy argues that Young's account usefully includes parameters to guide identification of agents occupying similar positions relative to structural injustices, including those involved in climate change: power (the relative ability to affect structural injustices); privilege (receiving benefits from a position in a social network); interests (that those benefiting from

a privilege, or those suffering injustice, have in maintaining or opposing the situation); collective ability (the capacity to act as (or like) a collective agent). Godoy applies this to the developing fossil free movement that colleges have been moved to join as members of a collective of agents that both benefits from fossil fuels and can press for effective change. The otherwise limited power of individual colleges is amplified when the pressure is collective; they share a privilege easily renounceable to provoke change through example and public rebuke of the immorality of benefiting from fossil fuels; they share an interest in the good of their communities and future wellbeing of their members (think of all those university mission statements). They also have a collective ability because they are similarly positioned and governed. 'Each university divests as an individual agent, but does so as part of a movement of agents that have similar powers over endowments from which they derive morally suspect privileges against their future interests' (pp. 706–707).

Such scenarios aside, clearly some are unwilling to cooperate in burdensome endeavours to take on the causes of human induced climate change. For example, they resist the siting of renewable energy infrastructure, such as windfarms, in their vicinity. Commonly known as 'NIMBYs' these are the topic of the third paper, in which Anne Schwenkenbecher considers how to address their concerns within the overall enterprise of boosting clean energy. Her main claim is that considerations of distributive justice and associated value rankings, trade-offs and cost-benefit analyses miss important features of such cases. From the standpoint of distributive justice, a case of NIMBY-ism may well seem indefensible, yet this misses the point that windfarms (for example) may destroy irreplaceable and priceless landscapes and so impose non-compensatable losses. The underlying problem here is the incommensurability of diverse values. Schwenkenbecher brings out how non-traditional (procedural, expressive and narrative) conceptions of rationality may be better suited to such situations than traditional ranking and trade-off approaches and cost-benefit analyses that presuppose value commensurability. Her point is not that any given case of NIMBY-style resistance is rationally justifiable, but that in principle it might be. Alongside distributive justice and compensation, decision procedures are required to ensure concerned stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, able to articulate their preferences and perhaps revise them (for more discussion bearing on this claim see Costa et al., Piso et al., Gendreau, all 2016, and Vargas et al., 2017). Even when NIMBY preferences remain unchanged and are unjustified, dialogue with those holding them is likely to secure their cooperation more quickly and effectively than simply informing them of the need for renewable energy infrastructure and providing economic compensation for what to them is more than an economic loss (though it may be that too). Schwenkenbecher points out that given the need to expedite transition to renewable energy and so speedily secure the cooperation of NIMBYs, there are both moral and prudential reasons to consider

NIMBY-ism in terms of non-traditional notions of rationality and procedural justice.

The need to recognise the meaning of items (put) in the environment and the practices that involve them for those whose practices they are is generalisable and an important theme of the final two papers of this issue, both of which draw upon empirical research. In the fourth paper Gareth Thomas and his colleagues focus on 'waste' and the processes through which materials previously deemed waste are re-interpreted as re-usable, repairable, or recyclable. They employ a relational approach that takes in social and infrastructural relations and combines practice theory and biographical research to investigate the shifting meaning of waste (see also Groves et al., 2016). Their core concept is 'texturing', which encompasses the embodied performance of meaning making, identity and attachment 'through which subjects stitch together diverse linguistic and material elements in an ongoing labour of situating themselves in relation to their wider social and cultural contexts' (p. 735). This highlights how subjects *feel* physically and emotionally their practices of consumption and disposal and how the texturing of these everyday routines shapes their sense of the useful/useless, efficient/wasteful. Thomas et al. illustrate this through a discussion of narrative interviews. For example, they show how interpretations of waste may be textured by memories of early family life and constructed in terms of failure to maintain relationships and practices in the face of changing socio-economic pressures (compare Lougheed et al., 2016). Or it might be that 'waste not, want not' norms acquired in early socialisation may be reinterpreted to inform a conception of 'efficiency' informing an aversion to waste in changed contexts and practices. A range of interviews show how forms of waste become re-textured as necessary to cooking, food production, heating and leisure practices, thereby constituting a shift from an experience of waste mediated by abstract norms (instantiated in the form of bills and unwanted clutter). This requires 'new competences, which allow for management of interdependencies formerly surrendered to abstract systems' (p 749). Thomas et al. argue in the light of this that policy and research seeking to replace wasteful with pro-environmental behaviour needs to address such everyday practice and texturing (see also Groves et al., 2016). Insofar as they ignore it and remain focussed on 'nudging' and infrastructural development they risk further undermining 'the identities, competences and attachments subjects require to engage in alternate waste reducing practices' (p 751).

In the final paper, Wylie Carr and Christopher Preston daw upon empirical research to bring the climate engineering (CE) ethics literature, such as that published in a recent special issue of this journal (see for example, papers by Baatz, Svoboda, Stelzer and Schuppert, and Preston, all 2016) into contact with social science. They discuss interviews with people living in three culturally and geographically diverse places chosen for their special vulnerability to climate change: Solomon Islands, Alaska and Kenya. The interviewees

shared concerns voiced in the ethics literature. For example, the belief that populations (including scientists, engineers and policy makers) in developed countries are liable to moral corruption in Gardiner's sense of accepting arguments for CE of merely apparent cogency that actually serve to further exploit positions of power. They also share the concern, frequently expressed in the ethics literature, that those like them, most affected by human induced climate change, also have the least responsibility for it and the least power to do anything about it. However, they also expressed a worry regarding CE 'solutions' not so widely discussed and, for Carr and Preston, this shows how social science can inform that literature by illuminating different ethical concerns of the public and explaining the social processes through which such concerns gain saliency. The salient worry here is that the 'skewed vulnerability' of vulnerable populations is also a 'historically constructed vulnerability'; the unjust present is the result and continuation of an unjust past of colonialism and exploitation. In this light CE can be expected to involve more of the same: more detrimental control over their lives to the benefit of the outsiders.

Strikingly, Carr and Preston report willingness to accept CE in the face of already substantial climate change impacts. The acceptance was reluctant though, and conditional on including those affected in CE research and governance and on CE being directed to climate change at local, national and regional scales, rather than, say, at controlling overall global temperature regardless of the potential effects on more local weather patterns. Unsurprisingly, interviewees were doubtful any such conditions would be met. Presumably they could be met by mechanisms of procedural justice and bringing the values and meanings animating the lives of affected peoples into attempts to take on our unwanted and harmful environmental impacts, and this ought to be the norm.

SIMON HAILWOOD

REFERENCES

Baatz, C. 2016. 'Can we have it both ways? On potential trade-offs between mitigation and solar radiation management', *Environmental Values* **25**(1): 29–49. **Crossref**

Carr, W. and Preston, C. 2017. 'Skewed vulnerabilities and moral corruption in global perspectives on climate engineering', *Environmental Values* **26**(6): 757–777:

Costa, A., Caldas, J. C., Coelho, R., Ferreiro, M. F. and Goncalves, V. 2016. 'The building of a dam: value conflicts in public decision-making', *Environmental Values* **25**(2): 215–234. **Crossref**

Doering, R., Goti, L., Fricke, L. and Jantzen, K. 2016. 'Equity and ITQs: about fair distributions in quota management systems in Florida', *Environmental Values* **25**(6): 729–749. **Crossref**

Gendreau, M. 2016. 'Environmental justice, political agency and the challenge of creating healthier communities', *Environmental Values* **25**(6): 707–728. **Crossref**

Godoy, E. S. 2017. ‘Sharing responsibility to divest from fossil fuels’, *Environmental Values* **26**(6): 693–710.

Groves, C., Henwood, K., Shirani, F., Butler, C., Parkhill, K. and Pidgeon, N. 2016. ‘Invested in unsustainability? On the psychosocial patterning of engagement in practices’, *Environmental Values* **25**(3): 309–328. **Crossref**

Knight, C. 2014. ‘Moderate emissions grandfathering’, *Environmental Values* **23**(5): 571–592. **Crossref**

Lougheed, S. C., Hird, M. J. and K. R. Rowe. 2016. ‘Governing household waste management: an empirical analysis and critique’, *Environmental Values* **25**(3): 287–308. **Crossref**

Morrow, D. 2017. ‘Fairness in allocating the global emissions budget’, *Environmental Values* **26**(6): 669–691.

Piso, Z., Werkheiser, I., Noll, S. and Leshko, C. 2016. ‘Sustainability of what? Recognising the diverse values that sustainable agriculture works to sustain’, *Environmental Values* **25**(2): 195–214. **Crossref**

Preston, C. 2016. ‘Climate engineering and the cessation requirement: the ethics of a life-cycle’, *Environmental Values* **25**(1): 91–107. **Crossref**

Schwenkenbecher, A. 2017. ‘What is wrong with NIMBYs?’, *Environmental Values* **26**(6): 711–731.

Stelzer, H. and Schuppert, F. 2016. ‘How much risk ought we to take? Exploring the possibilities of risk-sensitive consequentialism in the context of climate engineering’, *Environmental Values* **25**(1): 69–90. **Crossref**

Svoboda, T. 2016. ‘Aerosol geoengineering deployment and fairness’, *Environmental Values* **25**(1): 51–68. **Crossref**

Thomas, G., Groves, C., Henwood, K. and Pidgeon, N. 2017. ‘Texturing waste: attachment and identity in every-day consumption and waste practices’, *Environmental Values* **26**(6): 733–755.

Vargas, A., Lo, A., Howes, M. and Rohde, N. 2017. ‘The problem of inclusion in deliberative environmental evaluation’, *Environmental Values* **26**(2): 157–176. **Crossref**