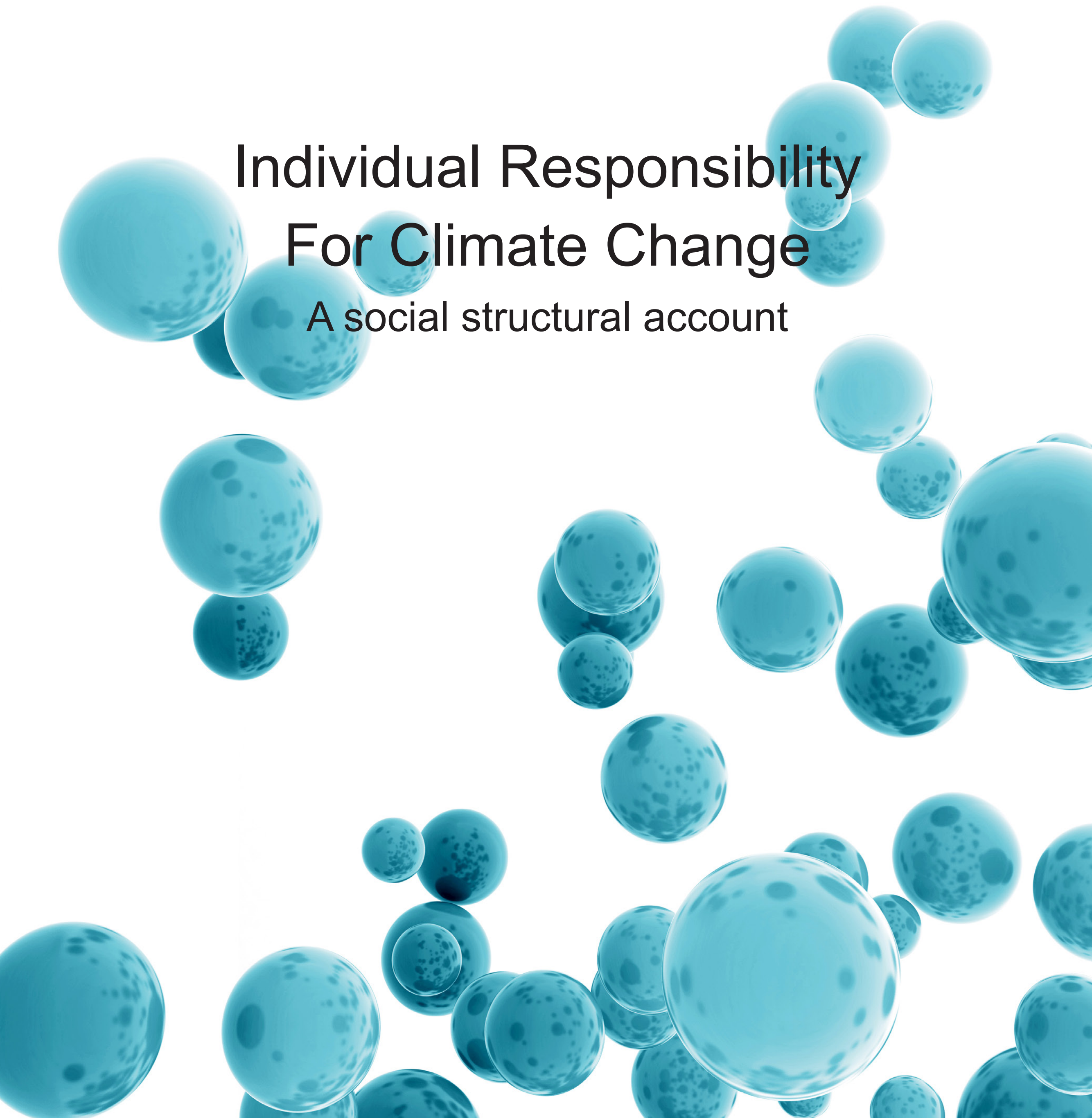
Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 2384

LAURI LAHIKAINEN

Individual Responsibility For Climate Change

A social structural account



LAURI LAHIKAINEN

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
To be presented, with the permission of
the Faculty Council of Social Sciences
of the University of Tampere, for public discussion
in the Pinni B building, auditorium 1097,
address: Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere,
on 4 June 2018, at 12 o'clock.

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 2384
Tampere University Press
Tampere 2018

UNIVERSITY
OF TAMPERE

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
University of Tampere
Faculty of Social Sciences
Finland

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service in accordance with the quality management system of the University of Tampere.

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Cover design by
Mikko Reinikka

Acta Universitatis Tamperensis 2384
ISBN 978-952-03-0760-8 (print)
ISSN-L 1455-1616
ISSN 1455-1616

Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 1893
ISBN 978-952-03-0761-5 (pdf)
ISSN 1456-954X
http://tampub.uta.fi

Suomen Yliopistopaino Oy – Juvenes Print
Tampere 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my pre-examiners, Italo Testa and Gunnar Björnsson, for encouragement, incisive and useful criticism, and exciting ideas for future research. I will do my best to do full justice to both your comments in my future work, if I could not do so in the hectic period of wrapping up this dissertation.

John O'Neill's work has been an inspiration to me for years, and I am excited, happy, and thankful that John agreed to be my opponent on the examination day.

I owe much gratitude to both my supervisors, Susanna Lindberg and Arto Laitinen. Both encouraged me to find my own voice, yet were (and still are) always ready to help. Both are exemplary philosophers and I am fortunate to have worked with them.

The dissertation was made possible by funding. The Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Pirkanmaa Regional Fund provided me with a grant for the first year of the research, and after that, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tampere employed me as a doctoral researcher for three years.

Risto Kunelius, then the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, asked me to teach a course on climate change for social science students, first with him and then on my own. This opportunity gave me a good grounding on social scientific approaches to climate change and invaluable teaching experience. Thank you Risto, and thank you all the hundreds of students who took part in YKYYHT1 from 2014 to 2017.

For the last few months, I have been employed in a fascinating multidisciplinary project, WISE: Creative adaptation to wicked socio-environmental disruptions, headed by Janne Hukkinen. Thank you Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen for inviting me to

join TreWise, the Tampere based subproject, and thank you the rest of TreWise, Mikko Virtanen and Tapio Reinekoski, and all the other WISE researchers.

During my PhD project, I was also lucky to be a part of another important project from 2014 to 2016, VoxClass: The voice and silence of class. Researching class with Anu-Hanna Anttila, Jussi Ojajärvi, Ralf Kauranen, Kati Launis, Katariina Mäkinen, Harley Bergroth, and Emma Lamberg was educational, enriching, and always fun.

The climate ethics reading group in Helsinki and the climate ethics community at large has been one important community. Thank you Säde Hormio and Simo Kyllönen for organizing the reading group and being great colleagues. Special thanks to Teea Kortetmäki for reading and commenting on my manuscript. Your comments and encouragement made a difference!

Thank you all the participants, organizers, and co-organizers of all the other reading groups and seminars.

Some writers somewhere have come up with a great concept for beating procrastination and getting things done. Thank you whoever invented the Shut-Up and Write method, and thank you Marjo Kolehmainen for organizing Shut-Up and Write meetings in Tampere! Since the method is based on group pressure, thank you all the other participants, Tuula, Raisa, Rebecca, Katariina.

While writing this monograph I have had the pleasure and privilege of co-writing articles and book chapters with brilliant researchers across disciplines. Thank you Esko Harni, Ralf Kauranen, Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, and Tero Toivanen.

The philosophy department has been a good place to work. Thank you Arto, Leila, Susanna, Kristina, Jani, Tommi, Panu, Jaakko K., Jaakko B., Jaakko R., Risto, Markku, Alma, Jaana P., Jaana V., Antti, Jan, Ilmari, Noora, Tapio, Juho, Renne, Minna, and all the other Tampere philosophers, past, present, and future. Despite the realities of neoliberal academia, in our coffee room one can experience moments of genuine philosophical life. Special thanks to Paula Rauhala, my fellow

Marxist office mate, for camaraderie, collaboration, and value theoretical discussions.

Thank you Lounasrinkula, Jukka., Liina, Katariina, Sanna, Matti, and Leena, for friendship, solidarity, and peer support.

My in-laws, Kari, Eija, Martta, Kaisa, and Inkku, thank you for being there for us.

My family, Martti, Kaisu, and Lee.

My wife Katariina and my son Pietari.

Thank you for protection, trust, hope, perseverance, joy, for love.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that in order to understand individual moral responsibility for climate change, we need to understand how climate change is related to social structures. I ask how we should understand responsibility if climate change is a social structural problem and if our moral agency is conditioned by the same structures that produce climate change. In climate ethics, climate change is often understood as a collective action problem where individuals, through their disparate and in themselves inconsequential actions, produce climate change. No single individual's greenhouse gas emissions contribute to climate change in a way that would make a difference. Thus, the question of individual responsibility has been problematized in many ways.

The social structural viewpoint that I advocate sees climate change as the result of the normal functioning of our societies. The practices of individuals are explained in reference to their social context. From the social structural viewpoint, individual responsibility also remains a troublesome issue, but for different reasons than in the collective action problem view.

In hierarchically structured societies, it is both a philosophical and an empirical question how much and in what way different individuals are responsible for climate change. Some people may occupy such social positions that they could make or could have made a significant difference. Thus, traditional ways of understanding responsibility in terms of blameworthiness or prospective obligations remain relevant. We can be responsible to different degrees for how we uphold or resist the social structures that cause climate change, not just for the emissions that can be traced to us as individuals. Taking responsibility for climate change requires that we understand our social positions and what kinds of actions and practices, including political activism, are possible for us. We should also strive to understand how living in contemporary societies makes being environmentally responsible difficult, and how one can live responsibly in an irresponsible society while striving to change social structures together with others. This dissertation is thus both a meditation on responsibility in the time of climate change and an argument for taking seriously the sociological assumptions behind our moral reasoning.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitän väitöskirjassani, että ymmärtääksemme yksilöiden moraalista vastuuta ilmastonmuutoksen suhteen, meidän tulee tarkastella ilmastonmuutosta yhteiskuntarakenteellisena ongelmana. Tutkimuskysymykseni on, miten vastuu ilmastonmuutoksesta tulisi ymmärtää, mikäli ilmastonmuutos on yhteiskuntarakenteellinen ongelma ja mikäli samat yhteiskuntarakenteet vaikuttavat sekä ilmastonmuutokseen että yksilöiden moraalisen toimijuuden muodostumiseen. Tähänastisessa ilmastoeettisessä keskustelussa on usein oletettu, että ilmastonmuutos on kollektiivisen toiminnan ongelma, jonka aiheuttavat toisistaan riippumattomien yksilöiden sinänsä harmittomat toimet. Tästä näkökulmasta kenenkään yhden yksilön ilmastopäästöillä ei ole mainittavaa vaikutusta ilmastonmuutoksen suhteen, joten kysymystä yksilön vastuusta on pidetty monin tavoin hankalana. Yhteiskuntarakenteellinen näkökulma kuitenkin tarkoittaa, että ilmastonmuutoksen ajatellaan johtuvan siitä, miten yhteiskuntamme toimivat ja yksilöiden toiminta ymmärretään yhteydessä siihen, miten yhteiskunta on rakentunut. Myös yhteiskuntarakenteellisesta näkökulmasta yksilön vastuu ilmastonmuutoksesta on hankala asia, mutta eri tavalla kuin kollektiivisen toiminnan ongelmissa.

Yhteiskuntarakenteellisesta näkökulmasta on sekä filosofinen että empiirinen kysymys, missä määrin jotkut tietyt yksilöt ovat vastuussa ilmastonmuutoksesta. Jos yhteiskunta on rakentunut hierarkkisesti, voi joillakin yksilöillä olla huomattavan suuret vaikutusmahdollisuudet myös ilmastonmuutokseen vaikuttavien toimien suhteen. Tällöin perinteiset tavat ymmärtää vastuuta syyllisyyden tai velvollisuuden suhteen ovat edelleen relevantteja. Yksilökohtaisten päästöjen lisäksi olemme ennen kaikkea vastuussa siitä, miten toimintamme ylläpitää tai vastustaa yhteiskuntarakenteita. Vastuu ilmastonmuutoksesta tarkoittaa myös sitä, että on tultava tietoiseksi omasta yhteiskunnallisesta asemasta ja niistä ilmastonmuutokseen vaikuttavista toimista, jotka tästä asemasta käsin ovat mahdollisia, mukaan lukien poliittinen aktivismi. On myös pyrittävä ymmärtämään, miten elämä nykyisenkaltaisessa yhteiskunnassa tekee ilmastovastuullisuuden hankalaksi ja miten vastuuttomassa yhteiskunnassa voi toimia vastuullisesti samalla kun pyrkii muuttamaan yhteiskuntarakenteita yhdessä toisten kanssa. Väitöskirjassani

pohditaan, mitä vastuu tarkoittaa ilmastonmuutoksen aikana ja samalla esitetään, että on syytä ottaa moraalisten pohdiskelujemme yhteiskuntateoreettiset taustaoletukset vakavasti.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Research Questions

Climate change, many climate ethicists argue, is fundamentally a moral problem that requires rethinking our basic moral concepts and theories. The prime example is our understanding of individual responsibility. Clearly, we ought to do something about climate change, but if any one individual's actions do not make a difference and if any climate change-related harms cannot be traced to any individual's actions, how can we really speak of individual responsibility? However, many remain uncomfortable with the idea that there are no moral obligations on individuals to do anything.

In this dissertation, my purpose is to show that the social theoretical underpinnings of climate ethics need to be reconsidered. Climate ethicists often start from the premise that climate change is a collective action problem, something caused by the independent actions of disparate individuals. I think that climate change is fundamentally a social structural problem. Our societies are structured in ways that make climate change result from the ordinary functioning of societies: production, consumption, and logistics. None of these practices are done by disparate individuals. They are social and often global practices carried out in hierarchical institutions, states, firms, and families. If we take the social structural view of climate change, some of the same ethical questions are raised—but with different answers—and we encounter some completely new moral problems.

The key questions of the research are:

How should we understand personal, individual responsibility regarding climate change if

a) climate change is connected to social structures, especially global capitalism and

b) individuals and their dispositions and capacities for responsibility are embedded in the same social structures?

Why think that climate change is connected to social structures? There is a clear scientific consensus that human practices are the physical cause of climate change. By burning fossil fuels and destroying carbon sinks, human beings are changing the molecular makeup of the atmosphere and thus changing the climate system. Social scientists, however, are concerned about why we have practices that cause climate change. When studying climate change as a social issue, sociologists and other social scientists refer more often to the ways that societies function than to the actions of individuals. Individuals think and make decisions about what they do and how they live, but they do so while deeply embedded in social contexts, with the help of technology and infrastructure, by using language that is shared with others, and so on. I cite some of this literature throughout this thesis, but the main theme of the thesis is individual responsibility. I examine what happens to the concept of individual responsibility if we see climate change as a structural problem rather than a collective action problem. My main example of a relevant social structure is global capitalism, and my theoretical framework of understanding capitalism comes from the Marxist tradition and the study of political economy inspired by Marxism. In addition, my understanding of social reality is informed by several theories of social structures, power, and oppression from feminist theory, critical race theory, and other social theories that sometimes have been lumped under the umbrella concept of critical theory.

However, the principal argument does not require the reader to be a Marxist of any stripe. Readers can disagree with my examples that draw on specific social theories and still agree that climate change is a structural issue and that, whatever way our societies are currently structured, they are structured in ways that produce climate change. The precise connections between social structures and the drivers of climate change are a topic of ongoing research, and we may yet be surprised by the results. Nonetheless, certain things are pretty straightforward: the global economy is driven by profit- and growth-seeking, and there has been a connection between economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions. How the profit motive affects individual agency and how it connects to other social structures are matters of context. With these issues in mind, it is wise to be careful about the level of abstraction at which we argue about individual responsibility.

Models and frames matter in ethics and moral reasoning, just as they do in science and everyday life interaction.[1] Different kinds of models lead to different kinds of moral questions, assumptions about what is possible, and thus to different conceptions of responsibility. Even if readers disagree with the models and assumptions that I use in my examples and arguments, they can hopefully still take the arguments on a more abstract level and apply them to another model of social structures. I cannot solve, within the scope of this thesis, the philosophical problems related to structural explanation, nor do I hope to convince all committed individualists.[2] What I hope to show is that there are good reasons to see climate change as a social structural issue and especially that a social structural understanding of climate change has consequences for how we can think of the moral issues related to it.

The main aim of this thesis is to elaborate the concepts of responsibility regarding climate change so that, first, climate change is a structural problem and, second, that our capacities for and theories of responsibility are shaped by the same structures that produce climate change. Looking at the problem of individual responsibility for climate change opens several avenues for a more general discussion on the role that critical theory can play in our times.

1.2 On Method: Analytic Climate Ethics and Critical Theory

The thesis takes part in climate ethical discussions but adopts a critical theoretical perspective. It is thus in a somewhat uncomfortable middle ground between two philosophical traditions. Climate change today is discussed through many different approaches in philosophy, but when I started this thesis, most of

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[1] As Robyn Eckersley (2016, 346) points out: "How we frame problems, and how we think about the relationship between agents and structures, shapes how we think about responsibility."

[2] Individualism does not necessarily preclude structural explanation. It is possible to think of structures as in the final instance traceable to individuals in complex ways. I do not subscribe to this view, however, because it does not take into account how non-humans, technology, and infrastructures also take part in structuring our social worlds (see Epstein (2015) for a critique of anthropocentric views on the social world). However, individualists who do not completely discount social structures should be able to agree with the main points of my thesis.

the philosophical literature I found on climate change as such was from the analytic tradition.

In analytic ethics, the methods generally consist of conceptual analysis, thought experiments, testing principles on concrete cases, and making and assessing arguments. One way that climate ethics has proceeded has been to carefully apply and examine principles of normative theories to climate change as a case. This has led many philosophers to conclude that if normative theories prove inadequate for understanding the moral reality of such a relevant problem as climate change, there is reason for a more thorough criticism of said theories (e.g., Gardiner 2011). When we start asking whether there is something seriously wrong with the social reality in which both climate change and ethical theories have their origins, we find ourselves in the same field of problems where critical theorists have traditionally worked.

Critical theory can be understood in two senses: broad and narrow. It can refer to the range of philosophical perspectives starting with Hegel and Marx that do their philosophizing in connection with social criticism, or it can refer to the Frankfurt School of Adorno, Horkheimer, and their colleagues and those thinkers who directly though not uncritically continue that project. (Bohman 2016). Critical theory has descriptive and explanatory, normative, and critical aspects, which is also true of this thesis. It is descriptive and explanatory because I argue that climate change is a structural problem in capitalism, normative because I discuss the thoroughly normative concept of responsibility, and critical because I argue that current social structures make it difficult for us to think and act responsibly regarding climate change—and thus understanding the world and changing it are intertwined.

Whether this thesis is critical theory in the broad or narrow sense depends on where one draws the line. In some ways, Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* has been an inspiration for this thesis, though that may initially be hard to believe. In terms of style and method they are completely different, yet both are concerned about the possibility of ethics in a world governed by problematic, pernicious, and even evil social facts and structures. For Adorno, the literary essay and the fragment were the only possible ways of writing about the (im)possibility of the good life in late capitalism. I do not share his stylistic and methodological commitments. I am not convinced that any style or method can remain untouched by the reifying tendencies of capitalism. The point is not to find an untarnished way of writing but to remain vigilant and critical of one's own writing, whichever way one writes. Whereas Adorno approaches the question of the good life in a bad

society from various fragmentary perspectives, I try instead to develop the perspective of the responsible individual in an irresponsible society as far as possible within the constraints of the dissertation form.

What I do share with Adorno and other critical theorists is the commitment to an *immanent critique* of philosophy and of society. It is fairly clear what an immanent critique of theories means: taking the text in its own terms and showing how it fails or runs into problems by its own standards. When we turn to criticism of society, however, things get more complicated. Different critical theorists have offered different answers in their methodological reflections, and they have used different methods, sometimes without explicit methodological reflection.

One issue, of course, concerns the relationship between social reality and philosophy and theoretical thought more generally. A common view in critical theory is *historicism*, the assumption that all philosophical theories are children of their own time, including critical theory itself. The question then becomes how criticism of society is possible. Critical theorists often argue that the criticism must be immanent to the society; the analytic resources for criticism must come from the same society that is under criticism. But if historicism is correct, then how could any criticism not be immanent in this minimal sense? All critical concepts and theories are developed within the world under criticism, even if they aspire to be transhistorical.

Habermas and Honneth have argued that we ought to criticize societies like we criticize texts, on their own terms. This requires making explicit the implicit norms of social practices. For example, by showing how the market economy presupposes certain norms of fairness and mutual recognition, we can then criticize those versions of capitalism where those forms fail (Honneth 1995). Deranty and Dunstall (2017) claim that Habermas and Honneth take modern societies and their values to be far too homogenous and coherent, arguing instead that we should attend to both continuities and discontinuities in history and that we should listen not only to the great names of philosophy but also to the anonymous who have made history by living, working, building, fighting, parenting, and dying, and have through many mediations made their mark even in intellectual histories. This allows us to see ourselves not only as moderns but also as inheritors of the "traditions of the oppressed" (Benjamin [1940] 2007, 257). We are not only contemporaries of Adam Smith, Kant, Hegel, and Rawls as moderns; we also share something with Spartacus, with the peasant rebels of the middle ages, with the Levellers and Diggers, with General Ludd, and with the suffragettes, insofar as we see them as bearers of the tradition of resistance to oppression and choose to take

up that tradition. When the subject matter is climate change, the list ought to include environmentalist movements of various stripes.

One aspect of critical theory, then, is that it is *partisan in social struggles*. Nancy Fraser, following Marx, argues that critical theory is about "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" and if "[a] critical social theory frames its research program and conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification" (1985, 97). Even with this definition, the original problem comes back in a new form. If our normative frameworks are conditioned by the society we seek to oppose, how do we know which oppositional social movements we should identify with? Social struggles can clarify and inspire moral reasoning and conceptual work, but our partisanship is supposed to be critical.

One possible answer to arriving at normative and critical concepts is *negativism*, a method of normative theorizing that involves trying to understand and define positive normative concepts such as justice by going through their negatives. Rather than starting from goodness and justice, negativism starts from obvious examples of badness and injustice and their causes. The social movements of critical theorists would then be partisans would be those that fight against injustices in the world. In this dissertation, negativism means coming to understand responsibility from how it fails and from investigating irresponsibility and its social causes.[3]

Immanent critique, partisanship, and negativism form the basic methodological commitments of the thesis, but I also make use of the traditional tools of analytic philosophy. When criticizing climate ethical texts, I not only contextualize them but also argue why analytic ethicists ought to think differently about the social theoretical underpinnings of climate ethics. In this criticism, I use the concept of the *model* as an analytical tool. Models and modeling have received a great deal of

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[3] For Freyenhagen, methodological negativism means that "the way to find out about something positive (say the human good or health) is to look at where things go badly, where the positive element is missing or being denied." The stronger thesis is "epistemic negativism," which argues that "we can only know the wrong, the bad, illness, etc." (2014, 4). "Substantive negativism" means that the reasons for the suppression of the good and the epistemic problems that entails are in the world or in the way the world is structured. (Freyenhagen 3–4). In this thesis I subscribe to methodological and substantive negativism. Whether epistemic negativism is true cannot be known in advance. The partisanship of the critical theorist in social struggles entails that it is in true engagement with the world where this question is decided. If the reasons for epistemic negativism are social and structural, then changing the world or certain social practices may lead to better knowledge of the good. I elaborate on this perspective in chapter 5.

attention in philosophy of science in recent years.[4] Models idealize, abstract, and/or isolate essential aspects of complex reality in order to be able to make predictions, explain, understand, and so on, depending on the discipline and context of use (Frigg and Hartmann 2017). In this dissertation, I argue that the unstructured collective action problem in climate ethics has served as a problematic model that has led climate ethicists to misunderstand the moral reality of climate change. I argue, by contrast, that a better model is to see climate change as a structural problem. The structural problem model makes it possible to understand individual responsibility better and criticize social structures at the same time.

Models are types of *frames*; they present the world in a certain way, making us pay attention to some things and not to others. Different frames and framings also imply different problems and different solutions.[5] Models in science often have an inbuilt epistemic normativity to them. For example, they are supposed to make some features of the world easier to understand, know about, or quantify. We can criticize them as models for failures in these epistemic respects. We can criticize frames (and models insofar as the latter are also frames from a moral point of view). They can for example show blameworthy things in a good light or lead our attention away from the suffering of some moral patients. The collective action model is problematic in both senses, epistemic and moral. Insofar as environmental virtues and vices have both epistemic and moral aspects, as I argue in chapter 2, this is not surprising.

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[4] See for example Mäki (2009) and the whole special issue of *Erkenntnis* 70(1) in which that article appears. See also Frigg and Hartmann (2017) for an overview of the discussions of modeling in the philosophy of science.

[5] The classic text on framing is Goffmann (1974). In climate ethics, the concept of framing has been usefully employed by Fragnière and Gardiner (2016). Models and frames have been topics of intense discussion in philosophy of science and social sciences, respectively. For the purposes of this thesis, the definitions of models and frames can be broad and fuzzy around the edges, so I need not enter into these complex debates. The difference I make between models and frames here is roughly that all models are also frames, but not all frames are models. Models are ways to frame the world according to certain epistemic reasons. When models are used in moral philosophy, their purpose can be to bring to light morally relevant factors of situations, states of the world, actions, and so on.

1.3 On Responsibility

For someone invested in Marxism, critical theory, and structural explanation, it may seem strange to choose individual responsibility as a focus, but I believe there are good reasons to do so.

First, individual responsibility is one of the most widely discussed problems in climate ethics, and it is precisely when discussing individual responsibility that the collective action problem model is most often invoked. It seems fruitful to show how a different social theoretical framework changes the parameters of individual responsibility.

Second, even if this thesis is an academic dissertation and aimed at a scholarly audience, I hope to be able to discover something that, if presented in a more approachable style later, will be of interest to any individuals who are concerned about climate change and what that means for them as individuals. Even in non-academic circles, questions of individual agency matter. My friends, my students, and many people on various Internet forums and social media are concerned with questions like whether individual choices, political activism, or voting are effective, and if they are not, what then? How should we as individuals and in our multiple social roles orient ourselves in the warming world? How does our worldview and understanding of what societies and individuals are like affect how we understand our responsibility? How can we reflect on and change them?

Some may think that all talk of individual responsibility is problematic, since it takes focus away from political action, but I strive to show in chapter 5 that individuals can have a moral responsibility for political action. Besides, in the course of political action, questions of moral responsibility remain relevant in many ways.

Finally, discussing individual responsibility allows us to think about the problem of individualization in connection to climate change. The study of individualization is a fascinating development in recent social theory, sociology, and related disciplines. Rather than taking individuals as the prime units of analysis like methodological individualists, theorists of individualization ask why it is that autonomous and free-floating individuals have come to appear as the prime ontological units of society and the only possible subjects of responsibility (Fevre 2016).

For example, when health care is delegated from the state to private individuals, because individuals should allegedly take care of themselves (by exercising, thinking positively, etc.) and not have to take responsibility for others' well-being through

taxation. The idea of responsibility in this thesis is not exactly the direct opposite, because individuals can be responsible for their own well-being to some extent, but the main point is that individuals are responsible for social reality and the preconditions of others' well-being in one way or another, depending on their social power and sphere of influence.

Responsibility has multiple meanings and has been under intense philosophical scrutiny over the last couple of decades. In this thesis, the aspects of responsibility I am mostly concerned with are retrospective responsibility, prospective responsibility, and responsibility as a virtue.

Retrospective responsibility, or backward-looking responsibility, means that one is responsible for something that has happened; it is thus connected to culpability, blameworthiness, and praiseworthiness. We may blame those who are responsible for bad things and praise those who are responsible for good things. Within climate ethics, retrospective responsibility for climate change has often been problematized, when it has been assumed that individual actions by themselves would have no effect on the overall problem. In this thesis, I argue against these assumptions and aim to show that when climate change is viewed as a social structural issue, we cannot *a priori* say that no individual action could make a difference. In hierarchical social structures, some individuals in some situations may have enough influence to make a difference on a geological time scale.

Prospective or forward-looking responsibility, by contrast, means that one is responsible for bringing something about. Retrospective responsibility may imply prospective responsibility. One may be responsible for righting a wrong one has done, for example. But sometimes prospective responsibility arises for other reasons, as when one has the power to bring about a necessary or a good thing or right some wrong, even if one's previous actions have nothing to do with the situation. Climate change is a global emergency whose possible results are catastrophic. It can be argued that if we are able we have a responsibility, wherever and whoever we are, to take action to mitigate climate change in order to save lives, communities, and the livability of the planet as whole.

Responsibility as a virtue means the capacity and disposition to act and think responsibly and to take responsibility for things that need to be taken care of. A responsible person is someone who is disposed to take prospective responsibility upon themselves when they, after epistemically responsible reflection, conclude that they are the right person for the situation. Responsibility is thus both a moral and an epistemic virtue. Some climate ethicists have advocated virtue ethics as an adequate moral theory and even a political praxis for the climate change-ridden

world. I make no such commitments. I take virtue ethics to be a useful way of thinking about moral agency and morality, but one that at the same time has to be critically contextualized.[6]

Responsibility is connected to the capacity to make a difference. It is generally thought that one can only be responsible for things one can make a difference about in an informed manner. There are some dissenting views which hold that there can be tragic situations where one ought to feel responsible about things one cannot do anything about. In this thesis, I am mostly concerned with responsibility in the traditional sense where ought implies can, although I also think that climate change may throw us into tragic situations where we only have bad choices

Retrospective and prospective responsibility as concepts are not in conflict with a virtue theoretical understanding of responsibility. A responsible person is someone who understands their responsibilities and thus understands both retrospective and prospective responsibility. Irresponsibility and other vice concepts, in turn, can begin to explain why we often fail to act on our responsibilities, although they themselves need to be explained with reference to social structures.

Role responsibility is one form that is connected to social structures through institutions; it means that some things are the responsibility of the person who holds a given role simply because they hold that role. Being a police officer, a doctor, a parent, a CEO, or a prime minister are all roles that come with responsibilities. In this thesis, I do not discuss role responsibilities except in specific examples. A possible defense for this omission is that I discuss responsibility for climate change on a different level of abstraction, where an individual's relation to climate change is a function of many factors, and social and institutional roles may or may not be among those factors. Role responsibilities are related to the main question of this thesis insofar as they are integral parts of the social contexts in which individuals find themselves. Many, perhaps most, role responsibilities today are made possible by the same structures that are implicated in climate change.

The real reason for omitting a deeper discussion of role responsibilities is related to another omission. I also do not discuss the state and civic responsibility at length. One important discussion in climate ethics concerns how states are responsible for climate change and whether it is only states and not individuals that

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[6] I return to questions of using and criticizing virtue ethics in chapter 2.

bear responsibility. Individuals have roles and are almost always citizens of states. Both facts give them reasons to act in certain ways and take responsibility for some things and not others. However, treating civic responsibility and role responsibility at length would require discussing state theory and institutional theory and how different conceptions of states and institutions relate them to social structures. Such a treatise from a critical theory perspective, say ”Role Responsibilities and Civic Virtues in a Wrong World,” remains to be written.[7] Insofar as social structures and institutions and states are related in complex ways, I hope this thesis offers some conceptual frameworks for that kind of future research. As the last chapter shows, individual moral responsibility may lead to political action, and thus questions of political and moral philosophy are never too far apart when discussing structural issues such as climate change.

1.4 Social Structures

Another key concept in this study is *social structure*. There are many theories of social structures in social sciences and social philosophy. I lean toward Marxism and different strands of critical theory, and many of the examples I use employ Marxist analyses of capitalism.

However, the main argument of this thesis is crafted to work for people with diverse social structural assumptions and theories. One can agree with the premise that climate change is a social structural issue even if one has a different theory of global capitalism, or even if one thinks that global capitalism is not a significant structure in our world.

In its most basic form, a structural explanation has some of the following features. Parts are explained in reference to a whole; the lives of individuals, for example, are explained in terms of their social class, gender, or ethnicity (Haslanger 2016). This does not mean that parts are determined by the totality in some mechanistic way. Rather, they are in a relationship where both shape each other. However, one individual acting alone has little influence on larger social structures. Some theorists think that social structures or social facts are simply the converged totality of individuals' patterns of behavior and thought. Anthony Giddens (1984),

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7 As far as civic responsibility is concerned, Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos* (2015) is one theoretical source for discussing how civic responsibility runs into problems in neoliberal contexts.

John Searle (1995), and to a certain extent Iris Marion Young (2011) are close to such a view. Climate change, however, complicates this by forcing us to pay attention to path dependencies of fossil-fueled infrastructures and the technological mediations of our thinking and actions, and how these are in turn related to social structures and power.[8] With social structures, patterns of individual and group behavior and thought reinforce one another and are in certain kinds of concordance with infrastructures, technologies, discourses or ideologies, and the division of material resources in society.

In addition to a more holistic view of the social world, a structural explanation usually entails that there is some kind of logic to the whole structure. For example, capitalism structures the world around profit-seeking, and both individuals and firms have to adapt in some way to this global social fact (Shaikh 2016). A structural explanation means that we do not see individuals as disparate units of thought and action, but rather as embedded in their social contexts; the features of these social contexts are not entirely random but rather can be talked about in reference to local and global structures. In terms of climate change, the idea is that some of the same structures that shape, constrain, and enable us as agents are also causes of climate change.

Shaping, enabling, and constraining do not mean that we can only act in ways determined by the social structure or that the elements of the structure operate seamlessly. There may well be cases where structural constraints are so strong that only bad and worse actions or omissions are available or even conceivable. On the other hand, there may well be considerable room to act for some individuals in certain contexts.

Structures are not static or outside history in any sense, although they may be very enduring. Generally, theorists of social structures tend to follow Marx in thinking that human beings make their own history even if they do not choose the conditions in which they make that history. The conditions of history-making include the outlook of the agents themselves.

The relations between morality and social structures are complex and dynamic. Thus, any solutions to moral problems related to social structures are contextual and provisional. Some problems and solutions, however, are more durable than others, some perhaps universal in the sense of being common to all imaginable human societies. Climate change and our practical responses to it will change our societies in highly fundamental ways, so in a few decades we may know better

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[8] See Epstein (2015), but also Althusser (1972) for arguments about the materiality of social structures.

which moral problems are common to a fossil-fueled world and to post-fossil societies.

1.5 Chapters

In the first chapter I start with a critique of collective action problem models as applied to understanding climate change. I show that when they abstract from the complex reality of climate change and its causes, they leave out features of the world that are essential for thinking about the responsibility of individuals. I then contrast the collective action problem model with one where climate change is seen as a social structural issue in global capitalism. In global capitalism, climate change is a result of the normal operations of social mechanisms that are understood as parts of a complex global system where the logic of profit making is dominant.

In the second chapter, I discuss responsibility as a virtue in connection to climate change. I start by discussing environmental virtue ethics and its understanding of responsibility. I do not argue for virtue ethics as a competitive moral theory for the era of climate change. Rather, I show how some tendencies in late capitalism, such as commodification of the self, what some sociologists have called "compulsory individualization", and the theoretical reduction and social transformation of human capacities into human capital together form an image of an ideal neoliberal subject. This ideal neoliberal subject lacks precisely those virtues that are required of a subject capable of thinking and acting responsibly in the face of climate change—it may actually have the corresponding vices. If virtue ethics centers on the moral self-development of the individual, it risks being co-opted by neoliberalism. Rather, it should attend to how subjects are socially formed and how they can influence this formation. The problem that arises is that in order to live well, subjects should live in a society where they can learn to live well and whose social structures, social narratives, and infrastructures support living well. The chapter concludes by arguing that a personal project of living well and responsibly with regard to climate change cannot rely on traditional narratives but must be combined with "radical hope" and concrete action toward a different kind of society, whose narratives we cannot yet fully know. However, the responsible subject whose outlines are emerging in the work of environmental virtue ethicists is a useful conceptual figure that can be contrasted with the actual social realities of our lives.

In the third chapter I discuss the responsibility of the global elite for climate change. In structural accounts of climate change it could be argued that individuals are not culpable as individuals for structural issues. However, this depends on precisely how societies are structured. In highly hierarchical societies some individuals can have disproportionate possibilities to affect how societies operate. Some recent studies show that a large portion of all greenhouse gas emissions can be traced to a relatively small number of corporations (e.g., Heede 2014). This suggests that we can assign the powerful people who can influence how those corporations operate a fairly high degree of responsibility for climate change, even if they too are constrained by social structures. I also discuss other recent social scientific studies that show how the social environment of the elite tends to shape its members in certain ways. It appears that an elite position in our society tends to cultivate dispositions that are almost directly opposite to those dispositions required by the responsible subject outlined in the second chapter. This in turn means that we ought to be careful in which ways we hold the elite responsible and in what ways climate activists ought to relate to the elite. On the other hand, investigating how the elite position shapes the dispositions of individuals can be a useful negativistic heuristic for thinking about alternative, more responsible ways of being.

In the fourth chapter I discuss climate change as an atrocity and the consequences that has for our understanding of responsibility. Climate change fits well with Claudia Card's (2001) atrocity paradigm of evil as an intolerable harm that is culpably caused. Not all causes of climate change are culpable, but some are, especially the well-documented and successful attempts to derail effective international action to mitigate climate change. Some culpabilities are clear, while others are more muddled and require empirical investigation. In addition to defining climate change as an atrocity, I discuss two ways how that should affect our understanding of responsibility. First, I follow Arendt and Adorno in their discussions of atrocious evil as banal, ordinary, and trivial, as complacency about the state of the world. Taking responsibility for atrocities requires not accepting the way the world is but seeking ways to resist and transform the social structures that make atrocities possible. The second, related moral feature of atrocities is that they make everyone responsible in some way. How this responsibility manifests itself depends on the particular situation, but to say of an atrocity that it is somebody else's problem would be immoral, even if one can do relatively little about it at that moment.

The fifth and final chapter takes its cue from climate ethical discussions of forward-looking responsibility. If responsibility for climate change ultimately means changing the world, then activism becomes a moral imperative, and this imperative is strengthened when climate change is understood to be an atrocity. A climate activist movement is taking shape, as evidenced by the climate marches and other actions around the world. In this chapter I discuss what implications the structurality of climate change might have for this movement, and how climate activism should not be seen as separate from other social issues.

I argue that the most important current forms of climate activism only make sense if we understand that activists either implicitly or explicitly take climate change to be structural to capitalism rather than a collective action problem. The divestment movement is one example: divestment activists are trying to influence social actors that they deem to have social power in capitalism, such as banks. I also discuss two empirical cases in more detail: the actions against the expansion of the Heathrow Airport in London and the struggle against the Dakota Pipeline Project in North America. Both struggles are significant: first because, again, many of their tactics and strategies make the most sense if we take them to be directed at fossil capitalism as a social structure, and second because they show how climate change intersects with other issues of social injustice on many different levels.

Besides showing how climate activists approach climate change as a structural problem, I also discuss, in the tradition of critical theory, how climate ethics can be "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" (Marx, quoted in Fraser 1985, 97). Due to the global extent and structural reality of climate change, I argue that climate activism as a reflective practice is well-poised to articulate the moral grammar of social struggles, if there is such a thing, since in order to be successful it has to be able to show how climate change is connected to other structural injustices and oppressions. Climate ethics could offer a theoretical framework for this practice. This chapter also proposes some routes out of the dilemmas that the two previous chapters end with by discussing how participating in social action aimed at social transformation also changes the participants themselves, making it possible for them to be responsible in new ways.

Chapters 2 and 3 flesh out a theoretical framework for thinking about moral responsibility and social structures in relation to climate change, and the fourth chapter on the elite and responsibility is one example of what that framework can do. The fifth chapter on climate change as an atrocity discusses the implications and stakes of the issue, and the last chapter on climate activism suggests how to

find new ways to think about responsibility in a dialectical relationship with moral and political practice.

2 CLIMATE CHANGE AS A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM AND RESPONSIBILITY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that 1) a very prevalent view in climate ethics is to model climate change as an unstructured collective action problem and that this approach is one-sided, or even completely mistaken, especially when it is used to explore issues of responsibility, 2) climate change should be seen as a structural problem in capitalist societies or world capitalism in general, and 3) the way in which climate change is modelled is morally significant, because different moral problems, dilemmas, duties, virtues, and possibilities for action follow.

It makes a difference how one models a moral problem and the facts that give rise to it. A model in science and other research is an abstraction that presents the important features of the problem and omits the less important, with importance determined by the question studied (Frigg and Hartmann 2017). Different aspects of models, abstraction, idealization, isolation, and so on are present in climate ethics to varying degrees. For the purposes of this thesis, it is sufficient to say that it is problematic to model climate change as a whole as a collective action problem for the purposes of moral reasoning, although collective action problem models may still be useful in trying to understand some aspects of climate change, such as impasses in climate negotiations.

The question then is how to judge what is essential and what is inessential. In the case of moral and other problems, it might be reasonable to suppose that at least those features of the world (or the target system of the model) that are needed for solving the problem are essential. If, for example, nation states are seen as collective agents with intentions, a different theory of just war follows than if only individual humans are seen as intentional beings with responsibility. One practical consequence of this view might be that if nation states qua nation states can be held responsible for starting a war without just cause, then a whole state could be

expected to be punished for it, whatever this would mean in any particular case. Similarly, the way we model the problem of climate change has consequences as to who can be held responsible and in what sense, what actions are necessary, obligatory, blameworthy, or otherwise morally problematic, who and what counts as a proper object of moral concern, what we should do, and even who is the "we" who should do something, and so on.

There have been many uses of collective action theory in climate ethics. I am arguing against the specific use where the situation that gives rise to climate change is modelled as an unstructured collective action problem from which moral conclusions are derived. For example:

P1 Climate change is a result of disparate individuals acting individually but producing a collective effect.

P2 The actions of any one individual are in themselves inconsequential in terms of the collective effect.

C Therefore it is wrong to blame individuals for the collective effect; either no one is to blame or there has to be a way to assign collective responsibility.

My view is that climate change is a structural problem and that individuals are not disparate. They are embedded in social and cultural contexts where social structures constrain and make possible different practices. Societies in global capitalism are structured in ways that produce global warming.[9] From this it may still follow that generally any one individual should not be blamed for climate change, but the picture of individual responsibility that emerges is much more nuanced, since individuals, their preferences, and their capacities for knowledge and action are all shaped by the social context in which they make their ways and live their lives. The question of any one individual's responsibility is much more of an empirical matter than the collective action model supposes. We do not know without investigation whether this or that individual could have done something to prevent catastrophic climate change or how much any one individual possesses the social power and influence needed to cause substantive changes in social systems.

[9] For a historical account of the entanglement of climate change and capitalism, see Malm (2016). For a general account, see Angus (2016).

2.2 Climate Change as a Collective Action Problem

The idea that climate change is an unstructured collective action problem is very prevalent in analytical climate ethics. Christopher Kutz offers a common account of unstructured collective action problems: "[e]nvironmental damage is typically the result of the knowing but uncoordinated activity of disparate individuals each of whose actions contributes only imperceptibly to the resulting harm" (2000, 171). Global warming is supposed to have come about through the actions of billions of individuals, but those individuals do not form a structured collective with decision procedures and a chain of command that could be blamed as a collective. And where we could hold individual members of a structured collective like the Nazi Party morally accountable owing to their avowed membership, we cannot say the same with climate change, since there are no membership cards for the carbon emissions club.[10] On the other hand, no individual as such could be easily blamed, for their individual emissions contribute to any harms caused by climate change through a very complex causal chain and only in concert with many other emitters. People are not unaware that carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions cause global warming, but they do not see immediately how their own activities affect the climate. Since any individual is only one among millions, whatever they could have done differently in terms of their emissions, the overall problem would remain the same.

Many climate ethicists have therefore argued that climate change is a challenge to traditional moral theories and institutions. The environmental philosopher Dale Jamieson noted this as early as in 1989 in a conference presentation that was turned into a 1992 article. According to Jamieson, traditional moral theories have been designed to answer relatively simple moral problems where we can identify a harm, a victim, and a perpetrator. His example is Jack stealing Jill's bicycle. It is contentious whether this model (victim-harm-perpetrator) and example (Jack steals Jill's bicycle) captures most of Western moral theorizing from the last 2,500 years, even if it is a good example of the sort of things that twentieth-century liberalism has considered wrong (the violation of an individual's property rights!).

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[10] In chapter 4, however, I argue that there may be organizations with membership criteria whose core purpose entails making climate change worse.

I agree with Jamieson that ethical theories need to be thoroughly reconsidered and criticized from the perspective of climate change. I disagree with his and several others' understanding of the structure of the climate change problem, a disagreement that has both moral theoretical and practical consequences. Traditional moral theories may prove inadequate but for different reasons, and different aspects of those theories will be problematic. "A moral philosophy […] characteristically presupposes a sociology," writes MacIntyre (1985, 23), and different sociologies produce different moral philosophies.

After considering five cases of lost bicycles, Jamieson arrives at an example that he thinks best captures the moral dimensions of climate change:

> [A]cting independently, Jack and a large number of unacquainted people set in motion a chain of events that causes a large number of future people who will live in another part of the world from ever having bikes. For some people the perception persists that this case poses a moral problem. This is because it may be thought that the core of what constitutes a moral problem remains. Some people have acted in a way that harms other people. However, most of what typically accompanies this core has disappeared. In this case it is difficult to identify the agents and the victims or the causal nexus that obtains between them; thus, it is difficult for the network of moral concepts (for example, responsibility, blame, and so forth) to gain traction. (Jamieson 2010, 436)

According to Jamieson, this example displays the essential features of the collective action problem. Climate change is supposed to be analogous to this example in the sense that it shares the same significant features that make assigning responsibility difficult or impossible. Individuals act independently of one another, without co-ordination, without knowing one another. Somehow, not intentionally or even explicably, their actions aggregately produce a harmful effect. In themselves, these actions are innocent, but their consequences are catastrophic. Driving a car, for example, is individually innocent but collectively harmful, because the emissions of a single car do not cause any disturbance in the climate system, but the aggregate effects of billions of drivers are a different story (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2005; Broome 2012). If the actions of individuals do not in

themselves cause climate change and if no one intends the collective outcome, then no one is responsible.

John Broome by contrast calculates that even the emissions of individuals may cause some harm, arguing that individuals in their private lives have a duty of justice to lower their emissions or somehow compensate for them. However, individuals can make a much greater difference in the world by using their resources to help others directly or through charities than by lowering their own emissions (Broome 2012, 13, 65).

For both Jamieson and Broome, the morally significant actions concerning climate change are the emissions of individuals. I argue throughout this thesis that, instead of individuals' emissions, we ought to pay attention to how their practices uphold or resist social structures. Yet, it is worth asking why would so many act in ways that emit carbon and other greenhouse gases. In Jamieson's bicycle example, it seems that this is just a coincidence. Unacquainted individuals just happen to act independently in all kinds of ways, but the unintended collective result is horrible. To be fair, Jamieson gives several reasons from economic factors to evolutionary psychology when he analyses reasons for inaction on climate change, but these factors are in play for him only once the problem already exists (Jamieson 2014). However, in terms of how the problem came about, he still thinks that the example of future people never having bicycles is a good example, and that this example show well the challenges of assigning responsibility and blame for climate change.

Jamieson's basic model for understanding climate change cannot account for the reasons for emitting greenhouse gases and other drivers of global warming, such as deforestation, and he does not discuss how these reasons may be connected and so be parts of a social totality. However, if, as I argue, human beings are socially and culturally embedded creatures whose activities are both made possible and constrained by social structures, and if social structures are such that different individuals do not all share the same possibilities and constraints, then attending to those structures is necessary for understanding individual responsibility for climate change.

2.3 Tragedy of the Commons

One frequent way to frame the problem of climate change as a collective action problem is by using Garret Hardin's famous example of the tragedy of the commons. Hardin (1968) originally meant his example to illustrate the population problem, but it has been used to discuss many environmental and other ethical and political issues, including climate change (e.g., Johnson 2003). In the tragedy of the commons, individual shepherds use a common plot of land for grazing. The common land can only sustainably support a certain number of sheep. However, every individual shepherd has an incentive to increase the number of their sheep, and according to the underlying norms of self-interested rationality, will do so, even though this leads to a tragedy, the destruction of the land, when all the shepherds increase their sheep. "As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain," writes Hardin (1968, 1244).

Initially, the tragedy of the commons seems like a fairly promising model for thinking morally about global warming. In it, the structure of the situation is such that it includes incentives and reasons for action, and it can generate possible structural and institutional explanations for the tragedy. Apparently, the essential motive of shepherds is economic gain (apparently, since no other motive is included in the model as a factor). Scarce resources (the plot of land) and the mode of production (sheep grazing) are seen as part of the structure of the problem, but like Jamieson's bikes they remain background conditions that require no explanation, problematization, or moral appraisal. In most discussions of the tragedy, the mode of production is not problematized, but since it is at least included in the model, it can be discussed as a part of the problem. The situation in the tragedy is thought to be analogous to climate change in the sense that the capacity of earth systems to absorb greenhouse gases is like the plot of land, a scarce resource used in common by individuals who seek to maximize their own gain and who thus inadvertently destroy the resource.

The tragedy of the commons still leaves much to be desired. As with so many game theoretical examples, the tragedy of the commons boils down to a problem of collective action when there are no means of communication, inducing trust, adjudication, and collective reasoning. Agents are seen as self-interested atoms (in the classical sense, not the atoms of physics). It is self-evident that this is not what people are like and how societies and economies work in real life, but this is usually not in dispute. The tragedy of the commons is an idealized model. It is not supposed to be the same as reality. My claim is that the tragedy of the commons

model omits morally essential features of how climate change has come to happen and why it has been made to happen, and that this makes it a bad model for asking ethical questions about responsibility. Even more problematically, game theoretical examples, at least in their basic form, do not include possibilities for changing the rules of the game. If we use only game theory to model a social problem, we risk making the possibilities for social change invisible.[11]

How did it come to be that individual shepherds are using a common land and yet do not manage to talk to one another? Why is short-term economic gain their prime motive? Could they change their dispositions? Why have sheep become and remained the only livelihood for the herders? To what extent would they be able to change things, to create new institutions, new ways of life and perhaps with them, new incentive structures? For some uses, the model need not answer these questions, but for questions of moral responsibility and for many other questions of social philosophy and ethics, they are essential.

If there were absolutely no way that the individual shepherds could have come together and deliberate, they would be less responsible for the damage they have collectively caused. If deliberation were possible but very difficult, this might be a mitigating circumstance. If some shepherds actively worked against reaching a collective decision, surely they would be more blameworthy than those who tried to form a collective. If there were really never a way that global warming could have been foreseen by anyone and proper institutions could never have been created, then no one would be responsible in the retrospective sense. But with climate change, this is empirically not the case. The greenhouse effect was discovered in the nineteenth century, and by the late twentieth century there was a clear consensus that human activities were warming the global climate with dangerous consequences for the future (Weart 2008). Of course, even if there were to be no retrospective responsibility, individuals might still have prospective responsibilities as, for example, Cripps (2013) argues. However, as I argue in

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[11] Elinor Oström (1990, 182 and *passim*) notes that Hardin's tragedy of the commons, the prisoner's dilemma, and Mancur Olson's logic of collective action "lead to the prediction that those using such resources will not cooperate so as to achieve further benefits [and] individuals are perceived as being trapped in a static situation, unable to change the rules affecting their incentives." Later game theorists have devised more complicated games. However, climate ethicists have so far only used the simplest models for discussing the genesis of global warming. It may be possible to device useful game theorical models where the social structural causes of climate change are taken into account, but this would require starting from those causes and how they shape the game and the participants of the game. It remains to be studied whether such games would be useful for understanding the moral problems of climate change. In this dissertation, my criticism focuses on the uses of game theoretical and collective action problem models in climate ethics so far.

chapter 6 in more detail, whether climate change is modelled as a collective action problem or a structural problem also makes a difference for prospective responsibility.

Stephen Gardiner (2011) has criticized the use of the tragedy of the commons model and other game theoretical models in the context of climate change research. For Gardiner, the most pressing structural concern with these models is that they are ill equipped for modeling climate change as an intergenerational issue. Solutions to game theoretical dilemmas usually aspire to be win-win solutions, but for Gardiner, this is problematic when there is a fundamental asymmetry between future generations and our own. Gardiner shows how even with the assumptions of collective action problems, where individuals supposedly act disparately, game theoretical models of collective action problems tend to fail. While as an immanent critique, this is an important achievement, I want to dispute the underlying suppositions of what individual action in our structured world is like and argue that these suppositions are morally significant.[12]

2.4 Toward a Structural Perspective

Steven Vogel (2015) points toward structural explanations while to an extent agreeing with both Jamieson and Gardiner that collective action problems explain why climate change arises and why it is difficult to deal with. For Vogel, our market societies are structured in ways that produce collective action problems. He uses the Hegelian-Marxist concept of alienation to illustrate how our collective actions in their current form come to be an alien power over us, because in global market capitalism, we do not have institutions for democratically deciding what to do collectively. We as individuals and our purposive actions are atomized, but there is no metaphysical necessity that they should remain so or indeed that they should have been atomized to begin with.

[12] One important aspect of Gardiner's (2011) criticism is that if climate change negotiations are modeled as game theoretical dilemmas, we tend to suppose that states as they currently exist are able to represent their citizens both existing and future ones. This important criticism can be made independently of assuming that climate change is a collective action problem, since even if climate change were a structural problem, attempts to solve it might end up looking like prisoner's dilemmas. Gardiner shows that even in this case, it would be a mistake to model them as such. Kopec (2017) also usefully points out that modelling climate negotiations as a tragedy of the commons might act as a self-fulfilling prophecy and thus have bad consequences.

It is common in environmental philosophy to argue that we are alienated from nature. For example, the shepherds in the tragedy of the commons do not see how their lives are dependent on the flourishing of the land. Vogel argues that alienation from nature is really an alienation from ourselves and our own activities, including all the effects that our activities have on non-human entities. This is alienation in the Marxist sense. We are alienated from our own labor in the sense that we do not determine how, to what purpose, and with what effects we labor; instead the capitalist systems of the market and division of labor, which themselves result from labor, determine what we do:

> We are alienated from the world surrounding us–from our "environment" – in that we fail to see that it is a world that is made by human action. And more particularly by social action: for the labor that builds the world around us is collective labor. The chair I am sitting on was built in a factory by the effort of many laborers working together; their labor required machinery, and that machinery had itself to be built, again by many workers; the energy to run the machinery had to be generated and the fuels necessary for that process had to be extracted, and these too required work. And all these activities furthermore needed to be planned, organized, financed, etc., and workers were needed for these tasks as well. We spend much of our time on chairs, in rooms, never noticing that the number of people whose labor made it possible for us to do so–in each room, on each chair–must run into the tens or even hundreds of thousands; we hardly ever give those people a moment's thought. This seems to me a failure to pay attention to the origin of the things in our environment that is as striking, and as serious, as our failure to notice their origin in "nature." We do not recognize our everyday dependence on nature, it is often said; I am suggesting that in the same way we do not recognize our everyday dependence on labor, and more precisely on the labor of others. (Vogel 2014, 93)

One aspect of this alienation is that we do not see our laboring activities as collective, as parts of a totality, just as the collective action problem view of climate change does not see emissions as parts of a totality—a chaotic totality without central planning but in which many activities are nonetheless "planned, organized, financed, etc." One aspect of our alienation from one another is that we are

connected only through commodities like chairs, computer, and pizza whose origins in human labor are obscure to us. This in itself would be a rather trivial point; clearly all our immediate experience of any object, human-made or not, does not include its origins. But Vogel's point is rather that what connects us to one another and our environment is human labor, and our societies are structured so that these fundamental social connections of laboring and thus transforming the environment and ourselves are not accessible to us as something we could change, but appear instead as if their current arrangement was a natural necessity.

Vogel is careful not to blame or point fingers. He appears to side with Jamieson in saying that no one may be responsible for our predicament in a backward-looking sense, even if we all have a responsibility to act in a forward-looking sense (2015, 217). Vogel argues that we ought to grasp that how the world as it is results from our own practices, and we should therefore take responsibility for it by transforming our practices "via the procedures of discursive democracy" so that taking responsibility for them becomes a possibility for us (2015, 231). To make Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach slightly more complicated (but in a perfectly Marxist fashion), a Vogelian thesis might be that *the point is to change the world so we can better understand it.* The only way out, according to Vogel, would be to change our practices and social structures via discursive democracy. This will not change the fact that in a complex world with increasingly connected societies and powerful technologies, human practices will have unintended consequences.

I am sympathetic to Vogel's account and his proposed solutions. However, it seems to me that his account of the structure of global capitalism is still too one-sided. It is as if, for him, there are individual market actors on an equal playing field where the structure of the playing field is such that it alienates the actors from one another and their collective actions. He has very little to say about power, conflicts of interests, and violence, clearly all parts of the way the world currently is. Vogel separates the market and the realm of politics from each other as ideal types and concedes that this is empirically inaccurate (2015, 226). However, a more critical approach would also consider how the practices of the market and politics intertwine and make each other possible, and how the market system is founded and maintained not just by politics but also by violence.[13] It is possible to do this in addition to comparing ideal types, and similar conclusions may follow. If violence

[13] See Marx (1976, 871–940) for a classic account; and Harvey (2004), Leech (2012), Jones (2016), and Tyner (2016) for different but possibly complementary contemporary perspectives on the relationship between market capitalism and violence.

is understood to be inherent in the capitalist market, it makes even more sense to advocate democratic politics to curb the power of the market.

It makes a moral difference, however, whether we only model individuals as market actors who are alienated from their own practices, or also as embedded in hierarchical social structures. Whether we can hold certain individuals and groups significantly more responsible and blameworthy than others for structural problems appears to require that we take power differences into account as internal to the structure of the world, as essential parts of the model that we need to use in order to ask questions about individual morality and climate change. If climate change is viewed as an unstructured collective action problem, the questions of power and interest are either concealed or added as an afterthought. For Vogel, environmental problems are collective action problems that arise because the structure of society is such that it produces collective action problems. He does not discuss power differentials in the structure of society and how these differentials affect and figure in environmental problems. Since the ownership and control of natural resources is intimately connected with social power, the concentration of natural resources in the hands of the few is a result of a history of war and forced appropriation, processes that are ongoing.[14] Furthermore, because the hierarchically organized processes of production, distribution, and consumption all have environmental effects, the environmental problems that we face are not just a result of alienated market structures, but also structures of power, violence, and inequality.

If we take a structural view of climate change, this changes our understanding of which actions are morally significant. Sunday drives are not entirely without moral content, but nonetheless investment decisions, political decisions to regulate or deregulate the economy, designing advertisement campaigns for fossil fuel companies, telling all one's friends to vote for a certain candidate, and many other actions that are not directly connected to emissions are morally and consequentially much more significant. It is a matter of social power and social positioning which ones of these or other actions are possible for any one individual.

Insofar as social structures create hierarchies and privileged positions, some people have more responsibility than others. They may also have incentives to act irresponsibly. There may be people who with their resources and social connections could have done (and could still do) a great deal to mitigate climate change, but have not done so. Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway (2010) and Naomi Klein (2014) document how some powerful people have not only failed to use

[14] See, for example, David Harvey (2004) on "accumulation by dispossession."

their influence to mitigate climate change but have instead intentionally obfuscated the issue and deterred others from acting. To explain and understand their behavior, we can look at economic incentives, group dynamics, and ideological schemas. A social scientific explanation does not preclude moral appraisal, but it is necessary for understanding responsibility in a complex world where actions and their consequences are mediated by social, technological, and political factors and by earth systems. In addition to the moral appraisal of powerful individuals, there are other relevant ethical questions. How should the rest of us associate with the elite? What moral risks are involved for those climate activists who try to further the mitigation of climate change by working with the global elite? I return to these questions in chapter 3.

2.5 Climate Change as a Structural Problem in Capitalism

I have already hinted at why climate change should be approached as a structural rather than a collective action problem. First, we should understand acts—or rather practices—that contribute to climate change as interdependent and following a logic that makes sense from the point of view of the whole. Second, we need to see how power and interests play a role and are an essential part of the picture. Third, a structural explanation helps us make sense of how ideology is a part of the problem. Finally, climate change is connected to other problems of structural injustice. These four aspects of social structures are discussed throughout this thesis.

If climate change is seen as a collective action problem, each contributing individual act and actor is assumed to be fundamentally independent of other contributors. A structural view, by contrast, considers them as fundamentally interdependent parts of a totality, in which the behavior of the parts can be explained by what the whole is like and their place within it (see e.g., Shapiro 1997; Haslanger 2015). If climate changed is modelled as a collective action problem, individuals relate to it as emitters of greenhouse gases. If climate change is modelled as a structural problem, individuals are related to it as active participants in social structures.

When discussing human beings and social structures, the behavior of parts (e.g., individual human beings or groups) can never be completely explained by the whole; if it could, it would make no sense to talk about responsibility. The complex and long debate over the relationship of structure and agency in social sciences demonstrates that it is no simple matter, and that there may be no permanent answer, except in the most abstract sense, since social structures affect the possibilities and the forms of agency, and social structures change, sometimes very rapidly, sometimes very slowly. Mitigating climate change would in fact require rapid changes in social structures and thus changes in the possibilities for agency.

In addition to a holistic and/or relational view of the world, structural models also tend to ascribe certain logics and tendencies to the whole structure that constrain and condition the possibilities for action within that structure. This point is crucial, since the social structural view of climate change means that in some sense the logic of current social structures is such that they tend to produce climate change. How these logics function and where they come from differs from model to model, but in general there is nothing very mysterious about the idea. Customs, power and property relations, infrastructures, the shape of technology, laws, and other enduring features of the social world make some practices easier to repeat and become customary than others.

In global capitalism, societies are structured in ways that, through actions of individuals, collectives, and institutions, produce global warming. This does not mean that structures are the real agents that work through individuals and collectives. Indeed, structures are themselves products, and it is how they are produced over which social theorists disagree. By focusing on global capitalism, I make social theoretical commitments. I believe that some relevant structures are global in scale, and that the "mode of production" called capitalism structures our lives and possibilities for agency. The theory of capitalism I am proposing is essentially Marxist, but one does not need to be a card-carrying Marxist to share some of these basic beliefs about social structures in today's world.

Some basic aspects of global capitalism that are most relevant to climate change are:

- There is a structural imperative for firms to seek profits, which results in capital accumulation and economic growth
- Market competition functions as one of the mechanisms that constrains the possibilities of what firms can do

- Having economic wealth carries influence in the social, cultural, and political spheres; having capital in certain key sectors of the economy, such as energy, means even more influence
- Aspects of social life and even natural processes that were previously non-economic become tendentially economized and commodified[15]

As Anwar Shaikh writes: "Capital is a particular social form of wealth driven by the profit motive. With this incentive comes a corresponding drive for expansion, for the conversion of capital into more capital, of profit into more profit" (2016, 259). Firms have to make more money than they invest. We can disagree about which factors and mechanisms are in play and in what ways, but it is hardly far-fetched to say that most firms try to be profitable, preferably more profitable than their competitors, since this allows them to invest more and thus acquire greater market share, which makes them even more profitable. If firms make less money than they invest, they cannot use their profits for new technologies and workforce training, giving their competitors an edge. Thus, even if CEOs wanted to minimize their carbon footprint, they would have to balance this aspiration with the need to make a profit. Forestry companies would have to make significant investments to change their modes of operation, and fossil fuel companies would have to discard their current business models completely. One does not have to be an avowed Marxist to agree with these points. It should be noted that the profit motive as a structural feature of the system is not the same as individual greed. It may be that the system rewards greed for some individuals or that it produces greed as a disposition. However, it may sometimes be the case that individuals sacrifice their personal well-being and resources in order to make a firm profitable without expecting returns to themselves.

Other more contentious parts of Marx's analysis, such as the theory of exploitation premised on the labor theory of value or the law of tendency of the rate of profit to fall, are also important in the context of climate change, as they concern among other things technological change and structural injustice, but if we can agree that firms have to make a profit and that this trumps other values in case of conflict, and that if we can also agree that in global capitalism there exist

[15] These features of capitalism have been examined in depth in Karl Marx's critique of political economy and more recently by the economist Anwar Shaikh (2016). However, it is possible to take them to be structural features of capitalism even if one does not commit to their Marxist explanations. For accounts of how global capitalism and climate change are connected, see for example Peet, Robbins, and Watts (2011), Wright and Nyberg (2015), and Malm (2016).

tendencies of commodification and that wealth carries social power, we already have the rough outlines of a theory on how capitalist social structures and climate change are related. Even so, my main argument does not even require one to think that capitalism is an essential structure in our world. It is enough to think that there are certain social structures and that power is a feature of how societies are structured.[16]

In our world, economic growth has so far tended to correlate with emissions (IPCC 2014). There are some indications that this may be changing, but at the time of this writing, it is still too early to tell. For example, according to some estimates, 2014 saw economic growth in Europe while emissions there decreased and worldwide emissions stalled.[17] This may be a hopeful indication that emissions and economic growth have finally been disconnected, but one year is not a trend.[18]

In the social structural view, climate change is not a random accident but a result of the "normal" functioning of social structures. Insofar as capitalism is supposed to provide economic growth and economic growth has been premised on the cheap energy provided by fossil fuels, climate change is not just an unhappy unintended consequence but the result of capitalism doing precisely what it is supposed to do, even in ideal theory (although ideal theories usually do not take into account the ecological conditions of the economic system, which is part of the problem). People not only cause emissions directly when doing ordinary things such as driving to work; in their roles as workers, managers, investors, and consumers, they participate in, uphold, produce, and reproduce social structures that cause emissions and other drivers of climate change via countless mediations.

These structures, however, are related to climate change. This is significant for two reasons. First, the social structural view allows us to see how there can be

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[16] The connection between wealth and social power seems almost trivial, and there is a vast literature on the commodification tendency, not just by Marxists. *The Great Transformation* (1944) by Karl Polanyi, for example, has had a great influence.

[17] See Olivier et al. (2015).

[18] The connection between economic growth and emissions is obviously an enormous question, because on it depend how much global social structures will have to change and how quickly. If greenhouse gas emissions and economic growth are in the end inextricably tied together, we must do away with the economic system based on growth and profit. This may not mean that there could not be economic growth at times or that no one should ever make a profit, only that constant growth and profit-seeking should not be the basis on which our societies are structured. On the other hand, it may be important to imagine possible worlds and ways of life where there is no profit, the market, or anything resembling economic growth at all. Even if it were possible to maintain economic growth while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, this would lead to other problems as long as economic growth requires energy. For example, the construction of solar panels uses rare and non-renewable minerals, and the deployment of electric cars would mean a huge increase in battery waste.

different ways retrospective responsibility can be assigned, which in turn has effects on how we should see prospective responsibility. Having done wrong will mean that one has a duty not just to prevent future harms and help those one can help, but also to alleviate the wrong done. The second reason is that social structures make possible and constrain different avenues for social action in different times and places and for different people. Therefore, "pure" prospective responsibility will also look different from the structural view than from the collective action problem view.

Capitalism is not the only social structure that is involved in climate change. In feminist theory, the term intersectionality is often used to conceptualize the positioning of individuals in social worlds structured by class, gender, race, sexuality, and other differences in power and identity. For the individual's responsibility for climate change, all these structures are relevant insofar as they have to do with social power and because the ways cultural factors such as ideas about masculinity constrain what individuals think they can and should do. How these different social and cultural factors influence the capacities of individuals to think and act is a topic of ongoing empirical and interdisciplinary investigation and debate.

2.6 Morality, Climate Change, and Structure

Collective action problems complicate questions of moral responsibility. What about structural problems? There is a significant literature in moral and political philosophy on ethics and structural injustice. In this literature, the fact that a problem or injustice is structural does not usually mean that there can be no moral responsibility. Most normative discussions on social structures concern the evaluative criteria of the goodness and badness, or justness and unjustness, of structures. With climate change these are important questions, and there is every reason to evaluate earlier theories of social justice from the perspective of climate change.

Iris Marion Young (2006, 114) argues that "[s]tructural injustice exists when social processes put large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time as these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities." In some ways climate change is a structural injustice in itself. Social processes influence earth systems in ways that create conditions in which some people are under threat of disasters, die from diseases that are new to their areas and immune systems, are deprived of their homes and possibilities of building a good life, and so on.

There is more. The structural injustices that put power and influence in the hands of the few also create incentives for them not to let us change the system that causes climate change. Andreas Malm (2016), for example, shows how the concentration of wealth and the accumulation of capital have historically been connected to fossil fuels in many ways, and Andrew Sayer (2014, 319–338) examines how fossil fuels support the extravagant lifestyles and social power of today's superrich. It is unjust that the most innocent will suffer most while the most culpable have the best chances to protect themselves. It is also wrong that unjustly acquired power has been used to thwart climate action. Chris Cuomo (2011) points out that otherwise vulnerable social groups, such as women and racialized minorities, are also more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than those with more privileges. Thus both injustices with definable culpable actors and other structural injustices besides global warming exacerbate the unjust effects of climate change.

As if instances of social injustice such as racism, sexism, and poverty were not enough, evaluating social structures from the perspective of climate change raises the stakes to the level of existential risk. Stephen Gardiner puts this nicely in what he calls "the global test":

> Suppose that human life on this planet were subject to some serious threat. Suppose also that this threat was both caused by human activities, but also preventable by changes in those activities. Suppose then that existing social and political systems had both allowed this threat to emerge and then shown themselves to be incapable of adequately responding to it. According to the global test, this fact would count as a criticism of those systems, and one potentially fatal to their acceptability. (Gardiner 2011, 128)

Gardiner may have in mind more clearly defined systems, such as parliamentary democracy or international law, but the argument can be expanded to those systems that social scientists call structures: patterns of individual and group behavior and thought that reinforce one another and that are in some kind of concordance with infrastructures, technologies, discourses or ideologies, and the division of material resources in society. In a way, the global test is a form (or beginning) of immanent critique, since it shows how the normal functioning of social structures can be self-destructive. On the other hand, it goes deeper, since the threats it is interested in are existential; they concern the survival of human life generally (cf. Jonas 1978). The test is also global in the sense that it applies to systems that have enough power to make a difference to the continuity of human life, at least as we know it. In the globalized world and in global capitalism certain structures such as the relations between wage labor and capital and the market have begun to concern almost all economic activity; even those that are not strictly capitalist have to react to the workings of the capitalist market in one way or another. Global capitalism concerns more than economic relations. Since the expanding market circulates cultural commodities and people, it also has an effect on other social structures and relations, such as gender, sexuality, and race.

2.7 Responsibility in the "Social Connection Model"

What about individual responsibility? It is one thing to criticize social structures as if one were not a part of them, as if one's life did not depend on them, but it is another thing to understand one's own position and the responsibility that follows from that position. The structural view of climate change agrees with Jamieson's collective action view that an individualist account of responsibility which depends on clearly identifiable agents and harms is not in itself adequate, although, unlike the collective action view, the structural view allows for instances where some more culpable agents and some wrong acts can be empirically identified. However, there is more to responsibility than culpability. It has been suggested that Iris Marion Young's "social connection model" is a good approach to understanding the responsibility for climate change (Eckersley 2016; Godoy 2017). I find Young's

model very helpful for explaining some aspects of responsibility, but not all. For example, I disagree regarding retrospective responsibility and blame.[19]

Young's work, especially the article "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model" (2006) and the posthumous book *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), are examples of theorizing ethics and social structures without losing the first-person perspective. For Young, the structurality of a problem does not mean that individuals are not responsible. She argues that "[a]ll the persons who participate by their actions in the ongoing schemes of cooperation that constitute these structures are responsible for them" (2006, 114). In a world where most economic activities are implicated in global warming more or less immediately, most persons participate in the structures that cause them. This, the social connection model, is enough for the attribution of responsibility. But what kind of responsibility? According to Young, in the social connection model "[o]ur actions are conditioned by and contribute to institutions that affect distant others, and their actions contribute to the operations of institutions that affect us" (2006, 106), thus making us responsible in a differentiated and situated way.

Clearly my choices of personal consumption, for example, would have very little effect on the whole, especially if we only count the emissions that can be directly attributed to me as effective action, but we can also ask in what ways eating, personal transportation, and other patterns of consumption serve to uphold structures that bind together individual practices in ways that make them contribute to climate change. Buying meat and gasoline gives money to the firms that produce them and sends them a signal that there is a demand for their products.

There are other effects besides the obvious economic ones. Consumption is sometimes thought to be a private activity, but it is in fact intensely social and public. Many social scientists and philosophers have pointed out that in a consumer society, buying and exhibiting what we buy is a way of embodying values.[20] It is a normative and communicative practice with a certain view of a good and desirable life. By participating in certain patterns of consumption, I not only channel my money but also fashion myself for myself and for others. What I buy, eat, wear, and drive and the brands I use all contribute to forming my public

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[19] Eckersley (2016, 347) points out that Young is concerned with "political responsibility," but "political responsibility cannot be dissociated from moral responsibility." In my reading, the responsibility that Young talks about seems to be largely moral in the sense that it is about how our actions relate to structures that have morally relevant outcomes to others.

[20] See Skeggs (2004) for one perspective and an extensive bibliography of relevant literature.

persona and my sense of myself. Furthermore, in the globalizing world some consumption patterns seem to become global themselves. One worrying development is the increase in eating meat and other animal products in the so-called developing world.[21]

While whatever I consume implicates me in social structures in many different ways, thus making me responsible for them in Young's sense, I do not consume in a vacuum. Social structures both constrain and make consumption possible. Both wealth and social positioning (white, male, North European, educated, etc.) influence what I can buy, what I want to buy, and what I can even think of as being for sale. Infrastructures, whether results of conscious planning or organic development or both, have an effect on my behavior.[22] A clear-cut way to think of responsibility is to say that I am responsible for my consumption insofar as I can make decisions concerning it, but my decision-making is delimited by social structures, both cultural and material. However, since social structures are practices—socially objectified to be sure, but practices nonetheless—they can potentially be changed. Responsibility is thus not exhausted by the possibilities that structures afford in any situation where an agent is acting, but also concerns the structures themselves, how the agent participates in upholding them, and what avenues are available for changing them.

Individual consumption is of course only a part of the story; as I already indicated, consumption is a public and social activity, even in highly individualized cultures. The production of what individuals consume causes emissions and uses up natural resources, and production can in turn be divided into production of consumables and production of the means of production. In sales and marketing, this division is marked by the terms "business to business" (b2b) and "business to customer" (b2c). While these productive and marketing activities may have other local purposes, they are invariably geared toward making a profit. Macro-level structures constrain what is possible on the micro level. Does my responsibility in the social connection model extend to the structures of global capitalism and climate change? Young thinks that "the social connection model applies to every case of structural injustice, whether local or global" (2006, 107). So, if Young is right, and if climate change is a case of structural injustice, then the social connection model applies.

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[21] See http://www.worldwatch.org/global-meat-production-and-consumption-continue-rise-1 (accessed 9 March 2018).

[22] On the morality of infrastructure, see Epting (2015).

I have benefited unjustly from global capitalism, the histories of imperialism and colonialism, and the resulting disparities in economic resources; therefore, I have a responsibility to help those who are harmed by climate change.[23] This is analogous to other issues of social justice, such as racism and the history of colonialism and slavery, where I do not have direct causal responsibility for the whole history and resulting structures, but they still put me in an undeservedly privileged position, from which follows responsibilities not just of redistributing my individual resources through charity, as Peter Singer (2015) suggests, but also in the sense of trying to find out how to help change the unjust social structures and how not to uphold them in my practices. This is daunting, at a minimum, as the responsibility of a lone individual, but as I use Young's work to argue in chapter 5, individual responsibility may amount to the duty to take part in collective action.

In addition, I too may be harmed by climate change. Even if I do not lose my home, life, health, or job to climate effects, it could be argued that having to live in anxiety, fear, and uncertainty about the future is a form of harm. My children will more probably be harmed or otherwise worse off due to climate change. From this may follow duties of solidarity. The structures need to change, and they can only be changed by collective action, so I must try do my part in some kind of collective action (cf. Cripps 2013; chapter 5 below). While someone starting from the collective action problem view could agree with these conclusions in the abstract sense, understanding individual responsibility and the possibilities for participating in, playing a part, and shaping collective action will require an understanding of the individual's position and situatedness in society.

For Young, the responsibility implied by structural injustice and the social connection model is forward-looking, but I would argue that whether and how much it makes sense to talk about backward-looking responsibility depends on how society is structured. Structures may enable some people to have enough influence in structural effects that it makes sense to blame them. In a dictatorship or absolutist monarchy, one person may have backward-looking responsibility for many things. In more complex but still hierarchical societies, there will be many instances of personal backward-looking responsibility, but the account must be more careful and situated. Young also argues against blaming for pragmatic, political reasons, but it may well be that in some cases naming, blaming, and shaming powerful individuals is an effective tactic. This depends on the context, the overall strategy and goals of the blamers, and other factors. It could also be

[23] See Page (2012) for an account and defense of the "beneficiary pays principle" in the context of climate change.

argued that accountability for past deeds is an important aspect of our moral lives, and losing it in the face of socially structured practices and misuses of social power carries moral risks.[24]

The social connection model is a useful framework for understanding responsibility in a situation where we know that we are connected with other people around the world in many ways. Over the course of this thesis, however, I come to advocate a more pluralistic conception of responsibility by showing how different conceptions of responsibility make sense in different ways if we take climate change to be a social structural issue. Any one approach to responsibility, and the social connection model in particular, can be a good start for understanding the responsibility of individuals embedded in complex and global social structures, but in thinking carefully and thoroughly about one's situation, other concepts and frameworks will come into play. My pluralism is epistemic and provisional. It is epistemic because I do not dismiss the possibility that there could be a true account of responsibility that would be monist, but I do not think any current account fits the bill. It is provisional because different historical circumstances make different theories possible, and we do not yet have access to those frameworks that could obtain in a radically different future.

2.8 Conclusion

What would Jamieson's bicycle example look like if it were analogous to climate change as a structural problem in capitalism? Here is an attempt:

Jack participates in an influential role in an economic system based on using as much bicycle-making resources as quickly as possible and where there is a tendency for most bicycles to end in the hands of the few. Most people are to some extent aware of the basic premises and tendencies of the system, but there is a vast ideological machinery that promotes the view that the system is fair, justified, natural, and necessary. Most experts agree that if nothing changes, in the near future most people will never have bicycles, and the experts have repeatedly said so in public. There is knowledge of how the system works, and there are predictions

[24] I offer an in-depth discussion of blaming in the case of the global elite in chapter 3.

of what will happen in the future. Many power interests are entangled in the issue, which has consequences for knowledge formation. Let us even suppose that the more bicycles one owns, the more one can influence public opinion. The most popular way of communication is via letters carried by bicycle messengers.

In a scenario such as this, it is possible to assign different degrees of causal and moral responsibility to persons and groups. Clearly it makes a difference how influential one is and how much resources one has. We cannot *a priori* say that no one is responsible or even that no one is culpable. There are those who have had both social power and access to knowledge; their social power is not external to the problem itself, but is rather made possible by the things that contribute to the problem. Whether some of them are much more culpable than others is a matter of empirical investigation, but this investigation requires a theoretical background and conceptual tools that are able to recognize how social structures empower and constrain individuals.

The structural perspective means that we can make more nuanced evaluations of our actions and practices. Many other actions and practices than "individual emissions" are relevant to the question of responsibility for climate change. We should see them as connected to and interdependent with other practices and reinforced and constrained by them. We cannot map all these connections and interdependencies, so we have to resort to models and theories, which in turn will imply different moral questions. The social connection model makes it possible to discuss individual responsibility in a more complex manner in ways that do not leave those with less power as the audience at a spectacle where the powerful cause disasters and then take or fail to take responsibility. Power relations themselves can change, and mitigating climate change will by necessity change them, since it will mean that those whose power is dependent on the fossil economy will lose that power.

The structural perspective therefore does not mean that ethics or even the first-person perspective and individual responsibility are irrelevant. However, it means that moral agency does not exist in a vacuum. We are embodied and embedded beings. The possibilities, ways of understanding, and resources needed for taking responsibility for climate change are in many ways external to the subject. This means that the subject has to be understood relationally. We only become subjects in relation not only to other people, but also with machines, economic and social systems, structures, and institutions, books, laws of nature, mountains, forests, rivers, cities, football fields, corn fields, and shopping malls, and with creatures whom we do not yet count us people, but should. One aspect of responsibility

would be displaying epistemic humility in a situation where we are faced with a complex problem and are not only ignorant about the precise effects of our practices, but also unsure about who should count as an object of responsibility and where our intuitions about both are conditioned by self-destructive and unjust social structures.

From growing and living with these relations, we develop an individuated perspective on the world, from which we take or fail to take responsibility. Moral philosophy may deal with collective responsibility, public policy, and global justice, and these should all be discussed in relation to climate change, but the question still arises: "what should I do and why?" Young's social connection model is a good starting point for rethinking individual responsibility, but there is more work to be done. How can we become responsible within social structures that foster irresponsibility and whose practices, technologies, and infrastructures have irresponsibility built into them? The dangerous flipside of thinking about individual responsibility is that there is a well-documented ideological tendency in our times to reduce structural injustices to individual failures; the tendency to understand climate change in terms of individual emissions may even be an instance of this ideology. I discuss these issues in the next chapter.

3 VIRTUES IN THE NEOLIBERAL WORLD, RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued against the view that climate change is a collective action problem. I claimed that it is instead a structural problem and therefore that different conceptions of moral responsibility than have been common in climate ethics literature follow. In this chapter, by considering responsibility as a virtue, I broaden my question about what happens to individual responsibility if we understand climate change as a social structural problem in capitalism rather than a collective action problem. I approach this question through a critique of virtue ethical approaches to climate change. The focus is responsibility as a virtue, as the capacity to recognize one's responsibility, to act responsibly, and to take responsibility when such a responsible person is required. A virtue approach to responsibility does not in any way contradict understanding responsibility in causal and retrospective or prospective ways. Rather, a responsible person is someone for whom understanding responsibility entails understanding both its retrospective and prospective aspects—and any additional aspects that may exist.

Despite its attractions, I do not argue in a straightforward fashion for virtue ethics as a moral theory for the era of climate change competing with utilitarianism or deontology. I also do not advocate virtue ethics as a praxis or strategy in itself. Rather, I believe that virtue ethics offers a framework of analysis that of necessity reflects certain social conditions. By trying out the framework one can test its limits and at the same time understand something of our social world.

Besides being a meditation on responsibility as a virtue, the chapter is also a critical contribution on ideology. Critical theorists are concerned with not just how to think but how forms of thought are conditioned by social structures. The critical

question when thinking about climate change is not only why the collective action problem view is wrong but why climate change appears to many to be the result of the independent activities of disparate individuals. There has to be something in our common sense, in social structures, and in how we live daily life embedded in them that makes such a view conceivable. There have been plenty of critiques of individualism as ideological common sense, and the collective action problem view of climate change is one example.[25] I will not rehearse those criticisms here; rather, I approach the issue through the concepts of moral and epistemic agency and how they are shaped by the social world. Moral and epistemic agency can be shaped in ways that make us atomized individuals, less likely to form certain kinds of relations with others, and more likely to see ourselves as independent and self-sufficient individuals. This in turn may be part of an explanation for why we may find individualistic models of climate change attractive.

3.2 The Examined Life and Climate Change

The collective action problem view occludes the responsibility of individuals from the view of an outside observer, or "from a view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986), but it can also make individuals unable to understand their own responsibility. If an individual takes up or becomes gripped by the image of social reality presented in collective action problem models, they may have a harder time understanding how and why they are responsible for climate change. If I look at the world and see rational and self-interested, or just randomly and disparately acting, individuals who produce global effects unintentionally, I can scarcely say that I am responsible, except in the most abstract terms. Climate ethics that models climate change as a collective action problem will not help individuals make sense of their responsibilities.

The structural view affords the possibility of gaining self-knowledge of subjects embedded in social structures and ecologies. If I "look" at the world and "see" structures, histories, and social facts and individuals as embedded in them, I can also try to examine my own place in the world with a critical eye. What could I have done differently? What can I do now? What kind of structures both make

[25] As a relevant example, see O'Neill (1993; 2007) for criticism of neoclassical economics in general, including game theory and individualism in environmental thought.

possible and constrain my activities? How do my social connections and daily practices make me complicit in unjust structures? How does my position in the social world both capacitate and constrain my knowing, my epistemic capacities? How does where I am now permit me to move somewhere else in terms of capacities for knowledge and action? The structural view offers individuals a theoretical framework for situating themselves, but this is far from simple. I cannot look at social structures as if I and my actions are not part of them: there is no pure view from nowhere.

Social structures shape not only the external constraints of how we navigate our lives but also how and through which conceptual frameworks we understand our lives. Some of this knowledge and understanding is non-propositional. It is "bodily knowledge" (Parviainen 2002) and "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi 1966). It is habitual, schematic, metaphorical, and depends on stereotypes (Haslanger 2011). Different theoretical perspectives conceptualize this aspect of knowledge differently, but the gist is that it does not easily translate into propositions, is not completely conscious, and is emotional, affective, and dispositional. This bodily knowledge is more about "knowing how" than about "knowing that" (Ryle 1949). Yet, it can concern social structures and moral action, since living in a society and trying to live well are not theoretical but practical pursuits, pursuits that require knowing how (cf. Bourdieu 1984). There may, I suppose, be gaps and discrepancies between one's bodily knowledge of how to live in a society, one's moral values, and one's theoretical knowledge of how the society is structured.

Without theoretical knowledge of my position in the structures of society I could not understand my responsibility either in the narrow legalistic sense or in a fuller and deeper sense as a part of who I am, as both something that is given to me by my own actions and by my position in the world, and as something I can have as a virtue. I can be responsible for something and for someone, and I can be a responsible person. Being or becoming a responsible person requires understanding responsibility in the legalistic sense, but it is not exhausted by it. Feeling responsible and acting responsibly at the right time and for the right reasons also requires bodily knowledge of a certain type in connection with theoretical knowledge: in other words, virtue. But I can also be wrong in both my theoretical understanding of social structures and the implicit theory of society that underlies my bodily knowledge. All this has consequences for one important development in climate ethics, the use of environmental virtue theory.

For Brian Treanor (2014, 37), virtue ethics can be divided into naturalistic and narrative approaches. Whereas the naturalistic approach to virtue ethics looks at

the flourishing of human beings from the ethological and ecological points of view, the narrative approach takes up "topics as varied as the role of narrative in cultivating both the emotions and reason, the necessity of a narrative context for framing ideas about flourishing and the virtues that constitute it, and the role of narrative in self-understanding and in the formation of identity; but they are unified in their respect for the power of narrative" (2014, 37–38).

For my purposes, the narrative approach is promising, because I am interested in the social and cultural contexts of moral agency, and the narrative approach is immediately social. We tell stories to one another, and the stories we tell to ourselves about ourselves are made up of other stories that circulate in our societies. However, the narrative approach should not be taken to mean that only linguistic narratives matter for our moral agency. Virtues are dispositions to act and feel in a certain way, and we may not have full linguistic access to these dispositions. Virtues are just as much bodily knowledge as they are about our self-understanding. Narratives may provide some access to what our bodies know, but there is no reason to suppose that this access is full and unmediated. Social structures, in turn, affect us on both the narrative and bodily levels. In addition, the division between the naturalistic and narrative approaches may be less clear than it initially appears. If Aristotle is right, we are social and political *animals*. Living together, making political decisions about how we live together, and telling stories where good and bad lives are examined and imagined are as much parts of what makes us flourishing organisms as having an impressive tail is for a peacock, or having an acute echolocation is for a bat. They are aspects of our *natural goodness* (cf. Foot 2001).

The narrative approach also helps to understand living in social structures as temporal and historical. The risk with the structural view of society is that structures are seen as static as if they comprised a concrete building within which we navigate. While some structures may be very enduring and reified, they are nonetheless historical processes. A narrative approach to life gives one a better chance to appreciate how some structures endure and constrain action through time, and how some structures change during a life; in exceptional cases, we can even see how one ordinary person's life has become extraordinary and contributed to social change.

3.3 Jamieson's Mindfulness

Many environmental philosophers have found virtue ethics attractive when discussing environmental ethics in general and climate change in particular. Ronald Sandler (2007, 10–11) charts three different ways that environmental virtue ethics has developed. First, environmental ethicists have investigated which new virtues would be needed to make sense of a virtuous relationship to nature. Second, they have looked at exemplary figures, whose actions, thoughts, and personalities are paradigmatic of an environmentally virtuous life. The third, extentionist approach has been to give new environmentally ethical meaning to traditional virtues such as courage or temperance. One main impulse for the turn to virtue ethics is the same one that has driven environmental ethics from the start: that environmental problems present us with an imperative to re-evaluate our values and ways of life. This impulse gains more urgency with climate change and other global environmental problems. As far as responsibility is concerned, the re-evaluation of ethics has been about both what we are responsible for and for whom we are responsible. Responsibility as an environmental virtue would mean being able to act responsibly regarding and take responsibility for the environment, together with expanding the circle of whom we are responsible for to include non-humans and future generations.

Dale Jamieson (2010) has argued that climate change gives us utilitarian reasons for being virtue ethicists. According to Jamieson, climate change does not easily translate into acts and trackable consequences. While we know that greenhouse gas emissions drive climate change, we cannot trace a specific climate change-caused harm to a certain act by an identifiable agent. While Jamieson is a consequentialist in the sense that he believes we should aim for good consequences (the best, if possible) and that we should work to make the world a better place, he argues that classic utilitarian methods such as cost-benefit analysis do not work well with the moral problems of climate change, because the causal chain from individual actions to climate harms is so long and complex.

If there were a brilliant computer program that contained all the relevant facts and possibilities about each of my possible choices and their values, a kind of moral Laplace's demon, and if I could run a simulation to calculate risks, costs, and benefits, it might tell me what to do. In fact, since so much of my daily life is made up of choices that have miniscule but real environmental consequences, this machine would also have to be running constantly and be able to notify me about the best course of action every time I am about to do something or should be

doing something. Since there are no such cost-benefit analysis machines, I have to find other ways to be a moral agent. While Jamieson sees climate change as a collective action problem, the same problem of calculating costs and benefits is to some extent true for the social structural view where the structures are complex and non-transparent. Jamieson believes that cultivating virtues would in fact have better consequences than trying to assess all acts separately (act-utilitarianism) or trying to devise rules (rule-utilitarianism).

It may be that Jamieson is right in thinking that promoting virtue ethics along with certain green virtues would produce good results. My claim, however, is that for cultivating virtues, the more one understands one's place in social structures, the better. Starting from a social ontology with unconnected individuals who perform actions independently will make one less well disposed to cultivate any kind of virtues if this social ontology is false. This argument is fairly straightforward if we assume that self-understanding is an integral part of being virtuous, but I am not sure whether we should make that assumption. If a person is disposed to do good things while or perhaps even because they do not understand themselves very well, would they still not be virtuous in some way?

However, even without assuming that self-understanding is required for all virtues as such, a certain form of understanding of oneself and social structures will be required for certain virtues. For example, epistemic and moral virtues like epistemic justice cannot develop due to implicit biases like racism; their cultivation requires deliberate work to understand and counter such biases through methodological negativism (Fricker 2007; Freyenhagen 2014, 3). I detail below how green virtues have analogous problems within certain social structures. Another, argument is that one of the new virtues that Jamieson advocates is called "mindfulness." Mindfulness, as Jamieson articulates it, requires understanding social structures and one's relation to them if the social world is somehow structured.

Jamieson argues that mindfulness could be one of the new climate virtues. Mindfulness means the disposition to pay attention to the environmental effects of one's life and actions. Mindfulness for Jamieson is not the same as the currently fashionable and increasingly commodified meditation practice with the same name. In fact, it appears to be quite the opposite. Mindfulness as a meditation practice is concentrated on being present in the immediate environment and moment in time, of experiencing and accepting what is going on right here at this moment. Mindfulness as an environmental virtue, by contrast, is concerned with the mediated effects of one's actions, possibly far away in space and time. For

Jamieson, mindfulness is a relevant new virtue now, because the causal powers of human beings have grown tremendously from the time when either the ancient or Christian version of virtue ethics was developed (Jamieson 2010; 2014, 187)

However, being mindful requires understanding social structures, because our causal powers are social in nature. Technology is a social thing, and our acts are not just our own. They are modeled after the acts of other people, they are made possible by technology and infrastructures built and designed by other people, and they often require the co-operation of other people. Our tendencies to act in some ways and not others are influenced by the social world we live in, and, through all kinds of mediations, by macroeconomic structures of global capitalism. Sometimes our acts themselves serve as models for other people, and sometimes our acts amount to innovating and designing new technology and infrastructures. Social structures both constrain and make these actions possible through repetition, law, organizational hierarchies, institutions like finance and property ownership, and infrastructural path dependencies. If we want to understand how our actions shape posterity, we must understand how they are technologically mediated and interrelated with other actions, and how structural logics, such as the profit motive in capitalism, shape them.

Mindfulness is clearly related to but not identical with responsibility as a virtue. A responsible person in our time will have to be mindful of their actions and interested in their spatially and temporally distant effects, but this is not the only aspect of environmental responsibility. A mindful person might seek to minimize their effects on the world and thus act as little as possible. This would not be responsible if we have forward-looking responsibilities to mitigate climate change and in other ways ensure that good life remains a possibility on Earth.[26] Environmental responsibility is not just about trying not to do harm to spatially and temporally distant others—whether human or non-human—but also about changing the world that is undergoing destructive processes.

[26] I return to forward-looking responsibility in more detail in chapter 5.

3.4 The Responsible Subject

In virtue ethical discussions on climate change, some outlines for the responsible subject appear to be taking shape. The virtues that characterize this subject are hybrid virtues that have both epistemic and moral components.[27] This makes sense, since the subject has to act in a world where actions are technologically mediated and their consequences are often difficult to predict, and since there are so many possible moral patients whose lifeworlds and interests are not transparent to us, from non-humans to future generations. Acting on and living with climate change also requires understanding complex earth systems that are the very ground of life and the social, and a proper understanding of such systems will require an attitude of respect, which in turn is related to epistemic humility. There are different accounts of reasons to "respect nature." Taylor's (1985) biocentric argument holds that individual organisms as subjects of life command moral respect in the Kantian sense, because they have purposes and goods of their own. Jamieson (2014, 191) argues in a Hegelian vein that we ought to respect nature because it is "the other" through which we come to be ourselves. Callicott (2014) argues that we ought to respect the biotic communities systems of which we are part because they are bigger than us and make us what we are, just as we ought to respect the families, cities, countries, and other communities to which we belong. The fourth way to respect nature is to respect it as seafarers respect the sea and the weather and how mountaineers respect mountains, as magnificent things that we cannot control and that have the power to destroy us. In all these examples, the underlying theory of nature is different, but they all track some important aspects of nature, whatever that is in the last instance. Furthermore, one can respect nature for all these reasons without contradiction. The failure to take climate change seriously appears to be a failure of respect in all these senses.

Understanding complex systems and taking distant others into account figure in different ways in environmental virtues. Environmental responsibility is related to

[27] Epistemic justice in Fricker's account is a hybrid virtue. It consists of being able to neutralize one's socially formed prejudices (such as race and gender stereotypes) against a speaker, and thus both be a good truth-seeker and avoid doing injustice. (Fricker 2007, 120–128). Fricker's method is negativist (cf. Freyenhagen 2014). She arrives at her conception of epistemic justice through an investigation of epistemic injustice. This is similar to my approach of trying to learn more about environmental responsibility by examining out how our social contexts tend to make us irresponsible. Fricker suggests that "epistemic justice" is a hybrid virtue with both epistemic and moral components. Epistemic injustice is both an epistemic failure because it amounts to defective knowledge formation and a moral failure because it means that some individuals are wronged in their capacity as knowers.

respect, which in turn requires both epistemic humility and curiosity. Humility, is required, first because understanding complex, dynamic, and powerful systems can never be complete. No model or simulation is a perfect copy, especially when the target is comprised of multiple moving targets, as is the case with complex systems; second, because earth systems are partly made of and are inhabited by creatures with agency and inner lives, or *others*. Curiosity is needed because they are worth knowing about, worth modeling and simulating, but—as any research ethicist or ethnographer can testify—some ways of knowing are morally better or worse than others.

Another aspect of the responsible subject involves the virtues required for living well in the conditions of the Anthropocene and those that have to do with collective action and changing the world. These may be the same or completely different, depending on how things turn out. Living well in such circumstances requires virtues that make it bearable to live with risks, uncertainty, and change. Most or all of these, however, are connected to the epistemic virtues or have epistemic aspects, in that they require the subject to have an understanding of the relations of interdependence that make living well, or living at all, possible. Interestingly, even courage, redefined as radical hope (see below), becomes a hybrid virtue, because the good that it might be attached to remains unknown; presumably, however, radical hope would entail active searching for such a good, a capacity to imagine good lives in radically different circumstances.

Are these other virtues parts of responsibility or related virtues, or is it the case that to be virtuous, one must have *all* the virtues? Perhaps it is useful to think about virtues as a kind of web, where responsibility forms one important knot that depends on other knots, some nearer, some closer. In a web, the virtues are not hierarchically ordered, but one missing knot may cause the whole or a large part of the web to unravel. With the web metaphor, we can remain agnostic on whether all virtues are required but still think of them as interdependent. A particular virtue knot may appear rather far from responsibility but may in fact be necessary to it.[28] The knot metaphor might even suggest that virtues have different aspects, moral and epistemic, tied together.

Some philosophers working in traditions other than virtue ethics have arrived at similar results. For example, Elena Pulcini's (2012) work on the responsible subject starts from the criticism of neoliberalism and a diagnosis of pathologies of modernity. Pulcini, however, pays special attention to the importance of care for

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[28] The web of virtues metaphor was suggested earlier by Jarem Sawatsky (2008)

responsibility. Care as responsibility is "prompted […] by the *vulnerability of humankind* (and the whole living world) which obliges us, through the strength of its own fragility, to be liable for its existence, acting in such a way as to ensure the permanence of human life on the earth" (2012, 165; see also Jonas 1978).

I mention Pulcini not only to emphasize the importance of care, but also because it is remarkable that the positive project of environmental virtue ethics and the negativist approach of Pulcini arrive at fairly similar conclusions. Perhaps this is because environmental ethics has always had a negativistic streak; its origins as an academic discipline coincided with the growing public understanding of global environmental problems and the parallel environmentalist movement. One important, even central, issue with environmental ethics has always been what is wrong with our value systems if something like the environmental destruction we are witnessing is possible.[29] Environmental virtues are imagined as opposites to the anthropocentric and promethean "image of man." The problem is that even such a negativistic understanding can lead to problematic practices, such as the idea that to live ethically, we must do as little anything as possible, or that the paragons of an environmentally friendly life are those who live on their own, outside human society. Negativism in itself is not enough if it is not followed by transformative projects. On the other hand, transformative projects without negative criticism risk co-optation by the very structures they set out to transform. Does environmental virtue ethics risk co-optation? It does if it becomes a purely affirmative project or if it, in its diagnostic mode, mistakes the symptoms for the disease.

3.5 Neoliberal Subjects

Two forceful objections can be made against virtue ethics. The first is that virtue ethics is about individuals making themselves better, whereas ethics should be about other people. The second is that virtue ethics is anti-political, since it is about individuals making themselves better rather than changing society for the better. Julia Annas (2008) has responded to the charge of egoism that a virtuous person is fair, just, and generous and thus by necessity other-regarding and

[29] See the supplement to Brennan and Yeuk-Sze (2016) for an overview.

interested in social and political issues. One possible response to the charge of not being sufficiently political is that traditional virtue ethics as practiced in the Greek polis was very much about political life, and that both Plato and Aristotle were concerned about how the structure of society promotes virtues and vices; if this part of the tradition has been underemphasized, we ought to revive it. In the social structural view, the social conditions of acquiring virtues and acting virtuously take part in shaping our dispositions and our ways of understanding ourselves. However, in some social conditions, including perhaps our own, the charges of individualism and anti-politics can stick in practice even when there are theoretical defenses.

Brian Treanor (2014, 52) writes in a negativistic mode: "It is the solipsism of Descartes, and the philosophical and intellectual traditions that followed from it, that has lead [sic] us to believe that there exists an independent, individual, monad-self prior to relationships with others and the world." First diagnosing our problematic relationship with the non-human world as atomistic individualism leads to understanding environmental virtues as dispositions to be in the world in a more relational and open manner, but this idealist explanation of atomistic individualism appears itself to be an individualistic explanation. The idea of one individual, Descartes, has led us astray. Treanor does not ask why Descartes had such an idea and why it has had so much purchase in the world, so much so that many people who have never read a page of Descartes still "continue to believe and act as if the self is primordial and sociality is nothing but a secondary phenomenon, added on, as it were, after the fact" (2014, 52).

To be fair, Treanor may not intend to use "the solipsism of Descartes" in a literal sense, but simply as a generic name for a common philosophical outlook. Yet, even in this case, the question arises of what the social reasons for this outlook are. In what kind of societies does such an outlook thrive? Elsewhere, Treanor does pay more attention to the social context of virtues. He has to, because his project is to offer a narrative approach to virtue, and narratives presuppose a shared language and narrative structures, a community of storytelling. But what if the stories we today tell about exemplary individuals are individualistic stories where the heroes and heroines are self-sufficient, highly autonomous, lone wolves, alone-against-the-world-misfits, Robinson Crusoes and Steve Jobses, heroes whose heroism consists precisely of their distance from, and antagonism to, social norms and others' expectations? And what if these stories are not mainly due to the mistaken philosophical tradition started by Descartes, but spring from the ways our societies are structured and the logics of our shared practices?

Many social scientists, activists, and philosophers have argued that in neoliberal capitalism we are called upon to change ourselves, to transform our bodies, brains, and even social networks in order to accumulate human capital and adjust to the changing realities of working life—and the environmental awareness in neoliberalism also leads to individualistic solutions. In a sense, virtue ethics shares some of the same anthropological assumptions with human capital theory, one of the main proponents of neoliberal rationality. Both see humans as malleable and plastic beings who can influence their own formation by learning, by acquiring new habits, and by changing their environment. Both also see humans as more or less responsible for their own happiness, but they understand happiness and thus the means for attaining happiness differently. For human capital theory, happiness is the satisfaction of subjective preferences, whatever they are, whereas for virtue ethics, happiness is *eudaimonia*, a contested and difficult concept to be sure; however, most virtue theorists at least agree that it is not subjective and certainly not about the satisfaction of preferences. Preferences can be harmful and vicious.

The neoliberal subject is not just a false philosophical anthropology with social roots. It is a pernicious normative model with real social force. It can be built into institutional practices and even infrastructure, as when for example cities are planned for individual car owners rather than with communal and public transportation in mind. Its social roots have to do with the development of capitalism and political projects aimed at the destruction of the workers movement and other progressive movements (Harvey 2005).

Consider the racist stereotype of the asylum shopper and the image of man as a self-sufficient human capital investor. Both examples are socially harmful, and they have climate ethical consequences. The image of the asylum shopper is connected to the idea that asylum seekers are rational and self-interested individuals whose motivation for migrating are economic in nature. This picture occludes the systemic reasons for and causes of migration, such as war and environmental degradation, and how these causes are connected to what happens in affluent countries (Rajendra 2015). The current crisis in the Middle East that has created millions of refugees has already been linked to droughts exacerbated by climate change (Gleick 2014). In the future, when there will inevitably be many more people displaced by climate effects, the idea that migrants are simply moving to make themselves better economically will have to be vigorously opposed—and climate ethicists ought to be vocal in this opposition.

That "man" should be self-sufficient is an old, gendered idea.[30] In neoliberal capitalism, the norm of self-sufficiency is tied to the economic idea of human capital. The scientific purpose of human capital theory was originally to account for the effect of education on individual earnings and the economic growth of countries. However, from the outset, human capital theorists appeared to have an ideological and political agenda. Gary Becker argued that the idea of human capital was a problem for those who wanted to understand social problems as the antagonism of capital versus labor, since for the human capital theorist, all humans have capital in their skills and there would thus be no laborers who were not also capitalists ([1963] 1993, 16). Similarly, Theodor Schultz argued that workers had become capitalists by investing in their education (1970, 28). Human capital can thus become a competing concept against social structures for explaining social problems and inequalities, and it can be used in the discourses of individualization and individualistic responsibilization to blame the worse off for their situation. After all, if the perceivable disparities in wealth and status are only results of the investment decisions of rational individuals themselves, they only have themselves to blame.

The idea of human capital implies that human beings have in themselves the means to "produce their own satisfaction," as Michel Foucault interpreted Becker's theory of human capital (2008, 226). This occludes the social and environmental connections and material resources needed to produce the necessities of life. It promotes the picture of human beings as severed from the world and thus makes it more difficult to appreciate both the collective and social nature of economic practices and their effect on society, the environment, and finally, the planet. This claim may seem too strong to make on the basis of one remark by Foucault. However, it gains traction from empirical research. In social psychology, there is ample evidence showing how social position makes us vulnerable to biases. Status quo bias means that there is a tendency to prefer things as they are despite evidence to the contrary. System justification means that people in privileged social positions tend to consider those positions earned and the social structures just and good, while they discount evidence that would entail having to give up their privileges and that the way things are would have to change. These biases may be rational in the sense of being helpful in living in the social circles where such biases are shared. Sincere belief that one is the master of one's own fate may well be helpful in projecting the image of competence and getting good job offers.

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[30] See, for example, Pateman (1989).

The link between neoliberal rationality and false individualism seems clear, but what follows from this individualism is precisely the anti-political attitude for which virtue ethics has been criticized. The neoliberal subject is completely responsible for his own well-being, and only for that. One cannot change the world, but one can change oneself. Again, several sociological studies show how this can be a powerful idea in different social domains like working life (Mäkinen 2014) and medicine and healthcare (Baum and Fisher 2014). The virtue of responsibility, if neoliberalized, becomes almost the opposite of responsibility as an environmental virtue. A neoliberal subject is not only detached from relations but also views other beings purely instrumentally, as sources of utility. It would be blind to the non-instrumental goodness of nature and to the effects of its actions on temporally and spatially distant others. In other words, the neoliberal subject (as an ideal type) is incapable of both respect for nature and mindfulness in Jamieson's terms. It will not respect nature either in its goodness or its destructiveness. It is also incapable of radical hope (see below), since having human beings intentionally cause radical changes in the structures of the social world is inconceivable to him.

3.6 Environmental Virtues and Alienation

The neoliberal subject can be understood through the Marxist concept of alienation. For a Marxist, Jamieson's mindfulness appears remarkably like a non-alienated condition where human beings are not separated by social structures from their collective products, from their "species-being," from one another, and from nature (Marx [1844] 1975b, 270–82). In capitalism, Marx argued in one of his earliest writings, workers are separated from their own products, which they have to give to the capitalist. These products, in the form of means of production and a predetermined labor process, for example, then stand against the workers as an alien force that uses them rather than workers being the users of machines.

The three other aspects of alienation in Marx's account are connected in various ways to this separation of the producer and the product, but in order to see this, production has to be understood as a collective endeavor, organized by the division of labor and mediated by the market. Human beings are alienated from one another since they do not relate to one another as social beings who can deliberate together over what to produce and how, but rather as owners of goods, capital, money, and labor power. This means that they are also alienated from their

species-being, or to use the more familiar (and controversial) term, "human nature." For Marx, humans are in essence potentially free and social beings who can plan things in advance and produce not only their products but also their own nature (and dispositions) by shaping their environment. Since in capitalism the whole production of society is minimally regulated, and while there are many planning activities in firms, these are carried out by specialists, in accordance with the division of labor more generally into mental and manual labor and thence into more and more specified tasks and skills. Thus, in an alienated society, humans cannot make any plans as to how large parts of societies develop, and most people cannot even take part in the planning of the work they themselves do. Humans are also historical creatures; they are shaped by history and can make history, but not as they please, only under "inherited circumstances" (Marx [1852] 1974, 146). Humans inherit the knowledge of all the previous generations via texts, technologies, and infrastructures, but again, because of the division of labor and the commodification of knowledge, most people have no real access to this inheritance, an inheritance they would need in order to shape their own societies. Mindfulness as an environmental virtue would mean understanding and regulating the effects of our actions in a manner that is mindful of their distant consequences. Since activities that have far-reaching consequences are social in nature, being mindful of them would require overcoming social alienation. A non-alienated society would not mean that humans could have a non-mediated, straightforward relation to their products, themselves, or one another, but rather that they would be able to shape these mediations together in moral and ethical ways.

Lastly, human beings are alienated from nature. Marx argues that:

> [t]he life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature; and the more universal man (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic[31] nature on which he lives. Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art – his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible – so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically man lives only on these

[31] "Inorganic" here does not mean "not alive," but rather those aspects of nature that can be used by humans but are not parts of the human body.

> products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc. The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body – both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic* body – nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. (Marx [1844] 1975b, 275–76)

The relationship with nature is an integral part of human existence both in producing the necessities of life and in creating art or doing scientific research. This is why the relationship to nature should be one of respect, but in capitalism most people are barred from taking a full and active part in this relationship, from their "inorganic body." Rather, they can only take part in nature as consumers of food and drink and in a mediated and impoverished way by being consumers of art and entertainment or being connected to the use of science and laws of nature by taking part in a technologized labor process. For Jamieson, one way to learn to respect nature is to experience it in its grandeur, say by climbing a mountain or camping in a desert (Jamieson 2013). This may well be true, but it should be qualified by saying that to be able to experience nature on one's own terms requires money and free time, and these experiences, even if everyone had enough resources to enjoy them occasionally, will not in themselves do anything to change the social structures that produce environmental calamities. They are practices that depend on a separation of alienated work time, when one cannot decide how one relates to nature, and free time, when one can form one's own individualized relationship to nature. Experiences of natural beauty may influence our character to some extent; they may be one possible starting point for a more thorough transformation for some people, and they may motivate social and political action, but while being appreciative of these experiences, we should be aware of the countervailing tendencies in our societies.

With respect to Jamieson's new virtues, to mindfulness, and to respect for nature, Marx's discussion of alienation is relevant by pointing out why these virtues are needed and why they are difficult to acquire. They are needed because societies and their productive activities are structured in ways that are not in accordance with an attitude of respect for nature and that are not mindful of the distant effects

of actions. They are difficult to acquire because people form dispositions in the social relations in which they live, work, consume, enjoy free time, are educated, and so on. The more these relations are alienated, the less likely they are to produce mindful individuals who respect nature. The question then is whether being able to change social relations requires people who have certain virtues, perhaps precisely those virtues are the ones that the same social relations make difficult to acquire.

The false ontologies of the human and its connection to capitalism has been analyzed and criticized extensively in critical theory since Hegel and Marx. The idea of human capital is only the latest manifestation. It is important to note the way in which neoliberal rationality is rooted in the structures of capitalism. Michael J. Thompson writes:

> The pathological effects of private property are here [in young Marx' *Paris Manuscripts* (1844)] seen to be the product of the fact that it undermines the crucial social essence of human collective and individual life. Marx here argues that we can understand the negative effects of private property only by comprehending that it is an institutionalization of a false understanding of human *being* – one that rests on the liberal conception of human agency and independence that both Hegel and Marx saw as only partial in its conception of human essence. Once this independence is posited as the essence of man, relations become dependent rather than interdependent; the kinds of goods that this kind of community will pursue will not be common relational goods, but particularistic goods; equality and interdependent forms of social-relationality are displaced by power, alienation, reification and human degradation. (Thompson 2017, 36)

The gist of the criticisms exemplified by Thompson is that the false ontology has roots in social reality, institutions of private property, the market, and the modes and relations of production. It cannot be done away with just by philosophizing, by "the arms of criticism" (which does not mean that philosophical criticism is not important to any progressive project). A virtue ethical approach to what human beings are like would not in itself transfer to practice. Rather, to put it bluntly, if virtue ethics centers on the moral self-development of the individual, it

risks being co-opted by neoliberalism.[32] Instead, it should attend to how subjects are socially formed and how they can influence this formation. Just like retrospective and prospective aspects of responsibility, understanding environmental responsibility as a virtue also requires understanding social structures. Since virtues are dispositional and embodied, those social theorists and philosophers who theorize the body and its dispositions as socially formed will be good, if difficult, partners in dialogue for environmental virtue ethicists.

3.7 Virtues in a Changing World

It would be nice to end this chapter on a positive note, to give a comprehensive definition and declare that we now have an understanding of what environmental responsibility in the context of neoliberal capitalism means, but we should resist this temptation. Climate change transcends its social origins. Whatever radical transformations our societies undergo, we cannot escape the fact that climate change and all the global environmental transformations that are entangled with it will persist. There is no going back to the Holocene. Climate change is not just a problem caused by a carbon-intensive economy, but a marker of a much more profound change in human and non-human conditions. This is a challenge for the method of immanent critique favored by critical theorists, especially for those like Habermas and Honneth to whom immanent critique means trying to tease out the norms implicit in the social practices of, for example, the market economy, by devising an ideal typical model of them. The norms discovered through such an immanent critique may well be used for criticizing pathologies and problems within a certain system, but with climate change the task is both to transcend a self-destructive system and to learn to live well in whatever follows. So, it is a challenge for critical theory—but also a challenge for virtue ethics, for similar reasons.

One way or another, the world will be very different. But why would this be a problem for virtue ethics? Cultivating virtues takes time, and the groundwork for virtue is laid already in childhood. We become virtuous in social interaction and by drawing on existing sources and examples of virtue. Virtue ethics in the narrative

[32] See Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) for an account of how neoliberal capitalism is able to co-opt and commodify critical discourses.

approach discussed here looks at lives as narratives or at least narratable wholes. Any narration assumes a certain background, something taken for granted. A historical novel set in medieval times requires some knowledge of history from its readers, but a skillful writer will interject information about the context of the story without being obviously didactic. Literary scholars working on Chaucer will have to learn a good bit of history because without knowing about the social conditions of fourteenth-century England, they will miss many of the nuances and meanings in the text. Science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy are genres that require world-building both from the writer and the reader. There can be several narrative and extra-narrative (e.g., maps and appendices) devices that allow the reader to familiarize themselves with a new world so they can fill in the gaps with their own imaginations.

Learning to live well according to the narrative approach to virtue ethics is somewhat analogous to the practices of reading and writing novels. In both cases a whole world is assumed in the background. The virtuous or vicious person, like the focalizer[33] of a novel, arranges the experience of the world in which they act in ways specific to them. Virtues as dispositions to feel, act, and perceive in ways that are conducive to the good life take part in this arrangement. As such, virtues suppose a world that somehow functions predictably. The virtuous person has a schema of the world which in some sense is like a scientific model; it abstracts and idealizes, but unlike ordinary scientific models, the world-schema is affective and value-laden and, argues Treanor, becomes understandable through narratives (2014, 177–83).

It is not always ethically or morally right to act according to what one takes the world to be like, because other beings can never be adequately represented schematically. Even trying such a complete representation of the other would be not just futile but wrong, because it would entail knowing the other completely and deciding in advance what the other is like.[34] This is why practical reason is so important for virtue ethicists. We need the capacity to reflect about the rightness of actions at the right time and for the right reasons, and sometimes this reflection leads us to override our initial reactions. Narratives of the lives of others may help in this and to some extent "open us to genuine, if complicated and partial,

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[33] The character from whose point of view the story is told.

[34] In continental ethics, this idea has been developed at length by Emmanuel Levinas ([1961] 1969), although environmental philosophers argue whether Levinas's ethics only applies to human beings or whether it has environmental ethical value (see Edelglass et al. 2012). Adorno's concept of non-identity has a similar ethical aspect (Freyenhagen 2014).

understanding of other human experiences and worlds [and even] to other non-human experiences and worlds" (Treanor 2014, 146). How we take into account the non-identity of our concepts and schemas of the world and others is an aspect of responsibility. This requirement has always been there, but it comes into the foreground with climate change, when we have to think about future generations, human and non-human, living in radically different conditions.

Virtue ethics gives us a vocabulary for analyzing our agency and the sort of agency that our condition might require. We can ask what virtues and vices appear to be easily cultivated in our context and which virtues would be required for changing our societies and ways of life to allow mitigation and justly adapting to the irreversible effects of climate change. I have argued that there is a gap between these two. In environmental ethical literature, the virtues often promoted are simplicity and temperance (e.g., Gamber and Cafaro 2010; Treanor 2014, 57–58). This is all well and good, especially if these virtues are seen in a social context and not as suggesting the life of a hermit. Seeing temperance and simplicity socially might mean investigating their social conditions of possibility and understanding having them as communicative, as being public examples of how different ways of life might be both possible and desirable. However, since climate change is a structural problem, we also have to ask which virtues would be required for changing the world together with others. Courage, solidarity, and radical hope are possible candidates.

Courage has been on the list of virtues since ancient Greece, and its connection with both transformative social action and living in the world of climate change seems fairly straightforward until we realize that our models and exemplars of courage are quite ambivalent. While promoting justice or some other worthy good, they are often also concerned about maintaining the status quo, and they may be gendered in problematic ways. If one is asked to imagine a courageous person, possible candidates are police officers and soldiers. Of course there can be counter-models: civil rights and environmental activists, conscientious objectors, Médecins Sans Frontières, climate scientists standing up to denialist campaigns of intimidation, and so on. What we count as courage is a matter of cultural struggle and hegemony. All of these models of courage have to do with solidarity. But conservative courage seems to be solidarity with communities as they now exist and are limited by their boundaries, whereas progressive models of courage are also examples of solidarity stretching beyond all kinds of frontiers. Such courageous, expansive solidarity ties in well with the common environmental ethical insight that

we need to expand our circle of concern to take into account distant others, whether they are distanced by space, time, or species.

3.8 Radical Hope

Radical hope is related to both courage and solidarity. Jonathan Lear (2006) has investigated the possibility of courage in a situation where courage must be redefined because the old way of life is no longer possible. His example was the story of Crow (the Apsáalooke) leader, Plenty-Coups, who (in Lear's reading) helped his people survive the genocidal devastation of the Native American tribes with some kind dignity by redefining what it means to be courageous. Lear calls this "radical hope." Allen Thompson has proposed that in a situation where, due to technological change, humanity has become responsible for the conditions of the biosphere, radical hope is the virtue that is required. He writes:

> A product of imaginative excellence and practical wisdom, radical hope allows courage to be manifest in situations where one has an out-dated conception of living well. Traditionally, courage concerns the willingness to risk significant harm defending some worthy good. However, radical hope is a form of courage at the end of goodness, a steadfastness underpinning action on the idea that someday the good will return in a presently unimaginable form. Radical hope is thus a distinctly novel form of courage, exhibiting commitment to some unknown but worthy conception of the good life, to an unknown form of flourishing. (Thompson 2012, 214)

Changing social structures would require radical hope since "out-dated conception[s] of living well" are connected with the old structures, and we do not yet know, even if we can imagine, what living well would mean in a world where the profit motive is not the driving force of social action and our relations to the non-human world, but we would still have to be motivated by the idea that another way of life is possible. Thompson further argues that radical hope as an environmental virtue consists of searching for a non-instrumental goodness for

nature, when nature's autonomy can no longer be the norm. Nature can no longer be regarded as autonomous, because human beings have already transformed the whole planet. Humans would then be responsible for this goodness, and, rather problematically, for "managing the global biosphere" (Thompson 2012, 214).[35]

Radical hope, as discussed by Thompson, is connected to responsibility in two ways. However we understand "managing the global biosphere," it at least implies responsibility. Whether those who can make decisions that affect the global biosphere will try to limit human influence as much as possible or engage in large-scale geoengineering projects, these are now decisions that require responsibility in most or all of its forms. But radical hope is also relevant to the imperative of responsibility discussed by Hans Jonas (1984). Consider Jonas's suggestion for a new categorical imperative: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life" (1984, 11). Jonas argues that responsibility requires "a heuristics of fear," actively imagining the possible bad effects of new technologies in different social contexts (1984, 26). But it also requires that even in the face of the multiple disasters, tragedies, catastrophes, and atrocities that we should expect from climate change, we should remain hopeful that genuine human life is still worth pursuing. This is difficult not only because there are plenty of reasons for pessimism, but also because, for the same reason that concepts like courage are problematic, we do not completely know, and we probably have false ideas about, what genuine human life means.

By contrast, hopelessness entails non-responsibility or irresponsibility. Non-responsibility in the case of hopelessness is fully justified by the way the world is, while irresponsibility is implied if there were actually some possibility for change, but the hopeless person does nothing to bring it about. Nick Smith writes: "If, as Axel Honneth has shown, positive self-relations and a capacity for autonomy emerge through structures of mutual recognition, perhaps the ability to relate to the future as a horizon of possibility through hope is also a formal requirement of the good life" (2005, 52). Being a responsible person is thus connected to hopefulness not just on the conceptual level but also at the level of personhood. Being responsible requires autonomy, and if Smith is right, then a hopeful disposition toward the future is needed for the capacity of autonomy.[36]

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[35] The wording is unfortunate. Thompson does not advocate any kind of specific geoengineering schemes, only that humans take responsibility for their own causal powers, whatever this will then entail. See also Vogel (2015 and, for a criticism of similar claims, Hettinger (2012).

[36] While I cannot pursue this line of thought in greater depth here, doing so might contribute usefully to theories of recognition that have thus far not had much to say about intergenerational ethics.

In this case, as in many others, the virtue of hopefulness has both normative and critical aspects. On the one hand, if we are to be responsible, we must be hopeful, and on the other, hope as the "ability to relate to the future as a horizon of possibility" is something that the prospects of catastrophic climate change together with the social structures we live with call into question or make difficult to attain. In order to be able to be more hopeful, we would have to concentrate on changing our social conditions, but being able to take on the task of changing the world would require hopefulness. This is a real problem, and one many activists living in desperate times will likely recognize. It does not have to be a vicious circle, however. In chapter 5, I argue that taking part in social action that aims at transformation can be a life-altering event that changes one's dispositions, including the capacity to hope. Of course, wearing oneself out in activism may also lead to hopelessness and lethargy.

It would also appear that radical hope requires the capacity for responsibility to be effective. More precisely, radical hope and responsibility can exist in an interdependent, mutually reinforcing relationship. Hoping without taking responsibility for bringing about the desired change in the world could manifest, for example, itself in a belief that someone else—politicians or the global elite—will take care of everything. As I argue in the next chapter, such hope would be misplaced and a failure to take responsibility. Radical hope as a climate ethical virtue would consist of political and social activity and the belief that this activity is meaningful; it would involve an active search for and articulation of that meaning.

Understanding responsibility through radical hope does not paint a complete picture of what responsibility now and in the future will entail. Rather, radical hope, along with the other epistemic and moral virtues knotted together with responsibility are the virtues that are involved in searching for new forms of the good life. They are needed in social transformative action, and they make such action more likely to produce forms of consciousness adequate to the new reality. Very little about them is certain, considering how uncertain our future looks at the moment.

There may also be a problems in reconciling the environmental virtues that promote care, a slow life, and adapting to the rhythms of ecosystems with the virtues needed for taking part in social transformation. This becomes even more difficult if we think that there is a possibility things will go so wrong that large-scale geoengineering is needed to keep the planet habitable for human beings. I will not rehearse the heated debates on geoengineering here, but will note instead that it is difficult to imagine a person or even organization so plastic that they could be well

disposed to slow, ecological living, revolutionary action or either taking or submitting to decisions to geoengineer earth systems in conditions of radical uncertainty. Our capitalist social systems do not exactly promote any of those virtues, but perhaps they promote plasticity and living with contradictions and conflicting expectations, when people have to juggle different roles as workers, family members, friends, and social activists. Such plasticity, in turn, may promote complacency and moral corruption that allow one to always excuse some wrongdoing by the demands of some role or other; the CEO who excuses environmentally catastrophic decisions by the obligations to the shareholders is a prime example. Is this a problem for virtue theory? I am more inclined to think of it as a problem for our social conditions. The practical antinomies that we encounter while trying to live well are socially produced, and social transformations may do away with them—while perhaps introducing new antinomies.[37]

3.9 Conclusion: Difficulties, Risks of Co-optation, Radical Hope

The purpose of this chapter was to approach environmental responsibility as a virtue, first by synthesizing some of the discussions in environmental virtue ethics, and, second and negatively, by discussing how social conditions make such responsibility difficult through the example of the "neoliberal subject." Responsibility is one knot in a vast web of virtues. When I focus on responsibility, the other related virtues are interpreted through responsibility. This does not mean that responsibility is the master virtue. Putting environmental virtue ethics in the context of neoliberal capitalism is a concrete example of climate ethics as critical theory. By looking at environmental virtues and their social conditions of possibility, by a social critique of virtue ethics, we can perhaps come to understand better what living well requires of us in the context of our lives, but this requires that we investigate our lives and their social context negatively. We can understand

[37] On practical antinomies as social, see Freyenhagen (2014), 56.

justice by looking at injustices in the world and we can come to understand climate responsibility by understanding how our social conditions tend to produce irresponsibility. In such a situation being responsible must take the form of social action that involves not just becoming more responsible ourselves but being aware of and trying to change the conditions that produce systemic irresponsibility. Putting environmental ethics and critical theory into dialogue in this way is possible, because there are already negativistic tendencies in environmental ethics insofar as it has proceeded by diagnosing the social causes of environmental calamities and our warped relationship with the non-human world.

Some of the virtues required by the responsible subject sketched here are difficult to attain because they are impossible for the neoliberal subject. On the other hand, other virtues and virtue ethics as a moral practice risk co-optation into the rationality of the neoliberal subject. The individualizing tendencies of neoliberal rationality are especially risky for virtue ethical practices. The ideal neoliberal subject lacks precisely those virtues that would be required of a subject capable of being responsible for climate change—it may actually have the corresponding vices. The neoliberal subject is not simply a false idea but it is also enacted and operates in social practices, labor processes, and even technology design. The neoliberal subjects lacks environmental virtues, but in some formal respects, the neoliberal subject resembles the cultivator of virtues. Both aim to shape the self, the virtuous person according to virtue, the neoliberal subject according to utility.

Virtue ethical theories do two kinds of work in this dissertation. First, they are an object of immanent critique and texts whose contextualized critical reading points to social problems rather than just problems in the text itself. Second, virtue ethics provides a conceptual framework for analyzing the possibilities of moral agency in late capitalism and in the conditions of the Anthropocene. If I find problems in being virtuous in our society, this does not necessarily mean that virtue theory is wrong. It may also mean that living well is difficult or impossible in a bad world (cf. Adorno 1991). Other moral theories would also face problems. As Adorno argues, "[h]aving broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself" (1973, 2). There is neither a place outside the social or a philosophy that is free from the social from which to construct a conception of responsibility that would be adequate to climate change. We have to make do with the stories that we have and begin from where we are, but we do not have to stay there. There can be many conflicting stories and interpretations about what it means to be a responsible subject. All moral theories may help us understand our predicament and what we ought to do but they may

also all be complicit in and shaped by the same predicament. This is one of the main tenets of critical theory generally.

Being virtuous in a false world, to paraphrase Adorno, is problematic enough, but being virtuous in the face of climate change, or more generally in the Anthropocene, is still another problem. Climate change and other strange conditions of the Anthropocene make our world unstable in completely new ways. Social structures and forms of life will have to change—hopefully not only for the worse—in order to both adapt to new conditions and mitigate what can still be mitigated. In the more frightening scenarios, the very fabrics of societies may be untangled. The trouble is that we learn and cultivate virtues in time, socially, and according to received models. To what extent will the virtues that we in our current societies can learn be adequate in the erratic times to come? In a sense, the virtue of responsibility should contain the capacity to grapple with this problem, to take it upon oneself to remain responsible. I return in chapter 5 to the questions of virtues and ethics in social transformations. In the next chapter, I discuss the formation of virtues and vices with examples of the global elite and their responsibility for climate change.

4 THE IRRESPONSIBLE ELITE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the case of the global elite and its responsibility for climate change. The case of the elite is interesting, first, because it shows that some elite individuals, due to how the history of global climate politics has unfolded and how they in the course of that history have behaved and used their social powers, bear a significant share of humanity's retrospective responsibility for climate change. The case of the elite thus strengthens the argument that the structural view of climate change gives different answers to moral questions about climate change. The responsibility of individuals qua individuals is not so diffused as to be insignificant or nearly so. Rather, significant degrees of responsibility can be assigned to different individuals. Second, by analyzing how the elite structural position shapes the subjectivity of elite individuals, we can, through negation, arrive at a better conception of what responsibility as an environmental virtue would be like. Third, the analysis of the structural position of the elite and the subjectivity it shapes has consequences for how the rest of us should orient ourselves toward the elite, whether as climate activists, concerned citizens, parents, or victims and survivors of climate change-related catastrophic events.

4.2 What and Who Are the Elites?

Dale Jamieson (1992, 2014) has argued that, due to the nature of the climate change problem, it makes no sense to blame individuals or even hold them causally responsible for it. For Jamieson the new problem of our times is that "the global

environment may be destroyed, yet no-one will be responsible" (Jamieson 1992, 149). In 2008, the celebrated climate scientist James Hansen wrote:

> CEOs of fossil energy companies know what they are doing and are aware of long-term consequences of continued business as usual. In my opinion, these CEOs should be tried for high crimes against humanity and nature. If their campaigns continue and "succeed" in confusing the public, I anticipate testifying against relevant CEOs in future public trials.[38]

The contrast is juicy. The moral philosopher absolves all individuals from blame, while the natural scientist wants heads to roll, but which one is right? From the structural point of view Jamieson's view might initially see more plausible. Even if climate change is a structural problem, this does not absolve us from the responsibility of changing structures that cause the problem. But with social structures, it is often said that no one individual qua individual matters in the causal sense (see, e.g., Kincaid 2008). If the structures of global capitalism are to blame, no one individual can be considered culpable for the whole structure, even if individuals can take responsibility and try to promote collective action and even if blame can be pointed at actions, vices, or ways of life that perpetuate unjust structures (cf. Young 2006, 102–03).

But things are not so simple. In the case of social structures we can ask which individual and in which position. In the most abstract terms, in the structural view, for the purposes of this dissertation, the elite refers to people in structural positions with the most power and influence over others. If a structure produces hierarchical positions with unequal amounts of influence and power, some individuals are more responsible than others. In an absolute monarchy, the monarch is responsible for a great deal. This is fairly straightforward in the case of prospective responsibility. More power means more possibilities for influencing how things go. However, having had more power may also mean that one is retrospectively responsible for some bad event due to omissions. One could have done something to prevent or mitigate a catastrophe but did nothing. Besides omissions, there can be acts that make one responsible. Since climate change is due

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[38] See: http://www.commondreams.org/views/2008/06/24/twenty-years-later-tipping-points-near-global-warming (accessed 9 March 2018).

to human action, it makes sense to ask whether some people have acted in ways that have directly contributed to the overall problem in a way that makes a substantial difference. The structural view means that this is conceivable and perhaps plausible. It is an empirical question whether it is the case.

Even if we give structural explanations for Nazi Germany and refer to geopolitical, social, and economic facts, no one would think that Hitler was not guilty, but is climate change analogous? Does it make sense to compare CEOs to absolute monarchs or Hitler, or would this be an absurd and tasteless exaggeration? This may be an empirical question, but it is a question that only becomes possible if we first assume that the social world is, or at least can be, hierarchically structured. If we take a strictly individualist, collective action problem view as our starting point, we cannot start investigating the causal role of agents in different structural positions. The model would not recognize such positions and the particular causal powers resulting from occupying a social position.

Are there empirical grounds for assuming that the social world is hierarchically structured in ways that are relevant to climate change and responsibility? According to a study by Richard Heede (2014), two thirds of greenhouse gas emissions can be traced to only 90 companies, some private, some state-owned. Considering that all these companies operate hierarchically, that many of their senior decision makers know one another, and that one person may serve on the boards of more than one firm, there are people who could be held much more responsible than others. These people, through their connections and financial resources, can also influence the policies of nation states. Some of them have made decisions to fund think tanks that produce climate denialist propaganda.[39] Their capacity to influence the world is structural. Their power is due to their social position, which is such as it is because our world is so structured that global corporations and thus their leaders are very powerful actors.

However, when speaking of the elites, I do not want to limit myself to those who have formal institutional positions as senior decision makers in either the fossil business or politics. It is important to pay attention to these positions since their occupants have recognizable influence on how things go with climate change mitigation and moving toward post-fossil societies, but I also want to discuss the elite as a larger, less easily defined global social group, a group that due to its social power, wealth, prestige, and connections is able to benefit from and influence the processes of global capitalism much more than the rest of us. Does the global elite constitute a social group in the sense of a "collective of persons differentiated from

[39] See Oreskes and Conway (2010) for documentation.

at least one other group by cultural forms, practices or way of life" (Young 2000, 37)? Whether it does or not is again an empirical matter. If it does, this has implications for discussing many aspects of responsibility and other moral issues. For example, how does its way of life shape their capacity for moral and epistemic responsibility? Or what does it mean for the rest of us, if the way of life of the elite is celebrated as something for which to strive in our cultural imaginaries?

One reason to think that the global elite may constitute a social group is the well-documented economic and social polarization between the richest members of humanity and the rest. The Occupy Movement, which began in August 2011 with protests on Wall Street against financial capitalism, brought a new simple and effective vocabulary of social class into the political discourse. They named themselves the 99% and the class enemy, the global elite, the 1%. It turns out that this estimate was fairly accurate. According to Credit Suisse, the 1% have more wealth than the rest of the world put together.[40] However, there are differences even within the 1%. The economist Paul Krugman argued in a column that even 1% is too low a figure and that "a large fraction of the top 1 percent's gains have actually gone to an even smaller group, the top 0.1 percent — the richest one-thousandth of the population."[41] There are enormous differences of wealth even within the 0.1%. Perhaps a university professor at an elite university could be part of the 1%, but not the 0.1%. What I mean by the global elite here is more akin to the 0.1%, but wealth is not the only indicator. Social connections matter too, and both are important only so far as they can translate to social power. Someone with less wealth may still have access to people in the elite and be able to influence their actions or perhaps make business decisions on their behalf. Besides the economic elite, there is also the political elite that, while not precisely equivalent to the economic elite, is in many ways connected and entangled with it. In this chapter I use the economic elite as the prime example, but the argument also applies partly to the political elite. The crucial thing is not to which institutional arrangement or sphere of society a member of an elite belongs, but how much influence they have on how society is structured.

The elite position is a structural position. It is not that some individuals have just been extremely lucky or productive on a level playing field, but that the background conditions and social mechanisms of our world allow such positions to exist. These structures are not automatic or natural, but historically specific and

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[40] See https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-1 (accessed 9 March 2018).

[41] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/25/opinion/we-are-the-99-9.html (accessed 9 March 2018).

produced and reproduced by social action. These structures are perpetuated not only by the activities and practices of everyday life, but also by the shape of technology and material resources, by political action and by laws. (Sayer 2015).

There are different roles in the 0.1%. Some are CEOs or other senior decision makers in powerful corporations, often in the financial sector. Some are investors or rentiers, people whose income consists of rents and interests from the assets they own, rather than any productive activities that they engage in (Sayer 2015, 83–96). Of course these roles often intersect; a CEO can be an investor, and investors play leading roles in many firms. The elite position brings both wealth and social power. Wealth is in itself social power in capitalism, since by making investment decisions, hiring and firing, and owning media assets, the elite can control and influence what other people can or will do. One important concept is that of "the senior decision maker," those in high places in business and government with the power to make decisions that may affect macro-scale social processes, those who have "influence they could potentially exert in cohort over the trajectory of socioeconomic, political, and thus environmental change" (Rickards et al. 2014, 754).

An important sub-group of the elite is what I will call, following Elmar Altvater (2009), fossil capitalists. Fossil capitalists are those whose wealth is generated by control in one form or another over the extraction or burning of fossil fuels. Considering the important role fossil fuels still play in all production in capitalism, the contours of the fossil capitalist group are fuzzy; ultimately, all members of the elite are implicated in fossil capitalism in one way or another. In terms of responsibility for climate change, there is clearly a difference whether one is a CEO who makes decisions about oil drilling or an owner of a restaurant chain—but the restaurateur could also significantly affect their carbon footprint by, for example, making vegetarian options available and attractive. A member of the elite can move from one institutional position to another and retain the social connections acquired in the previous position—and thus accumulate what sociologists call "social capital."

4.3 The Elite and Blameworthiness

But does what elite individuals do matter causally and morally? It could after all be argued that they are simply playing the role given them by social structures, and that if they stepped down, someone else would take their place and act according to the script. A classic example of this line of argument is when Karl Marx, in his analysis of the structure and logic of capitalism, does not deny that a particular capitalist may well have good intentions, but in his role as a capitalist, he will do capital's bidding, accumulating and striving to make a profit:

> The expansion of value, which is the objective basis or main-spring of the circulation M-C-M, becomes his [the capitalist's] subjective aim, and it is only in so far as the appropriation of ever more and more wealth in the abstract becomes the sole motive of his operations, that he functions as a capitalist, that is, as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will. Use-values must therefore never be looked upon as the real aim of the capitalist; neither must the profit on any single transaction. The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he aims at. (Marx [1867] 1976, 254).

But despite the acknowledgment of the structural constraints of being a capitalist, Marx's *Das Kapital* is filled with footnotes in which he criticizes individual capitalists for hypocrisy, greed, and inhumanity in general.[42] Much more recently, in the context of the financial crises of our century, Will Davies has argued that the elite in today's world should not be understood as conscious decision makers, but rather as ones who are "unreflexive regarding their power, or adopt the role of powerful interpreters mediating between the 'unconscious', cybernetic world of finance and that of politics" (2017, 244). If by being in an elite position one cannot help but maximize profit, and if even decision making has been more and more delegated to artificial intelligences, as Davies argues, what happens to responsibility? However, we need not accept the image of the elite as being completely determined by their environment any more than we accept such an image of the less privileged (cf. Young 2011). Embedded, structurally and historically constituted, and technologically mediated agency is not the same as no

[42] See, for representative examples, the footnotes to chapter ten "The Working Day" in volume I.

agency at all. Even if members of the elite act as interpreters of technologically mediated logics of capital, this interpretation is in itself a form of action and it is something that agents can, I suppose, take up or refuse to take up.

The question we can ask is whether it has been and whether it is now possible to act on climate change in the role of a capitalist, because if the answer is yes to either question, then it at least makes sense to hold those members of the elite responsible who could have acted did not, or could act now but do not. If the answer is no to both, then we can ask whether we should still hold those individuals responsible because they could have and should have given up the role of the capitalist and done something else. After all, even after having stepped down from the formal position and perhaps having relinquished their assets, a member of the elite would still retain some of their social capital and knowledge about the world of business. They could, for example, use their social connections to influence climate policies and they could use their insider knowledge to make climate activist strategies more efficient.

One way to look into the responsibility of senior decision makers is to ask counterfactual questions. If other people had been at key positions in the fossil fuel industry during the last thirty years, would things now be different? For if they were, this would mean that the environment of the senior decision makers does not determine their actions. This is a difficult question, and both empirical and theoretical research would be needed to answer it. We would have to know how much the structural positions both enabled and constrained the possibilities for action and change for the actual individuals who occupied them. We would obtain different results regarding different individuals, and it might be difficult to generalize from them. In any case, it is not theoretically impossible to do—in the case of the elite—what Jamieson and others think impossible: to hold some members of the elite directly responsible for some climate harms, and hold some partly responsible for the overall problem. In some cases this may even be easy. I offer a fictional case for consideration.

We can imagine someone, Jane, deliberately striving to become a senior manager in a fossil energy company in order to change it into a socially responsible and green company producing solely renewable energy, only to realize during her ascent in the company that the realities of the market, organizational culture, infrastructural path dependencies, and investor demands make this a lot more difficult than she thought. One morning, after some time, she looks back at her previous naive ideals with amusement and gratitude that she now knows how "the real world" works and no longer thinks climate change is such a problem and, even

if it is, it is a problem no individual can change, but the infinite human capacity for innovation fueled by market incentives will in the end prevail. The company's PR department still funnels money to climate change denialist think tanks and fossil fuel lobbyists who try to convince politicians not to vote for restrictions on emissions. We might find Jane blameworthy in many ways, but where exactly did things go wrong and why?

Jane could not be held responsible for the structural conditions as she found them. However, we can ask what she could have done to change them and what she could have done differently when constrained by them. Did she do everything she could, or did she lack imagination and fail to see some options that were available to her? Maybe she could have tried to forge alliances with other ethically minded managers and investors. If there were nothing she could do to change the structures, maybe at least refusing to participate would have been better. She might have found some other occupation, which, if not beneficial, might have been less harmful. By quitting her job, she might have kept her moral character intact. With the knowledge she had gathered during her time at the company, she could have helped environmental groups and climate activists to be more effective.

The classic moral philosophical term *akrasia*, weakness of will, is one possible explanatory concept for Jane's actions and non-actions. She knows what is right but still ends up doing the wrong thing, as we often do, because we feel that doing the right thing would be too difficult for us for some reason. Amelie Rorty notes that akrasia is often a social phenomenon, for "[a]s standard ordinary beliefs are elicited and reinforced by our fellows, so too are many of our favorite akratic failures" (1997, 652). But Jane also gradually changes the way she thinks about how the world works and about right and wrong. Akratic behavior and its rationalization and the distorted epistemic community she inhabits distort her beliefs. Jane does not learn from her failure, but instead changes her perspective so that the failure comes to seem like a success.

Jane's *akrasia* is both moral and epistemic. This is not surprising since environmental responsibility is a hybrid virtue with both epistemic and moral components;[43] she starts caring less about things and beings she ought to care about, which in turn influences the way she sees and understands the world. She cares more and more about what her colleagues think about her and less and less about the effects that her company has on the vulnerable. This failure to care means she does not take the time to actually learn about those effects and thus does not know in what ways she could make a difference. Daniel Greco (2014)

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[43] See chapter 2 above.

suggests that epistemic akrasia has to do with fragmentation or inner conflict.[44] In Jane's case the inner epistemic conflict or fragmentation has social reasons. Her changed social environment provides reasons and cues to have a certain set of beliefs about the world and her place in it that come into conflict with the earlier set of beliefs, which grounded her aspirations to change the world.

Her structural position, her everyday life, her colleagues who have also become her close friends, the company's organizational culture, and financial incentives all play a role in Jane's change. Perhaps, for example, she also feels that she has a responsibility to her family to maintain the same income and the same sphere of influence in order to make sure that her children have the best possible start in life. In some sense, we might feel sympathy for her. It is not easy to swim against the current when the cost might be one's job, the respect of one's peers, and even one's closest friends. I do not know if these would be extenuating circumstances if the court cases against CEOs envisioned by Hansen ever became a reality. Even trying to weigh these goods against the harms of climate change, however, feels wrong.

Jane is also incredibly privileged, possesses influence and social power, and has access to resources and knowledge. Even if she quit or lost her job, her life would probably not become intolerable. Compared to most others, she will be fairly safe from the catastrophic climate impacts of the near future. This might make us feel less sympathetic for her failure to even try to make a difference. What makes intuition and sympathy somewhat problematic guides in this case is that we appraise a gradual change in time without experiencing the passage of that time ourselves. Reading a full-length novel of Jane's life might make us feel differently about her.

Jane is an ambiguous figure. More work would be needed to understand the exact level and nature of her responsibility. However, since Jane is my invention, I can insert into the story some bad acts by her, conceivable as possible in the real world, acts that would clearly make her causally responsible for climate harms. Suppose the president of a powerful state meets with the representatives of different interest groups, including Jane, now a CEO, before important international climate negotiations. The president is leaning toward arguing for tough controls on carbon emissions but is also somewhat worried about

[44] The word "conflict" is perhaps unfortunate. Akrasia might feel less like conflict and more like pleasant and soothing acceptance of ignorance or conforming to the expectations of the social environment. One might suspect in some parts of one's being that these beliefs are false, but akrasia amounts to letting go of this suspicion rather than pursuing and examining it.

employment figures and corporate donations for his campaign for a second term. Jane, armed with figures produced by climate denialist think tanks, convinces the president that the effects on employment would be much worse than he thought and that climate change risks have been exaggerated; without quite saying so aloud, she also makes clear that she influence with lots of big-money donors. As a result of Jane's exchanges with the president, the climate negotiations fail to produce any results. The causes of the results of international negotiations are many and complex, but all other things being equal, the result would have been different had Jane and the president not met.[45] Without a binding agreement, emissions continue to grow and some critical thresholds are reached, with catastrophic impacts. Jane may believe in her own arguments, but she should know better. She used to know better, and her reasons for knowing worse now stem from factors of social belonging and perhaps excessive self-love and ambition or cowardice rather than epistemically responsible practices. Her ignorance, if it is genuine ignorance, is culpable (Smith 1983). The first version of Jane's story is about everyday life and habitual actions in a social role. A narrative of this sort gives us a picture of how structures slowly shape the epistemic and moral capacities of a person. The second narrative shows how the world is structured in such a way that even an extraordinary single act can have far-reaching consequences.

Jane's story should show that, with the structural viewpoint, the responsibility of the individual members of the global elite is not a clear-cut matter, but that blame and even direct responsibility are possible. The elite are "dependent rational animals" (MacIntyre 2001), but their circumstances make it seem as if they are not, even more so than is the case with other positions of social privilege (see chapter 2). Their knowledge about the world and about the good, about right and wrong, is a result of bodily interaction with their environment and other beings, along with their education and reasoning. However, during the last couple of decades, the global elite has perhaps become much more powerful, privileged, and insulated than ever before, and there is reason to think this growth of power has been undeserved (Sayer 2015). This also means that they can be causally responsible for much more than before. In addition, the elite has easy access to virtually all the knowledge there is in the world. If its members do not understand some piece of data or theory, they can always hire an expert to interpret it and explain it to them.

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[45] According to counterfactual theories of causation, Jane's behavior is then a causal factor in how climate change unfolds. In a classic definition, David Lewis writes: "We think of a cause as something that makes a difference, and the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it. Had it been absent, its effects – some of them, at least, and usually all – would have been absent as well." (1973, 161).

The structural position of the elite constrains its members as epistemic and moral agents and simultaneously gives them enormous power, but how does that happen, and what does it mean for the rest for us?

4.4 The Structural Position of the Elite and Irresponsibility

Jane is a fictional but not necessarily unrealistic character. A research group headed by Lauren Rickards has gone through an impressive amount of social scientific research (more than 400 references) in order to find out how "senior decision makers" and their attitudes are an obstacle to of action on environmental threats, especially climate change. They have published their results in an article where they argue that:

> [Senior decision makers] are strongly focused on their 'local' professional context and near-term pressures, including reputation among peers, relationships with competitors, and real-time financial status. As a group they exist within a largely closed circuit and perceive the world from a particular narrow perspective. Combined with the complexity and embedded character of existing systems, this occludes more systemic or reflexive thinking or action. (Rickards et al., 2014, 753)

The empirical research examined by Rickards et al. strongly suggests that living in an elite position in our social world tends to make the cultivation of certain virtues difficult and to breed some vices. Elites might be vulnerable to almost all the epistemic vices in Linda Zabzegski's list: "intellectual pride, negligence, idleness, cowardice, conformity, carelessness, rigidity, prejudice, wishful thinking, closed-mindedness, insensitivity to detail, obtuseness, and lack of thoroughness" (1996, 152). A belief that one is in a high position due to merit is bound to cause some intellectual pride, which in turn may lead to other vices such as carelessness and wishful thinking. A narrow perspective is related to prejudice, rigidity, and closed-mindedness. Near-term pressures, the need for quick decisions, and an

organizational culture where decisiveness is valued over thoughtfulness may cause insensitivity to detail and lack of thoroughness. It is important to understand that what Rickards et al. describe are tendencies, and there may be counter-tendencies. For example, getting into and staying in an elite position may require substantial talent and all kinds of epistemic capacities. However, I hesitate to call these capacities virtues, insofar as I think that getting into and staying in an elite position is not a worthy and virtuous goal in itself, and therefore qualities that help one achieve such a goal are not admirable. Capacities that are acquired and used in non-virtuous ways and for non-virtuous goals are not virtues as they are understood according to most versions of virtue ethics.

More importantly, the elite perspective seems to lack precisely those environmental hybrid virtues that were shown to be required for responsibility in the Anthropocene according to the environmental ethical literature.[46] Environmental responsibility can partly be summed up as understanding the "complexity and embedded character of existing systems" and the ethical implications and epistemic requirements that stem from that and acting according to this understanding. Another part of environmental responsibility involves understanding and being able to morally value and empathize with distant others, future generations, and non-humans; again, this is difficult for the elite, since it is focused on local contexts and exists insulated from other perspectives. These conditions are not prone to cultivate empathetic imagination. Indeed, many social researchers have found that the more privileged a person is, the less likely they are to have empathy for those with fewer life opportunities.[47]

Besides the social environment of the elite, its role in the structures of the economy is also a factor. Not every member of the elite necessarily acts as a capitalist all the time—as "capital personified" in Marx's terms—but those that do are to some extent bound to adapt their outlook on life to their role, and those that do not may still associate with capitalists proper frequently in everyday life. As capitalists, they are not interested in the "use values" of what is produced. In fact, some use values, such as the longevity of a product, can be detrimental to profit making. This is why many products have planned obsolescence built into them. But as capitalists, they are also not interested in the material, chemical, and physical properties and causal powers of the objects that go into and come out of the production process—unless they somehow visibly affect the bottom line. If climate

[46] See chapter 2 above.

[47] See, e.g., Kraus et al. (2010) and the list of references in Rickards et al. (2014). For a philosophical account of the "epistemic vices of the privileged," see Medina (2013, 30–40 and *passim*).

harms were to be taken into account, they would have to be seen as costs for the company. This was ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson's point, when he notoriously said in an interview:

> My philosophy is to make money. If I can drill and make money, then that's what I want to do. For us, it's about making quality investments for our shareholders. And it's not a quality investment if you can't manage the risk around it.[48]

Was this the philosophy of just Tillerson the fossil capitalist or also Tillerson the person? If Tillerson has integrated making money into his general philosophy of life and perhaps cultivated this as a disposition, he has clearly made a tragic moral mistake. Yet, even if Tillerson tried to cultivate a persona other than a fossil capitalist role, it would be strange if anyone could completely separate their sense of self from the work they do every day.

It is probable that acting as capital personified will also make one increasingly think like capital and see the world in terms of profits, losses, costs, and benefits. Many social scientists and political philosophers think that in neoliberal capitalism we are all called upon to think of ourselves as investors in human capital, thus adopting the rationality of capital as our own.[49] The firm and its rationality becomes the model of social and political action on all levels of society (Brown 2015). It would be strange if this process did not affect and reinforce the thinking of the actual capitalists heading actual firms. Financial capitalism separates many senior decision makers further from the actual realities and effects of production processes, so that making money with money, seemingly without the mediation of the production process, becomes the everyday life of the capitalist (Peet 2011).

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[48] See http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-03-07/charlie-rose-talks-to-exxonmobils-rex-tillerson (accessed 9 March 2018).

[49] See chapter 2 above.

4.5 The Environmental Problems of Profit Making

What happens if powerful people adopt the philosophy of making money? Ecosystems and earth systems, such as the climate, and societies and their interconnections are complex entities, and different values attach to them. Environmental thinkers have discussed and argued for decades over what their ontological status is and what makes them or their constituents or their emergent properties valuable, and while there are strong disagreements, very few think that monetary profit and loss or even cost and benefit are the right metrics to measure and understand the value of the global environment or any natural process or being. John O'Neill, for example, has argued against monetary valuation of the environment by pointing out that environmental values are not commensurable, and that monetary valuation can only count the strength of preferences, not whether there are good reasons for those preferences (O'Neill 1993, 2002).

Let us suppose that there is a conflict over whether it is acceptable that a mining company destroys a lake ecosystem for profit, and on the one side of the scale there are profits, shareholder value, economic growth, and a promise of jobs; on the other side are the cultural values of the lake for the community and perhaps an entire nation, which comprise many things from fishing and scenery to the very identity and sense of self of the people living near the lake.[50] In addition, there is the intrinsic value of the ecosystem, if we accept that ecosystems have intrinsic value, and there are all the non-human organisms whose lives depend on the lake, but who have no say on environmental policy. On top of these values that attach to the lake itself, there are the unintended consequences for other ecosystems, since ecosystems are not enclosed self-sustaining wholes. Even the climate may be affected because lakes are carbon sinks (Gudasz et al. 2010). If profit-seeking has adverse effects for moral reasoning and action in local environments where effects of productive practices are fairly immediate, the problem is likely to be worse with global environmental issues like climate change where the effects of decisions and productive activities are more mediated and distant. A rationality based on profit, the philosophy of making money, is not well poised to take into account either all different forms of value or the complex causal chains of social action and eco- and earth-systems. This difficulty is exacerbated by the social factors of the senior decision makers detailed by Rickards et al. (2014).

[50] On cultural environmental values, see O'Neill et al. (2008); on sense of self and the environment, see Jamieson (2014, 191–92).

The analysis of the elite's moral and epistemic agency and its connection to the rationality of profit-making can be taken further by taking technology or *technics* into account. Several philosophers have developed new perspectives on how technological prostheses affect or even constitute our subjectivity (e.g., Stiegler 1994; Verbeek 2011). Paul-Peter Verbeek, for example, argues that technological artifacts "mediate" our morality; they "give shape to what we do and how we experience the world" (2011, 1). For Verbeek, and often in philosophy of technology more generally, technologies are not merely means but also "help to form new ends" (2011, 46). It is impossible to detail here all the aspects of how our economies and societies are technological, but consider how the end of profit making is built into some technologies. I have already mentioned planned obsolescence, and there are other aspects of how some technologies are designed to make customers want to buy more. But there are also examples of technologies that shape how the world is experienced in terms of possibilities for profit while simultaneously occluding other aspects of the world, partly because something is always occluded whenever a perspective is taken and partly because of the logic of profit itself. Different management technologies and their associated practices, such as customer relationship management (CRM), or enterprise resource planning (ERP) are meant to help managers monitor business activities and make appropriate decisions at the right time. The financial capitalists and their underlings, in turn, can integrate stock market indices and other information into the digital technologies that they use daily. This is how one of the most famous information providers advertises their "integrated solutions":

> Dow Jones' premium data can be integrated seamlessly into client and third-party products through feeds, APIs and a range of innovative products. Get the information that is most relevant and timely, with customized alerts, specific searches and accessible interfaces for creating company newsletters and visually engaging data displays.[51]

Technologies such as these arrange the world in certain ways, with specific conceptual schemas and logics. They provide a structure for the daily lives of their users, but this structure is not neutral or value-free. They force or nudge their users

[51] http://www.dowjones.com/products/integrated-solutions/ (accessed 16 January 2016).

to pay attention to some aspects of the world and hide others. Their master schema is profit making, which both limits the possibilities of taking non-monetary values into account in the day-to-day practices of business management and affects the ethical subjectivity of those who use them. Perhaps it is the mid-level management of firms that mainly use these technologies, but, as Rickards et al. point out:

> For [senior decision makers], information is additionally filtered by their organizational information management strategies. Many decision makers rely heavily on colleagues and consultants to act as 'trusted advisors'. While little is known about this practice, it may reinforce self-serving responses to climate change by providing answers amenable to clients. While the in-house scientists of some companies emphasize/generate uncertainty about climate science, others tend to provide advice closely aligned with existing (climate change-resistant) organizational goals. (Rickards et al. 2014, 756)

The structural position of the elite, especially the fossil capitalist and the financial capitalist, is a paradoxical one. On the one hand, their responsibility for climate change, in the both retrospective and prospective sense, is about as large as is possible for individuals to have in our global social arrangements (with the possible exceptions of some heads of state). On the other hand, their immediate social, cultural, and technological surroundings, their everyday interactions, their official roles and duties (increasing shareholder value), and their financial incentives tend to shape them as irresponsible subjects, as subjects who cannot recognize or understand their own responsibility.

4.6 Political Elite

While I have consciously left questions of political responsibility out of this thesis, something ought to be said about the political elite in this context. In the most abstract sense, there is not much difference between the political elite and other (economic) elites. Both groups are exclusionary and have significantly more power than others; their positions gives both groups privileges and make luxurious

living possible. People who can individually influence how the most polluting companies operate include CEOs and other senior decision makers such as investors but also powerful politicians and bureaucrats.

How one becomes a member of the political elite can be very different from how one become part of the financial or fossil capitalist elite, although not always. There are also metaphorical revolving doors between “Wall Street” and “Washington” (the quotation marks indicate that this phenomenon is not unique to the United States). Bankers become politicians, politicians become industry lobbyists, and so on. There are real networks between different groups within the elites, and these group memberships, friendships, and financial ties will influence what the elite take to be its responsibilities. Whereas a non-elite individual can ideologically take up environmental vices due to imagining themselves sharing a community and interests with fossil fuel investors, the members of the elite share real economic interests and communal connections.[52]

Politicians have different role responsibilities from investors and CEOs and are answerable to different people, at least in ideal theory. In reality, politics and economics are different yet entangled, and the forms their relationship takes are historically contingent. The Netflix-produced TV series *House of Cards* dramatizes the relationship between economic and political power by showing how the different interests of politicians and capitalists in Washington are at once antagonistic and mutually dependent. In the Trump administration, the mutual dependencies of political and economic power are shown without shame. On the one hand fossil capitalists such as the aforementioned Tillerson and fossil fuel lobbyists have been appointed into highest political offices. On the other hand some divisions and antagonisms between different fractions of the global capitalist class may be appearing; for example, high-technology companies have been taking explicit political stances against the Trump administration.[53]

If it is difficult to understand what goes on in the mind of a CEO who calls climate change one of the biggest problems of our times and yet keeps on drilling, it is no less difficult to understand a head of state who, while publicly acknowledging the facts about climate change, keeps on approving permits for new oil pipelines or coal mines. Both are constrained by their social environments,

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[52] See Sayer (2015, 239–52) and references therein on how the economic elite can influence politicians and the political process.

[53] See, e.g., https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/06/silicon-valley-responds-trump-paris-accord-decision (accessed 9 March 2018).

which again are structurally conditioned. Global capitalism affects both environments, but the political environment has certain features that are different from the world of business.

It is uncontroversial that economic power translates into political power, although there can be and is disagreement through which practices and mechanisms this translation happens, whether this is acceptable, and to what degree. Economic power has been used to influence climate policies, as in the financing of opposition to emission regulations. Environmentalists usually have far fewer resources to lobby for more regulation.

Using political power for personal enrichment has been often condemned in most societies, even if such practices have been widespread. But are not these two "translations" connected in various ways? If Jane bribes Senator Bob to oppose emissions, Jane uses economic power to influence political power, but at the same time Bob uses his political power for personal enrichment. This is a straightforward case, but what about more complex ones like lobbying, campaign donations, or publishing propaganda? It would be a mistake to regard them as isolated transactions or other forms of single, independent actions. They are practices that create, reproduce, enforce, strengthen, shape, and transform relations between individuals, groups, and other practices. Sometimes a single act, such as making a deal or convincing a member of a parliament to vote in a certain way, can make a difference in large-scale social processes, and thus in the ways those social processes are disrupting the climate system and other earth systems.

In terms of personal responsibility, the political elite viewed abstractly is rather similar to the economic elite in terms of backward- and forward-looking responsibility. Both have power and have influenced the way our societies have operated. However, the way their characters are formed may be different in many ways, insofar as they occupy different yet interacting social worlds. A crucial difference is that a CEO and a politician have different role responsibilities and are answerable to different people.

A CEO can argue that their responsibility is to increase shareholder value and that they are answerable to the board of directors, and we could still hold that CEO morally culpable for acts and omissions that contribute to climate change, since moral responsibility cannot be reduced to role responsibility. Politicians, on the other hand, can also be blamed for failing in their role responsibilities and for being mistaken about to whom they are answerable. If politicians follow the instructions of the fossil fuel lobbyists, we can say that they have culpably misunderstood their accountability.

4.7 What's the Point of Blaming the Elite?

It thus appears that it is possible to morally blame some powerful individuals in a fairly straightforward sense. Precisely how much any one individual is culpable for climate change as it unfolds is a difficult empirical question. Should we bother to find out case by case? Or should we concentrate on positive political projects? What about the elite as a whole? The upshot of this chapter is that it is possible to find out whether some elite individuals are culpable to a degree that makes a difference. However, when discussing their responsibility, we ought to pay attention to their social positioning, which already invites the question of whether we should then blame the elite as a whole as responsible for the conditions in which some powerful individuals have been able to make climate change worse. If inaction in the face of climate change is also blameworthy, those who have the social power to make a difference but have not could also be blamed.

Iris Marion Young (2011) criticizes what she calls "the liability model of responsibility" in structural problems on moral, political, and epistemic grounds. Retrospective blame is problematic when causes and effects are remote, blaming some individuals may absolve the blame for others, correcting structural injustices requires forward-looking projects, and blaming others tends to make the blamed defensive and aversive to action.[54]

Some people might also argue that blaming the elite for climate change smacks of populism. Blaming the elite has certainly been an aspect of populism but not the only aspect. However, what counts as elite for me is an empirical question. I have referred to social research in describing them, and if it turns out through responsible empirical study that there is nothing in the world resembling the elite that I describe in this chapter, the chapter can be "committed to the flames." Second, the populist claim to speak for the "real people" is a nefarious and exclusionary fantasy; the global non-elite do not constitute a "real people." They are a vast plurality of social groups with different forms of life and different interests. Mitigating climate change would be good for all of them, but they relate to the elite and climate change in innumerable ways.

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[54] Robyn Eckersley (2016, 349) succinctly sums up these arguments by Young.

So far, my argument has been about whether members of the elite can be said to be morally blameworthy for climate change. A provisional answer is that they can, even at the individual level in some cases, but in many ways and to varying degrees. But they could not be blamed for all climate change, since climate change has a long and complex history. The pragmatic and political objections to blaming the elite suggest that even if they could be blamed in principle, it makes no practical sense to do so, and that it is more worthwhile to concentrate on the positive project of climate activism. This objection does not does not address the moral argument. If we make the moral argument that the elite are blameworthy, this does not yet necessarily entail practical conclusions. Our political practices may be guided by other reasons or weightier concerns.

Whether we ought to blame the elite in practice is a different question. There may be reasons not to blame some who are blameworthy. Like Miranda Fricker (2014), I understand blaming to be communicative action, and like her, I think that it has some basic functions in our social lives. When looking at communication we can pay attention to things like message, sender, receiver, and context. With political (and often moral) communication, there are multiple senders and receivers, and the message can be received in various contexts. Fricker is concerned with communication from blamer to blamed.[55] For her, blame ought to lead to the moral alignment of the blamer and the blamed. Blame as a communicative action can fail, for example, if the one blamed does not come to understand and agree with the notion that what they have done is blameworthy. I am more interested in the communicative aspects of blaming within a group of people that does not include the ones being blamed. What kind of social relationships does such blame foster? What does it entail for the moral and epistemic agency of the members of the group that blames? What further actions by them does it make possible and foreclose? These are broad questions. In what follows, I discuss them mainly so far as they relate to the question of responsibility.

The main purpose of this section is not to "speak truth to power." Rather, I am concerned about how the rest of us should think about the elite. How should we understand our own responsibilities concerning climate change, the planet, the vulnerable, future generations, non-humans, and one another, in relation to what we can know about the elite? How will we, in our different social positions, understand our relationships to some elite individuals whom we can clearly say have some degree of backward-looking, culpable responsibility for the shape that

[55] This is Young's concern when she worries that blame will make the blamed defensive and less likely to want change.

our planet is taking and the resulting disasters? If we think that the elite has acquired its destructive powers unjustly, how should we think about its prospective responsibilities? If we insist that the elite ought to use its social powers to compel the mitigation of climate change, do we in the same breath legitimate their position? Is it morally tragic if we have to do it anyway?

In the most abstract sense, blaming some individual or group entails at least that one is not guilty in the similar sense. If group A blames group B for the failure to mitigate climate change, this presupposes that A or members of A either did not fail or were in no position to either succeed or fail; it was not A's responsibility in the same way that it was B's. It can also mean that A and B were both responsible and both were needed, so B's failure meant that both ultimately failed. These examples seem like standard collective action problems. However, unlike the collective action problem view, the structural view sees the capacities for actions of both A and B as having histories embedded in social structures. In order to say exactly how they are responsible, these histories would have to be told. If we blame the elite for climate change, we may initially seem to absolve ourselves from blame, but the structural view affords more nuanced versions of blame, whether directed at self or others. I can blame myself for not using the resources at my disposal to promote climate activism and social justice and blame the elites for investing in fossil fuels and not using their position for something good—or if this is truly structurally impossible in the positions that they occupy, I can blame them for not stepping down from their positions. However, the problem of complicity and the tendency to pass the buck is a real problem.[56] Blaming the elite in a way that makes the blamers feel that they have no responsibility to act would not be right, since there are many other aspects of responsibility besides culpability at play, as I discuss throughout this dissertation.

Consider blaming the elite in the following way: "You the elite are responsible for climate change, you could have made a difference decades ago and did not, and some of you actively made global mitigation efforts difficult. Therefore it is your job to fix the situation." This sort of blame might have other problems besides buck-passing.

Even if the elite or some elite individuals collectively came to a decision to mitigate climate change, how likely is it that they would choose ways that we think

[56] Gardiner (2006) discusses intergenerational buck-passing as a problem for climate justice, by which he means leaving efforts to mitigate climate change to future generations for one reason or other. Buck-passing of this sort, however, can also happen across different social groups within the same generation.

are ethically sound, fair, and just? Would they choose solar radiation management and other spectacular, uncertain, and dangerous geoengineering techniques? The elite itself would be best protected from any adverse effects of geoengineering. It might also see geoengineering as one more way of making a profit, and perhaps weigh reasons of profit above considerations of risks to others, not to speak of justice or environmental values.

Following Giddens, Young (2011, 60–62) notes how social structures and positions are recursive. This means, among other things, that drawing on social resources to perform an action at the same time reproduces the structure that makes the resources available for some and not others. Thus, even when the elites would be using their powers for the mitigation of climate change, this use of power might at the same time amount to reproducing this power, but perhaps not necessarily. If we think that the powers of the elite are generally destructive and unjust, and we still think that the best tactic at this particular moment is to lobby it to use its powers to mitigate climate change, we should imagine ways to do this so that in using their powers, elite individuals do not reproduce the structures that gave them power, or better, that they even diminish or disperse that power while using it to mitigate climate change.[57]

Using social power is more or less public. Sometimes it is public in purpose, sometimes it is accidental or the work of whistleblowers. There are always communicative aspects to using social power, but infrastructures and technological design also play a role. The reason for worrying about legitimizing the powers of the elite is that the communicative aspects of social power entail that someone in a position of power is recognized as legitimately possessing that power. If Jane orders a subordinate around, nothing happens unless the subordinate recognizes Jane as having authority. Can we lobby Jane to mitigate climate change without at the same time recognizing that she has social power and, by asking her to use it, thus legitimizing it? It might be possible, but it is not easy to imagine how. We may have to start imagining such ways, if our situation is such that lobbying the elite to act is the only or the surest way to avoid a total climate catastrophe.

Suppose Jane herself finally realizes she has been in the wrong and wants to join a climate activist group, and perhaps even do a PhD in climate ethics. What should she do and how should others relate to her? Does she break her ties with the elite? Should she? Should her social connections be used? Can they be used without too much moral and political and even epistemic risk? These remain open questions. I

[57] Knowing what this could mean in practice would require further study and the practical learning processes of political action.

do not know how to answer them. However, they seem to me to be very important questions, and they can only be asked if we take some kind of social structural view of climate change. We need the concept of structural position to understand the elite and how they are responsible for climate change causally and morally. We need to be able to analyze how the structures of global capitalism empower the elite and yet constrain even its members in some ways. We need both a sociological and a moral imagination to think of ways to compel the mitigation of climate change without reinforcing destructive and unjust social structures.

We can also ask how what may happen to us and our moral characters if we lobby the elites to mitigate climate change. As I have noted, there are some similarities with bureaucracy and the elite in terms of the capacity for responsibility, but where the image of the bureaucrat is boring, unlikeable, and the very opposite of the artist, the image of the entrepreneur is something else. In some cases, the popularized image of a CEO of an "innovative" company has more in common with creative artists and rock stars than with government officials; consider Steve Jobs or Richard Branson. In the biographies of businessmen (often bestsellers), their initiative and self-sufficiency are usually emphasized, while their dependence on external factors played down.

I presented in chapter 2 a picture of moral and epistemic agency informed by virtue ethics and social theory. According to this picture, our moral and epistemic capacities and dispositions are shaped by social relations and our environment through the practical interactions we have with other beings and objects in our daily lives. While there are certainly periods in an individual's life when this process of learning (and unlearning) is more intensive than other times, there is never a stop to this process. When climate activists interact with senior decision makers, this will have an effect on all parties to the encounter. However, senior decision makers will generally possess more social power in terms of wealth and social capital than the average climate activist.

Besides visible and socially recognized if not always endorsed forms of power, there is something that political philosophers since Gramsci have called cultural hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony is the ability of some social class to present their interests as commonsensical. Common sense, for Gramsci, is not the ability to see the truth through useless academic theories. Rather, it is the how the basic ontological and moral concepts of everyday life organize thinking about the world. Common sense is not simply a false idea of the world in the heads of actors, but is enacted and reinforced in social and discursive practices (Gramsci 1971; Thomas 2009).

The projected image of the elite appears to radiate what Elena Pulcini calls "Promethean omnipotence" (Pulcini 2009). Their extravagant and carbon-intensive lifestyles are admired and coveted by other people (Sayer 2015, 303–38). Thus, blaming the elite might be a means of hegemonic struggle to promote other ways of life as good, necessary, and responsible.

Finally, there are epistemic problems in blaming individuals and groups when causes and effects are distant and complex. Could there also be epistemic opportunities in blaming the elite? In order to find whether we can blame any one individual or group in a complex situation, we will have to learn more, likely much more, about the situation. By discussing the different ways that we are responsible for climate change, we can make better sense of what kind of political alliances and activities are appropriate to the situation and how blaming can facilitate them. Assessing the blameworthiness of individuals and groups case by case either as an exercise of moral reasoning or in a court of law entails having to learn more about how social power functions in our societies and how individuals may come to use their power irresponsibly. This in turn might help us grasp our own responsibility better both by coming to understand how social structures operate and by negation, by learning how not to be irresponsible in certain ways.

4.8 Conclusion

The responsibility of the elite becomes a possible question if we understand how our global world is hierarchically structured. If we look at climate change as the product of the emissions of individuals who act disparately, we cannot understand how CEOs can be responsible for climate change much more extensively than just by having big houses with air conditioning and expensive cars. The more philosophical and abstract upshot of the discussion in this chapter is that backward-looking and forward-looking responsibilities can influence each other in many ways, and that trying to promote one without the other will lose important aspects of the moral quandary we are in, one part of the situation being the responsibility of those who can in their social positions affect large-scale social

processes more than others. Whether it makes sense to blame the elite politically is a distinct question of its moral blameworthiness, although it is difficult not to say that someone is blameworthy without actually blaming them in the very same speech act.

The elite and its social environment is also an interesting area of study for understanding environmental responsibility negatively. If the senior decision makers of global corporations live in a world where it is more difficult to be environmentally responsible, then we can learn from this what we ought to pay attention to when trying to form different social environments. The role of technology as mediating our acts and thoughts is one aspect of moral and epistemic agency that remains undertheorized.

When understood in terms of hegemony, the analysis of the epistemic vices of the elite also points to a richer critical theory of society. If the elite is able to present its view of the world as commonsensical and itself as the exemplar of knowing and acting, the critical analysis of the epistemic and moral condition of the elite is relevant to the analysis of the society as a whole.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN ATROCITY

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss climate change as an atrocity, as an evil. I take my cue from Claudia Card's atrocity paradigm, in which the definition of evil is culpable intolerable harm (Card 2002). Climate change appears to fit Card's definition, even if culpability for climate change is a deeply difficult question. In the last chapter I described the elite or some members of the elite as responsible, culpable, blameworthy, and their social powers as destructive and unjust. Are they evil? Should our attitude toward the global elite be analogous to our attitudes toward those who have orchestrated large-scale atrocities? There is a danger in blaming the elite as culpable for evil, if this blame at the same time works to absolve others from responsibility. Climate change as a structural issue has many different degrees of culpabilities, and culpability is not the only way to be responsible. Since there are many agents in different social positions with different degrees of power and influence, their responsibilities also come in degrees. Besides having retrospective responsibility stemming from culpability, one can be responsible in a prospective sense. If we approach climate change as an atrocity, both these points remain. What I aim to show in this chapter is that approaching climate change as an atrocity has an effect on how we ought to understand our responsibilities regarding it in a particular light.

If climate change is an atrocity, how to orient ourselves toward it, how to respond? Hannah Arendt's work on the banality of evil is important insofar as it helps us understand how evil can in fact be quite ordinary. There are many social and cultural causes that make it difficult for us to understand the urgency of climate change and easy to be thoughtless, in Arendt's terms. Theodor Adorno discusses evil as complacency, as accepting the wrong state of things. Adorno's view, while not very systematic due to his stylistic choices, sits well between Card

and Arendt. Adorno's sometimes hyperbolic insistence that we live in the midst of a catastrophe without comprehending it fits with Card's understanding of evil as atrocious, and Arendt's discussion on the banality of evil can in turn make complacency more understandable. Understanding climate change as an atrocity has consequences for how we ought to understand our responsibility. Global atrocities make individuals responsible in ways that are not neatly captured by ordinary conceptions of responsibility, such as retrospective and prospective responsibility. Global atrocities have many culpable agents and structural causes, and any one agent can be responsible in the traditional sense only for its own contribution. Yet, atrocities are events or processes that require the co-operation of many more or less clearly culpable active agents and the passivity of complicit onlookers. Their relationship to the atrocity makes all of them responsible for more than just the actions that were clearly their own. As members of a society, we also have a degree of responsibility for the social structures that we in our daily life reproduce. To use Max Scheler's (1973) term, we are co-responsible for the effects of our social structures and, to an extent, even for the actions of other individuals that social structures make possible.[58]

Besides having structural and social features, atrocities have the moral feature of demanding urgent action. No matter what my connection is to a specific ongoing atrocity, it feels somehow wrong or vicious to say or think that it is not my fault and I am not responsible, even if there is little I could actually do at a given moment. Perhaps this intuition is connected to co-responsibility or perhaps to prospective responsibility, both discussed in the next chapter… or perhaps both.

5.2 How Climate Change is Evil

The theories of evil that I find illuminating for climate change are Card's atrocity paradigm, Arendt's banality of evil, and Adorno's understanding of evil as triviality, the acceptance of the world as it is. What these theories have in common is that they are not concerned about evil motivations as such. This is important,

[58] Consider this analogy from the micro level. Suppose I have in my group of friends one who tends to behave badly and dangerously when drunk. He is of course responsible for his own actions, but if I participate in creating an atmosphere where binge drinking is acceptable and never speak of my concerns to him, I would not be wrong to feel partly responsible for anything bad that happens because of his behavior.

because what drives climate change is not ultimately anybody's evil intention to destroy the global environment or hatred of any one group vulnerable to climate effects. Indeed, one of the things that may factor into climate denialism for some people is the association of worries about climate change with greens and liberals and malice toward those political and cultural groups, but on the global scene, these motivational factors are hardly the most decisive factor for climate change.

Card asks on what grounds we can call some set of actions evil, and Arendt is concerned about those contexts in which ordinary, boring people can become not just complicit in but active perpetrators of extreme evil. Both perspectives are motivated by the great atrocities of the twentieth century. Like Adorno's philosophy, they are examples of trying to think after Auschwitz, a name that stands for both the singular events at that particular place and for the more general logic and practice of dehumanization.

Card's atrocity paradigm comes from the attempt to come up with a concept of evil that would be adequate to historical atrocities. Evil harm for Card has three conditions: it is "(1) reasonably foreseeable (or appreciable) and (2) culpably inflicted (or tolerated, aggravated, or maintained), and it (3) deprives, or seriously risks depriving, others of the basics that are necessary to make a life possible and tolerable or decent (or to make a death decent)" (2001, 16). In a revision of her theory, Card modifies the second condition to be more sensitive to motivation: evil actions have no moral reasons that would excuse them (Card 2010, 21). I find the revision problematic, for it may excuse if not justify some of the worst evils of our history, if, for example, the perpetrators sincerely believed that they had no other choice or that what they did was for the good of the souls of the victims. This would be against Card's own stated purpose to have a concept of evil that is adequate to historical atrocities. However, climate change may meet even her revised conception of evil. Given the anticipated effects of business as usual and the availability of knowledge concerning climate change, there really might be no possible excuse for most actors. In light of what powerful people know or at least should know, I find it very difficult to think of any excuses for some of them to continue undertaking practices that cause climate change and to thwart mitigation efforts. In Card's earlier version of the atrocity paradigm, I argue, climate change is clearly evil. In the revised version, it is still very likely to count as evil, but it might be more excusable in the case of more though not all perpetrators. Card's atrocity paradigm would even hold if there were no active perpetrators, only complicit onlookers. For Card, structural evils may have active agents, but they also have

enablers, people who make structural evils possible by upholding the social structures that lead to evil (Card 2010 85–87).[59]

It is contestable at which point climate change has been reasonably foreseeable, but at least since the Rio Declaration in 1992, ignorance has not been an acceptable excuse for a great number people, especially for those in senior decision maker positions. They ought to have known, and many probably did know, that there is a scientific consensus about human-induced climate change and its most important causes. To give one example, we now know that researchers employed by Exxon already knew about climate change in the 1970s and made their concerns clear to company managers. Still, Exxon and other energy companies have not only failed to change their business model but have also funded climate change denialist think tanks such as the Heartland Institute (Oreskes and Conway 2010; Klein 2014). Climate change in its present form is culpably caused, since emissions have only grown since 1992; they have grown due to what human beings have been doing, and some people could have acted in ways that would have made a difference.[60] It might be possible to argue that even before that, the use of natural resources without little worry was culpably reckless. Not all emissions were culpable, but probably enough of them were. This is of course an empirical question, but it seems believable that if there had been a significant reduction rather than growth in emissions after 1992, we would be looking at a less catastrophic future.

Besides acts leading directly to emissions, the structural view of climate change recognizes many other kinds of acts as relevant to the problem. Some people may think that well-being and economic growth are justifiable excuses for inaction, but with the knowledge that we have about the probable future effects and already ongoing processes of climate change, this excuse clearly does not work, even on its own terms. Even if we accepted the immensely controversial moral assumptions

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[59] Vicky Davion (2009) has previously discussed Card's theory of evil in connection to climate change. Davion argues that the loss of communities and cultural identities counts as social death and is thus genocidal and that the failure to help communities at risk to keep their identities is an atrocity. I agree with Davion and think that climate change counts as an atrocity more generally by many of its effects from deaths by climate change-powered hurricanes to species extinction.

[60] The first two conditions are non-controversial, while the third from the structural point of view is an empirical matter. However, I believe there are strong reasons to think that the senior decision makers of the biggest companies in the world, the largest investors, and people with influence in the political elite could all have made a difference.

about economic growth and well-being, it is clear that climate change will have adverse effects on both in the relatively near future.[61]

With the structural view of climate change, however, the focus is not just on immediate emissions but on actions that reinforce and promote the social structures that cause emissions. Many economic and political decision makers have done nothing where they could have done something, and some have downplayed the problem and used their considerable social power to hinder mitigation attempts. These actions contribute to climate change, even if there is a long and complex chain of causes and effects from them to any particular carbon dioxide molecule being emitted. Many fossil capitalists and their paid lobbyists have fought tooth and nail against carbon taxes, regulations, and government support of renewable energy investment and research in many countries (as documented by Oreskes and Conway 2010; Klein 2014). These, rather than anyone's Sunday drive, are paradigmatically culpable climate change causing actions (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2005). Culpable toleration, aggravation, and maintaining of climate change have all been present.

Climate change already is already causing deaths, debilitating diseases when bacteria and viruses spread or move to non-immune populations (the Zika virus and Lyme disease, for example), and loss of homes and life prospects for hundreds of thousands.[62] Climate change will destroy whole cultures and ways of life when indigenous peoples can no longer practice their traditional livelihoods or when seaside communities are forced into diaspora (Davion 2009).

In addition, there is the harm caused to non-human animals. Card suggests that her theory may even apply to harm to non-sentient life-forms like plants if we think that they have moral standing (2004). Since human beings are natural creatures who depend on natural processes for survival and whose sense of self is formed in an environment with both cultural artifacts and natural beings, one cannot harm a great number of non-humans without also eventually harming humans. The harms that humans will directly suffer are great enough to call climate change an atrocity, but this does not mean that the harms to non-humans would be insignificant; even if miraculously no humans were harmed by climate change, the effects on non-humans would still count as evil. We should also be mindful of the

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[61] *IPCC Assessment Report 5,* "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability," https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg2/ (accessed 25 April 2018).

[62] The report by Dara International, *Climate Vulnerability Monitor* (2012) summarizes ongoing health impacts of climate change: http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate-vulnerability-monitor-2012/report/ (accessed 9 May 2018).

concern that seeing human beings as disconnected from non-human nature may be precisely one of those attitudes that make it psychologically possible to ignore climate change until it is too late, an attitude that makes us prone to thoughtlessness and evil more generally.[63]

Why is it significant that climate change is an atrocity rather than (just) a problem? To begin with, it is a question of how the words we use fit with the severity of the issue.[64] To call climate change a problem seems simply too euphemistic, not to say insulting to those already dead, harmed, or at risk. To call it a catastrophe would entail that no one is culpable, that climate change is morally equivalent to natural disasters. The words we use are connected in many ways to our dispositions. They may express our attitudes, but using some words and not others over time may also reinforce some attitudes and not others. The attitude we have toward problems is different from our attitude toward atrocities, and this has consequences for how we understand our responsibility. Consider climate refugees; if we see them as victims of an atrocity and that in some ways we are complicit in the atrocity, we are clearly responsible for helping them, not out of conditional hospitality but out of a duty arising from social connections (Young 2006), co-responsibility, and even retrospective responsibility and culpability.[65]

There are at least three reasons to prefer the word "atrocity." It is more truthful since it always, in addition to culpability and responsibility, points to the severity of the issue; it expresses the proper, most fitting attitudes toward climate change, and it would do different work in the social world than the world "problem." The last

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[63] Val Plumwood (2002) calls the set of attitudes, ideologies, and social practices that see separate human beings as both distinct from and masters of non-human nature "hyperseparation" and argues that similar and entangled separations occur between genders and self and other more generally in our culture.

[64] Davion (2009, 165) makes this point by contrasting evil and injustice. I am not sure if this is a good contrast. Evils in Card's terms are unjust even if not all injustices are evil. It seems to me that we can speak of climate change as both a grave injustice and evil, where injustice points to the unfairness or wrongness of the distribution of harms , while the severity of the harms makes this injustice evil. On the other hand, as I suggest below, framing matters, and if in some contexts framing climate change as an injustice makes it seem less severe than it is, then Davion's worry is justified.

[65] Jones (2016, 151) suggests that a better term would be "climate-induced migration" because according to United Nations Convention on Refugees, a refugee is "someone who flees political, ethnic, or racial persecution, not environmental change." However, if climate change is an atrocity, its effects are not on the same conceptual plane with environmental changes not induced by humans, even if they are also not exactly persecution. "Climate-induced migration" risks naturalizing a phenomenon that is at all its levels social, political, and moral. Whether some other term is better is, I think, an open question, inviting further philosophical study. Climate refugees deserve our help and solidarity in any case.

reason is not without risks. The social worlds we live in are complicated and the framings of global issues can have unintended consequences. Atrocities can invite proper moral concern and the correct attitudes of urgency and personal prospective responsibility, but they may also cause irresponsible and catastrophic reactions. Atrocities should not be responded to by other atrocities. The atrocities of the Nazis did not justify the firebombing of Dresden. It is an empirical question what social consequences would follow if climate change were framed as an atrocity and if this framing gained traction. Here, as more generally, how to respond to atrocities is a difficult question, but inaction is not an option.

5.3 Evil Organizations and Responsibility

If climate change is an atrocity, what does this entail for individual responsibility? In the previous chapter, I discussed the possibility that it is conceivable, that even a single individual might have been in a position to make a significant difference at some particular time. Thus, some individuals may be directly responsible for an atrocity, but they would still not be the only ones responsible, and direct retrospective responsibility is not the only relevant form of responsibility.

Individuals can be co-responsible for atrocities in various degrees and in various ways. One way that we can discuss co-responsibility for climate change is by concentrating on individual actions as contributing to a collectively caused evil result. This is how the collective action problem model as explained by Kutz (2000) operates. With climate change we can look at how individual actions contribute to emissions and other factors such as deforestation. The structural view, however, is more concerned with how individuals are related to social structures as agents. One way that individuals relate to social structures as agents is by being members of organizations.

Card (2010) discusses whether organizations can be evil. Evil organizations are those whose purpose is to do evil. They are irredeemably evil if they lack internal structures for redefining their purposes. For Card, the destruction of organizations can be wrong, and it can be evil, but the destruction of evil organizations is not evil, but rather can be morally required. This does not mean that the members of those organizations ought to be destroyed—this would also be evil—but it is

possible to disband an organization without harming its members. Sometimes members may be harmed in some justifiable way. They may lose wealth, privileges, or social standing, but this harm would be justifiable, since the goods that they lost had been unjustly acquired.

If climate change is evil and if some core purpose of certain organizations is to undertake activities that cause climate change directly or make its mitigation more difficult, it seems that we can call these organizations evil. If the core purpose of the organization is to burn fossil fuels or make fossil fuels available for burning, its activities contribute directly to climate change. If an organization uses most of its resources to make climate action difficult by lobbying and disinformation, we may be justified in thinking that this is the organization's core purpose, even if its formal statements of purpose say something different.

The more difficult question is whether they are irredeemably evil. In the abstract, the organizations probably include decision structures that enable changing their business models and activities. Many companies and other organizations have undergone dramatic changes in the course of history. It is not always clear whether an organization is still the same organization, if, like the ship of Theseus, it has changed significantly over time. Yet, if an organization is evil and is seen as evil, it might be better to disband it, even from the perspective of its members. The history of an organization is always a part of it, and if an organization is known for being an active, significant, and willing participant in destroying the global environment, this would hardly be a legacy of which to be proud. On the other hand, if Shell, for example, miraculously decided to use all its resources for mitigating climate change in a just way, would we then consider Shell to be irredeemably tarnished?

If there are organizations whose core purpose is a significant causal factor in climate change, this clearly has implications for discussions of collective responsibility. However, the main topic of this thesis, individual responsibility, is also relevant in many ways. First, we can ask how these organizations are structured and whether there are individuals who can easily influence the way the organization operates. Second, we can ask whether being employed or otherwise affiliated with these organizations makes one responsible in a specific way. What about other connections to those organizations? What if my university invited someone from the Heartland Institute to speak to students; how should I respond? What if a close friend took a job with an oil company? Of course, in some situations the alternative to working for an evil organization is starvation, but such emergency situations aside, if climate change is an atrocity, there is surely

something tarnishing in working for an organization that not only directly contributes to emissions, builds infrastructures that make for path dependencies for even more emissions, and employs and funds climate change denialists and deregulation lobbyists. I do not know whether in those cases I ought to admonish my university publicly and my friend privately or do something else. My social connections to them, however, mean that whatever I do, my actions could have a connection to climate change and I am responsible for them.

Being co-responsible for climate change by being a member or supporter of an organization does not require that one's own activities directly contribute to climate change. Activities that support and facilitate the existence and operations of an evil organization are enough to make one responsible for the evils that are committed by the organization, while of course those who make decisions in the organization can be much more responsible. Sometimes just membership on paper is enough to make one responsible even in a consequential sense, as when, for example, the organization argues that the fact that it has so many supporters adds to the organization's legitimacy.

If I buy goods from companies that contribute to climate change, am I a supporter? What counts as support? Most companies contribute to climate change insofar as all economic activities require energy, still mostly fueled by fossils. Some lobbyists for business as usual argue so when they claim that the fact that people keep buying fossil fuels or any goods produced with the help of fossil fuels means that they support their production and use. I suspect different moral theories may give slightly different answers to this question. The structural view can help by making the following distinctions between organizations and supporting activities. First, all economic activities may contribute to climate change, but there are crucial differences between those 1) organizations whose activities contribute to climate change because the world is structured as it is, and 2) those organizations whose core purpose is to undertake activities that directly contribute to climate change, and 3) those organizations whose core purpose is to keep the world and our economic activities structured as they are. Second, activities can be differentiated by a) whether they support some organizations because the world is structured so that such activities are hard or impossible to avoid, and b) whether they are motivated by the desire to directly support some organization or another. Finally, we can investigate how social structures shape, constrain, and enable the motivations of individuals and the purposes of organizations. These considerations can in turn both help us assess the responsibilities in different cases and contexts,

and arrive, via negation, at a better understanding of what responsibility means and requires.

Should individuals refrain from working for evil organizations or try to change them from within? There are no stock answers, as organizations operate in different contexts and are structured in various ways. However, from the social structural perspective, we can see how for some organizations changing their core purpose can be very difficult. The activities of an organization can be connected to the interests of powerful groups. There can be infrastructural path dependencies. Individuals connected to the organization can be fiercely loyal to it and understand loyalty as fighting tooth and nail to maintain business as usual. They can have deeply entrenched dispositions to understand the world in problematic ways. Working for an organization every day forms people in certain ways. We should not think of these issues as excuses. We are all shaped by our environment, but we also take part in shaping it, though not according to our whims or under the conditions of our own choosing. If I want to think that I am responsible for my actions in my environment, I should think the same about people in other environments. Of course, different social environments make their occupants vulnerable to different blind spots. Usually we do not live in just one social environment, but have different roles and different projects throughout our lives, and social environments are not isolated monoliths, but rather interact with one another and change over time. The organizations that we belong to, with their institutions, norms, practices, and material infrastructures, are both constituents of our environment and vehicles for shaping the environment.

The example of Jane in the previous chapter showed how being an active member in an organization can change an individual's capacity for moral and epistemic responsibility. Being a responsible person in relation to climate change requires a self-reflexive understanding of how the organizations one belongs to or supports are related to climate change *and* how one's own capacities are shaped by one's own relations to those organizations. Social structural models, in turn, view organizations not simply as sums of their individual members, but as shaped by wider, macro-level structures, while they at the same time shape, uphold, and sometimes transform the same structures by their activities.

5.4 Atrocities and Co-Responsibility

Organizations are an important part of our social world, but they do not exhaust it by any means. In previous chapters, I have discussed responsibility for social structures with the help of Young's social connection model (2006). Being a member of an organization or a group is a form of social connection that contributes to one's responsibilities, but it is not the only form. We are connected to others via language, cultural practices, economic activities, friendships, and familial and romantic relations, to name just a few. Some of these social connections are obvious, some recognized and celebrated, some are hidden or forgotten, and some are actively ignored or suppressed. These social connections do not exist in a vacuum but are all in various ways embedded in structurally shaped contexts. The same structures of global capitalism that produce climate change also affect how we relate to other people and what relations we understand as real and crucial and what we do not understand as relations at all. The temporal and spatial distances of climate change mean that we do not immediately recognize how our actions affect others and thus connect us to them. Yet, we are responsible for those structures and those connections since they would not exist without being enacted in our social practices.

This is not to say that all are equally responsible. As discussed in the previous chapter, the world may be structured so that some individuals can have much more of an effect than others on whether and how social structures are transformed. Yet, there is a danger of abdication of responsibility in blaming the elite for climate change. While the atrocity paradigm makes it possible to blame particular individuals, it also allows for complex cases where responsibility is distributed and differentiated. In the historically paradigmatic cases of atrocities, there were often individuals who were the masterminds and planners, the senior decision makers of their day. There were also a great number of people who were complicit, who took part in activities that made the atrocity possible, or who knowingly tolerated the atrocity, even when they could have acted against it without intolerable risks against themselves. Like the concentration camps, climate change also tarnishes many of those who are not directly responsible or whose particular actions are in themselves negligible. Applying Young's social connection model, we should ask how our actions, no matter how ordinary they seem, are contributing to the social structural processes that produce climate change and how not just our active

participation but simple tolerance, looking away, makes us complicit.[66] Being beneficiaries of an economic system that produces climate change also makes many of us complicit.

Climate change can be an ongoing atrocity, but for some people, especially us in affluent countries, this remains invisible because we are not suffering from its effects directly at the moment. This is one cause for complacency, and framing climate change as an atrocity might be required to wake up from this complacency. However, climate change will also cause many locally immediate situations of emergency, such as extreme weather events and conflicts over resources. Understanding how these emergencies are connected to the planetary emergency of climate change would hopefully help us react to them in the spirit of solidarity and with appropriate responsibility. The failure of European states in recent years to treat refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan with anything approaching rudimentary morality suggests that our current dominant practices and forms of thought are inadequate to the emergencies to come.[67]

If climate change is an atrocity, we are required to take a certain kind of stance of responsibility toward it. What specific modes responsibility takes, whether it is better considered as retrospective or prospective, for example, depends on how we are situated in the social world and in relation to the atrocity. A senior decision maker in an organization that promotes climate denialist propaganda and has access to both economic and political elites is more blameworthy and has prospective responsibilities to make amends than most others. A police officer may have to decide how act if their role responsibilities and feelings of solidarity appear to conflict with their moral responsibilities regarding climate change if ordered to stop a climate activist demonstration. However, some forms of responsibility are peculiar to atrocities. An atrocity demands that we take a side. It demands that we orient ourselves in certain ways toward the phenomena that make up the atrocity. It demands urgent action. It may trump other responsibilities. For example, Eichmann's appeal to role responsibility was not an excuse. Taking urgent action rashly and without thinking may of course be dangerous and make matters worse. Yet, inaction toward atrocities is morally unacceptable. The responsible stance to climate change also has epistemic components just as responsibility as a virtue does, for it requires finding out how one is situated in the social world in relation to the atrocity and what can be done from that position.

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[66] See Young (2006, especially pp. 102–13) and Card (2010, 62–87).

[67] See Jones (2016, 140–61 and *passim*) for a discussion of current practices of policing and militarizing borders in general but also in connection to climate change.

Evan G. Williams gives the following conditions for a moral catastrophe, but he could have been defining "atrocity" instead, as the conditions clearly apply to climate change as discussed in this dissertation:

> For my purposes, moral wrongdoing counts as catastrophic when three elements are present. First, it must be serious wrongdoing: for example, in the case of actions which are wrong by virtue of harming people—not necessarily the only type of seriously-wrong action, but certainly a type—the harm must be something closer to death or slavery than to mere insult or inconvenience. Second, the wrongdoing must be large-scale; a single wrongful execution, although certainly tragic, is not the same league as the slaughter of millions. Third, responsibility for the wrongdoing must also be widespread, touching many members of society. For example, the blame for slavery and the Holocaust does not rest merely on slave-owners and Nazi bigwigs; it also stains non-slave-owning Americans who consumed the products of slave labor, non-genocidal Germans who supported the Nazis for reasons of economics or patriotism, and indeed anyone who failed to oppose the evils as actively as he should have. We would never wish such a fate for ourselves or our loved ones—in fact, I hope I speak for most of my readers when I say that we would give almost anything to avert it. (Williams 2015, 972)

If we consider past atrocities like genocides, it appears that we can criticize in strong moral terms both failures to treat them as emergencies when they were going on and trying to forget them or speaking about them in euphemistic terms afterward. Atrocities ought to be opposed as actively as possible.

Following Theodor Adorno (1998, 191–204; 2000, 103–111 and *passim*), we can argue that Holocaust was an event that made everyone responsible on some level, although only some were culpable. This is because the Holocaust for Adorno, just like climate change for me, was not an accidental, freak event, but something made not only possible but actually probable by the normal functioning of modern capitalist societies, and that there is an absolute duty to do what we can to ensure that it never happens again. Max Scheler and Adorno were philosophical and

political opponents, but Scheler's concept of co-responsibility[68] shares similarities with Adorno's understanding of responsibility for Auschwitz. As contributors to and beneficiaries of society, we are all in some manner responsible for the social structures that make some atrocities possible and probable. Of course, besides co-responsibility, there is differentiated responsibility, where the differentiating factor is the amount of social power one has to uphold or change social structures.[69] Both forms of responsibility are significant for atrocities in general and climate change in particular. Individuals find themselves in different situations and contexts with different histories, and it is not easy to say exactly how any one individual is responsible. Co-responsibility for climate change means that individuals ought to accept that they are urgently responsible *in some way or another* and should try to understand how.

There are those who have more direct responsibilities stemming from causal roles or capacities due to social power, but everyone participates in a society in some form. This explains why Adorno (2000, 115) thinks that "triviality" is evil. One aspect of "triviality" is complacency. If complacency is evil, this should make us feel worried. Are we complacent? What is enough not to be complacent? Is it even psychologically possible to fully comprehend the full scale of climate change and remain functioning in ordinary daily life; can we go on living without being complacent? This again seems like a question that cannot have a stock answer, because people live in different situations and have differentiated capacities for action and thought. Complacency from a member of the global elite is probably less excusable than from a single parent with debts working in a gas station. In any case, reflecting on socially shaped complacency as a cause for irresponsibility may be one path to a deeper understanding of responsibility as co-responsibility.

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[68] "In the life-community the bearer of *all* responsibility is the reality of the community, and the individual is *co*responsible for the life-community; in the collective person every individual *and* the collective person are *self*-responsible (= responsible for oneself), and at the same time every individual is also *co*responsible for the collective person (and for every individual "in" it), just as the collective person is *co*responsible for *each* of its members." (Scheler 1973, 533–55, emphases in the original).

[69] For Adorno (1998, 191–204), the possibilities of changing social structures seemed bleak, but at the same time he was conscious of both local possibilities of resistance and the possibility of different historical circumstances. What kinds of social action our current circumstances make possible remain to be seen.

5.5 On the Banality of Evil

Turning to Hannah Arendt, we can follow her suggestion to consider how evil can be or look ordinary and banal, which in turn can help us understand the problem of complacency in the face of atrocities. Human-induced climate change is an incredibly rapid process compared to natural climatic changes, but compared to common examples of evil, such as murder, it is relatively slow. While there are spectacular conferences regarding climate politics, it is important to pay attention to the quotidian nature of carbon-intensive lives. The lives of the elite may seem incredibly luxurious to the rest of the world, but even for them life may be routine, and it may be in the routine actions of "making money" where the evil lies. Arendt writes on Eichmann, one the main organizers of Holocaust:

> When I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been further from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain.' Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. It was precisely this lack of imagination which enabled him to sit for months on end facing a German Jew who was conducting the police interrogation, pouring out his heart to the man and explaining again and again how it was that he reached only the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the SS, and that it had not been his fault that he was not promoted. In principle he knew quite well what it was all about, and in his final statement to the court he spoke of the 'revaluation of values' prescribed by the (Nazi) government. He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness—something by no means identical to stupidity—that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. (Arendt [1963] 2006, 287)

For Arendt, thoughtlessness did not mean the absence of mental contents, but rather the inability to think things in their full dimensions, especially moral dimensions, and the lack of inner dialogue in which we second-guess ourselves and our reasons for doing the things we do (Arendt 2006, 287–88 and *passim*). Thoughtlessness in Arendt's sense is more akin to a lack of imagination than a lack of logic. In chapter 2 I discussed Jamieson's idea of mindfulness as a virtue and suggested that its corresponding vice might be recklessness. However, perhaps we should rather, or also, think of mindfulness as an opposite of thoughtlessness, not just an understanding of the causes of one's place and actions in physical terms, but also in moral and political terms.

Thoughtlessness and lack of imagination seem to share aspects with the environmental vices that the elite position tends to form and with the dispositions of neoliberal individualism (see chapters 2 and 3), but the Eichmann example gives them some additional depth. Arendt's narration adds the element of temporality to Eichmann's character, something a simple list of virtues or vices could not do, even if the context of their formation were described (cf. Treanor 2014). Eichmann both knew and did not know what he was doing. He committed his mental capacities to doing his job as efficiently as possible without thinking about the whole picture and the ramifications of his job. A similar compartmentalization may be the reason why an oil company CEO is able to worry about climate change in interviews and public speeches while funneling money to denialist think tanks. At certain points in time, they are able to understand what is going on, but they do not see themselves as culpable, or even as agents, in their daily roles as decision makers. Knowing "in principle" is not the same as knowing well. Knowing well would mean being epistemically virtuous by having the knowledge integrated into one's epistemic and moral agency as a constituent of practical reason. Arendt's story of Eichmann and my story of Jane in the previous chapter show that in an unjust and evil system, having or developing vices such as thoughtlessness may actually help one thrive.

The social-structural view of moral agency does not see evil as an unchangeable property of persons but rather as a disposition that is produced in an interaction with others, with one's environment, and technological objects, all of which are in turn shaped to some extent by macro-structural factors. If the disposition is produced through social structures, it is not exactly incorrigible, but its transformation may require the transformation of those structures or making for oneself together with others an environment where those structures are less influential. The problem is that the status quo tends to be seen as the normal

against which exceptions are seen as evil or sometimes exceptionally good, but in any case supererogatory. Arendt is right to suggest that we should not think of evil as an extraordinary or cosmic phenomenon, but rather attend carefully to its normality and banality. What we deem as normal may be evil.[70]

Arendt's account of the banality of evil is related to her criticism of the bureaucracy as "the rule by nobody" (Arendt 1970, 81 and *passim*). While Arendt is concerned with bureaucracy, the problem of responsibility in a structured society is to some extent similar, whether the relevant structures are those of global capitalism or those of bureaucratic rule. As Mary Midgley argues, bureaucratic rule does not mean that no one is responsible, but bureaucratic rule tends to make it hard to see responsibility and power:

> As [Arendt] says, the administrative complexity of the modern world makes such cases increasingly common. Bureaucracy tends to look like 'the rule of nobody', and this obscuring of individual responsibility is one thing which makes the concept of wickedness seem so hard to apply. But if we fatalistically accept that it has become impossible, we are falling for propaganda. 'The essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of every bureaucracy, is to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them.' It has not really changed their nature and removed their responsibility from them. It has certainly made it easier for them to do wrong, and harder to do right. But there have always been agencies that would do that, and in all ages much ingenuity has gone into building them for that very purpose. (Midgley 2001, 66)

Bureaucratic rule is one example of how institutional settings and social structural patterns affect the conditions of moral agency. The conditions of the senior decision makers of big corporations in twenty-first-century capitalism are not the same as those of the bureaucracies in the first half of the twentieth century, but both systems show evidence of obscuring individual responsibility and make it "easier to do wrong." Bureaucratic reasoning still exists within both state

[70] Williams (2015) argues through inductive reasoning that we may be living and participating unknowingly in a moral catastrophe. He points out that previous societies have engaged in moral catastrophes such as slavery without realizing collectively that they were great evils.

institutions and capitalist corporations. In combination with neoliberal ideology, it enables mid-level management to say that they are following procedures and orders. Both forms of thought are concerned with the rationalization of social action according to numeric measures, and, finally, both are hierarchical and create positions where some individuals have power over others.[71] Neoliberal capitalism, can create additional responsibility gaps. On the level of ideology, we are called upon to see the market as a device that tells the truth about the world, about the value of things, and even about what there is.[72] In other words, we are called upon to surrender to the market our responsibility for what we know and what happens to the world. The sociologist William Davies (2016) has argued that this is especially true for the elites in contemporary neoliberalism, who are called upon to surrender their agency for market decisions to financial algorithms. Beside ideology, the practices of the market economy, where things appear as their exchange values, obscure the many particular effects and moral dimensions of economic activities (Marx [1867] 1976). Compare this again with Eichmann, "a new type of criminal [who] commits his crime under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong." (Arendt, [1963] 2006, 276).

When evaluating anyone's life then, we ought to pay attention to their possibilities for changing their lived environment, whether by changing the environment itself or by moving to another environment. For Adorno, "[t]riviality is evil – triviality, that is, in the form of consciousness and mind that adapts itself to the world as it is, that obeys the principle of inertia" (Adorno 2000, 115). Triviality may be evil in the sense of a culpable bad attitude that we can willfully or accidentally adopt, but it may also be an evil that is suffered as a thwarted specific human potential, the potential to willfully and ethically change ourselves along with our environment. Adorno's categorical imperative was that individuals ought to "arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen" (2005, 365). The antidote to triviality is to take a

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[71] For a classic treatise on bureaucracy in modern societies, see Weber (2015 [1921], 73–128). On bureaucratization in neoliberalism and how it produces social and political indifference, see Hibou (2015). One possible way to analyze bureaucracy and responsibility would be to investigate how in bureaucracies role responsibilities come to trump other responsibilities for the bureaucrat, while at the same time, the existence of the bureaucracy produces indifference in the citizenry, thus creating responsibility gaps.

[72] Michel Foucault analyzed this aspect of neoliberalism in his discussions of the market as a "site of veridiction" (2008, 31). Foucault avoided the term "ideology" for his own reasons, but I think those of us who do not share Foucault's theoretical commitments can still find his analyses useful, even for criticism of ideology.

similarly urgent attitude to our daily lives as we would if we fully understood that something like Auschwitz is about to happen.

Climate change shares some similarities with the Holocaust. Both meet Card's atrocity criteria, and both have social structural elements. One important difference is that climate change involves more spatial and temporal gaps between acts and consequences. This feature of climate change makes us even more susceptible to complacency and thus requires more vigilance. Another important difference is that climate change is not targeted toward any particular group. However, certain groups are more vulnerable to climate effects than others, and it may be that one reason for the inaction on climate change so far has been that the most vulnerable also have the least social power.

Sandin (2009) argues that one problem with emergencies is that we are often uncertain whether one is about to happen. Once we are certain, it is usually too late. On the other hand, responding to a situation as a state of emergency may have horrible consequences and thus should be used as a last resort (Arendt 2006, 156). With climate change, we can be quite certain that either we already are in, or are fast approaching, a global supreme emergency. Some communities are closer to catastrophic impacts than others. However, we are less certain about exactly what means are effective when all the complexities of the global situation are taken into account. What to me seems the most appealing strategy is twofold: promote renewable energy and whatever regulative measures are politically possible, along with community-led solutions to equitable adaptation measures, while at the same time building an environmentalist and socialist movement that would be capable of a large-scale transformation of social structures. The problem with this strategy is that it feels slow and undramatic considering the emergency, but at this point I believe the responsible thing to do is to learn live with this anxiety and remember that sometimes social upheavals are quite sudden and unexpected. In a complex and uncertain world all political proposals regarding large-scale problems ought to be approached with epistemic humility and care, and yet, if climate change is an ongoing atrocity, something needs to be done immediately, and no one can say that this is not their problem.

5.6 Conclusion

It is possible to that climate change is an atrocity. Whether blaming the elites and certain organizations and calling climate change an evil atrocity makes political, consequentialist, and pragmatic sense, I do not know. It may be politically problematic and have adverse consequences in some conjunctures, even if morally possible or even required. The purpose of this chapter was not to offer political strategies but to show that thinking of climate change as an atrocity adds to our understanding of responsibility. There are differentiated responsibilities that can be discussed in reference to social structures, but if it is true that atrocities ought to be actively opposed by all who somehow can, this is also true for climate change, either because climate change is an atrocity or at least because it shares relevant features with atrocities. Climate change may not be as targeted and it may be more complex as far as its culpability structure is concerned, but something can be done about it; it is ongoing and, to paraphrase Williams (2015), we would not wish the worst effects of climate change "for ourselves or our loved ones." If we take a stance of responsibility toward atrocities, this stance informs our thinking about many other moral issues and serves as a compass when we navigate ourselves in the social worlds, landscapes, and ecologies that we inhabit or pass through.

If we grant that climate change is an ongoing atrocity, we suddenly have a whole host of ethical questions that are familiar from the debates concerning twentieth-century atrocities, such as how to differentiate between the responsibility of ordinary citizens, consumers, and workers and that of the elite decision makers. These questions have been widely discussed in moral and political philosophy, and while there are of course many different conceptions of responsibility at work in these debates, a common view is that such atrocities make everyone somehow connected to them responsible, if to different modes and degrees. Whether victims are also responsible in some manner is of course a terribly difficult and painful question, but it becomes somewhat easier when we think that not all modes of being responsible relate to culpability. We may think that even those who are very far from the atrocity spatially and temporally should take a certain form of responsibility: being aware of the atrocity and its causes and following Adorno's imperative of rearranging patterns thoughts and practices. Climate change as an ongoing atrocity demands awareness, urgency, and the rearrangement of thinking patterns, social practices, and organizations. By examining how our social worlds tend to make us less aware and more complacent and trying to find ways around those epistemic and moral risks, we can, via the negative, come to understand

better what responsibility means and entails. This in itself will not make us properly responsible persons, with the possible exception of some heroic individuals, unless we transform those social worlds.

6 RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLIMATE ACTIVISM

6.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with climate activism. Some philosophers who start from the collective action view of climate change think that climate change entails a prospective responsibility to promote and participate in collective action to mitigate. For the purposes of this chapter, we can call this the responsibility to be a climate activist. Starting from the structural view can lead to similar conclusions. Some reasons to think that there is such a prospective responsibility are roughly common to both views, but the structural view allows for more reasons. Having more reasons is significant if they are cumulative, and also pragmatically, in the event that some people in certain social positions will be moved by different reasons than others. With the collective action view the prospective responsibility to be a climate activism can make sense of the intuition that we ought to take responsibility for climate change even if no one is retrospectively responsible. With the structural view, by contrast, there can be many degrees of retrospective responsibility for some people, so the responsibility to be a climate activist is not the solution to the problem of how to be responsible if no one is culpable. Some people may well be culpable. However, those who are not, or whose culpability amounts to very little, can still have good reasons to think themselves responsible for collective action to deal with climate change.

Whereas with the collective action problem view, the question of what form the action on climate change should take is either not discussed or is seen in the abstract terms of having a collective scheme for cutting everyone's emissions in some proportion. In some cases this leads to a problematically individualized view; the point of the collective action scheme is to get all individuals to cut their personal emissions. The structural view has more nuanced implications for what

sort of action mitigating climate change and just adaptation should be, for it is interested in the social reasons and social mechanisms that drive emissions and other drivers of climate change.

This chapter also reinforces my argument that climate change ought to be seen as structural rather than as a collective action problem by showing how certain forms of already occurring climate activism only make sense if we see them as trying to change social structures to be less carbon intensive. Finally, the chapter discusses how climate activism may be well disposed to articulate the moral grammar of social struggles and considers what that entails for discussions of climate ethical responsibility in general.

6.2 Prospective Responsibility and Climate Activism

Sine climate ethicists coming from the collective action problem view have argued that climate change presents a duty to join in collective action against it, to force collective mitigation measures, with Elizabeth Cripps (2013) the most prominent example. Even those who see no sense in retrospective responsibility usually do not want to abandon responsibility altogether. Climate change presents us with a prospective or forward-looking responsibility, a duty to bring something about or prevent something from happening. Sometimes the motivation for discussing prospective responsibility appears to be to save at least some form of responsibility if causally determined retrospective responsibility does not make sense. Our prospective responsibility for climate change can take many forms, but at it must at least mean ensuring that a good life (or even a life worth living) remains a possibility on Earth for humans and for other species. If climate change seriously threatens the possibility for decent lives for all or vast numbers of human and other beings, and if we can do something to prevent this, we have a duty to do so. If climate change is also an ongoing atrocity, as I argued in the previous chapter, we simply cannot avoid taking a stance of responsibility toward it. One part of the argument in this chapter is to say that responsible climate activism is not just about actions to promote mitigation, but also a learning process, a collective search for new meanings and new forms of life that make flourishing possible.

Prospective responsibility can be realized in many ways, but the one I am concerned about here is the duty to become a climate activist. Perhaps the realization of prospective responsibility always entails being a climate activist; that depends on how broadly we define climate activism. I am partial to rather a broad definition. We could call climate activism any kind of practice that is in itself or promotes collective action to mitigate climate change and its effects. In the latter part of this chapter, however, I discuss examples of activism that look like activism in the rather traditional or paradigmatic sense, as belonging and acting in a social movement with certain aims.

Climate change is such a dire threat that whether or not there is a backward-looking responsibility due to an individual's past actions or how they have lived their life so far, that individual still (or also) has a forward-looking responsibility to act on climate change. Second, the nature of climate change and its social causes are such that only concerted collective action can make a meaningful difference. Third, the structures that are currently available for individuals for collective action, such as starting or joining a company or an NGO or joining a political party, are not adequate for the mitigation of climate change. They might be made so, or new structures of collective action would have to be invented, or both. Inventing and upholding new structures and trying to change old ones for particular purposes count as activism. These premises are not self-evident, but they are widely shared in climate ethical discussions.[73] These premises are all also compatible with both the collective action problem view and the structural view of climate change.[74]

Elizabeth Cripps, for example, argues compellingly that where an unstructured group of individuals encounter a situation in which they can prevent great harm by collective action without unacceptable risk or cost to themselves, they have a duty to act collectively (Cripps 2013, *passim*). In addition to this duty, Cripps thinks "the young," those who will live to suffer climate harms, have a prudential duty to act, while those who emit more than their fair share ("the polluters") have a moral duty to cut their emissions (Cripps 2013, 3). It is possible to be in all these positions at once. As an academic, I fly to conferences more than once a year and sometimes

[73] Some versions of these premises are argued for in Gardiner (2011), Cripps (2013), and Jamieson (2014).

[74] Although there is a need for new kinds of structures and institutions, this does not mean that current institutions are off the hook, so to speak. Current institutions may, for example, have decision-making structures that enable them to change their constitutions and modes of operation. Furthermore, even if they were unable to make a positive difference, some institutions should still stop making matters worse.

for holidays, and in my daily life, I use more electricity produced by fossil fuels than necessary. My life is complicit in the production of luxury emissions (Shue 1993). I would probably be counted among the polluters. I don't disagree that I ought to fly less and save more energy, but I find Cripps's model problematic in the sense that it does not differentiate between me and someone like Rex Tillerson, except in a quantitative sense. Rex Tillerson, in his roles as investor, CEO, and now US Secretary of State, can influence not only the emissions of many other people but also the structures of the social world and the material infrastructures that contribute to all sorts of path dependencies (see chapter 3 above).

Since current research shows that we are already seeing climate change effects around the world, everyone alive more or less counts as "young." Everyone alive now may suffer climate change-related harms. Of course the younger one is, the likelier that eventuality becomes. Some are much more vulnerable than others, but even a very privileged individual may be unlucky, on holiday, for example, and be killed or maimed in an extreme weather event that would not have occurred without global warming. I am a young polluter and also "able," since I have some resources for speaking out and trying to influence people. Cripps's model should of course not be read as a work of sociological classification. Its point is to distinguish different moral and prudential reasons for considering oneself in a responsible manner. If there are many people in the world who are prospectively responsible for all or many of the reasons Cripps discusses, all the better for her model.

However, as I argue throughout this dissertation, attention to social structures, social positioning, and social connections will also point to moral reasons. In terms of ability to act and influence others to act, the strengths of the structural view are especially easy to see. With it, for example, we can examine not only the relative social power produced by one social position but also the qualitative aspects of that social power and, finally, the moral aspects of that social power. Someone may have the ability to influence the behavior of many others, but their social position may shape that influence in particular ways that escape the intentions of the influencer; furthermore, that social position may be unjustly acquired and constitutively based on the oppression and exclusion of others. Perhaps it would be morally wrong and politically problematic to advocate using such a position to mitigate climate change (see chapter 3 above for further discussion).[75] In the

[75] My framework can also point to prudential reasons, but these remain underdeveloped in this work, for reasons of space and focus. An example would be that those who are more vulnerable to climate effects have prudential reasons to organize into political collectives and at the same time act

structural view, the collectivities we should be concerned about and interested in are not defined by climate change in a straightforward way but also by the way our societies themselves are structured.

Cripps also differentiates between duties. There is a duty to directly decrease one's emissions, the duty to act as if a collective action to mitigate climate change were already in place ("mimicking duty"), and a duty to promote collective action. This last ("promotional duty") is for Cripps the most important. She argues that climate change presents us with a duty to act so that our actions can help bring about a collective movement to mitigate climate change. In short, we have a duty to become climate activists. Similar arguments have been presented by others (Jackuet and Jamieson 2016; Kyllönen 2014), but Cripps's monograph is the most systematic account of the duty to become a climate activist of which I am aware. Cripps subscribes to the view of climate change as an unstructured collective action problem. Her three loose collectivities are only differentiated by their direct relationship to climate change itself. The category of "the able" might invite more social structural considerations, but Cripps does not pursue these. If we take the structural view of climate change, the makeup of the collectivities and the conditions of their membership will differ. There will of course be similarities, for the structural view allows for the three different modes of relationship to climate change discussed by Cripps, being in the position to do something, being harmed by or suffering because of climate change, and being culpable in some form. However, there may be many other groups with various capacities for action. Both vulnerability and culpability are socially mediated and should be explained with reference to social structures.

I have argued that individual retrospective responsibility remains a relevant issue when climate change is considered as a social structural problem, for social structures that produce climate change (via many mediations) are produced and reproduced by the actions of human beings. Some people have, due to their social position, contributed to the climate atrocity more than others, some possibly even willingly and knowingly. From the collective action problem view, retrospective responsibility either does not make sense or is nearly diluted into non-existence, for any one individual's actions or omissions will have virtually no effect on the global problem. Both views however, are consistent with advocating prospective responsibility. Prospective responsibility can be generated through retrospective responsibility. One can have a duty to correct a wrong one has taken part in

on climate change and try to change social systems so that the structures that make them vulnerable are transformed or destroyed (see, e.g., Whyte 2011)

committing. However, prospective responsibility does not require retrospective responsibility; it is about what one ought to do, for some reason or another. Someone completely innocent for the plight of someone else may still be responsible for helping them, if they have the ability to do so without significant risk to themselves. Similarly, whether and how much I have been responsible for the drivers of climate change, such as carbon emissions and deforestation, may contribute to my having a duty to do something about climate change—but I may be responsible regardless of my past acts. In reality, it will be difficult to find an individual who would be purely prospectively or purely retrospectively responsible. However, the theoretical differentiation between varieties of responsibility is still important for understanding how they may come together in different combinations for different individuals in different situations. It helps me to make sense of my own responsibility regarding climate change if I have both concepts of responsibility, retrospective and prospective, as hermeneutical resources.[76]

Like collective action problems, structural problems cannot usually be solved by any one individual—although the structural view allows even this, in the event that a society is structured in such a way that there exists an individual or several individuals who have the social power to transform the very structure of society. Obviously even they could not change society on their own (a technological dystopia with mind control devices notwithstanding); they would have to order other people to change their practices and create new infrastructures and institutions, but they would have the initiative. Changing social structures usually requires political action, civil disobedience, technological and scientific innovation, imagining and enacting new ways of life on a small scale that can nevertheless be scaled upwards. These are all collective endeavors. The structural view of climate change then also leads to prospective responsibility, but it points to different reasons for and different ways of being responsible. In addition, the structural view shows that social structures influence not only the capacities to realize our responsibilities through action but also our epistemic and moral capacities for being responsible.

Vulnerability, culpability, and the ability to act are reasons for being responsible in Cripps's view, and I agree. However, they all look somewhat different in the structural view. They are not defined simply by whether one is young enough to see bad climate effects, one's past individual emissions (however they are traced and calculated), or whether one can influence one's own or others' emissions, but by social positioning and social structural processes, both historical and ongoing. If

[76] On hermeneutic resources, see Beeby (2012).

I understand climate change as a collective action problem caused by disparate individual emissions, I will not see how my social positioning makes me vulnerable, culpable, and able to act. Besides these, there are moral and prudential reasons that stem from our relationships to existing communities and how these communities in turn affect and are affected by climate change. Climate change is also mixed with other issues of social justice, which has consequences for how we are responsible.

Furthermore, the structural view has implications for what collective action can and should look like. That structural factors both constrain and make possible different forms of collective action has both pragmatic and ethical implications. This chapter is about mapping and articulating those implications. The structural view makes it possible to investigate the moral and political problems that arise in the course of collective action, problems related for example to the connections between climate activism and other social movements and the possible conflicts between different duties and obligations. What follows from this is not exactly a duty to become a climate activist due to prospective responsibility. Rather, it is the case that neither retrospective nor prospective responsibilities can be realized by most people except by forming collectives capable of action. Insofar as current social structures prevent us from being responsible, the attempts to be responsible collectively will mean trying to transform our social worlds. Some powerful individuals might be able to act on climate change from where they are situated right now, but this is not the case for the vast majority of people; in any event, if the social structures that make such powerful positions possible are wrong, using a powerful position even for good ends may be problematic, if it means legitimizing and entrenching that position. This is one reason for climate activism, for change from below rather than above. Of course, there may be ways to use resources and privileges in ways that do not promote unwelcome social structures. The structural view entails that people in different social positions will have different possibilities for action and different trajectories toward climate activism. At the same time, the structures are not static and climate activism may (should) aim at transforming them, thus making many current social positions obsolete.

Iris Marion Young's social connection model again offers one fruitful approach to begin making sense of the duty to change unjust and harmful social structures through collective political action. Young writes:

> The structural processes can be altered only if many actors in diverse social positions work together to intervene in these processes to produce different outcomes. Responsibility derived from social connection, then, is ultimately *political*

> responsibility. Taking responsibility in a forward-looking sense under this model [the social connection model of responsibility] involves joining with others to organize collective action to reform unjust structures. Most fundamentally, what I mean by "politics" here is public communicative engagement with others for the sake of organizing our relationships and coordinating our actions most justly. Thus, discharging my responsibility in relation to sweatshop workers might involve trying to persuade others that the treatment of these workers is unacceptable and that we collectively can alter social practices and institutional rules and priorities to prevent such a treatment. Our working through state institutions is often an effective means of such collective action to change structural processes, but states are not the only tools of effective social action. (Young 2006, 123; emphasis in the original.)

The arguments in favor of forward-looking responsibility for climate change are analogous to Young's sweatshop example (cf. Godoy 2017). Responsibility for social structures does not attach individuals to deeds in any simple manner. In situations where A harms B, A has the individual responsibility to stop and alleviate the harm, apologize, and perhaps offer recompense, depending on the nature of the harm. With social structures, the logic of responsibility is different, even if it also makes individuals responsible. If we could have perfect knowledge of how our acts contribute to the operations of complex systems, we could perhaps be responsible in the simple sense. However, such knowledge may well be even metaphysically impossible, since the enmeshed and interacting systems of social structures, the climate, ecosystems, and other earth systems are not only complex but also include agents with free will (even if that will is structurally shaped). With social structures I am not simply responsible for the emissions that can be directly traced to my consuming behavior. Rather, I am responsible for being an active participant in social structures that structure our social worlds in ways that make our lives dependent on the burning of coal and oil and other destructive productive activities.

In many cases, of course, individuals still directly harm individuals, but social positioning and resources make particular harms more likely or possible. A corrupt police officer will have different potential victims and different means to harm them than an oil company CEO. But alleviating harm and leaving in place the structures that cause the harm or simply make it possible would hardly be the best

outcome, even if for some individuals in some places the only available way to be more responsible at a particular moment is to give money to charities. Again, by being a participant in society, I may even have some degree of responsibility for the fact that society is so structured that harming others is possible, an instance of Scheler's co-responsibility (1973, 497–538)

Like the collective action problem model for Cripps, the social connection model also requires actors coming together to form a collective capable of consequential action. But this time what must change are the social structures, and this entails more complex and more diverse set of actors and actions. Social structures are dynamic processes with different positions that individuals (and groups) can occupy. Making a consequential change will require different actions, the sort that depend on social position, time, and place. To take Young's example, working to prevent the unjust treatment of sweatshop workers and changing the structures that make that treatment possible in the first place will place different moral responsibilities on and open different pragmatic possibilities to social justice activists in different parts of the globe, consumers of cheap clothing, owners of sweatshops and clothing companies, the workers themselves, trade union activists, politicians, officials, and so on. At the same time, forming a collective and working to change the structures will also change the preconditions of action. If a social movement becomes powerful, it will change the map of possible social positions, and its actions will intervene in the structural processes making new avenues of action available and closing off others.

For Young, what matters is forward-looking responsibility.[77] Young wants to do politics without the friend-enemy distinction.[78] I argue in chapter 3 that with climate change it makes sense from a moral point of view to attribute significant portions of backward-looking responsibility, blame, and culpability to some people. The decision as to whether it makes political sense can only be solved politically, in discussions with others in connection and in the course of political action. It may be that the friend-enemy distinction reasserts itself in these practices. It may be that not all want to take part of the project of climate activism. At the moment, some

[77] For a critical discussion, see Martha Nussbaum's preface to Young's *Responsibility for Justice* (2011).

[78] Consider Young's definition of "politics" quoted above: "Most fundamentally, what I mean by 'politics' here is public communicative engagement with others for the sake of organizing our relationships and coordinating our actions most justly." This definition excludes from politics engagements that have other aims than justice. A diametrically opposed view is found in Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* ([1932] 1996); I do not at all wish to advocate Schmitt's reactionary politics, but I am inclined to think that there are many groups that are engaged in politics, but whose aims are not just, and that attempts to remove conflict from politics, at least in our current societies, are only possible in ideal theory.

powerful people vehemently oppose it, and perhaps some, say fossil fuel industry lobbyists, ought to be excluded from the discussion from the start for political and moral reasons. The way these lines will be formed may be partly determined by backward-looking responsibility. If, for instance, some people have previously acted in ways that have made mitigation efforts by states and other large-scale social actors more difficult, it makes sense to be cautious of including them in political climate activism.

Responsibility for climate change can have many sources. Besides prudential reasons and reasons stemming from prospective and retrospective responsibility, the structural view allows for reasons stemming from group belonging. A member of an indigenous people whose cultural traditions, sacred places, and forms of life depend on a particular ecology can be responsible in prospective, retrospective, and prudential ways and, in addition, due to group belonging. Since their lives and meanings are threatened by climate change as a group in ways that are particular to them, they have additional reasons to be concerned and act (Davion 2009). Besides, indigenous places are not threatened just by climate change but by the constructions of oil lines on their lands and other land grabs connected to fossil capitalism and settler colonialism (Whyte 2017). For non-indigenous people, these may count as reasons for solidarity. The non-indigenous do not share the same reasons, since they do not share the same lifeworld. They may still respect indigenous rights for that lifeworld, and due to histories of settler colonialism and imperialism, they may have complicated connections to that world. For the indigenous, combating climate change is a question of immediate self-defense. Those who live in more dominant positions in settler colonial societies or who otherwise benefit from settler colonialism have moral reasons to act on climate change, just as those who lived in slave-holding societies had reasons to become abolitionists. In terms of social connections, we need to ask how our social lives are connected to both the histories and the present of settler colonialism and how these histories are in turn connected to the fossil economy.

On the other hand, the existing social systems may also give reasons—perhaps false reasons, perhaps *prima facie* reasons—for some people not to act on climate change if they perceive that their way of life and in-group solidarities are threatened by the changes that world economy would have to undergo). While we may disagree with these reasons altogether or the weight given to them, they still ought to be understood. This is because, as argued in chapter 2, people develop their moral and epistemic characters within a social world and cannot simply step out of their personal and social histories. If their communities do not see climate change

as a major issue, it may be a long process for them to come to think differently. Objectively, they still have very strong reasons to act and climate change, and, in fact and in the longer run, the survival of their communities depends on the mitigation of climate change. The coal miners of Appalachia and oil workers in Louisiana must find ways to understand, love, and participate in their communities that do not depend on fossil fuels.[79] The responsibilities people feel for their communities can be a source of either environmental responsibility or the corresponding vice of recklessness or some other harmful disposition. People can, however, be wrong on what is the most important thing for their community. A struggling worker can imagine sharing a form of life and thus have very similar concerns and interests with Rex Tillerson. Besides prospective responsibilities and corresponding duties, understanding other forms of responsibility, even feelings of responsibility stemming from community belonging whether real or imagined, is important for climate activism.

6.3 Learning from Climate Activism

Climate ethicists who begin by framing climate change as an unstructured collective action problem have so far discussed the duty of collective action as if climate activism were not already taking place. This is not historically accurate, but it may be a useful idealization from some climate ethicist's perspective. Critical theory about climate change, however, cannot ignore ongoing struggle. It must take into account the ongoing efforts to mitigate climate change in order to understand the normative implications and critical force that they have. Nancy Fraser argues, following Marx, that critical theory is about "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" and if "[a] critical social theory frames its research program and conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan, though not uncritical identification" (1985, 97). With Fraser's definition, a critical theory of

[79] It is unlikely that such an understanding could or would be imposed from above, given what was discussed in chapter 3. Rather, collective organizing and education at the grassroots level would be needed.

climate change would not just take climate activism into account, but would be partisan to it. The partisanship does not mean being uncritical, and it is not easy to know how much and what kind of critical distance is warranted. There cannot be a stock answer to this question, because different circumstances make different modes of criticism possible. This point would have to be added to Fraser's definition. Critical theory is not only about changing the world but also about understanding it, especially how the world shapes understanding: how the conditions of thought and criticism are historical.

Philosophers can make conceptual clarifications and sometimes show where things that seem simple are complicated, but climate activists are doing practical work in an arena where the social world and its structures push back. They learn how the world works by grappling with it. They find that some strategies and tactics work and others do not. Looking at climate activism, both philosophers and social and political scientists can learn about how the world is and how it can be changed and what moral reasons are at play. Of course, activists may fail, and they may misunderstand the world in their practice, just as theorists can build models that are false. Activism is a social learning process with risks and pitfalls; when we try to make sense of it whether as observers or participants, we should remember that, at any at particular time, we are never seeing the whole picture or reading the whole story.

Axel Honneth (1995) has argued that there is a kind of implicit or pre-theoretical moral grammar in social struggles. For Honneth, social struggles are motivated by forms of disrespect, lack of recognition. The new social movements after the 1960s illuminated the importance of mutual recognition as both a social process and a normative principle. Marion Hourdequin (2016) has shown that theories of recognition are useful for understanding some aspects of climate change, but I think it should remain an open question, whether any one particular norm, whether recognition, justice, freedom, equality, or ecological flourishing explain and motivate social struggles, and even if they did, whether this or that particular principle ought to guide our future. This is so for three reasons. First, we are living at a point of history where there will be massive global changes due to climate change in any case, and we have to very quickly learn to live with this situation and find ways to intervene in these processes of change so that the world will not be dramatically worse, unjust, unfree, where people are "debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being[s]" (Marx [1843] 1975, 182). Second, climate change concerns future generations and non-humans as well, and it is still a very much an open question how we should ethically relate to people who do not yet exist, to

animals, to other species, and to ecosystems. A model of mutual recognition probably gets many things right, but it is obviously problematic when the other part of the ethical relation is incapable of recognition. And third, our moral norms are in various ways implicated in the same social processes of global capitalism that have led to the current situation; just as we should criticize our social systems for leading to climate change, we should also critically examine our social theories, both descriptive and normative, from the perspective of climate change (cf. Gardiner 2011). While rejecting Honneth's monism for epistemic reasons, at least provisionally, I find the concept of moral grammar useful and inspirational, at least as a heuristic. The concept of moral grammar allows us to make comparisons of normative ideals, whether outspoken or implicit in political practices, on a level that does not require the use of same moral concepts, just as we can compare the grammars of languages with different vocabularies. However, just like linguists studying non-Indo-European languages, we should not assume in advance that the grammars we know are universal, even if we can assume that all languages have some kind of grammar.

The structural account discussed so far has already proven to be helpful in understanding the social connections that give rise to both climate change and other forms of injustice. On the one hand, experiencing and understanding other forms of injustice may help in understanding climate change. On the other hand, the emerging climate activist movement also appears to show that it is possible to be concerned about climate change and act, even if one is not (yet) suffering from climate harms personally. The movement makes use of normative arguments that are familiar from the history of other social movements: global ethics, ethics of future generations, and environmental ethics. Some climate activists, unsurprisingly, are also professional philosophers, while others are climate scientists. They are all philosophers in the Gramscian sense: "[…] everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in 'language', there is contained a specific conception of the world, one then moves on to the second level, which is that of awareness and criticism" (Gramsci 1971, 323). We can listen to climate activists and learn how they see themselves to be responsible in the forward-looking or some other sense. Both their words and practices can be analyzed by looking at both what kind of a conception of the world they contain implicitly and explicitly, and what kind of moral norms they assume.

6.4 Climate Activism and Climate Change as a Structural Problem

We can make a rough distinction between two forms of climate activism according to their different backgrounds. These two forms of activism are of course abstractions. Rather than static categories, these two ideal typical forms of activism should be seen as starting points with possibly converging horizons for people with different backgrounds and motives who come to understand their responsibility about climate change. First, there is the climate activist movement itself, which is comprised of people who are for the most part committed to the mitigation of climate change and whose politics are premised on the recognition of climate change as the most crucial issue of our times. We can call this "unmixed climate activism." An example of this type is 350.org, a rapidly growing international organization founded by famed environmentalist Bill McKibben. This form of activism is understandable in terms of both the collective action problem view and the structural problem view, but different forms of action and different strategies may follow if climate activists themselves understand climate change one way or the other.

On the other hand, many activists from various social movements are coming to grips with how climate change affects them and the issues they consider worth fighting for, which we can call "hybrid climate activism." One example of this is feminists who have argued that women and other non-dominant groups are more vulnerable to climate harms; their perspectives and experience are absolutely crucial for fighting climate change (Cuomo 2011). Another example is those trade union activists who are campaigning for a just transition to an economic system based on renewable energy (Barca 2016). Understanding this hybrid form of activism requires the structural view, for it is about struggles where some structural injustices connect to climate change in various ways.[80] These activists start from the understanding that world is structured in unjust ways, even if they may have very different theories about social structures. It will more easily make sense for

[80] One interesting example is the activist group Conceivable Future, which connects climate justice to reproductive justice. See http://conceivablefuture.org/.

them to see climate change as also a social structural issue when their political practices are built upon the assumption that there are such things as social structures. To be successful as climate activists, they would have to make the connection and understand the interdependencies between different structural issues and injustices such as race, gender, sexuality, workers' rights, anti-capitalism, poverty, social class, indigenous rights, and climate change. But many unmixed climate activist strategies more directly linked to climate change also only make sense from the structural point of view. They can become more mixed in time.

Consider this example from the United Kingdom:

> The campaign against a proposed third runway at London's Heathrow Airport represents a campaign to stop the construction of carbon-intensive infrastructure, or as a spokesperson for the group Campaign against Climate Change (CaCC) put it: 'This is not just about Heathrow, this is about drawing a line in the sand against big investment decisions that are locking us into a headlong plummet into climate catastrophe' (in Vidal, 2008). The expansion of Heathrow Airport would result in increased flights, and research at the time found that growing aviation emissions could hamper attempts to mitigate climate change. Local campaigners mobilized around various local issues including air and noise pollution as well as the demolition of houses and other buildings. At the same time, a key figure in the campaign also encouraged climate change activists to mobilize against the airport expansion plans, which resulted in sustained direct action that generated unprecedented levels of media attention. Campaigners were able to convince the major opposition political party to oppose the third runway, which resulted in political jousting during the election cycle. When two opposition parties formed a coalition government in 2010, they put an end to the threat of the third runway at Heathrow... for the time being." (Nulman 2015, 3).

There is an inbuilt assumption in the tactics of CaCC that the world works in a certain way. They assume that there is a possibility of "drawing a line in the sand" by opposing one particular action. Some actions are like levers that can force social changes much larger than their immediate local effects. The rationale might be that

if there is a risk of similar action whenever a big greenhouse gas-intensive project is proposed, investors will be less willing to consider such projects. This rationale is based on assumptions about economic structures and the behavior of investors and other stakeholders, but it is not the whole story.

There is an implicit interpretation of what kinds of actions are important and worth protesting and taking direct action against. One aspect of the action is that protesting against an airport expansion is also a protest against the carbon-intensive life of a mobile society (cf. Urry 2011). However, CaCC is not trying to stop individuals going on Sunday drives or promoting web conferencing for international organizations but "protesting investment decisions that are locking us into a headlong plummet into climate catastrophe." The activists understand that in capitalism investment decisions have causal power both in making new things happen and in *keeping existing processes going.* An investment decision is an action of a very different kind from the decision to go for a drive or even to buy a car. An investment binds together many individuals, groups, technologies, patents, plans, and other financial and emotional investments. The investors want return on investment from the airport expansion. This requires thinking about the investment as an ongoing process, and the CEOs and other managers of the different corporations associated with the airport must remain committed to this process or fail in their roles. By attacking the investment decision at the crucial point in time, or *kairos,* the activists are trying to stop a process at the start, when it is still easy, as opposed to a point in time when many more individuals and corporations have a stake in keeping the process going, and the process has become a crucial infrastructural factor in the economy at large. This is a prime example of how a structural understanding of climate change affects the form that political action takes.

Eric Godoy (2017) argues that for structural reasons the divestment movement is exemplary of the sort of climate activism needed. The divestment movement aims to influence big investors, such as banks, foundations and often universities,[81] to divest their fossil fuel investments. In my view, protesting and disrupting harmful investments is just as central. Protesting fossil investment and promoting divestment are of course not mutually exclusive strategies. They can reinforce each other. Investors who divest are less likely to make new investments in climate-

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[81] Universities may not be the largest investors, but it makes sense for many student and academic activists to target universities. Their university is their immediate environment and the collective with which they identify, so they feel responsible for them. Universities also have symbolic power in addition to their economic power, so if a university divests, that may have additional symbolic value beyond the purely economic effect.

threatening projects, and divestment sends a signal that being a fossil fuel investor is no longer acceptable to many people. However, divestment activists and investment protestors may have different relationships to the investors and thus the financial capitalist elite. Divestment activists may have to enter into dialogue with the investors, try to understand their point of view, go to meetings, and socialize with them. Protesting investment may not require such dialogue. The investors need not be the primary audience of the activists' communications, and investments may be thwarted by direct, non-communicative action and civil disobedience.

6.5 Theories of Social Movements and Climate Activism

While climate activism may help us understand the social structural and moral aspects of climate change, climate change may also alter the way we understand activism. The climate movement is gaining momentum in a specific historical context. The literature on new social movements since the 1960s has emphasized difference, multiplicity, and plurality. We can call this the *difference model of social movements*. According to this view, many different oppressed groups, their allies, and interest groups for those who have no possible voice (ecosystems, non-humans, future generations) struggle for a better world by having their viewpoint legitimated and voices heard in the negotiation and struggle for recognition and/or resources. There is arguably no issue or platform that could unite them all, as their only common struggle invokes the democratic principle spelled out by Young (2011, 184): "a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed and disadvantaged." These social movements may then find common ground on this meta-level, on the need for space where a difference may be voiced, heard, and taken into account by others—or where conflicts may take place without the risk of physical violence and war (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The social movements themselves, however, may not necessarily share any such metatheory, even though it is supposed by theorists to be the precondition for their political strategies. Axel Honneth (1995) appears to

accept the difference model of social movements, but he thinks that, although they struggle for different issues from different subject positions, they share a moral grammar based on the need for mutual recognition.

Some intellectuals and activists even reject the need for a democratic public sphere, emphasizing instead the autonomous spaces of different groups and their possible temporary alliances. The reject the idea of the need for recognition or a dialectical relationship to the powerful, and instead focus on positive, non-dialectical difference and the exodus of "minoritarian" groups from current social arrangements. By non-dialectical difference they typically mean a sort of difference that is not constituted through a relationship with the other but internal to the dynamic development of the entity itself. The strategy for minoritarian movements is not to change the fabric of society but to escape social structures and form their own autonomous social forms.[82]

Climate change poses a problem for this *difference model* of social movements. Could climate activism be just one of many struggles undertaken by some groups but not others? If so, what group would not be affected by climate change? Even those members of the elite who are unlikely to suffer from climate change but benefit from its causes or even its impacts are connected to it in multiple ways, and arguably have a duty to act stemming from both retrospective responsibility and ability. There is no exodus from climate change, no safe autonomous space. Would climate change require a return to a more *universalist model* of politics? These are not just political and social ontological questions but also ethical questions, and they relate to specific questions of responsibility in many ways.

The difference model of social movements is often contrasted with the universalism of the socialist workers movement, which was about changing the whole world through class struggle, with other social issues were subordinated to class struggle. Another example of a universalist social movement is the radical feminism of the 1970s, which assumed that social injustices generally were the result of patriarchal organization of society. The universalist models were problematic because they assumed a homogenous history with one single social form developing toward the present according to the logic of one antagonism, such as class struggle. Other unjust social structures, such as gender and race, were subject to being reproduced within the universalist movement. In the socialist movement, for example, vulgar Marxist economic determinism was often put to

[82] The works of Toni Negri and Michael Hardt and some other post-autonomist Marxists inspired by the works of Gilles Deleuze exemplify this tendency. Guattari and Negri (1990) offer a programmatic text.

work in arguing that class struggle was the primary social antagonism and that other issues, such as "the woman question," would be solved by the workers revolution, and that talking about them as important issues in themselves would only be a distraction (Hartmann 1979). This was theoretically, ethically, and politically unfortunate and irresponsible, and served to privilege men's experience as supposedly universal and cement the position of the male leadership. There is a similar risk with climate activism, if climate change is taken to be such a concern that it trumps all others. This is ethically problematic in itself, if it means that other ethical issues can be forgotten, but it may also be problematic epistemically if it prevents us from understanding how climate change actually works.

In recent times, the difference model (under various names) has been criticized for being toothless against neoliberal capitalism, which is very good at commodifying difference and treating different identity groups as both new and still unsaturated markets and sources for commercial inspiration for the culture industry (see, e.g., Fraser 2013). The fall of the Soviet bloc seemed to some to discredit anti-capitalist movements in general, but anti-capitalist ideas quickly resurfaced in the alter-globalization movements of the 1990, the anti-austerity movements in the 2000s, and the Occupy Movement and other reactions to the 2008 financial crisis. Yet many of these anti-capitalist movements took on board the experiences, strategies, and the social analyses of the "new social movements." One example of this mixture is the slogan, attributed to the Mexican activist Gustavo Esteva, "one no, many yeses"—no to capitalism and yes to many possible alternatives to it. From this perspective, the critique of capitalism translates to a practical rather than theoretical criticism of universalism. Capitalism is to be opposed because it universalizes the logics of capital, the market, and the commodity while it destroys or subsumes different forms of life.

However, the effects of climate change will persist, and the technological conditions of the Anthropocene may persist through a transformation to a post-capitalist world society (if the transformation does not happen through a catastrophic unravelling of social systems). The questions of planetary politics and responsibility will remain even after saying "no" to capital (cf. Thompson 2012). This does not necessarily mean that the normative ideas of, for example, environmental responsibility and the social systems that we want to create ought to be universal, one-size-fits-all solutions. In different contexts different forms of life may be better. A post-capitalist world might actually make different experiments in

social life possible, since the false universalism of exchange value would no longer homogenize the social forms of humans and their companion species.[83]

Even if climate activism cannot be understood as simply one more type of social movement within a plurality of movements, the actions, discourses, concepts, and theories legitimated by the difference model, such as the struggle for recognition, provide important insight into how different groups may be connected to climate change in different ways. Current pathologies of recognition figure in climate politics. Marion Hourdequin (2016), for example, argues that the debates on geoengineering are chronically premised on the perspectives of the privileged and misrecognizing who is affected and who ought to have a say. Climate change is in itself a structural injustice. It is unjust that the most innocent will suffer most and the guiltiest parties have the best chances to protect themselves. It is also unjust that unjustly acquired power has been used to thwart climate action, but climate change is also connected to other structural injustices in various ways. Otherwise vulnerable social groups, women, and racialized minorities, for example, are also more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than those with more privileges (Cuomo 2011).

The difference model is also important for understanding some political and moral pitfalls in collective action on climate change. Moving to a post-fossil economy in itself may entail large-scale social changes. Moving to a society where global environmental problems other than climate change can actually be dealt with in an ethical manner will certainly require massive social changes. If these changes are fought for under false universalism and under the leadership of powerful and privileged groups, it is unlikely, that the outcome will be good or just. If we consider how epistemic and moral virtues are developed within a lifeworld, this is not surprising. If one is not used to being vulnerable or oppressed and is not in close relationships with vulnerable or oppressed people, one is less likely to understand their experiences.

The question, then, is how to realize the prospective responsibility of becoming a climate activist without false universalism while also being aware of the planetary scale of the climate atrocity. How do we not let global issues trump local issues? In some sense the threat of climate change is so big that it may trump many other issues in desperate times, but how do we know when we really face an either-or situation? How to decide which issue is more important than any other? Can "solving" one issue lead to others being "solved" at the same time? It would be

[83] On the concept of "companion species," see Haraway (2003). For a less hopeful vision of a post-capitalist world after a run-away climate change, see Mulgan (2011).

presumptuous to try to solve this problem once and for all in theory, or even for any one situated practice. It would also be self-defeating because it would mean carrying out a falsely universalizing move that was just the sort to be avoided. Besides a sense of justice and care for others, close and distant, responsibility in climate activism requires epistemic humility and the desire to understand complex social reality. In this sense, it is similar to the virtue of environmental responsibility sketched in chapter 2.

6.6 Articulating Concerns Together

Climate activism exists in an intersection of heavy concerns and urgent issues. Because of this, I argue that climate activism is disposed to articulate or sketch the implicit moral grammar of social struggles because in order to be successful, climate activists will have to be able to articulate together different concerns of social justice, recognition, and forms of life. I borrow the concept of articulation from Gramscian social theory, in which articulation is about how the relations between different, relatively autonomous social fields, say culture and the economy, or environmental politics and working life, are mediated by one another and determined by the social totality. Social struggles can affect these mediations and thus change the relations between different social fields (Hall 1986; Kortesoja 2016). Analogously, we can speak of articulation in the context of social justice. Different forms of structural injustice are sometimes distinct, sometimes intertwined, sometimes mediated by one another. The social totality that they form in turn determines them. However, I also want to play with the more common meanings of the verb to articulate: to express, to speak clearly, to make explicit.

The climate activists protesting the Heathrow expansion were able to articulate their concerns with the local concerns of pollution and the demolition of homes. Their climate activism became mixed with other concerns. This mixing can be interpreted in different ways. For example, it could be said that it is unfortunate that climate change in itself is not seen as a powerful reason enough to oppose new runways. It is certainly true that, generally speaking, climate change ought to be taken much more seriously. On the other hand, the event can also be seen as an example of articulating concerns of social justice and climate change together in a

fruitful way. These articulations can also be understood as knots in the web of virtues through which we understand environmental responsibility.[84]

Social activism should be seen as a dynamic process in time. The fruitfulness of this particular action will be proven in practice if it sets an example of how to repeat similar articulations in the future and if in the course of these repetitions, the movement grows in power and understanding of how climate change is connected to other issues. It is a possible point of convergence, an encounter that leaves neither side as they were before. Climate activists will have a better understanding of how their global concerns are tied to local concerns, and local neighborhood activists will see the big picture of global capitalism, climate change, and the threats to local communities more clearly.

The action shows that a fundamental connection can be made between the global issue of climate change and the local issues in the London Borough of Hillingdon where Heathrow is located. Both aspects of the struggle, global and local, share the concern of defending non-monetary values and forms of life against environmental destruction caused by actions motivated by profit-seeking and structurally determined by global capitalism. Evidently there are cases where it is possible to simultaneously act against climate change and defend local communities. To see how these cases connect to other cases, how Heathrow connects to the Amazon and the threatened forms of life of indigenous communities, they must be understood in the context of global capitalism, but also in connection to other forms of structural injustice.

Later in 2016, there was another protest in Heathrow, this time by the activists of Black Lives Matter Britain. Black Lives Matter began in the US as a protest against the killings of black Americans by the police and developed into a bigger loosely organized movement for equality and social justice with branches in other countries. Black Lives Matter Britain activists have paid attention to the intersection between matters of race and climate change in many different actions, but their protest in Heathrow gained the most media attention. They blocked the motorways to the airport and used the slogan, "Climate crisis is a racist crisis. Shutdown!" The activists pointed out in written and video communiques and interviews that while rich, mostly white people have made and continue to make decisions that lead to climate change, many of the worst effects of climate change will be suffered in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, since race and class intersect in the UK, non-white neighborhoods will statistically be more at risk from flooding and extreme weather. Finally, the activists argued that besides climate change, the

[84] See chapter 2 above.

airport participates in and facilitates the racist immigration policies of UK and the EU.[85] The climate crisis is not just a racist crisis, and racism is about a lot more than climate change, but insofar as they are connected, it is possible to find several points of articulation where both issues can be addressed in the same breath; ways to begin transforming different but interconnected and interdependent social structures can be found. For Black Lives Matter Britain, the Heathrow expansion was such a point.

By articulating different concerns together in the Gramscian sense, climate activism shows how different issues are connected and tries to change these connections. It makes explicit the structural injustices involved and the moral subjectivity that would embody different, oppositional values. Climate activism is a dynamic learning process that may discover what responsibility, along with other normative concepts, in the time of climate change means. Moral philosophers should pay attention. In a way, climate activism has some similarities to scientific research as a practice. Finding effective ways to change a complex world while also discovering norms and values that would be adequate to the post-fossil future, whatever shape it will take, is both a most ambitious research project and a political project. Environmental responsibility as a hybrid virtue consisting of epistemic humility and courage, the capacity to understand complex systems, openness to strange forms of life, and the capacity for empathy for distant others can be required in this project, but it may not be the final word of climate ethics in either theory or practice. There is a danger of imagining climate activists as a sort of secret group of masterminds trying to plot how different people with different concerns could be manipulated into doing climate activist work. My reply to this worry is that it is only collective practice and reflection together with others that make articulations possible. What kind of moral grammar comes out of this process, we cannot know beforehand. The concept of articulation is a useful guide, because it is likely that it is in the process finding the common ground between different concerns where shared or at least *shareable* moral concepts and frameworks can be found.

[85] http://www.huckmagazine.com/perspectives/activism-2/black-lives-matter-shutdown-heathrow-airport-morning/ (accessed 9 March 2018).

6.7 Climate Activism and New Virtues

We can now return to the question that I found troubling in chapter 2. Virtue ethics faces the problem that people supposedly become virtuous only in a well-ordered society. Bad social arrangements form people in bad ways. Changing social arrangements for the better would require virtuous people, first, because it is not easy, and second, presumably only the virtuous would have some idea about what a good society would be like. This would be a problem for any moral theory, unless we assume that people make moral decisions and act completely freely without being influenced by their own histories and their social and physical environment. Current social scientific and psychological theories would disagree with such an assumption. The relationship between the formation of virtues and society is a classical problem that was already being discussed by the ancients. In contemporary philosophy, however, there has been a tendency to take current social arrangements as reasonably fair, if not perfect. However, if current social arrangements are not only unjust but also self-destructive, this makes the problem worse.

As discussed in previous chapters, capitalist social structures enforced by neoliberal ideology tend to form people in ways that are directly opposite to the sort of responsible subject envisioned by environmental virtue ethics. This could be read as an argument against virtue ethics as a moral theory, but I prefer to see it as a real social problem. Virtue ethics might be a great moral theory, but for we who live in neoliberal capitalist societies, it risks being co-opted into neoliberal ideology and commodified into life coaching. This is more of a verdict on our society than on virtue ethics. Can there be a way out of this vicious circle?

The problem of the need for proper social institutions and structures for developing virtues gains a partial answer by looking at how activism is a learning process (Choudry 2015). The building of a movement may change militants in fundamental ways. It is a part of changing their character to suit the just society they are trying to create. They participate and have a hand in this self-transformation, but it is done together with others. It is usually not avowedly a project of self-transformation, even if such movements have existed. Rather, the goal is social change; self-transformation happens alongside, even where the movement does not meet its (possibly quite utopian) goals. Indeed, trying first to be virtuous might lead to the problem of the well-known paradox of hedonism. The pursuit of happiness understood as pleasure for its own sake will lead to a bad result, compared to becoming happy via other meaningful pursuits. Similarly, trying

to become virtuous individually might lead to a worse result than participating in a movement for social justice with others, even if one's initial motivation for participation was simply the desire to belong to any group or having romantic feelings for another activist.

In a social movement, new relations between persons are forged, relations that are based on a common purpose or purposes and shared values, but those values and purposes become common in the process of the formation and the practices of the movement. In historical revolutions, militants have also turned into executioners and perpetrators of purges and state terror, but these counterexamples are still examples of individuals changing in the course of taking part in social upheavals; they just are not positive examples. The danger of turning into an executioner or a terrorist should not be brushed aside, but taken into account and reflected upon.[86]

The claim that taking part in a movement changes the participants is in itself fairly non-controversial, even banal. Since being human is an ongoing process of interaction with others and the environment, when these relationships change, the character of the participant changes in some ways. But are these changes fundamental? What would a fundamental change of character mean? How could we know if such a change has taken place? Are there changes that are more fundamental than others? And how are they connected to the political, social, and ethical goals of the movement?

One reason to think that there is something fundamental in human character at work in social movements is that they are about changing the world. They are about imagining what a different society would be like and planning for and acting to make that change happen. When discussing how to change the fundamental structures of society such as energy production, regimes of economic regulation, and cultural values, there would also have to be a discussion about what is fundamental for a good human life. Should we, for example, strive to make the economy more democratic or rather turn economic planning over to philosopher kings? If people are engaged in making large-scale economic decisions collectively, they will form different characters than if they leave economic decision making to others. Is democracy such a fundamental value that holding on to it, even if that it would mean less efficiency in mitigating climate change, is necessary? I do not wish to claim that such a tragic choice would be likely. It may well be that some

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[86] Future research on both the ethics and politics of climate change would do well to consider the nature of climate change as an emergency and the political and ethical implications of that consideration.

democratic system of decision making is more efficient in getting things right than any authoritarian system, even if authoritarianism seems faster initially. My point is that within climate activism such discussions can and ought to occur. In a collective movement, it is also possible to experiment with different forms of decision making on a smaller scale. If such experiments become a part of the daily life of the activists, this will over time have an effect on their character. Social movements are created and exist in spaces where it is possible to live differently than by hegemonic social norms.[87] The problem for transformative movements is that they often stay on this level and become ineffective as a force of larger-scale social change. The argument is not only moral but also instrumentally normative. In order to have an effect, social movements that aim at fundamental social change ought to have such practices that the characters of their participants will be changed.

As in Fraser's definition, partisanship in social movements is crucial for critical theory. Karl Marx set an inspiring example. For Marx, observing and taking part in the workers movement was just as fundamental as critically reading Hegel and classical political economy. One of his important observations was that taking part in the movement changed the characters of the participants, an important aspect of which was that the movement was about changing the world:

> When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process, the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies. (Marx [1844] 1975b, 313)

[87] For one autobiographical account of such a process, see Kollontai ([1926] 1971).

This passage contains some of Marx's fundamental moral ideas. For him, being human could have a similar dignity to the kind that Kant discussed. But whereas for Kant human dignity stemmed from the autonomy of the individual person, for Marx dignity is connected to the capacity for solidarity and the potentiality of taking society as a goal, in being an active part of a collective that deliberates how it wants to organize itself and its relation to nature (Saito 2017). This normative idea has philosophical precursors in Aristotle, Kant, and especially Hegel, but Marx's being an observer and a participant in the workers movement must not be overlooked. My reading of Marx as having a moral philosophy is contentious, but it is certainly shared by many Marx scholars. It is clear that moral ideas can be read from Marx; the passage above is evidence enough. Whether these moral ideas have an important role in Marx's theory as a whole is a different matter. I happen to think that they do, but here it suffices to say that Marx at some points of his life was inspired by and wrote about the moral ideas implicit in the practices of the workers movement and that this was an example of doing philosophy in the context of socially transformative collective practice. Similarly, climate ethicists can pay more attention to how moral ideas are implicit in the practice of climate activists and sometimes explicitly discovered and articulated by them. If climate change is a structural issue that is connected with other forms of structural injustice, exploring what happens when these connections are made explicit in practice is especially fruitful for climate ethics and for social philosophy in general.

6.8 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that there is a responsibility to change the world via climate activism, and that the social structural view of climate change is required to understand the forms of climate activism that are already in progress. In addition, I argued for learning from climate activism about what morality and ethics might look like in the post-fossil world. This last argument is clearly unfinished, as it is about a social process that is ongoing and whose future remains radically uncertain.

I have offered two reasons for why climate activism can be a source of learning for climate ethicists. First, taking part in a transformative movement is also a process that transforms persons; new virtues are cultivated and new vices formed. Where the movement is concerned about changing the world on a large scale, as climate activism by necessity is, an element of reflexivity can be added to these processes of transformation. Thinking and talking about what the world and we ought to be like can become an integral part of being a climate activist. Second, climate activists, whether they become climate activists through participating in other struggles or whether they become aware of other struggles through being climate activists, are in a position to articulate the common features of those struggles. Thus, they can learn whether and how the struggles share some kind of moral grammar. Both the new kinds of persons and the new ways of thinking about the moral grammar of social conflicts can then inform the theoretical discussions of climate ethics. In an optimistic scenario, this would lead to a positive feedback loop between practice and theory.[88]

Climate activism is related to responsibility in several ways, of which I have discussed three in some depth. First, prospective responsibility demands that we act collectively to change social structures to make the mitigation of climate change and just adaptation possible and to create such social structures where similar global problems can be dealt with ethically. Second, responsibility in activism entails taking into account the complexity of climate change and its intersections with other issues of social justice; it is a combination of political, moral, and epistemic responsibility. Finally, climate activism can create spaces where new modes of responsibility can be thought about, learned, and practiced, a responsibility that is more adequate to the world as it is now and the world that is to come. These spaces are not vacuums but are situated in the intersections of various issues and struggles for social justice and climate change. In these intersections, a shared or shareable moral grammar may be discovered and

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[88] Fraser's definition aside, the tradition of critical theory has historically had both a celebratory and an ambiguous or even distraught relationship with social activism. Theodor Adorno wrote that the moment for the realization of philosophy "had been missed" (2005, 3). This was a somewhat oblique reference to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach that philosophers had so far tried to interpret the world, but the point was to change it. The realization of philosophy, it was hoped, would be through the collective action of the workers movement. Adorno thought that capitalism had so thoroughly colonized all aspects of life that not just the capacity to change the world but also to think about it, to interpret it, had been lost. Ironically, by being able to say interesting and important things about late capitalism and the culture industry, Adorno showed himself to be wrong about our capacities to interpret the world; whether he was also wrong about our capacity to change it remains to be seen.

articulated. The last point remain hypothetical, but it also opens avenues for future research. If we can learn from climate activism what a responsibility adequate to the struggle to mitigate climate change and deal with the post-fossil world might be like, the same may happen with justice, the good life, duty, beauty, and other normative concepts.

7 CONCLUSION

The key questions of this dissertation were:

How should we understand personal, individual responsibility regarding climate change if

1) climate change is connected to social structures, especially global capitalism and

2) individuals and their dispositions and capacities for responsibility are embedded in the same social structures?

I have discussed these questions by contrasting them with the prevalent view of climate change in climate ethics as an unstructured collective action problem. I have shown that it makes a relevant difference for many moral questions if we see climate change as a social structural issue rather than a collective action problem. If climate change is understood as resulting from the disparate actions of billions of individuals, it is difficult to speak of individual responsibility in any sense.

If climate change, by contrast, is a social structural issue then the ways in which individuals can be assumed to be responsible for climate change will depend on the structure. If the structure is hierarchical and some people have more possibilities for influencing how things go than others, then some people will be more responsible, in both the backward-looking and forward-looking senses. Some people will have had more possibilities to influence how our social systems have affected earth systems by acts and omissions, and some people are now in such positions that they can have more of an effect on how things will go in the future. In the collective action problem view, where individuals are assumed to act disparately, the model itself will determine whether it makes sense to hold individuals responsible or not. In the structural view, by contrast, individuals are in various positions of power and act in concert with others in many ways. Thus, it is an empirical question as to whether, how much, and in what way(s) a particular individual is responsible for climate change. As there have been studies to show that a relatively small number of corporations are responsible for a significant proportion of greenhouse gas emissions, it makes sense to assume that the senior decision makers and others who could have influenced the operations of those companies can be held responsible and blameworthy. They could have done something differently… and they should have. This much can be said with a very

traditional conception of responsibility. Climate change means that we ought to ruthlessly criticize our moral and social theories, but it is also significant that different social theoretical assumptions produce different results, even with traditional conceptions of responsibility. The responsibility of the global elite is an important moral and political question that requires understanding social structural issues: power, hierarchy, social constraints, the logic of global capitalism, and so on. If climate change is an ongoing atrocity, as I have argued, such questions are all the more important, since the moral stakes are high in assigning responsibility and blame.

Properly taking forward-looking responsibility for climate change will mean striving together with others to change those social structures that produce it. This is the forward-looking responsibility that I believe all who have any possibilities to act can have. How such responsibility can be realized on a personal level again depends on the particular situation of the individual. However, the imperative of changing social structures means that current social positions and contexts should not be seen as something that forever constrains us in the same way, as they are precisely the things that need to be transformed.

As social beings, we and our endeavors, including both moral theorizing and morality embodied as virtues, are embedded in and conditioned by the same social structures that produce climate change. I discussed this issue through a critical reading of virtue ethical responses to climate change. Understanding how we can be responsible beings requires understanding social structures. An example of this is how "the neoliberal subject" is an ideal sort of subject whose dispositions and ways of being in the world are almost directly opposite to the responsible subject envisioned by environmental ethicists. Where environmental responsibility requires understanding complex systems and being able to empathize and take into account distant others, the neoliberal subject is responsible for the satisfaction of its own preferences. Yet, there are formal similarities in the subject of virtue ethics and the neoliberal subject, in the sense that both are malleable and plastic beings who are responsible for the sort of person they become. This means that virtue ethics risks being co-opted and individualized unless it is seen in historical and social context and unless the forming of virtues is understood as a collective rather than an individual project. In the view I have presented, the sort of responsibility that our condition requires is formed only in and through projects of social transformation. Climate activism is an example that can be studied as such a project.

But is climate change ultimately the same as capitalism? Do we need climate ethics or just the ethics of opposing capitalism and other harmful social structures?

I would argue that climate ethics absolutely requires social theories that take social structures such as capitalism seriously. There is a clear gap in the climate ethical literature that I am, for my part, trying to fill with this dissertation, among other efforts. However, climate change and other earth-system level global crises exist on different time scales than social structures even though they are disrupted and driven to crisis by social systems. Even if we can transform the social structures that produce climate change and even if we are able to avoid catastrophic climate disruption, we are still committed to some level of warming, which means more extreme weather, species extinction, climate refugees, and generally more uncertainty and precarious conditions. Being responsible in the warming world will mean something different from being responsible in a social system conditioned by a stable climate. The causal powers of human societies may increase even further through technology and new social connections, which again means new urgency for environmental responsibility. While it is dangerous to give recipes for the construction of future social systems, at least one goal ought to be that whatever new social structures will be in place in the future, they are such that they allow us to understand our responsibility for our common world. In a complex and uncertain world, there will probably always be responsibility gaps, but they need not always be the same gaps. We can and should have ways to reflect on how our capacities of responsibility are formed by our social systems and how we can influence that formation.

In the last chapter, I proposed that, due to the nature of climate change, climate activists are in a good position to find out what kinds of shared or shareable normative frameworks different movements of social justice have, whether explicitly or implicitly. Climate change is entangled with other issues of structural injustices, such as those connected to class, race, and gender. By attending to those entanglements climate activists may discover new ways to think about normative concepts such as responsibility, ways that can be useful for people concerned with different issues of social justice. I do not mean to suggest that climate activists become a kind of super group over and above other collectivities. Rather, individuals and groups in diverse social situations can find their own ways to be climate activists.

The general upshot of the thesis is that with climate change and other moral issues that have social causes and social consequences, the moral philosopher ought to pay attention to the social-theoretical underpinnings of their philosophical activities. If one understands the social world in a particular way, one will also think

of the moral problem in a particular way. If one makes explicit and questions the social theory, one will have a better understanding of the problem.

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