Global Climate Change Justice and a ‘Global Greenhouse Gas Tax’: Competing theories of justice, competing utopias

- DRAFT ONLY, PLEASE DO NOT CITE -

Author: Shannon K. Brincat

Affiliation: University of Helsinki

Abstract:

The problem of global climate change, whether perceived as a crisis or natural environmental process, has resulted in contestations over how to best approach the issue at the level of global governance. A key problem is the vast discrepancy between the causes and effects of global warming and the injustices that have resulted from a history that has experienced uneven levels of industrialisation and the uneven consumption/enjoyment of fossil fuels. This paper shall systematically explore the issues relating to global climate justice and, more specifically, identify the ethico-political implications surrounding the proposed creation of a ‘Global Greenhouse Gas Tax’ (GGGT). Partly derived from the idea of a ‘Currency Transaction Tax’ (CTT), or Tobin Tax, the GGGT would be a tax on greenhouse gas emissions intended to discourage the use of fossil fuels and to redistribute funds for the global common good. The issue of climate change justice shall be explored through three alternative, if not competing, frameworks of justice; John Rawls Theory of Justice, Stephen Vanderheiden’s Atmospheric Justice and Axel Honneth’s Struggle for Recognition. As it seems impossible to sustain the abstract notion of a complete theory of justice amenable for all times and all cultures, the paper shall argue that the normative foundation of global climate change justice must remain open, contextual and contested – the parameters of which affirm an incomplete (or ontologically non-closed) ethico-political concept of justice. It will argue that an approach that encompasses both atmospheric and recognitive justice principles offers a viable means to legitimise the pragmatic deployment of a GGGT. In this sense, the debates and various positions regarding global climate justice are recast, not merely as ideological commitments for or against harmonising humankind’s relation with the environment, but also as contestations between forms of concrete utopias, between rival conceptions of justice, and between competing visions for the future of global governance.

Keywords:
Global Climate Change, theory of justice, Tobin Tax, recognition theory, Honneth, Atmospheric Justice, Rawls

Contact:
shannonbrincat@yahoo.com.au

“...the reason we should be interested in establishing a just social order is that it is only under these conditions that subjects can attain the most undamaged possible self-relation, and thus individual autonomy”

- Axel Honneth

Introduction

The problem of global climate change, whether perceived as a crisis or natural environmental processes, has resulted in contestations over how to best approach the issue at the level of global governance. The fact that U.S. defection from the global regime of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol was made on the arguments related to fairness highlights the deeply normative character of global climate policy – and yet, as Vanderheiden has found, relatively little attention has been paid to these unique issues of justice in comparison to our enhanced understanding of the scientific causes, estimates and possible solutions of climate change. The position of so-called ‘climate change skeptics’ notwithstanding, key points of contention focus on the likely outcomes of global warming rather than debating the existence of the complex phenomena, presupposing three interrelated elements; (i) that the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) releases carbon dioxide and other gases (such as methane, nitrous oxide etc.) into the atmosphere which contributes to the greenhouse effect; (ii) that the resulting global warming will affect ecological and atmospheric conditions across the globe, though its effects will be geographically uneven, and; (iii) that the impact of such climate change will most likely fall disproportionately on developing countries and poor peoples and therefore presents an extreme case of global injustice. While these scientific matters are not addressed at length in this article – for this writer at least, the evidence is overwhelming and needs little justification – they form the background to the hotbed of ethico-political issues surrounding a ‘Global Greenhouse Gas Tax’ (GGGT), otherwise colloquially known as a ‘carbon tax’, that has been raised as a potential solution to the problem of global

---

4 While there exists some scientific dispute in regards to the contingencies, relevant factors and likely outcomes of global warming, it is well established that the process is occurring – and at an accelerating rate. See Peter Jacques, “The Rearguard of Modernity: Environmental Skepticism as a Struggle of Citizenship”, Global Environmental Politics, 6(1), 2006, 76-101. For an important, though largely discredited account, see Willie Soon, Sallie Baliunas, “Proxy Climatic and Environmental Changes over the Past 1000 Years”, Climate Research, 23, 2003, 89-110.
5 The ‘greenhouse effect’ refers to the process by which these gases collect in the atmosphere, letting in direct solar radiation whilst trapping in thermal radiation reflected from the earth’s surface, causing the planet to undergo climatic change (i.e. ‘positive radiative forcing’).
warming. In this context, the key question of justice that emerges is the vast discrepancy between the causes and effects of global warming that have resulted from a human history that has experienced uneven processes of industrialisation and uneven consumption/enjoyment of fossil fuels.

Partly derived from the idea of a Currency Transaction Tax (CTT), something that gained prominence with the global financial crisis (2008-2009) and the formation of ATTAC, the GGGT would be a tax on greenhouse gas emissions intended to discourage the use of fossil fuels as a source of energy and is finding increasing support amongst activists, academics and some states. Whereas a CTT is a tax levied on currency exchanges, similar to the idea of the Tobin Tax, the GGGT would apply to carbon emissions directly. Following, the principle of ‘polluter pays’, the GGGT would tax the consumption/use of fossil fuels, thereby encouraging the development of more energy efficient technologies whilst decreasing the commercial desirability of fossil fuels. Such a move would overcome many of the limitations within the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and its emissions trading mechanism through which the right to emit has become a mere tradable commodity. Emissions trading actively allows corporations to purchase emission allowances (or ‘credits’) from elsewhere, thus avoiding making any real reductions in their use of fossil fuels. A key benefit of a GGGT is that it offers a clear means by which to move away from relying on ‘pricing’ the emission of greenhouse gases appropriately so that the ‘free market’ may induce positive change in corporate behaviour. Not only could the funds derived from such a taxation scheme be used for further mitigation or adaptation measures to climate change particularly for developing states, but the taxation scheme itself would provide a means for incentivised global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. In these ways, a GGGT offers a non-ideal, pragmatist approach toward combating global climate change.

---
7 Such a tax has been raised by many green political parties and a number of theorists. Perhaps the most famous was the Clinton Btu Tax (1993) introduced by President Bill Clinton that was widely opposed and only a broad-based tax as originally proposed.
10 The Carbon Tax Center maintains a list of supporters (visit: http://www.carbontax.org/who-supports/) as does Climate Action Group (visit: http://sites.google.com/site/yarravalleyclimateactiongroup/Home).
11 A CCT is a tax levied on currency exchanges, but which is set at a level not to hinder transactions to finance trade in goods/services or long term capital investments. James Tobin proposed the idea in 1972 with the intention that it would stabilise financial markets and reduce speculation. ATTAC (Association pour une Taxe sur les Transactions Financières pour l’Aide aux Citoyens) was founded in 1998 as a transnational movement for a CTT. See Heikki Patomäki, “The Tobin Tax and Global Civil Society Organisations” The Aftermath of the 2008-2009 Crisis, The International Studies Association of Ritsumeikan University, Vol. 8., 2009. See also Ignacio Ramonent, ‘Désarmer les marches’, Le Monde Diplomatique, 1997.
Yet this paper is not concerned with detailing the form and content of a GGGT and the above comments are made only to introduce the contours of debate for the current inquiry into the logically prior question of the ethical legitimacy of a GGGT itself. This question involves a complex array of competing claims of justice and visions of global governance which need to be systematically explored in order to identify the ethico-political implications surrounding the proposed creation of a GGGT. In particular, the global nature of the uneven development and industrialization, and the uneven use and enjoyment of fossil fuels, needs careful consideration from both historical and ethical vantages. That is, the injustices that result from what Jorgenson, Austin and Dick have correctly identified as the ‘ecologically unequal exchange’ in political economy between developed and developing states regarding their responsibility and contribution for carbon emissions that forms the locus of this seemingly intractable normative dispute. One axis of injustice in this debate centers on the problem of the different levels of use and emission levels between states, or the disparity between population percentage and the equitable distribution of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, past and present. What complicates the matter even further in formulating a theory of justice amenable to the formation of a GGGT, is that such a taxation scheme must not only be considered just and fair for each particular member state (or peoples) affected by its application but that it must satisfy the claims of justice that satisfies the whole (i.e. the vast majority of states). Only in this way could a GGGT hope to adequately meet the challenges it is designed to face, that is, the immediate and ongoing reduction of GHG emissions. To analogise from the common law, a GGGT must satisfy both the courts of equity, concerned with the application of fairness in particular cases against the formal enforcement of the law, and, the purposes of the ethics of taxation to form a legitimate, generally sourced fund for activities both necessary and/or beneficial to society.

There are a number of competing justice frameworks prevalent in the climate change debate that could be used to justify a GGGT; those that focus on inequalities between the North and South divide, or core-periphery, in international political economy; those that focus on procedural justice in global climate change policy, and; those that look to distributive and re-distributive justice regarding the impact of climate change for future generations, to name but a few. However, it seems that the dominant conception of global justice, often echoed most loudly in climate change justice debates, is linked to neo-liberal conceptions of free market mechanisms that would rely on consumer behaviour to mitigate GHG and in expanding production to

---

16 A clear case in point here is the example of the USA who emit 25% of the world’s CO2 emissions but who have only 4.5% of the world’s population. Baylis, Smith, Owens, 2008, 362-363.
help with adaptations strategies to compensate victims of climate change.\textsuperscript{18} The limitations of these two proposals alone offer compelling reasons to develop viable alternative theories of justice that may provide a more adequate basis for the complex issues surrounding climate change.\textsuperscript{19} The empirical dimensions of histories of uneven development and asymmetric climate impacts are however, even more compelling.\textsuperscript{20} What these various positions regarding global climate justice reveal however, is that we are engaged not merely ideological commitments for or against harmonising humankind’s relation with the environment but with contestations between competing visions of the future governance of humankind.

Unfortunately for our purposes, the deduction of a theory of justice from abstract principles does not, of itself, formally prove the universal validity of such a concept. As argued by Patomäki, while justice, as an abstract concept, may be universal, the value judgments of such conceptions are dependent on relevant social practices that are both particular and, at the same time, based on a “sustained dialogue with different others involved or concerned with the same realities” and therefore do not exist in some ethical vacuum. Justice is both dialogical and contextual, neither rationality nor nature dictates any one conception. This does not lead to some ambiguous relativism however, but rather the view that while no one conception of justice “is absolutely wrong” that all “can be criticized”.\textsuperscript{21} Here, while not all concepts of justice are made equal, the plurality of justice claims does not preclude rational dialogue upon the merits of each, so that the most important question for contemporary debates on climate justice is how to obtain a legitimate justification for one’s methods of assessment between these competing justice models? In this article, I suggest that it is by overcoming the limitations inherent to Rawlsian (liberal) assumptions that pervade a majority of (Northern) theoretical explorations of climate change justice by reference to the alternative theory of justice present within Axel Honneth’s recognition theoretic that may overcome the current impasse. Here an alternate theory of justice is forwarded that makes significant advances on those that focus on distribution and ‘fairness’ alone. While only a few scholars involved in debates over climate change justice have openly adopted the methods of Critical Theory,\textsuperscript{22} I believe it can offer a viable framework to ground the legitimacy not only of a GGGT but other mitigation responses to benefit the environmental conditions of all humankind.

\textsuperscript{18} Some suggest market-mechanisms are the most appropriate for climate change. See Bjorn Lomborg, The Skeptical Environmentalist, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001,305-315. Such views are evident within American environmental policy of the Bush regime which envisioned pressure for environmental safety through stimulating consumer demand for sustainable goods and which stated that “…empirical evidence suggests that growth eventually goes hand in hand with environmental improvements.” See Executive Office of the President, Economic Report of the President, February 2002, 218.
\textsuperscript{22} For example Amy Lovecraft’s has employed the Habermaisan concept of the Lifeworld to help conceptualise how global climate change has altered the Lifeworld of various peoples, particularly those who inhabit the Arctic. See Amy Lauren Lovecraft, Climate Change and Arctic Cases: A Normative Exploration of Social-Ecological System Analysis”, in Stephen Vanderheiden Ed., Political Theory and Global Climate Change, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, 91-120.
The limits of Rawlsian approaches to climate change

Despite the various generous assessment of Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, Martha Nussbaum has offered the sober view that he actually gives us little “helpful guidance” in those areas that “affect us all,” such as the global environment and climate change. It is curious therefore that Rawls’s basic framework appears in the vast majority of literature on climate justice, if not as an ideal position, as something of a useful starting point that is in need of radical extension. Under the ‘veil of ignorance’ Rawls could have stipulated that not only do persons not know their level of “natural resources” or “economic development” but also the conditions of their surrounding environment which would have placed climate justice firmly within the deliberations of those in the ‘original position’. Without this however, Rawlsian ethicists are forced to reach into the parameters of Rawlsian ethics in an attempt to find principle by which to make this connection. The key problem is that out of this large grouping of theorists there does not emerge what one could call a shared interpretation of Rawlsian justice that could lead to a coherent program for climate change. For example, Peter Singer has posited that Rawls’ ‘difference principle’ could be used to regulate the distribution of emission quotas, whereas this principle has also been examined by Bell to quite different conclusions. For some, such as Page and Caney, Rawls appears as the foil by which more critical and expanded ethical claims regarding climate justice can be derived, and for others still, his approach has been said to be in need of replacement entirely. However, some like Huseby and Hartzell have deliberately moved beyond *A Theory of Justice*, and – in what seems to be the most productive efforts to engage Rawls with climate change debates – have suggested that it is by means of amendments to *The Law of Peoples* that Rawls finds his proper place of relevance regarding climate change.

As many have argued, implicit within Rawls’s theory is an atomistic conception of human nature, abstracted from the social contexts in which ‘real’

---


people live and derived without any engagement with socio-political praxis. The resultant depiction of persons in the ‘original position’ is heavily overloaded with assumptions that the interests of human agents are pre-socially defined and primarily based around the rational pursuit of egoistic interests (despite the ‘veil of ignorance’ as a tool for limiting one’s explicit self-interested allocations in regarding what is both rational and fair). \(^{30}\) For Sandel, the attributes Rawls ascribe to human-beings are of isolated and autonomous individuals who choose their goals via the purposive-rational calculation of their interests as if they “were making a decision to buy something.” \(^{31}\) Such views are clearly compatible with the Hayekian interpretations of Rawls’ model which found neoclassical economic market forces as a just outcome of this theory of justice, \(^{32}\) and yet it is difficult to see how this could be made as the basis for positively addressing the problem of climate change. If one of the central ideas of Rawls understanding of justice as fairness (the notion the equitable distribution of things of negative or positive value) is the idea of “the establishment, within the structure of a practice, of a proper balance between competing claims,” \(^{33}\) this would seem to be insufficiently guaranteed by market mechanisms in which the vast majority of human-beings only have nominal influence, or are excluded altogether. Yet, on the other hand, one could also plausibly argue on the basis of Rawls’s foundational arguments that free market forces could be subordinated to the requirements of the ‘liberty principle’ and the political rights of citizens that Rawls places far more emphasis (i.e. free assembly, speech, conscience etc). This would seem to bring the Rawlsian framework back within the fold of social conceptions of justice – a part of ‘Left Criticism’ as per the readings of MacPherson and DiQuattro – that would seem more amenable to the issues surrounding climate change and its potentially disastrous affects on the rights of citizens. \(^{34}\) Yet the fact that there can be such widespread disagreement on the nature of Rawls work and how it is ‘adopted’ not only by competing theoretical frameworks but traditions clearly incompatible with each other, reveals the underlying problems of relying on the Rawlsian framework for climate change justice. \(^{35}\)

Rawls does not address questions of the environment in any significant detail which is an obvious limitation for those attempting to draw upon his theory for

---


\(^{35}\) For a general account of these issues see Quentin P. Taylor, “An Original Omission? Property in Rawls’s Political Thought”, The Independence Review, VIII(3), 2004, 387-400. It should be noted however that Rawls had revised his position in an updated version of A Theory of Justice, and other articles, with the result of some confusion – even contradictions – that led him to publish Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, though the basic themes remain essentially unchanged throughout.
climate justice.\textsuperscript{36} However, as his normative theory of a just foreign policy of liberal states must clearly encompass such concerns in the circumstances of contemporary world politics,\textsuperscript{37} it may be possible to reconstruct the essential parameters of a Rawlsian ethic that could be extended to include environmental concerns including those specifically relating to climate change.\textsuperscript{38} Here, Rawls’s rejection of ‘comprehensive worldviews’ as inconsistent with ‘reasonable pluralism’ could be of some benefit in global debates regarding climate change, because in his conception of reasonability, public debates of justice must be framed in such a way as to allow broader segments to understand, if not accept, such views. This would seem, in principle, to allow for the democratic, rational debate of climate justice at the level of global governance – at least amongst ‘liberal’ and ‘decent’ societies in Rawls’s hierarchy of peoples.\textsuperscript{39}

As argued by Terry Hoy, while it is clear that Rawls cannot define the moral basis of justice as fairness without some implicit notion of the ‘good life’, his notion of “reflective equilibrium” allows for competing principles of justice to be weighed against rival moral theories in order to establish what is “most reasonable to us,” thus allowing for the analysis, debate and potential for consensus-formation regarding climate justice. Yet as Hoy questions, the problem is how it is “possible to establish criteria of moral justification in which the fact of our inevitable involvement within a historical-cultural context does not preclude the possibility of a reasonable consensus upon minimal principles of justice…”\textsuperscript{40} The answer that Rawls provides us with however is quite limited, and reflects his reliance on the ‘reasonableness’ of humankind – a faith which may be misplaced. For Rawls, the best account of justice is not that which fits some a priori judgment made in advance of examining other concepts of justice but that which matches the judgment of fairness in ‘reflective equilibrium.’ That is, while we cannot step outside our situatedness within institutionalised norms of our community, the essential element of Rawls’s theory is the process of wider reflective equilibrium by which initial conceptions of justice can be subjected to reasoned modification.\textsuperscript{41} Yet this mistakes process for judgment and whatever merit it possesses as an analytic device is lost within the actual way climate justice debates are conducted in world politics which is anything but based on reasonable reflection. Rather, it is a complex nexus of power and persuasion that only takes hold when certain arguments/positions capture the minds of the ‘majority’ of people – or rather what the most powerful take as being persuasive.\textsuperscript{42} The relatively easy manner in which Soon and Baliunas were able to override far more


\textsuperscript{37} As he writes: “to work out the ideals and principles of the foreign policy of a reasonably just liberal people” (original emphasis). J. Rawls, The Law of Peoples (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9–10.

\textsuperscript{38} For example Brent A. Singer, “An Extension of Rawls’ Theory of Justice to Environmental Ethics”, Environmental Ethics, 10, 1988, 217-231.


\textsuperscript{41} As stated by Rawls: “This state is one reached after a person has weighed various proposed conceptions and has either revised his judgments to accord with one of them or held fast to his initial convictions”. See John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1971, 48.

\textsuperscript{42} I have made this point elsewhere. See Shannon Brincat, “Towards a Social-Relational Dialectic of World Politics”, .
comprehensive scientific accounts regarding climate change provides an acute example of this potential for reflective equilibrium to be overridden by interest. Yet another example is provided by the previous BP Chairmen John Browne who remarked on the occasion surrounding the withdrawal of his company from the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) – an industry lobbying group initiated to debunk climate change – when he stated; “The time to consider the policy dimensions of climate change is not when the link between GHGs and climate change is conclusively proven, but when the possibility cannot be discounted and is taken seriously by the society of which we are a part.”

Yet while we are clearly far removed from the ideal conditions of ‘reflective equilibrium’ in the highly divisive debates surrounding climate justice, one could still appeal to Rawls’s notion of liberal foreign policy to stake out appropriate normative standards. As is well known, a fundamental component of Rawls’s political liberalism is the notion of reciprocity that requires a liberal state to adopt foreign policy that could be acceptable to all “reasonable” and “rational”, “free and equal” peoples. For him, a ‘rational’ society will pursue its interests as an equal within the international society of states but, as a ‘reasonable’ society, will also both expect and grant respect for the same recognition of other states as equals, the assumption being that this criterion of reasonableness will serve to self-constrain a state’s pursuit of its own interests. From this basic premise Rawls derives eight principles of justice that a ‘rational and reasonable’ society would follow in its foreign policy. A key feature of this formulaic notion of foreign policy is a strident defence of state sovereignty over its territory, institutions, environmental integrity and population size. Yet by his rejection of any notion of a world state – which seems to include forms of global governance even without a state apparatus – Rawls’s theory of justice seems ill-equipped to deal with the problems stemming from global climate change for two key reasons. As explained by Derek Bell, because global climate and the upper atmosphere do not form part of any territory but part of the ‘global commons’, Rawls simply ignores them, and because of Rawls’s inherent understanding of property as the maintenance of assets, the ‘tragedy of the global commons’ regarding the world’s climatic conditions seems inevitable in his society of peoples because no one people can be taken to have responsibility for it.

One potential solution to this intractable problem is to refer to the eighth principle of The Law of Peoples which recognizes the right to assist “burdened societies” (i.e. those living under ‘unfavorable conditions’) and to extend this to include those harmed (either threatened or actual) by climate change. Even while such a move is already reaching far beyond the intentions Rawls’s initial premise, it would be of only limited utility in forming a cornerstone of climate change justice as it is concerned with assisting those ‘burdened societies’ to use their territory most

---

44 Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 34.
45 Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 28-37
46 Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 36-39
48 Rawls defines this as “the human capital and know-how, and, often, the material and technological resources’ needed to secure and maintain the conditions necessary for just institutions.” Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 106.
effectively to promote and maintain their own institutions. Yet what if your people constituted a ‘burdened society’ that was neither responsible for, or enjoyed the benefits of, the use of fossil fuels but were nevertheless being grossly affected by global warming processes? One could think here of the Tuvalese who do not seek the mere ‘promotion and maintenance of their just institutions’ but their very existence that is threatened by rising sea levels?49 While Bell suggests ad hoc solutions as found in Rawls’s account of “marginal cases” where a society’s resources have become so scarce as to be unable to maintain its institutions,50 this is hardly sufficient for a global problem of such magnitude of climate change which, by the vast majority of scientific forecasting models will not affect only marginal cases, but hundreds of millions of people. The only principle left then is to hope that ‘peoples observe their treaties and undertakings’ (Principle Two)51 and somehow, beyond their ‘rational interest’ and without any responsibility for the global commons, come to a binding agreement on climate change.

Yet despite these broad – if not fundamental – limitations in the Rawlsian framework, let’s put aside these general remarks to critically engage with the main areas where Rawls’s work has been extended as a model for climate change justice. Here, there appear to be five ways that theorists have employed various Rawlsian arguments in support of such a move; the ‘Just Savings Principle’; by extending the notion of property rights to include the deterioration of the environment as an asset; through the ‘Principle of Assistance’; by extending the ‘Society of Peoples’,52 or finally; by viewing climate change as adversely impacting on basic human rights.

The ‘Just Savings Principle’ would seem the most logical starting point for a Rawlsian conception of climate justice in that it provides for a form of intergenerational justice already been expressly included in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.53 For Rawls, each generation is to save, proportionate to its ability, for the next generation so that its “decent” basic structure are secured,54 that is, to ensure its “just institutions are firmly established” and all “basic liberties effectively realized.”55 Here Rawls stipulates, inter alia, that nonrenewable resources should be “husbanded” for the future and that natural sustainability should not be undermined by existing generations.56 This duty to secure social structures and measures pertaining to developmental sustainability would seem to offer a clear justification for some form of climate change justice to prevent global

49 Tuvalu, at only 4.5 meters above sea level, is ranked as “extremely vulnerable” on the Environmental Vulnerability Index.
50 Rawls, The Law of Peoples,, 108
53 The central normative commitment of this declaration states that “the Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities”. See Article 3.1, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992).
55 Rawls, 1971, 251.
56 Rawls, 1999, 107
warming for the benefit of future generations and yet any critical potential of this principle is lost by Rawls’s pre-normative commitment to methodological nationalism. That is, the ‘Just Savings Principles’, and by its extension to the maintenance of a stable environment, applies only domestically – it expressly does not pertain to include the resources or sustainability of ‘other’ peoples, nor to the ‘husbanding’ of the global commons such as the planetary climate. In this context, Beitz has raised the glaringly obvious challenge against Rawls’s assumption that the nation-state is a self-sufficient unit for justice, for otherwise participants in the original position could equally have moved toward a form of justice beyond the existing borders of states. What guides Rawls’s maxim is not the liberal egalitarianism of the ‘principle of difference’ but the establishment and maintenance of just institutions beyond which there is only the further duty of ‘sustaining’ them.

Moreover, the Just Savings Principles is construed minimally by Rawls – it is a duty incumbent on the living to establish and maintain just institutions only when it can be achieved “without too much cost to ourselves,” which is ultimately an arbitrary measurement. So while a particular peoples are charged by Rawls with securing the environmental security of their territory for future citizens, this does not extend in ways relevant to the global processes associated with climate change that are not only caused unevenly but whose geographical effects will be uneven. As argued by Vanderheiden, a more “robust foundation” for intergenerational obligations is needed to justify GHG emission reductions and the costly measures necessary to avoid causing future climatic instability. As the causes and effect of climate change are unavoidably global, social cooperation on this issue must of necessity be a transnational phenomenon, in which the notion of state’s ‘self-sufficiency’ is implausible. Due to the global nature of the phenomenon, it is virtually impossible for a particular people to secure its structures and institutions for the benefit of its own future generations without internationally shared commitments and cooperation in regards to climate change. Here Page’s work offers a theoretical advancement of the Rawlsian obligations for the reduction of injustices associated with climate change for persons across time. Yet Page’s analysis is premised toward refuting the arguments of environmental skeptics against intergenerational responsibilities but is relatively mute regarding wider ecological concerns associated with climate change such as biodiversity. So even if wider ecological protections could be brought in under this ambit, such person-affecting morality shares the problems associated with any form of ethical consequentialism rendering it less capable of determining what we ought to do regarding climate change because it determine this post-facto i.e. as based on the consequences of climate change rather than promoting effective preventative action.

The known longevity of the carbon cycle and the time-lag of its effects on climate highlight the problems of waiting for consequences to emerge to gauge a retrospective

60 Vanderheiden, 117 and 119, endnote 8, quoting Rawls, 1971, 115.
ethics and appropriate responses. Quite simply, if we wait, it may preclude future generations from being able to act effectively.63

For Vanderheiden, the limitations of Rawls are readily apparent because his ‘Just Savings Principle’ is explicitly not based on rights and thus his concept of intergenerational justice cannot assure equal rights for future persons.64 In distinction, Vanderheiden turns to Feinberg, who suggests the possibility for talking about rights of future generations as based on how we can reasonably predict the outcome of our present actions. While the future maybe uncertain “does not weaken its claim on us that it will, after all, be human”, that is, they will have basic needs that are similar to our own.65 The assumption that the basic interest between present and future persons will be similar enables Vanderheiden to link existent and future duties based on the likelihood of harm. The exposure of others to risk is not diminished in any way by shifts in time or other contingencies. From this Vanderheiden concludes a positive duty for environmental rights and sustainability as an obligation that parallels Honneth’s account of rights (as we shall see). For Vanderheiden, we need not know the identities or preferences of those in the future to anticipate the need to protect the rights and interests that are “basic to human flourishing.”66 This links also with the arguments of Andrew Linklater and cosmopolitan harm principles. For both thinkers, if we can identify with predictability those likely to be adversely effected in distant lands or in the future means that to refrain form such actions are just as binding as if it were to violate some one immediately.67 The foresight of the effect of our actions, fortifies an anticipatory right against environmental harm. However, it should be noted that the frustrating aspect of Vanderheiden’s otherwise useful work is that despite these express limitations, he remains committed – in later writings – to a Rawlsian, liberal understanding of environmental rights.68 For Adamian, who contributes to one of Vanderhieden’s volume argues, the liberal framework of justice does not effectively capture or deal with the various dimensions of global climate change injustice, both geographically or temporally, and therefore must be cautioned against and alternative models pursued.69

The Rawlsian would be then forced to retreat to a hope that somehow all ‘peoples’ would spontaneously come to consciously register how their interests in fact overlap regarding the need to reduce GHG emissions – though the recent failures at Copenhagen would seem to contravene this optimism. The way Rawls constructed the

64 As he writes: “no persons or societies have a right to our assistance, even if we have an obligation of justice to provide it”. Vanderheiden 127.
66 Vanderheiden, 135.
boundedness of the duty to future generations within the domestic sphere meant that it would have little, if any, meaningful affect outside of the voluntary cooperation of peoples. In fact, the principle may provide the unwanted justification for a particular peoples to pursue the environmental security of its own future generations without considering, or even at the expense of, other peoples. Such a possibility is already evidenced by those who have advocated for the pursuit of economic growth measures (without significant GHG reductions) as a means to help with adaptation policies to climate change in the future.\textsuperscript{70} Such ‘adaptation without mitigation measures’ have been advanced in the work of Bercherman and Lomborg who recommended, based on economic determinants alone, that mitigation measures should be abandoned in favour of adaptation methods such as relocating environmental refugees.\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, Posner and Weisbach have claimed that the best way to combat climate change is to exclude measures designed to redistribute wealth or address historical wrongs regarding climate change.\textsuperscript{72}

Another possibility however relies on a particular passage of \textit{The Law of Peoples} in which Rawls discusses the boundaries and institutions of private property. Here, Rawls stipulates that governments are “the representative and effective agent of a people as they take responsibility for their territory and its environmental integrity, as well as for the size of their population…” This he links to his Lockean understanding of property that “unless a definite agent is given responsibility for maintaining an asset and bears the loss for not doing so, that asset tends to deteriorate. In this case the asset is the people’s territory and its capacity to support them \textit{in perpetuity}; and the agent is the people themselves as politically organized.”\textsuperscript{73} This notion of the deterioration of assets mirrors the intentions of the Just Savings Principle in securing environmental stability for the future but the question is whether its assumed understanding of \textit{property} can include the global atmosphere? Aside from the problems of attaching a Lockean labour theory of value to the atmosphere,\textsuperscript{74} the connection is implausible because Rawls’s theory here refers specifically to the property within a territory of a people and not to the global commons. As argued by Vanderheiden, the issue is that “there is no natural ‘distribution’ of atmospheric space, so climate defies conventional theories of property by presenting a case of a pure public good that is fully international.”\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} See Eric A. Posner, David Weisbach, Climate Change Justice, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010. One way to overcome these one-sided approaches to the problem of climate change has been offered by the introduction of “numeraires” of Schneider and Lane that move beyond the simplistic, if conventional cost-benefit analysis, through the metrics of human lives lost, biodiversity loss, welfare impact, and quality of life. See Schneider, Lane, in W. Neil Adger, Jouni Paavola, Saleemul Huq, M.I. Mace (Eds.), \textit{Fairness in Adaptation to Climate Change}, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.
\textsuperscript{74} As argued by Leigh Raymond, Lockean allocations of the global atmosphere based on the notion of ‘prior use’ are scarce in debates on climate change. See Leigh Raymond, “Allocating the Global Commons: Theory and Practice”, in S. Vanderheiden (Ed.), \textit{Political Theory and Global Climate Change}, 16.
\textsuperscript{75} Vanderheiden, 103.
One could then turn to the ‘Principle of Assistance’ as a means by which peoples could be seen to have positive obligations those adversely affected by climate change, even though it suffers from the same limitations stated previously regarding a form of climate change justice based on ethical consequentialism (i.e. assistance would only be provided as an adaptive measure after climate change had adversely affected societies). More problematic however, is the effect of the hierarchical way in which Rawls has categorized societies of peoples in which liberal and decent peoples represent the highest ethical forms of community, with outlaw states and benevolent absolutisms at the lower end of the spectrum. In Rawls’s schema, only the former two groups are included Society of Peoples proper because of the criterion of well-orderedness – the same criteria by which Rawls reduces the obligation of assistance owed to those lower peoples. For those “people living under unfavourable conditions” assistance is provided only to the extent that of alleviating those things “that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime.” This duty is expressly purposed toward helping such societies become well-ordered (i.e. just and decent) rather than being concerned with their environmental protection – or any other form of social justice for that matter – and is therefore an insufficient principle to deal with the complex needs surrounding climate change. As Rawls’s express limitations placed on humanitarian aid reveal, assistance is not provided for promoting global equality but is solely intended for the maintenance of liberal institutions. As explained by Wenar, any “intervention is not for the sake of the well-being of the oppressed or the starving individuals in the other country. Rather, the intervener aims to bring the ‘outlaw’ or ‘burdened’ people up to the level of legitimacy, so that it can play its role in the society of peoples.”

Even if it is assumed that the theoretical extension of the Principle of Assistance could be made to include climate change as threatening the institutions of liberal and decent societies, even this would be of little help to those peoples in the lower tiers of Rawls’s hierarchy. Such peoples would still be unable to claim assistance from the Society of People’s in Rawls’s typology because they lacked the requisite level of orderliness before the impacts of climate change. Rejected from the Society of Peoples they would be unable to access the Principle of Assistance even for the means of reducing the impacts of climate change which, somewhat ironically, liberal and decent societies are largely responsible for in terms of their higher consumption and enjoyment of fossil fuels. The only possible way to employ the Principle of Assistance as an effective means to combat climate change would be to view global warming as threatening the maintenance of just institutions in well-ordered states which, because of the global nature of its causes, would require

---

76 The ‘Principle of Assistance’ refers to how liberal and decent societies are required to act in their foreign policy as part of The Society of Peoples. Amongst these requirements are the respect of the equality of other peoples, the observance of treaties, the observance of human rights, nonaggression except in self-defense, restrictions in the conduct of war, and the assistance of peoples that doe not live within a decent regime. This principle is later said to specifically refer ‘burdened societies defined as those that lack “the political and cultural traditions, the human capital and know-how, and, often, the material and technological resources needed to be well-ordered. See, John Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 37, 106.


assistance to be given to all types of peoples regardless of where they stand on the hierarchy of societies. Yet the number of sophisticated theoretical alterations to Rawls’s original premise required for such a move would render any connection tenuous – indeed, the position would become so detached that one could question the continued use of the Rawlsian framework at all.

Outside these two specific principles of Just Savings and Assistance, Rawlsians are compelled to stretch ethics in ways to fit the needs of climate justice. One such attempt has been to expand the Society of Peoples (Rawls’ ideal vision of a stable association of well-ordered peoples that both individually and collectively uphold The Law of Peoples). This argument is linked to the Principle of Assistance but only in a general sense, in that it does not refer to positive obligations per se but the fact that the Society of Peoples have a limited responsibility to help ‘burdened societies’ become able and willing to respect The Law of Peoples through assistance, sanction and intervention. For Huseby, the wish to “extend” the Society of Peoples may allow the Rawlsian framework to incorporate aspects of climate change justice because well-ordered liberal and decent societies are charged with taking collective steps to “secure a just and stable world” and “prevent it from avoidably and severely deteriorating.” Such an argument does have some credence in that Rawls has previously affirmed that an “all-inclusive” Society of Peoples is a long-term goal of his theory of justice, as is eradicating ‘great evils’ such as genocide, grave oppression and unjust war – of which climate change would find itself in similar company as a grave threat to humankind.

Such an argument could then be fortified by linking in with Rawls’s affirmation of universal human rights in circumstances where climate change threatens to obstruct the human rights of citizens. The benefit of this move is that it is less hampered by purely domestic considerations than other parts of Rawls’s work. Here, well-ordered liberal and decent societies have a duty to assist – and even intervene when human rights of peoples are being threatened – those ‘burdened societies’ that lack either the “political and cultural traditions” or the “material and technological resources” to be well-ordered. Caney has been a key voice in championing the link between human rights and climate change in this context, arguing that current consumption of fossil fuels undermines human rights because it generates outcomes in which peoples fundamental interests are unprotected, whether of fellow citizens, foreigners or those unborn, future generations. To the extent that climate change could be said to affect the basic human rights to water, food and

---

80 Rawls, 1999, 93, 106.
82 Rawls, 1999, 105-113, 126.
83 Rawls’s list of human rights however is somewhat limited. As he writes: “Among the human rights are the right to life (to the means of subsistence and security); to liberty (to freedom from slavery, serfdom, and forced occupation); and to a sufficient measure of liberty of conscience to ensure freedom of religion and thought; to property (personal property); and to formal equality expressed by the rules of natural justice (that is, that similar cases be treated similarly).” John Rawls, The Law of Peoples, 1999, 65.
85 Rawls, 1999, 106.
shelter, the Rawlsian argument could be posited as a syllogism: (i) well-ordered societies have a duty to uphold human rights and assist burdened societies unable to honour the human rights of its citizens, and (ii) as climate change may adversely affect the provision of basic human rights, therefore (iii) well-ordered states have a duty to protect against climate change.

Even though this approach would at best offer a justification for post-facto adaptive compensatory mechanisms to climate change, the more serious problem is Rawls’s anthropocentric derivation of human rights in which wider ecological problems are rendered meaningless. While the human cost of climate change could be addressed by this provision, to secure wider ecological protections (i.e. biodiversity) as a legitimate concern in its own right would need another justification entirely. Moreover, Rawls’s conception of human right seems to lack engagement with the political economy of climate change in any meaningful sense. As has been stated previously, the parties involved in constructing their foreign policies according to The Law of Peoples are liberal societies and decent peoples.\(^87\) This would seem to assume that mitigation efforts against climate change should be placed, justly, onto these liberal or decent societies merely because they are already at the level of well-orderedness necessary for the maintenance of human rights and not because of the fact that they are causally responsible for the majority of GHG emissions (assuming, of course, that Western industrialized nations actually fulfill Rawls’s definition of liberal or decent societies).\(^88\) Such moves continue to fail to adequately engage with the power constellations that generate these inequalities in the first place. Rawls’s theory of justice does engage with domestic socio-economic inequalities, yet it says little of the type of inequalities in global society, particularly regarding the link between the formation of just institutions and economic development. Even in his last reformulations, his only defence for why natural inequality was relevant only for domestic justice and not relevant when determining a nation’s opportunity to become well ordered, was a spurious re-statement of his original thesis – that what is “the crucial element in how a country fares is its political culture – its members’ political and civic virtues – and not the level of its resources...”\(^89\) However, as Vanderheiden, Przeworski et al and others have argued, the essential conditions for developing well-ordered liberal and decent societies are more likely to be found in wealthy states rather than poorer ones,\(^90\) and to de-link this from the environmental costs associated with such development leaves a key determinant of Rawls’s understanding of historical progress unaccounted for.

Global Climate Justice as a Struggle for Recognition?

\(^{87}\) Rawls, 1999, 62-64.

\(^{88}\) As stated by Athanasiou and Baer: “In 1990, the industrialised countries were responsible for 75 percent of all CO2 emissions, as well as 79 percent of the CO2 in the air and 88 percent of the human-caused warming...” Thomas Athanasiou, Paul Baer, Dead Heat: Global Justice and Global Warming, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002, 73-74.

\(^{89}\) Rawls, 1999, 116-117

\(^{90}\) This argument is actually logically conceded by Rawl’s in his move to the Principle of Assistance in which such liberal and decent societies are charged with this duty precisely because those peoples do not have the material and/or prerequisites to do so. See Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, José Antonio Chibeub, Fernando Limongi, Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 106
Climate change in its causes and effects is unavoidably an international issue. GHGs produced anywhere in the world have the same heat-trapping-effect regardless of origin and yet it is expected that the effect of global warming will fall most heavily on those least responsible for its causation.\textsuperscript{91} For Vanderheiden, if the UNFCCC’s mandate to avoid dangerous interference with the planet’s climatic system is to be successful requires international cooperation on abatement efforts in which all the world’s states and peoples see themselves as stakeholders and participants in a truly global endeavour. Yet he finds three challenges to this form of cosmopolitan climate justice; the doctrine of strong state-sovereignty, the various arguments of political realism and, interestingly, Rawls’s claim that his justice principles apply only to the internal affairs of states and cannot be extended between nations or the world’s peoples. While the first two objections can be readily countered they are nevertheless beyond the scope of this article to engage. Yet Vanderheiden’s recognition of the problems associated with Rawls’s express limitations of his theory of justice to the domestic sphere reveals an inherent weakness for those who have sought to rely on this framework for climate change justice, discussed above. For Rawls, the normative ideals of justice pertain only to communities with a common shared culture because justice is believed to require forms of solidarity and reciprocity found only amongst close interpersonal ties of citizenship or a ‘shared community of fate’. The result is a peculiar liberal communitarianism which denies the viability of cosmopolitan justice not only because of the lack of an existing institutional structure but because of the lack of a “shared identity” or “common ethos.”\textsuperscript{92} The assumption here is that a particular sense of community is necessary to see others as ‘recipients’ (and moral equals) of justice which a cosmopolitan framework of climate change justice would stretch too thin to bind people effectively. This is despite the widely agreed upon existence of embedded cosmopolitanism in the international system, though its reception is as yet “uneven”.\textsuperscript{93}

Amongst Rawlsian scholars, there have been various attempts to overcome this communitarian challenge. Pogge has attempted to raise Rawlsian principles to a “well-ordered world society” and to be more inclusive of the globally “least advantaged,”\textsuperscript{94} and O’Neill provides a useable connection between Rawls, cosmopolitan justice, and climate change. Yet whereas Pogge’s \textit{Realising Rawls} refuted both libertarian and communitarian critiques of Rawls, making an argument for the application of the principles of justice at the international level,\textsuperscript{95} it was O’Neill who added a dialogical element to a needs-based fairness model that looked to principles of action that could be universally adopted.\textsuperscript{96} In making this move, O’Neill was able to overcome Rawls’s boundedness to methodological nationalism by showing how obligations of justice (in both economic and social forms) inhere


17
beyond the borders of states. Moreover, she highlighted the very real limitations of communitarian assumptions in the conditions of contemporary (globalised) world politics through which justice is becoming increasingly transnationalised along with concerns over the just arrangements of global governance institutions.97

Yet in distinction to these approaches, Vanderheiden’s *Atmospheric Justice* turns to Andrew Hurrell’s “political prerequisites for a meaningful justice community” to overcome the communitarian trap and ascertain what it would take for humanity to see itself bound in a common justice community. What is interesting is not only that this list of ‘political prerequisites’ show that the nascent conception of universal human rights has forged shared moral and civil bonds across a common humanity (thus providing empirical evidence overriding communitarian assumptions of the necessity of close communities for binding justice claims),98 but that the list corresponds with the justice framework given in the recent work of Axel Honneth.99 As such, in this section I wanted to develop Vanderheiden’s otherwise highly useful conception not because it remains immersed within the Rawlsian framework, albeit critically, but because it does not countenance alternative conceptions of justice that offer significant advantages when talking about climate change justice. Here, I want to explore the alternative theory of justice offered by Axel Honneth which I argue offers an approach that is sufficiently connected to core Rawlsian principles to be understandable to those working in this tradition but which surpasses them in ways helpful for the development of a theory of global climate change justice. In this final part, I aim to demonstrate the connection between recognition theory and climate justice, and, how climate injustice constitutes a form of social pathology using what some have called Honneth’s “ethical reorientation” of Critical Theory100 as the analytic framework to deploy this alternative position.

Rawls’s principles of justice are amenable to the broad contours of Honneth’s approach. Not only does Honneth make such a claim openly101 but the ‘Leftist’ interpretations of Rawls *Theory of Justice* that emphasise the notions of equality of

---

98 Vanderheiden, 98-99. While this is partly explainable by Rawls’s connection with the contractarian tradition that is often said to preclude the extension of obligations and responsibilities beyond what the members of a political community would accept in their fictional social-contract, this does not seem *prima facie* evidence for believing such members could not extend their hypothetical endorsement to include global considerations of climate change. Despite the massive inroads of universal human rights, Vanderheiden shows how Rawls resisted any calls to internationalise his theory and treat national origin as morally irrelevant and thus broaden his liberal egalitarianism into a cosmopolitan theory of justice.
99 The ‘political prerequisites’ include; equality of status and respect, commitments to reciprocity, autonomous decision-making based on reasons/information, uncoerced willingness to participate, where all (even the most disadvantaged) have a stake in the system, institutional processes by which all (even the most disadvantaged) can make their voice heard. See Andrew Hurrell, “Global Inequality and International Institutions”, in *Global Justice* (T.W. Pogge Ed.), Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, 32-54, 42.
opportunity, the just distribution of goods, and the ‘fair’ possibilities to participate in the democratic political processes, can all be seen as fundamental conditions of Honneth’s concept of mutual recognition. Here the radical implications of Rawls’s ‘liberty principle’ which maintains that the structure of society should provide each member with their basic liberties (i.e. freedom of thought, expression and due process etc) could be seen to reflect Honneth’s concern regarding the social conditions necessary for successful identity formation. For Honneth, individual identity formation takes place through “internalising” socially standardised recognition responses in which persons are gradually assured of their capabilities and needs by the “supportive reactions” of their interactive partners. This conception of recognition holds that a subject’s self-understanding develops through recognition and affirmation of, and by, other subjects, which in turn presupposes recognising these subjects as equals. Here, “[a]ll subjectivity is ‘constitutively’ related to reciprocal intersubjectivity.” That is, every human subject is dependent on a context of social interaction governed by principles of recognition, the disappearance or obstruction of which, results in experiences of disrespect that has “damaging consequences” for the identity-formation of individuals. This intermeshing of recognition and socialisation gives rise to a concept of society in which integration is seen as a process of inclusion through stable forms of recognition. Societies are therefore only legitimate to the extent that they guarantee “reliable” relations and processes of mutual recognition on three levels necessary for positive relations to self; love, rights and solidarity, which, taken together, form the conditions not only of an ideal society but the basis of Honneth’s concept of justice.

Based on the work of Mead, Piaget and Winnicott amongst others, these three forms of social recognition are regarded by Honneth as the “communicative presuppositions” for the successful formation of identity – emotional concerns in intimate relations such as love or friendship, rights-based recognition as a morally accountable member of society, and social the esteem of individual achievement and abilities. Yet these identities of self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem are not

106 Love and friendship facilitates the development of the basic or fundamental relation-to-self or ‘basic self-confidence’ in which trust in the expression of one’s needs and desires without fear of abandonment. Self-respect, rather than being focused on ones opinion of themselves, concerns the ‘universal dignity’ of the person – the respect of one’s status as an agent capable of acting as the autonomous author of moral choices. Here rights and the recognition of possessing capacities of a ‘legal person’ are crucial, though the specific content of the universal capacities and the procedures by which politico-moral issues are resolved shifts over time. This is not a purely procedurist move but a “minimally substantive” conception of justice that can determine the “conditions under which participants in practical discourse can be said to have acquired the practical relations-to-self necessary for engaging fully in collective or personal self-determination.” Every subject of the law is also its author. Solidarity refers to “the cultural climate in which the acquisition of self-esteem has become broadly possible”, and where no member is denied the opportunity to earn the ‘esteem’ for their contribution of the common good. Joel Anderson, “Translator’s Introduction”, in Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*, (J. Anderson Trans.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, xiii, xiv-xvi, xvii.
emotional states or beliefs about oneself but result from the dynamic processes by which a person experiences themselves as possessing a certain status; an “object of concern”, a “responsible agent”, a “valued contributor,” respectively. For Pinkard, recognition is more than a set of social and psychological conditions that can “facilitate” the successful formation of identity and autonomy, “it is a condition that constitutes agency itself…” It is the three clusters of necessary intersubjective conditions for successful identity-formation (love, rights and solidarity) that provides the basis for Honneth’s conception of ethical life and his theory of justice which he defines as the “normative ideal of a society in which patterns of recognition would allow individuals to acquire the self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem necessary for the full development of their identities”. For the individual, the possibility of realising their autonomy is dependent on being able to develop an “intact self-relation through the experience of social recognition.” As Honneth believes individuals owe the “possibility” of an intact identity to successful forms of love, legal equality and social esteem he places – “in the name of individual autonomy” – these three recognition principles as the “normative core” of his conception of social justice. For Honneth a theory of justice must of necessity encompass these three principles of recognition because for individuals to realise their autonomy they must be recognised in their neediness, their legal equality, and their social contribution.

Consequently, ethics and social justice are for Honneth tailored to the “quality” of the relations of recognition within a society. That is, “[t]he justice or well-being of a society is proportionate to its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition under which personal identity-formation [or individual self-realisation], can proceed adequately.” The fact that human-beings rely on “stable expectations” of social recognition opens up the ethical justification for dismantling social asymmetries and exclusions that obstruct or distort conditions of mutual recognition.


Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange, 180-181.

Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange, 181-182.

Honneth’s theory of justice then proceeds from the “plurality: of the three equally important principles of social justice that arse because modern subjects are assumed to depend for their successful identity-formation on the three forms of social recognition; love, equal legal treatment, social esteem. For him, the argument that decisively justifies this is that for the individual, the possibility of realising their autonomy is dependent on being able to develop an “intact self-relation through the experience of social recognition.” Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange, 180-181.
Within this dialectic, there is an open-ended, non-deterministic possibility for moral progress to the extent that the demands for social recognition possess what Honneth calls a ‘surplus of validity’ which may bring about “an increase in the quality of social integration.” This involves a process of individualisation (the increase of opportunities to legitimately articulate parts of one’s personality) and also a process of social inclusion (expanding the inclusion of subjects into full membership of society). These axes form the possibilities for increasing social recognition by which the actual “moral quality” of social integration can improve through an “increase in either the ‘recognised’ parts of one’s personality or by expanding those included within the recognition framework.”

How this surplus validity enhances recognition patterns need not concern us here, what is of importance however, is that the three recognition principles of love, equality, and esteem, determine the contours of an alternate framework of social justice to that of Rawls that is of considerable use in discussions pertaining to climate change justice. The thrust of Honneth’s argument is that political ethics and social morality should be oriented by the principles that govern the legitimate expectations of recognition among members of society. Justice is no longer about an abstract notion of ‘fairness’, something vulnerable to colonisation by liberal ideology, but with the conditions of human freedom. What is considered socially ‘just’ is that measured by its responsiveness to each sphere of recognition; need, legal equality, and the merit or esteem principle. Honneth sees that the “ethical core” of social philosophy is now dependent on “the possibility of giving a convincing justification of our ethical judgments concerning the necessary requirements of a good and well-lived human life.”

Honneth admits that Rawls’s notion of ‘justice as fairness’ offers one of the most influential accounts of proceduralism – that normative judgments about cooperation must be located in deliberative contexts under conditions of impartiality (i.e. the ‘veil of ignorance’). Yet because Rawlsian subjects are assumed utilitarian-instrumental actors, questions of human intersubjectivity disappear completely from view in this framework so that it is difficult to explain why they would be motivated to abide by principles agreed to in the ‘original position’ because subjects must have some understanding of their intersubjective vulnerability to make any notion of justice sensical to them. As explained by Anderson and Honneth, as liberal justice is about “protecting individuals” where they are most vulnerable regarding the exercise of their autonomy, then those in the ‘original position’ must understand the recognition needs to be met in a any future society if individual autonomy is to be “protected and enabled” adequately. Rawls attempts to offset this problem by arguing that issues of human vulnerabilities can be sufficiently addressed at the legislative level and thus should not be made an empirical consideration in the ‘original position’. The problem for Anderson and Honneth however, is that “the autonomy-related capacities” of

---


114 Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, 173-175.

115 Yet at the same time, Honneth admits that even recognition theory, understood as a teleological conception of social justice, has the status only of a “hypothetically generalised outline of the good life” informed by existing (imperfect) knowledge that seems to determine the types of mutual recognition that subjects “need in order to develop the most intact possible identities.” Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, 185, 179-180.

subjects are vulnerable to injustice before such acts of legislative deliberation. Consequently, vulnerability must be accommodated in the notion of ‘justice as fairness’ because the basic structures needed to protect a person’s moral powers to “form a conception of a worthwhile life-plan” necessitates the securing of “primary goods” (i.e. “the requisite powers of moral personality and the other capacities that enable persons to be normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life”). While Honneth suggests that Rawls does have the resources for accommodating these conditions it nevertheless requires a “significant revision” of Rawls’s model to include the relevance of recognitional conditions and infrastructure on the autonomy of individuals and vulnerabilities of that autonomy. For Anderson and Honneth, this would unavoidably lead to the introduction in discussions of justice of the capacities for “autonomy-sustaining relations-to-self” and the conditions for their acquisition. Consequently, the “intersubjectivity” of Honneth’s recognitional approach requires a reconceptualisation of justice toward “a normative theory of the recognitional basic structure of a society” and securing the social conditions for mutual recognition, or what Honneth calls “supportive recognitional infrastructure.”

This fundamental difference between Rawls and Honneth centres on the debate between equally-distributed rights as a standard of justice and the idea of socially-binding value orientations. As posited by Honneth when following the Sandel and Rawls debate, Rawls’s theory of justice presupposes an atomistic conception of the subject that prevented him from recognising the necessary priority of “commonly-shared values, over the dimension of ‘rights’. Yet we are “radically situated” within the horizon of specific notions of value and intersubjective relations as Sandel makes clear, so that with processes of cultural socialisation the notion of an independent, isolated subject or “solipsistic, pre-societal being” is untenable. For Honneth, this implies that Rawls’s liberal model will “inevitably run into difficulties” when it begins to take into account the conditions – not merely the material but the specific ethical values of social community as well – that are necessary for the realisation of self-determination. Yet the dilemma suffered by both liberals and communitarians is that they no longer have any “supra-contextual criterion with which to distinguish justifiably between morally acceptable and morally objectionable concepts of the collective good”, favouring contextualist principles of morality.

---

120 It should be noted that Rawls later counters by showing that for the individual ‘search for the good’ requires “that the social collective protect certain basic rights and a basic standard of living”. In “Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical” Rawls emphasises that the concept of justice is context specific, beginning in he tradition of Western democracies. Here he the idea of contractual agreement as a normative procedure is founded in the collectively shared value-convictions of Western democracies, which embodies a compromise with Communitarianism.. Axel Honneth, “The Limits of Liberalism: On the Political-Ethical Discussion Concerning Comunitarianism,” 235, 238 citing John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical”, Philosophy and Public Affairs, 14, 1985, 223ff.
anchored in Western democracy and abstaining from universalist foundations. For Honneth, the only way out of this “theoretical cul-de-sac” is to adopt a “formal model of ethical life” that could include as acceptable “all those collective notions of the good life” that are “sufficiently reflexive and pluralistic as not to violate the principle of the individual autonomy of each and every subject.”

On this fundamental basis, Honneth offers a clear alternative to those theories of justice that take as their starting point a generally valid procedure from which to derive a justification of norms of which Rawls provides an exemplary example. Honneth offers something that is both different, and more, than the narrow focus of left-Rawlsianism on the normative principles underlying political structures. From within the Left Hegelian tradition to which Honneth openly identifies, because freedom is defined as ‘being with oneself in the other’ the justice of society is “measured” by its “ability to guarantee for all their members equally the conditions of such a communicative experience and thus enable every individual to participate in condition of undistorted interaction.” While Rawls, like Honneth, views self-respect as a basic condition for the good life, he does not see that a commitment to protecting individuals from threats to their autonomy entails a concomitant commitment to securing the rights necessary to actualise such freedom. Guaranteeing rights does not ensure autonomy directly but supports the formation of such autonomy through self-respect which, for Honneth, necessitates a radical rethinking of even the most sophisticated liberal position advanced by Rawls. That is, Honneth agrees with part of Rawls’s thought but suggests it is not sufficient in contrast with his own plural concept of justice. As Honneth writes, there is no way of avoiding substantialising “a little bit” what Rawls means by the ‘good life’ but this substantialisation should be “formal” (or “thin”) enough so that they are in agreement with reasonable pluralism. Yet in Rawls, Honneth finds a pre-understanding of the what the good life “incorporates” as to be something quite individualistic. In distinction, Honneth’s ethical idea involves intersubjective determinations in which subjects are

“...presumed to have an interest in the freedom of the others from whom they expect social recognition. In contrast to Rawls, the idea of the good on which a recognition-theoretical conception of justice is based is tailored from the start to the intersubjective character of human relations. For it assumes that the subjects for whose sake just social relations are to be established are aware that their autonomy depends on the autonomy of their partners in interaction”¹³⁰

The balance then requires a derivation of a concept of the good life that is both formal enough and not too substantive to violate the requirements of pluralism.¹³¹

For Honneth, the preconditions of personal identity formation must inform the theory of ethical life and express the conditions that are “indispensable” to giving every individual an “equal chance to realise his or her personality” – and he argues that even Rawls places this assumption on his list of ‘basic goods’.¹³² As such, both thinkers tie their justification of social justice to an ethical theory that defines the “preconditions” that must be available for individual subjects to realise autonomy. Yet whereas for one social preconditions of freedom are fundamental, for the other they are downplayed. That is, for Honneth, successful personal identity-formation and effective self-realisation are dependent on relations of mutual recognition, which becomes the theoretical link between his idea of social justice and conception of the ‘good’.¹³³ Honneth is therefore less concerned with formalistic and procedural deontological principles of justice than with articulating the general social conditions necessary for all individual freedom. In distinction, Rawls’s trans-historical notion of ‘justice as fairness’ represents one of the most analytically elaborate examples of the neo-Kantian approach to justice that has, as we have seen in the first part, been utilised by a number of theorists involved in global climate justice debates. What Honneth offers is the Hegelian critique of such an approach by reinstating the importance of the ‘ethical’ against purely (formal) ‘moral’ criteria.¹³⁴ Honneth is concerned not only with the moral autonomy of human beings but the necessary conditions for their self-realisation in which the “concept of the good” is not “conceived as the expression of substantive values that constitute the ethos of a concrete tradition-based community [but rather] with the structural elements of ethical life.”¹³⁵ In this context, struggles for recognition are seen as (potential) refinements or

¹³¹ Honneth argues against what he called the “ideology today” that believes the Rawlsian conception offers the only concept of the good life that accords which value pluralism. What Honneth is “striving” for is a “more demanding concept of the good life which is still in accordance with pluralism”. And he finds that many in fact assert a concept of the good life (citing Fraser’s concept of participation that constitutes a “thick” concept of the good life). See Axel Honneth (interview with Gwynn Markle), “From Struggles for Recognition to a Plural Concept of Justice: An Interview with Axel Honneth”, Acta Sociologica, Recognition, Redistribution, and Justice, 2004, 47(4), 389.
¹³⁵ Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, 172-173.
progressive movements toward the ‘good life’ and Honneth proposes a moral theory premised on the historically progressive expansion of attitudes of recognition born out of the practical struggles of groups and subjects— an expansion of recognition claims that could, arguably, be made to include claims for environmental rights as a primary necessity for identity formation. This is made possible because the ‘surplus validity’ of each sphere of recognition can be measured against the “facticity” of its social interpretation. That is, against the dominant, accepted and existing form of interpretation, hitherto neglected facts or needs are raised whose moral consideration requires an expansion of the spheres of recognition to accommodate them successfully. As Honneth has argued, “By invoking an overarching principle of recognition, one brings a new, previously neglected special value into play whose consideration compels us to enlarge our evaluative horizon of awareness and thereby intensify or enlarge recognition.”

The remaining questions are then twofold; can this recognition-theoretical conception of justice be raised to the international level, or does it pertain only to internal processes within smaller communities in which set patterns of recognition are established, accepted and normalised? Secondly, how can this moral framework be expanded to include the notion of ‘environmental rights’ (and climate change justice) as being a necessary condition for successful identity formation?

Because of the implicit universalism of recognition theory regarding the centrality of identity formation for the autonomy of all human subjects, it is curious that Honneth has not yet explored the international or cosmopolitan forms of struggles for recognition. This has led Deranty and Renault to assert that Honneth’s theory reduces recognition to a “single interaction between me and you”, eschewing larger interactive forms. Yet for some, while the sociological and psychological basis of Honneth’s recognition theoretic is premised at the individual level, the interstate system can be interpreted using this framework because of the influence of the struggle for recognition on the identity formation of states. This move has already been reflected in the work of Ringmar and Greenhill for example, who have noted the parallel between state-to-state recognition processes and that between individual interaction partners. As argued by Ringmar, the desire of states to have a particular type of identity recognised provides a more compelling explanation of state behaviour and identity formation than a mere focus on material factors. Though this raises the

---

danger of conflating the recognition of states with that of individuals, it is a view shared with the assessment of Haacke who has examined how Honneth’s identification of the three related forms of recognition is transferable to IR in terms of the territorial and cultural integrity of states as approximate equivalents. Wendt, focusing on a more Hegelian concept of recognition which he uses to advance the lofty claim for the inevitability of a world state argues that the process of recognition between individuals can continue through the interactions of states. This view offers an advance on the former conceptions of recognition in IR theory because it does not merely suggest the ‘levelling-up’ of recognition from individuals to states (though this, in the end, is what Wendt posits) but allows for a social-relational account of recognition in world politics between human-beings rather than deferring to the state as the only actor in cosmopolitan processes of recognition.

In this manner, Heins has offered a method to extend recognition theory into IR that is of considerable use when discussing environmental rights and global climate change justice. His aim has been to overcome the limitations of Honneth’s work regarding how it has continued to overlook the global nature of many contemporary justice claims and outlines the “transnational extensions” of the recognition principles of love, rights and solidarity. Heins identifies the problem in Honneth as emanating from his exclusive focus on the domestic conditions of highly developed societies and his “scant curiosity” regarding the problems of a global moral order that is “mirrored” in the “absence of any reference to the dimension of recognition in theories of international distributive justice”. The problem is that the institutional patterns of late modern capitalism that Honneth focuses on would seem to only apply to Western-liberal states so that if we attempt to broaden the scope of recognition theory to global struggles such as climate change the existence of “agreed-upon” principles of recognition taken from within a domestic context can no longer be taken for granted. While Heins does not tackle this problem directly, his approach of expanding recognition claims transnationally is made on the basis of not “signing on to a substantivist picture of these collectives [i.e. states or peoples in the

---

142 Lindemann and Ringmar posit that the model of identity formation of the individual and recognition is applicable in IR as between relations of states. While they acknowledge that states, of course, are not humans, they rely on the historical manner in which states have been described often in terms of the ‘body’ through which the subjectivity of the state was initially established. While they note such metaphysical language is the only outward sign of such subjectivity, this still seems to dangerously conflate the two realms of recognition of states and individuals. However, when Lindemann and Ringmar turn to diplomacy and the recognition of sovereign statehood however, the case for mutual recognition becomes more sensical in that official acknowledgement and exchange seems to offer incontrovertible links between the individual and state relations. Here sovereign equality of states endows all with the same rights including territorial integrity, independence and so on. Eric Ringmar, “The International Politics of Recognition”, in T. Lindemann, E. Ringmar (Eds.), The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations, Paradigm, 2010, forthcoming, 5-12.


144 See


146 I have made similar arguments in “Hegel’s Gesture to Radical Cosmopolitanism” and “Towards a Social-Relational Dialectic for World Politics”.

Rawlsian sense], and without overstretching the analogy between domestic and international struggles”.

For Heins, Honneth provides little in the way of how we can analyse transnational conflicts over rights, resources and even climate change. The question is whether moral progress can be evaluated through struggles within global society that largely takes place within international institutions that are beyond the scope of Honneth’s research focus. As argued by Heins, Honneth only refers to claims that constitute the normative framework in already institutionalised principles of recognition within liberal democracy (i.e. rights, live and solidarity), here citizens can expect and demand certain forms of recognition within an “institutionalised recognition order”, something lacking or under-developed in world politics. Yet, in distinction to Heins, I would posit that this does not deny the possibility of examining recognition patterns in world patterns including, and beyond, liberal societies even though they are “weak institutional forms.” Legal recognition may provide some evidence to support this claim as the expanding international human rights regime, while routinely unenforced, nevertheless creates a moral vocabulary in which claims of recognition in the international sphere are recognisable. Human rights, in this sense, offers a shared legal framework to express the equality principle between all human-beings – and this is something that Honneth has noted regarding the global extension of law-based forms of mutual recognition. Human rights offers a shared value horizon regarding human dignity, thus linking in with solidarity and the merit principle. I would argue the expansion of these global social relations within global civil society indicates that an exclusive reliance on domestic life does not exhaust forms of recognition struggles in world politics. Yet, as argued by Heins, this means extending or internationalising recognition theory by applying it to different segments of social reality and broadening some of its key methodological assumptions.

The correctness of Heins’s basic approach can be confirmed in those passages where Honneth indicates how principles of recognition, like self-esteem, can be extended into other areas. For example, Honneth states that any social-environment

---


153 Honneth also hints at this possibility regarding the condition for developing self-worth and self-esteem that could be impaired through denigration that “renders a person less able to be self-determining with regard to his or her projects”. While Honneth clearly has in mind acts of humiliation and shaming as the active hindering of a persons self-determination, such obstruction is also done by wrecking this is equally done by wrecking their environment. See Joel Anderson, Axel Honneth,
that is hostile to what an individual considers meaningful is demoralizing and therefore that a form of social justice committed to protecting the autonomy of individuals must protect against such threats of denigration, from wherever they emerge.\textsuperscript{154} This opens up the possibility for conceptions of environmental rights to be included in our understanding of the necessary conditions for individual autonomy because of the link between overcoming the denigration of forms of life along cultural, ethnic, gendered lines that have already been documented as crucial to successful processes of recognition in the work of Piaget and Mead. Alternatively, we may look at the social-relations between real human-beings across state-borders as another facet of intersubjective interaction that forms a necessary part of the recognition process just as like that of primary care and love in the family circle, or the moral equality of being in legal rights. While Honneth has commented little on this possibility, I would argue that such a cosmopolitan form of recognition is feasible and is something that Honneth should engage in to develop his recognition theoretic above his current sociological analysis that is unduly bounded by the state and domestic forms of recognition.\textsuperscript{155} Such an argument could then resonate with the 1992 UNFCCC that declared anthropogenic climate change a “common concern of mankind”\textsuperscript{156} thus effectively linking cosmopolitan justice with climate change. However, as this latter option would require far more analytical development of the links between Honneth and climate justice than possible here, I will pursue the argument for climate stability as an environmental right that is fundamental for successful identity-formation.

So how can environmental rights be conceptualised under a recognition-theoretical conception of justice? The answer relies on the fundamentality of environment to human-life. As a stable environment constitutes a vital human need, any conception of justice concerned with the conditions of individual freedom as Honneth’s, must consider it a necessary component. As the conditions for individual self-realisation are only secured when subjects can experience intersubjective recognition of their personal autonomy, specific needs, and particular capacities,\textsuperscript{157} the question of the necessary environmental conditions for such recognitive processes becomes an \textit{a priori} requirement for their successful fulfilment. Here struggles for environmental protections can fall under any of the three spheres of recognition; stability in relations of self-love, as a form of right owed equally to all, and as a necessary precondition for the effective articulation of one’s abilities. As Honneth has argued, individual autonomy can be guaranteed only through a “multiplicity of forms of recognition, whose particularities vary according to the respective layer of personality to be affirmed” rather than the being some single, elementary form of recognition.\textsuperscript{158} This raises the possibility of elaborating on the normative content of

\textsuperscript{155}I have made similar arguments in “Towards a Social-Relational Dialectic for IR”, and “Hegel’s Gesture to Radical Cosmopolitanism”,
\textsuperscript{156}UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992).
the features that are ‘desirable’ or that maybe ‘legitimately expected’ in intersubjective relations.\textsuperscript{159} Here a broad interpretation of what Honneth refers to as the importance of the “social environment” becomes evident as to include a vast array of conditions for autonomously leading one’s own life, dependent as they are on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition (which include legally institutionalized relations of equality and respect, relations of trust and networks of solidarity with members of a community).\textsuperscript{160}

Aside from viewing environmental stability as a positive component of recognition, anthropogenetic global climate change can also be seen negatively as an acute form of global social pathology. For Honneth, pathology denotes the diagnosis of a social anomaly or distortion that obstructs the formation of, or conditions for, a successful human life\textsuperscript{161} – and for this reason is seen as the negative spectrum of his recognition theoretic. Honneth argues for the need to extend the concept of “negativity” from offences against social justice to the violations of the conditions for a successful life and the diagnosis of social developments that can be understood as preventing the members of a society from living a ‘good life.’\textsuperscript{162} This requires criteria of an ethical nature to adequately reflect on the conditions necessary for successful social life and Honneth is able to locate this vocabulary in the notion of ‘pathology,’ shared by other members of the Frankfurt School, which presuppose an “intact” state of social-relations in which “all members are provided an opportunity for successful self-actualisation”. Here it is assumed that the cause of the negative state of society relates to a deficit in social rationality.\textsuperscript{163} Within Critical Theory “all claim that it is a lack of social rationality that causes the pathology of capitalist society”, as explained by Honneth:

“The members of society must agree that leading a successful, undistorted life together is only possible if they all orient themselves according to principles or institutions that they can understand as rational ends for self-actualisation. Any deviation from the ideal outlined here must lead to a social pathology insofar as subjects are recognisably suffering from a loss of universal, communal ends”.\textsuperscript{164}


\textsuperscript{161} Examples can be seen in Weber’s process of rationalisation, Habermas’ colonisation of the life-world but which Honneth suggests such rationalist notions of pathology ought be replaced with pathologies of recognition. Axel Honneth (Ed.), Pathologies des Sozialen: Die Aufgaben der Sozialphilosophie, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, 49-51.


Deviations from this ideal, for Honneth, must be accompanied by a “regrettable loss of prospects for intersubjective self-actualisation”.\(^{165}\) For Foster, this is a significant development as it retains the substantive social critique of the earlier members of the Critical tradition in the investigation of ‘social contradictions’.\(^{166}\) Moreover, as argued by Roberts, it allows Honneth to link combating social pathologies of a social and political nature whether they are situated in global centres or peripheries\(^{167}\) — a key benefit when examining climate change and something that overcomes the problematic liberal framework of Rawls that diverts attention from the domination rooted in economic and political structures, both domestically and internationally.\(^{168}\) This leads to the possibility of describing what Honneth calls the “culturally independent conditions” that would allow subjects to “experience undistorted self-realisation”\(^{169}\) by which a society is considered “successful, ideal or ‘healthy’ if they allow individuals undistorted self-realisation.”\(^{170}\) The difference then between the diverse standards of evaluation between theorists, such as that between Rawls and Honneth is explainable not by reference to differences in formal-ethical perspectives, but the respective foundational concept of self-realisation that underlies their approaches.\(^{171}\)

The various inter-governmental forums focused on climate change (Rio (1992), Kyoto (1997) and Copenhagen (2010) in particular) provide empirical support for the link between climate change and recognition theory. The development crisis that lies at the heart of the climate policy impasse at the international level not only creates divergent interests but erodes the likelihood of reciprocity. Roberts and Parks have shown that it is the fact that core, industrially advanced states have the highest per capita levels of greenhouse gas emissions and the periphery the lowest emissions but the highest incidence of climate change related catastrophes that is largely responsible for the mistrust – misrecognition – between nations at the international level.\(^{172}\) As the core is seen to ‘owe’ the periphery an ecological debt for environmental damage that continues to go unrecognised by the former, it is this ‘ecologically unequal exchange’ between developed and developing that is the


\(^{172}\) The colonial legacy of the positioning of states in the international economy increases climate risk which they demonstrate through a dataset of 4000 extreme weather events which reveal that it is the poor and rural peoples, mostly from within developing states, that suffer most from climate change disaster between 10 to 1000 more times that wealthier states. See Timmons J. Roberts, Bradley C. Parks, A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, 229.
principle cause of distrust and the major fault-line in climate change debate at the international level.\textsuperscript{173} Yet while the \textit{contribution} to climate change and the \textit{responsibility} for climate change are two fundamentally different things,\textsuperscript{174} global material inequalities translate into forms of distorted recognition in which the fundamental equality of peoples is obstructed or deformed. These contrasting responsibilities, contributions, and effects of climate change are what generates the distrust between states involved in reaching agreement on global climate change policy. As argued by O’Hara, inequality has engendered “non-cooperation as those with the most power eschew responsibility and those with the greatest extreme events have little bargaining power…”\textsuperscript{175} – a sentiment echoed in Honneth’s account of moral injustice that arises whenever human subjects are denied the recognition they “feel they deserve”, what he refers to as “feelings of social disrespect.”\textsuperscript{176}

As such social recognition appears initially only in negative form, the experience of humiliation and disrespect through “withheld” types of recognition. “Disrespect” thus constitutes the “systematic key” to comprehending patterns of social recognition that generates justified demands on the way “subjects treat each other.”\textsuperscript{177} That is, the moral experiences of those who have had their identity claims disrespected forms the pre-theoretical resource of struggles for recognition even though there is inherent ambivalence to the political consequences of such disrespect that Honneth openly admits. Disrespect “lacks any normative indication or direction that would stipulate in what ways one should struggle against the experience of disrespect and humiliation.”\textsuperscript{178} So while feelings of moral indignation “contain within themselves the potential for an idealising anticipation of the conditions for successful, undistorted recognition” the “admitted weakness” in this “practical pillar” of moralität is that emotional reactions do not necessarily disclose the injustice, its causes or possibilities of its sublation. For the experience of disrespect to become a “source of motivation for acts of political resistance”, requires a social movement through which it can be articulated and thus manifest itself in “positive forms.” At this point only, disrespect becomes an empirical interest that can be analysed by historical and sociological studies capable of showing that moral progress is in fact born of such

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{174} Müller, Höhne, Ellermann have offered a method for calculating shares of responsibility as opposed to shares in causal contribution. See Benito Müller, Niklas Höhne, Christian Ellermann, “Differentiating (historic) responsibilities for climate change”, \textit{Climate Policy}, Vol. 9, 2009, 593-611.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} Phillip Anthony O’Hara, “Political economy of climate change, ecological destruction and uneven development”, \textit{Ecological Economics}, 69(2), 2009, 230.
  \item \textsuperscript{178} Yet at the same time, Honneth is aware of the “extremely ambivalent” nature of the political consequences of the experience of social disrespect. As he writes, “social esteem can just as well be sought in small militaristic groups, whose code of honour is dominated by the practice of violence, as it can in the public arenas of a democratic society”. Axel Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today,” in \textit{Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory}, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, 77. Consciousness of social repression and social injustice is not the same as the perception of unsolved problems in the social system.” Axel Honneth, Hans Joas, \textit{Social Action and Human Nature}, (R. Meyer Trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 166.
\end{itemize}
struggle for recognition.\textsuperscript{179} The question then becomes the relatively simple one of determining within the discourse of relevant actors regarding climate change justice whether the moral vocabulary confirm these features of Honneth’s recognition theoretic – something that is \textit{prima facie} evidenced in the language of international debates that are replete with concerns of fairness and respect, intergenerational justice and the fundamental equality of peoples.\textsuperscript{180}

What can count as legitimate demands in such struggles for recognition concerned with environmental rights emerges from the possible consequences of its implementation and whether this results in a “gain” for individuality and/or inclusion.\textsuperscript{181} Arguably, climate justice satisfies both conditions for it is about expanding what is considered necessary for human freedom as a vital human need (sphere 1) and also concerned with expanding those included as requiring environmental protection and stability as a vital human need (sphere 2).\textsuperscript{182} The method by which Honneth has shown the increased value accorded to female housework overtime as a justified demand for “new accentuations of social recognition” provides an example that could be used for climate change justice and environmental movements.\textsuperscript{183} Here Honneth spells out the conditions necessary for recognition to be conferred in which recognition is viewed as a “suitable rational, moral response to the valuable qualities of human beings” and something that is not merely symbolic but which gives “real expression” to the promise of recognition.\textsuperscript{184} Such a movements “generate a subcultural horizon of interpretation” within which experiences of disrespect previously coped with only privately now become the “moral motives” for collective struggles for recognition.\textsuperscript{185}

Here Page’s reference to ‘capability theories’ like Nussbaum that have modified the Rawlsian approach by envisioning equality as actively fostering basic capabilities offers support to ethical theories regarding intergenerational justice and the environment. These capabilities refer to the preservation of the environment for future generations to retain the “substantive freedom to be healthy, well fed, and well clothed.”\textsuperscript{186} The link here with the necessary material and ethical conditions of freedom bridge the Honnethian understanding of justice with the Rawlsian so that a dialogue can open as to the proper boundary fields of climate justice. By this development, the debate is no longer one of mere formal principle but engages with

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In particular see Article 3.1, \textit{United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change} (1992).
\item As Honneth writes: “For only demands that potentially contribute to the expansion of social relations of recognition can be considered normatively grounded, since they point in the direction of a rise in the moral level of social integration”. Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, \textit{Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange}, 186-187.
\item Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser”, in Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, \textit{Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange}, 187.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the question of the global conditions necessary for human existence and flourishment. This is reflected in one of Honneth’s few writings expressly dealing with Kantian IR theory which he believes to be prescient regarding the “globalisation of moral responsibility”. Here Honneth presupposes the recognition of an “international responsibility” that cannot be apportioned to geographical proximity for persons suffering from life-threatening situations (such as global climate change), a process of “moralising international relations” that he finds is most likely to be “historically irreversible”. Yet elsewhere, he is ambivalent as to the direction of this emancipatory recognition processes in social struggle:

“whether these substantive values point in the direction of a political republicanism, an ecologically based asceticism, or a collective existentialism, whether the presuppose changes in socio-economic circumstances or are compatible with the conditions of a capitalist society – this is no longer a matter for theory but rather for the future of social struggles”.

**Conclusion**

It has been said that “[o]ften ontology is the key to understanding why a particular model has been chosen as the basis for a generalised account of social justice”, and this paper is no exception. Accepting, as its starting point, the conditions necessary for human freedom defined individual self-realisation, in and through others, the ontological parameters of justice are taken to be focused on the social relations and social conditions necessary for the successful formation of individual identity. In the first part, it was seen that any Rawlsian inspired framework can be of little assistance with developing an effective theory of climate change justice because it does not provide an action-guiding framework from which a global response to climate change could be based. The agents in Rawls’s world are peoples who are charged only with securing the just institutions for their future generations, they have no duty to the global commons, and only a minimally construed obligation of assistance to fellow decent peoples, both of which are insufficient principles from which to develop an effective theory of climate change justice. As such, in the second part, we turned to the alternative theory of justice advanced in the work of Axel Honneth which offered a theory amenable to, but far surpassing, the Rawlsian framework. Here it was shown how environmental stability forms a precondition for successful identity formation and therefore a fundamental aspect of recognition theory, albeit one that Honneth has inadequately reflected on. Global climate change represents both an example of misrecognition processes in the international sphere, a form of global social pathology and also a legitimate ground for the expansion of mutual recognition to include environmental rights and global climate change justice within world politics. However, the danger of this argument is that it may be guilty of the same infractions regarding ‘over-extension’ that was charged at those Rawlsian

---


