

The Ethics of Climate Change

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1. A moral problem

The question of what to do about climate change is fundamentally a moral one. Who is responsible for the problem? Who will be most harmed by climate change? What are our obligations to future generations? Who should fix the problem—those who are doing the polluting, those who did it in the past, those who can afford to, or everyone? Arguably, the failure of the world to respond to the threat posed by global warming mostly reflects an inability to resolve these ethical questions, a kind of moral confusion.

In characterising climate change as a perfect moral storm, ethicist Stephen Gardiner argues that the way forward is so difficult in part, because we “do not yet have a good understanding of many of the ethical issues at stake in global-warming policy”.¹ We remain confused about vital factors like scientific uncertainty, intergenerational equity and how to treat nonhuman animals, and this

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¹ Stephen Gardiner, Is “Arming the Future” with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?, in Stephen Gardiner, Simon Caney, Dale Jamieson and Henry Shue (eds), *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, pp. 94, 287. Gardiner has developed this and other arguments in *The Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.

confusion provides fertile grounds for avoiding our obligations. He comments on the resistance by governments to taking action and attempts by various players to throw sand in the eyes of the public with specious moral arguments to justify their own inaction. Gardiner calls this moral corruption, “the subversion of our moral discourse to our own ends”.²

While Gardiner’s analysis is most enlightening, is it really so hard for us to know what to do? We already have a widely agreed set of principles to guide global action, the ones embedded in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. The 1992 Framework Convention has been ratified by virtually all nations. The Kyoto Protocol was agreed to by all nations in 1997 and was subsequently ratified by almost all nations. However, soon after the Kyoto conference the United States and Australia changed their positions and refused to ratify the agreement. This critical turn was not a fault of the Protocol but arose from domestic political considerations, including the influence of those who deny the science of climate change.

The Framework Convention enshrines a number of ethical principles. The principle of intergenerational equity states that “the Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind”. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities reflects the greater historical contribution of developed countries to the accumulation of carbon emissions (the polluter pays principle) as well as their ability to afford measures to cut emissions and to provide assistance to poor countries (the ability to pay principle).

The Kyoto Protocol gave effect to these principles of fairness by prescribing legally binding emission reduction obligations for developed countries and various lesser obligations for all parties. It foreshadowed emission reduction obligations for all countries beyond the first commitment period in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Although imperfect, the agreement at Kyoto was a remarkable achievement, a diplomatic victory that goes unacknowledged by critics too influenced by attacks on it made by conservatives and climate deniers in the United States and Australia. It was not any inherent flaws in the Protocol that weakened and marginalised it but political intransigence. Self-interest and sectional lobbying over-ruled the ethical balance that had been agreed by all nations.

² Gardiner, *Is “Arming the Future”*, p. 286.

So the existence of moral corruption and moral confusion should not cause us to throw up our arms and declare that it is all too hard, for then thinking about ethics becomes, perversely, a reason for not acting ethically. While the principles embodied in the Framework Convention and the Kyoto Protocol are at a high level of generality, and their interpretation has been the subject of wide debate, that should not be used as a smokescreen to obscure the fact that we know what we ought to be doing. Before the Copenhagen conference in December 2009 a group of eminent scientists, mostly senior authors of the IPCC report, re-evaluated the science of climate change and concluded that to have a good chance of limiting warming of 2°C developed countries would need to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2020 with large reductions from developing countries following in later periods.³

This was the task and it would not be too hard, given the will, to work out how much each developed economy needed to commit to on the basis of some fairly straightforward ethical principles. Simple principles and a modicum of self-sacrifice can slice through the most difficult ethical tangle. The simple principles are known; the only thing missing is a little selflessness or even enlightened self-interest. Why have they been in such short supply?

2. Ethics and consumption

To answer this question we need to understand the link between greenhouse gas emissions and consumption, and the role of consumption in modern society. As we know, measured on a per person basis there are huge disparities in greenhouse gas emissions between nations. In 2005 each citizen of Australia was responsible for 27 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent; in the United States the figure was 24 tonnes.⁴ A range of nations, including Singapore, Germany, Norway, Taiwan, United Kingdom and Japan, have emissions of around 10-11 tonnes per person. China stands at 5.5, India and the Philippines 1.7, and Pakistan 1.5 tonnes per person. Most of the poorest countries of the world have per capita emissions of less than 1 tonne, with some as low as 0.1 tonne per person, less than a hundredth of US levels.

³ Katherine Richardson et al., *Synthesis Report*, from the Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions conference, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, 2009.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_greenhouse_gas_emissions_per_capita.

While differences in energy systems can make a big difference, the most important determinant of a nation's greenhouse gas emissions is how much its citizens consume, and growth in emissions is dominated by growth in GDP.⁵ As a rule, as economies grow more quickly greenhouse gas emissions grow more quickly. Responding to climate change seems to threaten consumption levels so understanding the failure of rich countries to respond adequately to the threat of global warming needs to take account of the powerful role of consumption and consumption growth in those societies.

An important insight can be gained from the distinction between “luxury emissions” and “subsistence emissions”. In rich countries like Australia and the United States consumers typically spend large amounts of money on luxury goods rather than goods required to lead a life of reasonable comfort. During the long consumer boom that led to the financial crisis of 2008 sociologists began writing about “luxury fever”, reflecting that fact that in the United States spending on luxury goods—such as luxury travel, luxury cars, pleasure craft, cosmetic surgery, trophy homes, holiday homes and professional-quality home appliances—had been growing four times faster than spending overall.⁶ This was not confined to the rich. Households on average or modest incomes spent a growing portion of their income on luxury goods, giving rise to the idea of the “democratisation of luxury”.⁷

As this suggests, the long consumer boom saw a transformation in the psychology of consumption, whereby people in rich countries increasingly derived their sense of self-worth from what they bought. Consumer brands became means by which people could acquire an identity, a sense of who they were and where they fitted in to society.⁸ Advertisers promoted this idea heavily.

At the same time, the nature of shopping changed; it was no longer aimed at just acquiring the goods desired but became a powerful objective in itself. Indeed, large sums were spent by households buying goods that were not even used but ended up being thrown away. This is known as wasteful consumption. A 2005 study in Australia found that virtually all households waste money by buying things they never use—food, clothes, shoes, CDs, books, exercise bikes,

⁵ Hal Turton and Clive Hamilton, ‘Determinants of Emissions Growth in OECD Countries’, *Energy Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2002, pp. 63-71

⁶ Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever: money and happiness in an era of excess*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1999, p. 18.

⁷ Kate Betts, ‘Luxury fever: how long will it last?’, *Time Magazine*, ‘Style and design supplement’, Fall, 2004, p. 44.

⁸ Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, Chapter 2.

cosmetics, kitchen appliances, and much more.⁹ They admitted to spending a total of \$10.5 billion every year on goods they do not use, an average of \$1,200 for each household, more than total government spending on universities or roads.

In the case of greenhouse pollution, wasteful consumption adds to the volume of luxury emissions, usually defined as those emissions associated with consumption above a subsistence level, but perhaps better understood as those emissions above those associated with a reasonable standard of living. According to some, the moral status of a tonne of luxury emissions is not the same as a tonne of emissions that allows someone to survive. As ethicist John Garvey has written:

Not all emissions have the same moral standing. Some emissions have more or different value, even if the quantity of emissions is just the same. The emissions resulting from an African farmer's efforts to feed his family are not on a par with the emissions resulting from an American dermatologist's efforts to get to Vegas for the weekend.¹⁰

The case is strongest when we consider the moral standing of emissions associated with the purchase of consumer goods that are not even consumed but simply thrown away. In conventional thinking, while the American dermatologist's Vegas emissions may have some form of moral standing because they at least impart some benefit to him, the emissions from wasteful consumption must have 'negative' moral standing because they are emitted for no benefit yet cause harm to others.

This seems obvious, yet there are deeper forces at work. In response to the demand that the US play its part by reducing its carbon emissions, President George Bush Snr. once said that "the American way of life is non-negotiable",¹¹ and the truth is that the "right" to fly to Vegas for a weekend is part of that vision of the American way of life. The psychological commitment to a consumption-based way of life is extremely powerful and that commitment depends on constantly expanding consumption. Indeed, over the last few decades political and social structures have been shaped around the dominant goal of promoting economic growth above all else.

The more we examine the role of growth in modern society, the more the preoccupation with it appears to be a fetish, that is, the worship of an inanimate

⁹ Hamilton and Denniss, *Affluenza*, Chapter 7.

¹⁰ James Garvey, 'Environmental morality in the present', *New Statesman* online, 10 January 2008.

¹¹ <http://prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=10312>.

object for its apparent magical powers.¹² Growth fetishism is not confined to advanced countries. Of course, the justification for higher economic growth is much stronger in poorer countries, because lifting people out of poverty is vital to their wellbeing. The opportunity to lead a fulfilling life depends on having access to a reasonable standard of living. But beyond legitimate development goals developing countries too are also obsessed with economic growth, perhaps the last and most potent legacy of colonialism.

Growth fetishism goes hand-in-hand with the free market, and an unfettered market is also woven into the conception of the American way of life that President Bush spoke about. There is a long debate over the moral status of the free market, focussed mainly on inequalities of wealth and power. But now we must ask whether the defence of the free market has exposed the planet to severe risk. The fact is that carbon emissions will be reduced only by compelling private investors to direct their funds away from carbon-intensive energy and into low-carbon energy sources. Left to itself the free market, combined with cheap fossil fuels, will give us a radically changed climate less friendly to most forms of life.

While growth fetishism is powerful, US and Australian consumers (with emissions per person double those of Europeans and 5-10 times those of citizens in developing countries) could live comfortable, healthy and safe lives with emissions of a quarter or a fifth of current levels even without any change in the way energy is supplied. In 1970 air travel by passengers from affluent countries was 10-20 per cent of current levels. The average new house built today in Australia is around 50 per cent larger than in the 1970s, even though the average number of people living in them has fallen. Were people unhappier then? All the evidence suggests they were no less happy.¹³ Despite high and sustained levels of economic growth in the West over a period of fifty years—growth that has seen average real incomes increase several times over—the mass of people are no more satisfied with their lives now than they were then. Yet the psychological attachment to the prevailing consumption level is limpet-like.

This situation creates a sense of historic guilt among those responsible for high and growing levels of carbon emissions. For someone to be morally responsible for causing harm to others they need to be aware that their actions are causing harm and be able to change their actions to stop the harm. Clear scientific warnings about the causes of global warming and the harms it causes have been made for two decades, so it is not possible for the citizens and leaders of major

¹² I develop this theme in Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2003.

¹³ Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*, Penguin, New York, 2005, Chapter 3.

emitting nations to claim they did not know. Since we know that continuing to burn fossil fuels will cause harm, it could be said that global warming is now a “deliberate” act on the part of the major polluting countries, even if warming the globe is not their intention.

Continued release of greenhouse gases is undoubtedly negligent—rich countries have breached a duty of care and are responsible for the harm caused. But the damaging consequences of those actions are so well understood that they are no longer merely negligent. On the scale of culpability, between negligence and intention lies recklessness; recklessness combined with foresight means the major polluters are knowingly exposing others to harm. Those responsible for high levels of emissions may therefore, in a collective sense, be guilty of criminal negligence. There is certainly enough to justify what the lawyers call *mens rea* or guilty mind.

The situation of China is ambiguous. On the one hand, China is now the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, and its emissions are growing very quickly, compounding the global warming problem and storing up harm for the decades to come. On the other hand, in per capita terms China’s emissions are only around one fifth those of the United States. China asserts its legitimate right to development, in order to bring its people out of poverty, and points to the wastefulness of much economic activity in rich countries. The Chinese government is investing heavily in low and zero-emissions technologies and has announced a plan to reduce its emissions sharply per unit of production. There is no doubt that China, while doing more than any other country to contribute to global warming, it is also doing more than some rich countries, notably the United States, to attempt to ameliorate the harms.

3. Moral corruption

In recent years it has become apparent that for many citizens of the West, and especially in North America and Australia, as the warnings of the climate scientists become louder the willingness to act on them has diminished. The desire to disbelieve deepens as the scale of the threat grows. It seems that the warnings being issued by the scientists are too much to bear. After all, even with *optimistic* assumptions about how quickly global emissions can be reduced, the world is expected to warm by 4°C this century.¹⁴ Who can believe that within the life-time of a child born today the planet will become hotter than at any time

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, Chapter 1.

for 15 million years? When scientists say we will cross tipping points leading to chaotic weather for centuries we retreat to incredulity.

Researchers are beginning to explore the psychological strategies we deploy to deny or, more commonly, to evade the facts of climate science. They can be thought of as “coping strategies” used to defend against or manage the unpleasant emotions associated with the dangers of a warming globe—fear, anxiety, anger, depression, guilt and helplessness.¹⁵ But in using them we can blind ourselves to our moral responsibilities or reduce the pressure to act on them. For selfish reasons we do not want to change our behaviour or elect governments that will require us to change our behaviour. This manipulation of the moral discourse in our short-term selfish interests Gardiner calls moral corruption.¹⁶

What are these strategies?

Many members of the public engage in what might be called “casual denial”. Less forthright than outright denial of the science, casual denial relies on using inner narratives such as “Environmentalists always exaggerate”, “Didn’t those leaked Climategate emails show it’s all rubbish?” and “I’ll worry about it when the scientists make up their minds”. Anxiety can be reduced simply by restricting exposure to upsetting information, a form of selective disengagement. The desire to disbelieve is activated by news outlets each time they give undue prominence to stories that create the impression that climate scientists cannot agree or that the science is politically tainted.¹⁷

Most people do not deny climate science, but use various techniques to blunt the emotional impact of the scientific warnings. We might “de-problematise” the threat by making its scale seem smaller, or distance ourselves from it by emphasising the time lapse before the consequences of warming are felt. We use self-talk to good effect, inner narratives such as “Humans have solved these sorts of problems before” and “It won’t affect me much”. Alternatively, we might divert attention from anxious thoughts and unpleasant emotions by engaging in minor behaviour changes (like changing light-bulbs) that mollify feelings of helplessness or guilt.

¹⁵ Clive Hamilton and Tim Kasser, ‘Psychological Adaptation to the Threats and Stresses of a Four Degree World’, A paper for *Four Degrees and Beyond* conference, University of Oxford, 28-30 September 2009 http://www.clivehamilton.net.au/cms/media/documents/articles/oxford_four_degrees_paper_final.pdf

¹⁶ Gardiner, *Is “Arming the Future”*, p. 286.

¹⁷ M. T. Boykoff and J. Smith, *Media Presentations of Climate Change. Routledge Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, pp. 210-218, Routledge, 2010.

Blame-shifting is a form of moral disengagement whereby people disavow their responsibility for the problem or the solution. Belittling out-groups can help solidify one's sense of self and ward off threats to it, a tactic in play whenever we hear someone say: "China builds a new coal-fired power plant every week." Another strategy is to cultivate indifference to global warming and its implications. Apathy is typically understood as meaning the absence of feeling, but it can often reflect a suppression of feeling that serves a useful psychological function.¹⁸ Who at times has not thought: "If I don't care I won't feel bad"?

One of the most widespread methods of avoiding the full force of the warnings is to practice wishful thinking. Cultivating "benign fictions" can be comforting in an often unfriendly world, yet such fictions become dangerous delusions when they are clung to despite overwhelming evidence.¹⁹ The climate debate is rife with wishful thinking, deploying narratives such as "Technology will save us" (with carbon capture and storage, nuclear power, biochar, and geoengineering prominent examples), "We've solved these problems before and we will do it again" or simply "Something will come along".

The psychological predisposition to avoid facing up to the truth about climate change has been exploited for political reasons by those opposed to taking action against global warming. It is now well-known that the campaign to deny the science of climate change was developed in the 1990s, initially by the fossil fuel lobby, and put into practice by conservative think tanks and front groups in the United States.²⁰ In the 2000s the campaign had successfully associated, in the minds of conservative voters, acceptance of global warming science with "liberal" views, a catchword for all that is dangerous and unpatriotic. In other words, the campaign had activated the human predisposition to adopt views that cement one's connections with cultural groups and thereby shore up a sense of self. In the 1990s views on global warming were influenced mostly by attentiveness to the science; now one can make a good guess at an American's opinion on global warming by identifying their views on abortion and gun-control.

So in rich countries these psychological devices are used to deny, dilute or distance the facts of climate science. They serve to absolve them of moral responsibility so that they can continue on with prevailing life-styles. These are

¹⁸ Renée Lertzman, 'The myth of apathy', *The Ecologist*, 19 June 2008.

¹⁹ Shelley Taylor, *Positive Illusions: Creative self-deception and the healthy mind*, New York: Basic Books, 1989.

²⁰ This is detailed and documented in Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2010.

perhaps regrettable human failings, ones that historically have been overcome by strong leaders expressing moral clarity. At present there seems to be a dearth of strong leadership, and moral clarity is being lost in a fog of confusion that is created by those putting commercial or political interests ahead of the common good, and particularly ahead of the interests of poor people most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

4. Humanism and climate ethics

When we pose the question of the ethics of climate change, it is answered almost universally using a set of rules and presuppositions founded in some kind of humanism. That is, the ethics of climate change are judged by the effects of human actions on the wellbeing of humans.²¹ Some ethicists expand the circle of concern to encompass the welfare of other species and ecosystems, yet the essential humanist perspective that assigns self-determining humans a special place in the scheme of things persists. In this view the human being is a world-maker endowed with a special capacity for spontaneous self-expression. The dominant forms of climate ethics are rooted in a conception of the human as a creative being concerned with the outcomes of human affairs, where even the mistakes—the blunders and the injustices—are the products of flawed reasoning, psychological weakness, moral failings or emotional incontinence, rather than the result of a contest with larger forces over their fate.

Despite our vulnerability to psychological weaknesses, and beyond the influence of institutionalised social and political structures, I think there are deeper explanations of the causes of the climate crisis. The crisis cannot be divorced from the essential ideology of modernity, that is, the idea of human progress. Although we often think of human history as a relentless process of improvement, the idea of progress is quite new, no more than 200 years old.²² It has passed through a number of phases in which it has been identified with applied science and technology, evolution, social utopias and the ethical perfectibility of humankind.

In the 19th century, humanism had an optimistic faith in eventual human perfectibility, but after the horrors of the First World War and the rise of totalitarianism, some thinkers argued that the idea of progress was a superstition that should be discarded. But with the ascendancy of the United States in the

²¹ For an overview of climate ethics see Stephen Gardiner et al. (eds), *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

²² For a longer discussion see Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, Chapter 4.

1950s, sustained rates of economic expansion and the emergence of a consumer culture rescued the idea and transformed it into an aspiration measured by the annual rate of economic growth. This idea of progress perhaps reached its highest expression after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 when Francis Fukuyama declared that history itself had come to an end, an end-point beyond which there would only be pure, inexorable progress: “Technology makes possible the limitless accumulation of wealth, and thus the satisfaction of an ever-expanding set of human desires”.²³ Human destiny was no longer in question.

This triumph of progress was the victory of a particular idea of what a human being is. At its core humanism is “a set of presuppositions that assigns to human beings a special position in the scheme of things”.²⁴ In a world devoid of the transcendent, humans could through their own efforts and moral commitment build societies of freedom, respect and prosperity. As a commitment to “human-centred” ideas or practices, modern humanism begins with the repudiation of divine influences in the relations between humans and the natural and social worlds. All humanisms agree on a conception of humans whose individual and collective fate lies in their own hands rather than supernatural ones.

Humanism can also be contrasted with scientific conceptions of the human being, especially biological and genetic ones, in which humans are rendered akin to animals with certain superior faculties of rationality or tool-making. So humans are seen to occupy a middle position between the natural order and the transcendent with a distinctive stance towards life, with a spirit of openness, reason, independent action and ethical commitment to the common good being the highest measures. Politically, these commitments to the values of “freedom, equality, tolerance, secularism, and cosmopolitanism”²⁵ have made humanism a progressive force.

Against this, I want to ask whether the climate crisis we now confront calls into question the essential humanist premise. I wonder whether we are beginning to find ourselves thrown into a world not of our making and which we cannot control, where the task is not to remake and conquer but to withdraw, reflect and understand anew, where the nature of our existence cannot be grasped merely as that of the rational animal or the social being.

²³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, The Free Press, New York, 1992, p. xiv.

²⁴ From the “humanism” entry in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

²⁵ Humanism in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

I would like to suggest that some kind of post-humanist or post-secular conception has received a powerful boost from an unexpected quarter, from science itself, in particular from the new discipline of Earth system science. Earth system science is the emerging understanding of the Earth as an interdependent system with four components—the lithosphere (the planet’s crust), the hydrosphere (the planet’s water and ice), the biosphere (living organisms), and the atmosphere. Earth scientists now believe that we have entered a new geological epoch known as the Anthropocene, a fact that has implications we have barely begun to think about.

Before the Anthropocene, the epoch covering the last 10,000 years in Earth history is known as the Holocene. The Holocene was a period of unusual climatic stability. After a long “reign of chaos”—the previous 100,000 years of wild swings “from the depths of glacial frigidity to relative mildness in the space of a few years”²⁶—these 10 sympathetic millennia of mild and constant climate have permitted human civilization to flourish. The Holocene epoch culminated in the advanced technological civilisation of nearly seven billion people today. But now Earth scientists have announced that the Holocene has come to an end and we have entered a new and unprecedented geological epoch, the Anthropocene or the Age of Humans. The impact of burning fossil fuels on the Earth’s atmosphere has been so far-reaching that it is the principal factor, along with population growth, that persuaded Earth scientists to declare the end of the Holocene. In the new Age of Humans, the “human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system.”²⁷ After the remarkable climatic stability of the Holocene, the Anthropocene is expected to be very unstable.

It will be a long time before we understand the full significance of the shift to the new Anthropocene epoch. We have always assumed, at least since the time of the Enlightenment, that there is a clear distinction between geological history—slow processes that occur on a scale of millions of years—and human history—a series of events that occur on the scale of years, decades and centuries. Yet, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has point out,²⁸ with the arrival of the Anthropocene, the distinction between geological history and human history has now collapsed. Humans have become a geological force so that the two kinds of history have

²⁶ William Burroughs, *Climate Change in Prehistory: The End of the Reign of Chaos*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

²⁷ Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen and John McNeil, The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369: 842–867, 2011.

²⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, The Climate of History: Four Theses, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009).

converged. Our future has become entangled with that of the Earth's geological evolution.

Contrary to the humanist conception, it can no longer be maintained that humans make their own history, for the stage on which we make it has now entered into the play as a dynamic and largely uncontrollable force. So the convergence of Earth history and human history destroys the essential humanist belief in the autonomous subject, the human as "world-maker".

The blurring of the divisions between human and non-human history has ethico-theological implications. A moral distinction has always been drawn between suffering caused by human action and suffering caused by natural processes, the distinction between moral evil and natural evil (in theology known as theodicy). As the flows of human and geological history merge, it will become more difficult to separate the two. If floods in the future are intensified by human-induced global warming, the division between moral evil and natural evil will become more elusive.

So in the Anthropocene we may need to rethink our ethical categories and the essential conception of what it is to be human that we inherited from the Enlightenment. Needless to say, this post-humanist conception is the antithesis of the technological hubris and desire to master nature that characterises the modern world.■



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