

SYMPOSIUM
A CHANGING MORAL CLIMATE



JUSTICE IN THE AUDITORIUM.
GARDINER'S THEORY OF
INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

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Justice in the Auditorium

Gardiner's Theory of Intergenerational Justice

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Stephen Gardiner's is destined to be a necessary reading for anyone interested in the ethics of climate change.¹ Gardiner filled a gap in climate ethics, and he did this in the most insightful way. His main effort was to provide a unified account of the ethical problems raised by climate change, assuming that by so doing climate ethics could be given a fresh (and better) start (xi, 3-4, 61-2). Gardiner's core assumption is that a given description of the problems people face when climate change is at stake will suggest a given view of the moral traits of the situation. From the description of the difficulties of the situation, conclusions about justice descend (4, 22-3, 43).² The book's central claims are that

¹ Stephen M. Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm. The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Unless otherwise specified, parenthetical references are to this text.

² Gardiner insists that the perfect storm is also a source of moral corruption (4, 13, 22-3, 45-8, 298, 301-338). Indeed, he sees unfairness as a core case of corruption (304). I shall not focus on this aspect, though, as it is considered in

- (i) climate change ethics faces three big problems,
- (ii) these problems reinforce each other, and
- (iii) their coexistence and reinforcement worsen the difficulties to any ethically-driven solution to climate change (6-8, 22-3, 47).

Gardiner drives our attention to the contrast between the interests of industrialized and developing nations in the present generations and the interests of the poorest nations, of poor citizens of developing nations and of future generations. Industrialized and developing nations gain in increasing their carbon-based consumption (thereby over-emitting), whereas poor nations and future generations would gain if the former group stopped their consumption (thereby mitigating present and future effects of climate change). Gardiner calls the conflict of interests between industrialized/developing and poor nations on one side and present and future generations on the other respectively the *global* and the *intergenerational storms*. The final problem he points at is the inadequacy of both our current political institutions and philosophical theories in dealing with the global and the intergenerational storms. This is the *theoretical storm* (6-7, 27-41, 108-9, 116-8, 123, 127-8, 213-19, 248).

Gardiner suggests that, in failing to cooperate, some of the participants in the global and the intergenerational storms inflict undeserved harms on others (7, 68). From the normative point of view, Gardiner attempts to take a neutral stance, on the assumption that a plausible view of the moral traits of climate change can be given without too many controversial assumptions (5, 7 fn. 9, 44, 155-6, 220 fn. 17). However, in his picture of the

a distinct comment in this issue (cf. Marcello Di Paola, *Climate Change and Moral Corruption*, in this issue).

intergenerational storm he relies on a conception of intergenerational fairness, as he repeatedly asserts that current generations are committing inexcusable and blatant wrongs toward future people, harming them in order to gain undue benefits (7-8, 143, 150, 158-60, 277).

In this comment, I shall contend that Gardiner's description of the intergenerational storm does not license his view of intergenerational fairness, and that this breaks the unity of the picture of climate ethics he provides. I shall claim that the most natural conclusion derivable from Gardiner's description is that our duties toward future generations are more *lenient* than are our duties toward people presently affected by climate change. Accordingly, if Gardiner's description of the intergenerational storm is right, as I believe it is, then his invocation of intergenerational fairness is unsupported. Gardiner's magisterial description of the problem of climate change shows that its solution relies not on justice or fairness, but at most on beneficence.³ Moreover, the problem of climate ethics is not a unified threefold storm, as Gardiner contends. We rather face divergent problems, and the theoretical storm is even worse than Gardiner admits—as we have also the problem of coping with different and not parallel issues. In Gardiner's hands, climate ethics is a serious, and theoretically elegant, issue. I am afraid that

³ I am here assuming a common sense distinction between issues of justice understood as questions concerning harms to be avoided and issues of beneficence understood as questions concerning goods to be promoted. Of course, this dichotomy can be challenged, or further developed in various directions. A similar distinction between issues concerning goodness or value and issues concerning justice is established in John. Broome, *Climate Matters. Ethics in a Warming World* (New York: Norton & Company, 2012), 12, 13-4. Notice that Broome suggests that governmental and collective action are aimed at 'doing the best thing—making the world a better place—', whereas only private morality, i.e. individual action, has justice as its aim (*ibid.*, 13). In a sense, I think my conclusions here aligns with Broome's view.

elegance will turn out to lie merely at the surface level, while the deep levels of the issue contain only hard problems.

My comment will proceed as follows. In § I, I will quickly reproduce Gardiner's account of the global and the intergenerational storm. In § II, I will give an alternative, but not divergent, description of the structure of the intergenerational storm. In § III, I shall contend that the intergenerational storm does not licence compelling duties of fairness towards future generations—indeed, it implies that we have more stringent duties toward present victims of climate change. Accordingly, Gardiner's description of the moral problem of climate change turns out to have unintended quietist results.⁴

I

For Gardiner, the global and the intergenerational storms encapsulate a contrast between the dictates of individual and collective rationality, a contrast consisting in the mutual opposition between the following couples of claims:

- (1) It is *collectively rational* to cooperate: each agent prefers the outcome produced by everyone cooperating over the outcome produced by no one cooperating.
- (2) It is *individually rational* not to cooperate: when each individual has the power to decide whether or not she will cooperate, each person (rationally) prefers not to cooperate, whatever the others do (26; see also 104-9).

⁴ Gardiner's book is immensely rich and detailed. For the sake of space, this comment will not focus on many of the topics deserving examination. However, I shall attempt to give full references to places where topics that can be substantial to my discussion are treated by Gardiner.

(1*) It is *collectively rational* for most generations to cooperate: (almost) every generation prefers the outcome produced by everyone cooperating over the outcome produced by no one cooperating.

(2) It is *individually rational* for all generations not to cooperate: when each generation has the power to decide whether or not it will cooperate, each generation prefers not to cooperate, whatever the others do (162; see also 36).

The consequence of the truth of the above claims is a “paradoxical” situation, Gardiner remarks: “each agents [and almost each generation] accepts that it is *collectively rational* to cooperate; but [...] each agent [and each generation] believes that it is *individually rational* not to cooperate.” The tragedy comes from a dominance of individual rationality, which leads to a suboptimal outcome and to a failure of collective rationality (27-8, 104, 181). The paradox instantiated in the global and the intergenerational storms becomes manifest in the sphere of climate change mitigation. Even though no country wants climate change, each nation prefers not curbing its own emissions and letting other do the necessary cuts; accordingly, no one will accept cuts in emissions rates. Moreover, the present generation prefers gaining from over-emission rather than losing because of cuts on emitting activities. Any of the following generations will have the same preference. Accordingly, over-emission will be iterated across generations (28, 35).

Gardiner emphasizes differences between the intergenerational and the global storms. In intergenerational cooperation, the claim about collective rationality (1*) is less general and more unstable than the corresponding claim (1) in the global storm. The first generation able to over-emit (hereafter *the first generation*) has no incentive to cooperate, because it gains nothing from the cooperation of successive generations, nor does it share the costs of over-emission, which are passed onto future generations. As a

consequence, for the first generation cooperation is pure sacrifice. Moreover, if and when the first generation fails to cooperate, this fixes the incentives of any subsequent generation (hereafter the *later generations*). Accordingly, Gardiner concludes, “the defection of the first generation is enough to unravel the entire scheme of cooperation” (37-8), and the buck-passing will be iterated, bringing about increased and cumulative effects and worse impacts for more distant generations, which will be forced to pay compounded costs from the defection of earlier generations (153; see also pp. 35-9, 43-45, 47, 123, 148-50, 153-4, 160-64, 201-3, 266).

In addition, none of the usual solutions to similar *intragenerational* dilemmas are available in the *intergenerational* case. No reciprocity reasons, provided by wider and iterated contexts, are available; and neither are institutional solutions.⁵ Accordingly, the dominance of individual reasons to defect is even stronger in the *intergenerational* than it is in the *intragenerational* case (37). In the latter, reasons in favour of individual defection are contingent on the present state of incentives, which can be changed through institutional or interactional solutions. By contrast, in the former individual reasons to defect are not contingent, as when it is its turn to decide whether to cooperate or not, each generation is not subject to any reciprocal retaliation on the side of its predecessors (163; see also pp. 37-8, 50 fn. 1, 76, 106 fn. 6, 115-7, 213).

Gardiner points out that the *intragenerational* and the *intergenerational* storms produce unfairly distributed losses (118-

⁵ To be true, Gardiner is clear on the fact that even in the global storm, i.e. in the *intragenerational* case, current institutions are unable to do the required task. However, it seems that in the *intragenerational* case better institutions are possible, whereas in the *intergenerational* case institutions are unable to do the trick, especially with not overlapping generations (at 28-9, 435).

23, 242). For instance, surely in industrialized countries poor people have experienced heavier adverse effects from climate change-driven extreme climatic events.⁶ Likewise, poor citizens of developing countries suffer more from present impacts of climate change. As a consequence, in the global storm a failure of rationality leads also to a failure of morality—someone’s failure to act rationally is also a cause of harms for others. For the ruling elites of industrialized countries, failure to mitigate climate change is both a long-term irrational behaviour and a wrong, being a cause of serious harms to vulnerable people. Similar circumstances obtain in the intergenerational storm, where later generations suffer from harms produced by the self-interested behaviour of previous generations, thereby progressively lowering the overall well-being across generations (see pp. 31, 38).

II

Gardiner claims that current behaviour in the face of climate change is driven by a self-defeating view of practical reasons (56-7).⁷ He suggests that failure in seriously cutting greenhouse emissions is a failure of rationality, because when everyone fails to do so, everyone gets less (27-9). In failing to cut their own emissions, even industrialized countries and their ruling elites get less, because of the impact that ongoing climate change has even on them—as it is confirmed by increases in storms and heat-

⁶ On the connections between climate change and extreme events, see Marten K. van Aalst, “The impacts of climate change on the risk of natural disasters,” *Disasters* 30 (2006), 5-18; P.J. Webster, G.J. Holland et al., “Changes in Tropical Cyclone Number, Duration, and Intensity in a Warming Environment,” *Science* 309 (2005), 1844-46.

⁷ On self-defeating views of practical reasons, see Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Part I.

waves in many Western countries.⁸ Moreover, recurrent food crises can be evidence that also for developing countries climate change's effects can outweigh the gains of economic development⁹. As a consequence, when everyone fails to cut emissions in order to gain from carbon-based activities, everyone gets less on the whole, and everyone loses more than the losses produced by cutting emissions.

In the intergenerational case things are different. It is not the case that when each generation acts in pursuit of its generation-indexed interests, each generation gets less. Each generation has the possibility to pass on the costs of over-emission to future generations, guaranteeing for itself only the gains of industrialization. In the intragenerational storm, no one can maximize her gain if everyone acts as a maximizer, but everyone maximizes if everyone acts as a non-maximizer. Accordingly, in the intragenerational interaction maximization is *indirectly reachable*, i.e. it can be reached if everyone avoids its direct pursuit.¹⁰ By contrast, in the intergenerational storm each generation can maximize its gains even when everyone acts as a maximizer. However, each generation (except for the first) inherits from its

⁸ See IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," in T.F. Stocker et al., *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). However, if national impact is at stake, it is not clear which nations will be adversely affected by climate change, and it may be the case that specific parts of the world will even gain from climate change. This exacerbates the global storm, as Gardiner emphasizes at 29-30.

⁹ See Molly E. Brown and Chris C. Funk. "Food Security Under Climate Change," *Science* 319 (2008), 580-1, Munir A. Hanjra and M. Ejaz Qureshib. "Global water crisis and future food security in an era of climate change," *Food Policy* 35 (2010), 365-77.

¹⁰ On indirect theories of rationality and morality, see R.B. Brandt, "Fairness to Indirect Theories in Ethics," in Id. *Morality, Utilitarianism, and Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 137-57.

predecessor’s substantial losses, which diminish its aggregate well-being. Nevertheless, for each generation is better to increase its emissions as much as possible, as doing otherwise would add to the already existing losses inherited from the past. So, for each generation cutting emissions would be suboptimal, and the only way to maximize is through the highest emission rate. Accordingly, each generation’s maximization on the whole produces a suboptimal, and decreasing, trend, as each generation’s maximum—after the first generation—is inferior to its predecessor’s maximum. As the generations go on, each generation’s quality of life diminishes, whereas each generation’s emissions increase. The overall well-being of generations, then, is suboptimal, i.e. it is inferior to the well-being that generations would have enjoyed had the first generation cut its consumption. However, each of the generations gets the maximum *it could have*, if because there is no way to access a world where its maximum is greater. Here’s a representation of this dynamic for seven not overlapping generations:

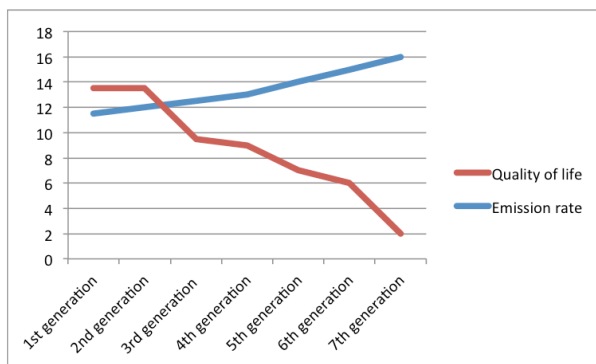


Fig. 1: trends of quality of life and emissions rate across not overlapping generations¹¹

¹¹ Notice that in framing Figure 1, and in the following figures, I am assuming: i. an arbitrary zero level; ii. that by over-emitting, each of the generations

In the intragenerational case two possible worlds are equally accessible, i.e. they can both be made actual—in one world no one maximizes, and thereby everyone gets the maximum (call this the *maximal world*); in another world, everyone maximizes, and for this reason no one gets the maximum (call this the *maximizing world*). Both worlds are equally accessible to everyone, but no one knows which of them is actual. They are *metaphysically accessible*, but *epistemically inaccessible*. Each person thinks in the following way: ‘I do not know in which world I am living. Suppose I am in the maximizing world. If so, it is better for me to maximize, as there is nothing I can do to actualize the maximal world, and by failing to maximize I would get less than what is available. Suppose instead that I am in the maximal world. If so, it is better for me to maximize, thereby getting an extra gain. But as everyone thinks this way, the maximizing world is made actual. Obviously, if for whatever reasons everyone decides not to maximize, then the

increases its level of quality of life, as compared to successors, and simultaneously decreases it, as compared to predecessors; iii. that sudden, non-linear, falls of the level of quality of life obtain as the emission rate grows, due to the overcoming of various tipping points in the effects of greenhouse gas concentration on the whole system of Earth climate. These assumptions are grounded on predictions contained in IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers”. On tipping points, see pp. 39, 100-1, 112, 186-91, 201-2, 222-3; see also Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 2000), Peter U. Clark, Nicklas G. Pisiias, Thomas F. Stocker, and Andrew J. Weaver, “The Role of the Termohaline Circulation in Abrupt Climate Change,” *Nature* 415 (2002), 863-9, Michael D. Mastandrea and Stephen H. Schneider, “Integrated Assessment of Abrupt Climatic Changes,” *Climate Policy* 1 (2001), 433-49, Mike Hulme, “Abrupt Climate Change: Can Society Cope?” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 361 (2003), 2001-21, Timothy Lenton et al., “Tipping Points at the Earth’s Climate System,” *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science* 105 (2008), 1786-93. Assumption ii. above encapsulates the evolving aspects of the climate change tragedy (at 110-12). See also pp. 200-3.

maximal world becomes actual.¹² Accordingly, the maximal world is epistemically inaccessible, but not *practically* so. In any moment, it would be possible to make it actual. Hence, the outcome produced by everyone maximizing is suboptimal: it is inferior to the outcome produced by everyone cooperating. Institutional solutions, and other ways to change incentives, are tools able to induce people to avoid maximizing conduct, thereby actualizing the maximal world.

In the intragenerational case, the maximal and the maximizing worlds are simultaneous. At each point on the time curve, everyone can actualize either one of them. In the intergenerational case, there might be two worlds, too, and they run parallel to those appearing in the intragenerational case. First, there is a world where each generation restraints its maximization, by cutting its emissions (call this the *maximal** world). Second, there is a world where the first generation over-emits, and later generations continue the trend. In the latter world, the compounded losses cumulate across the generations, thereby causing a decreasing trend of the quality of life (call this the *lowering-maximizing* world). Here is a representation of the two worlds:

¹² Of course, if someone decides not to maximize, this is not enough to actualize the maximal world. On the structure of this situations, see D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 59-110, 382-4, 524-5.

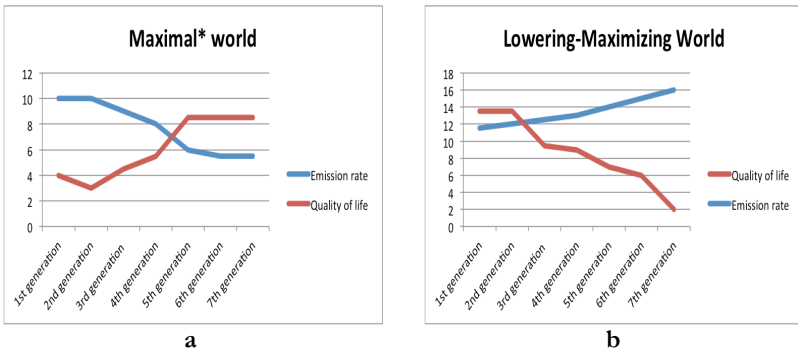


Fig. 2: a two-worlds representation of the intergenerational storm¹³

As generations are placed at successive points in time, each generation might have its world fixed by the choices of its predecessor. A generation succeeding a generation that actualized a maximal* world can either replicate the non-maximizing behaviour of its predecessor, or maximize. The first choice would make the maximal* world last one more generation. The second choice would put an end to the maximal* world and give rise to a lowering-maximizing world—indeed, this would be a *mixed world*,

¹³ Notice that in Figure 2 various discontinuous fallings and risings of quality of life are assumed. In particular, in the lowering-maximizing world quality of life can collapse rapidly due to the overcome of tipping points in the dynamics of climate change (this is what is posited in the assumption iii. presupposed in Figure 1 and stated in fn. 11 above), whereas in the maximal* world avoidance of those catastrophic changes in climate can represent substantial, incremental, and non-linear improvement of quality of life. In the diagrams, both collapses and improvements of quality of life obtain from the fifth generation onwards. Moreover, it is assumed that improvements of quality of life will be less drastic, and smaller, than collapses. This corresponds to the idea that the worst effects of climate change will produce substantial suffering, as compared to the initial conditions, whereas avoiding these effects will guarantee security and maintenance of levels of well-being only mildly superior to the initial conditions.

beginning with a not maximizing generation and going on with maximizing ones. By contrast, when it succeeds a generation that actualized a lowering-maximizing world, a generation cannot actualize a maximal* world. Even if this generation decides to cut its emissions, the world in which it lives is already wretched by its predecessor's emissions. The only rational choice, for such a generation, is to continue the maximizing behaviour of previous generations. Accordingly, mixed worlds can only be worlds beginning as maximal* ones and turning into lowering-maximizing ones. In Figure 2, the second generation in diagram **a** succeeded a maximizing generation, and has no choice but continuing to maximize. (By contrast, the second generation in diagram **b** succeeded a not maximizing generation and chose to follow that trend, thereby creating a maximal* world).

Here's the representation of mixed world:

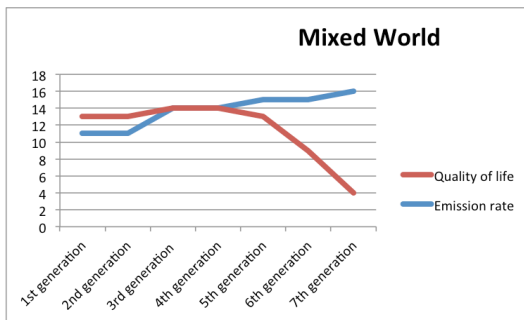


Fig. 3: A mixed world

For each generation living in a lowering-maximizing world, maximal* worlds can be *metaphysically* inaccessible. While moves from maximal* to lowering-maximizing worlds are possible, it is impossible to go from a lowering-maximizing world to a maximal* one—mixed worlds begin with not maximizing

generations (able to create maximal* worlds) and go on with maximizing generations (who make actual lowering-maximizing worlds). Let's call this way of framing the intra- and the intergenerational storms the *two-worlds story*.

Our actual world is a lowering-maximizing one: as many previous generations have over-emitted, and have done so despite awareness of the harms connected to over-emission, present and future generations cannot accede a maximal* world. As a consequence, the moral assessment of a lowering-maximizing world is the only relevant issue in intergenerational climate ethics.

III

In a lowering-maximizing world, cooperation—i.e. the maximal* world—is metaphysically inaccessible. In a lowering-maximizing world maximization is not a suboptimal strategy—even though it is a strategy leading to a decreasing maximum. If so, whereas in the intragenerational case a failure of rationality amounts to a moral fault, in the intergenerational case there is no failure of rationality at all. In lowering-maximizing worlds rationality and morality diverge. An over-emitting behaviour is not irrational, even though it causes unfair harms on later generations. Accordingly, unfairness—and moral fault in general—are not consequences, or counterparts, of failures in practical rationality. In lowering-maximizing worlds, over-emitting generations cannot be accused of irrationality or self-contradiction.¹⁴

However, it might be argued that even in a lowering-maximizing world a rational but harming behaviour is immoral.

¹⁴ Gardiner acknowledges this at 162-3.

In deciding to actualize a lowering-maximizing world, the first generation harms later generations, because in a maximal* world later generations would have been better off than they are in a lowering-maximizing world. (In Figure 2, diagram **b**, later generations are better off than are later generations in Figure 3.) In a lowering-maximizing world later generations are worse-off because of a choice made by the first generation. This generation could have caused them to be better off. As a consequence, they have been harmed by the first generation. By contrast, later generations are not causally responsible for the fate of their successors—as this fate has been fixed, as it were, by the first generation. Accordingly, they are not harming their successors.

Consider the *Auditorium Dilemma*:

If the First Row stands, it will improve its view of the engrossing spectacle on stage. If it is worth standing to get this better view, it will be better for the First Row if it stands. But this would block the Second Row's view. This Row would need to stand to regain the view that it had when all were sitting. Since it would now be standing, but would not have improved its view, this outcome would be worse for the Second Row. Similar remarks apply to all the other Rows.¹⁵

People in the first row may either stand or sit down. In choosing to stand, they harm people in the other rows—because those people will have a worse view. What about the second row? It may either stand or sit down, too. By choosing to stand, it will come back to the initial condition—people in this row will see how they would have seen had the first row sat down. The third row people can choose to stand as well, in order to restore their original condition—i.e. the visibility they would have had had the first row sat down. And so on.

¹⁵ D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 524.

It might be argued that as the first row harms the second row by choosing to stand, similarly the second row harms the third row, and so on. But this cannot be true, because the alternatives available to the first row are different ones. The first row can choose either to stand or to sit down. If they choose to sit down, the view of the other rows is the best available—i.e. it is the best in the conditions given.¹⁶ When they choose to stand, they worsen the view of the other rows—making it less than best, i.e. suboptimal. This is not true of the rows from the second one

¹⁶ Some particulars need to be settled. The goodness of the view of the rows other than the first depends on the shape of the auditorium and the position of the stage. If the auditorium is of the amphitheatrical kind—with rows placed at different heights and in a circular arrangement –, then it might be supposed that when all the other persons sit down *each* person in *each* row has the same quality of vision. If the auditorium is of the ordinary kind, then people in the rows other than the first can have a progressively worse view. I shall assume that Parfit does not refer to an amphitheatrical auditorium, as in this kind of structure even with the first row standing, the view of the other rows will be worsened in decreasing degrees—indeed, as the distance from the first row increases the view improves. In contrast, in an ordinary theatre the first row worsen the view of each of the other rows. To be true, both representations can be inaccurate. Climate change has both *continuous* effects, effects that can be prolonged by inaction of the first generation but tend to decrease, and *jumping* effects, as it were, effects that affect distant generation once a given threshold is overcome, while proximal generations are spared. Neither the amphitheatrical auditorium, nor the ordinary one can accurately represent both these effects. Here, I shall not consider further this point. Gardiner considers these two kinds of effects at pp. 40-1 (at 101 he seems to be skeptical on the relevance of tipping points in climate change ethics; however, he qualifies this position at 183-203, 224-30). I am assuming that the fact that the first row stands creates a harm on the other rows that even though decreasing (if the auditorium is amphitheatrical) cannot be cancelled. This amounts to assuming that some of the effects of climate change—for instance extinction of certain species—will be permanent and irreversible. If this is the case, an ordinary and an amphitheatrical auditorium are equivalent, as it were: when continuous effects are not at stake, then jumping effects are to be considered, and vice versa. This is the reason why in the text I do not consider further this issue.

onwards. If people in the second row choose to sit down they will have a worse view than they would have by standing. In this respect, their condition is similar to the first row people. But if the second row audience chooses to stand this does not harm (i.e. *it does not make worse*) the third row's view, because the third row is already seeing worse *because of* the first row's choice to stand. The first row's choice worsen the view of *each* of the other rows, while the choices of each of the other rows have no impact on the succeeding rows. The harm produced by the first row spreads over each of the other rows.¹⁷

Accordingly, each of the rows except the first does not harm their successors—at least not in the sense of making them worse off. In a sense, each of the rows except the first is metaphysically necessitated to not making any difference in the predicament of their successors. In the terminology employed in the two-worlds story, once the first row decided to stand, the world where each of the rows sees at its best is metaphysically inaccessible. It seems pointless to ask them to act otherwise—i.e. to sit down—in order to produce a better outcome—i.e. in order to give a better view to the other rows. For in the worlds accessible to them, no better outcome is achievable—once the first row stood, no better view

¹⁷ It might be claimed that the first over-emitting generation cause harms impacting on distant generations—namely, harms whose bad effects jump some near cohorts and impact on distant generations, harms whose bad effects are jumping effects (see fn. 16 above). This might depend on tipping points to be overcome, and to non-linear effects of climate change (on this, see the references in fn. 11 above). I do not see how this might change substantially the points made in the main text. The only consequence of this alternative view of how harms of over-emission spread is to postpone the very moment when a generation is forced to over-emit to cope with its inherited burdens. In that moment, the intergenerational dynamics considered in the text obtains—the first generation harms later generations, which in their turn over-emit to recover the inherited losses.

is possible for the other rows. The state of affairs where all the rows have a better view is metaphysically inaccessible.

For similar reasons, each of the later generations in a lowering-maximizing world cannot be demanded to abstain from maximization. They could be so demanded if their abstention would produce the best outcome. But each of the worlds where their abstention would have this result is metaphysically inaccessible for them. It might be objected that if any of the later generations would abstain from maximization, this would avert losses to its successors—even though the successors must still incur some of the losses coming as a consequence of the first generation's over-emission. Accordingly, the objection continues, each of the later generations may be demanded to abstain from maximization, as this would relieve its successors from some burdens.

This objection can be answered. Demanding each of the later generations to abstain from maximization for the sake of its successors cannot be a request of fairness, but rather a duty of beneficence. Fairness is not realized if any of the later generations takes on itself losses coming from the first generation and some of the losses that its successors would bear as a consequence of the first generation's over-emission. Rather, this would produce an uneven and unfair distribution of burdens among generations, where substantial sacrifices of earlier generations would be asked in order to relieve losses for later generations. This cannot be a fair intergenerational distribution of the burdens deriving from the first generation's over-emitting.¹⁸

¹⁸ Gardiner comes near to acknowledging this point in Stephen M. Gardiner, "A Contract on Future Generations," pp. 110-12, in *Intergenerational Justice*, ed. A. Gosseries and Lukas H. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77-118.

If the two-world story and the auditorium dilemma are reliable representations of the structural features of the intergenerational storm, then intergenerational fairness cannot be demanded of later generations. More precisely, only the first generation able to over-emit can be asked to be fair towards the later generations, i.e. to abstain from any action leading to harm. But once the first generation decided to harm the later ones, whatever its successors do is morally permissible—at least in terms of fairness. Since the initial generators of climate-change-inducing over-emissions are now past generations, Gardiner’s picture of the intergenerational storm implies that nobody can be accused of being unfair now, and that nobody could be so accused in the future.

If the above reasoning is sound, it turns out that Gardiner’s description of the intergenerational storm has the unintended effect of fuelling some skepticism towards intergenerational climate ethics. In the intragenerational case, reluctant nations can be charged of being collectively irrational (because their cooperation would make the overall world better off), as well as unfair (because their actual conduct harms developing and poor nations). By contrast, in the intergenerational case, later generations cannot be charged either of irrationality or of unfairness, because they are not guilty of harming their successors—at least in the sense that each generation is metaphysically unable to produce an outcome where its successors are not worse off. Henceforth, it seems that each of us—as an individual citizen of a developed or developing nation—has more stringent duties towards present victims of climate change than towards future generation. Not only the structural parallel between the intragenerational and the intergenerational storm fades away, but the moral consequences of such a parallel also vanish. While the intragenerational storm is a firm ground for advocating global fairness in dealing with the costs of climate change, the intergenerational storm is better

passed unnoticed, as it would legitimize a strong preference for the present at the cost of future generations. The intergenerational storm can at most ground duties of beneficence towards future generations, and these duties—one can assume—are less stringent than duties of fairness or of corrective justice.

If so, Gardiner's overall project appears to be seriously weakened. There is no common core for climate ethics. Whereas intragenerationally we face a contradiction within practical rationality, and this contradiction can ground duties of justice, intergenerationally we seem to face the absence of grounds for claims of justice in favour of future generations. Possibly, the theoretical storm is even deeper than Gardiner allows, because we are faced with scattered problems, rather than common issues in different fields. But the overall storm is surely less than perfect.

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