CHAPTER TWO

ROBIN ATTFIELD: CHANGING THE ETHICAL CLIMATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

In this paper I examine Robin Attfield's defence of the idea of an equal entitlement to the atmospheric commons, his rejection of two historical approaches (Kyoto 1990 levels basis and aggregate emissions), and his neutrality between the Contract and Convergence approach supplemented with Millennium Development Goals commitment and the Greenhouse Development Rights approach. In the discussion I distinguish between the diversity of moral theories that support his principle, suggesting a widening of these, and the plurality of working principles that may be needed, again suggesting that the range may need to be broadened. Using another article on mediated responsibilities, I argue that the main emphasis on what states ought to do needs to be supplemented with a robust account of what individuals—in both the North and in the South—ought to be doing, prior to and independent of what laws, taxes, markets or social mores require—both as morally required in itself and as a necessary condition for states effectively doing what needs to be done.

Introduction

I have chosen this aspect of Attfield's wide-ranging interest in environmental and related matters, partly because it is something he has focussed on in a number of writings in recent years, and partly because it is a matter on which I want to develop my own thinking.

It will come as no surprise that I am in large measure in agreement with Attfield's approach to this vital issue. It was not apparent at the time when we first met as undergraduates reading Greats at Oxford in the early 60s that our interests would develop in similar directions, but by 1977, when as I recall Attfield invited me to Cardiff to give two papers, we realised that we had developed similar interests in the environment and development issues, we had both developed a global or cosmopolitan perspective, and what's more we had both got involved with Quakers—and both subsequently became members of the Religious Society of Friends.

It was on the basis of our similarity of approach, and my acquaintance with Attfield's writings, not least his *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Attfield 1983), that I invited him to contribute to the series I edited on world ethics and he wrote *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (Attfield 1999). In this he was already tackling the issue of climate change, and later I got him to send several articles which I have used in some teaching I have done since in Iceland and in the USA. In this lecture I am going to take up some ideas in his article 'Global Warming, Justice and Future Generations' (Attfield 2003) and also in an article that is about to be published which Attfield was kind enough to send to me, entitled 'Climate Change: the Ethical Dimension' (Attfield 2008). I shall later on turn to some ideas in an article with a different focus: 'Mediated Responsibilities, Global Warming and the Scope of Ethics' (Attfield 2009).

Part I

Acceptance of the principle of an equal entitlement to the atmosphere's absorptive capacity and rejection of historical approaches

In the first mentioned article Attfield basically argued for the fundamental principle that we should recognise that the absorptive capacity of the atmosphere comprises an instance of the Common Heritage of Humankind and on this basis we need to proportion the amounts of emissions from countries according to population size. This I take it means working out what the average level of emissions for people in the world would need to be in order for increases in temperature to stabilise at an acceptable level, this being generally understood to be the lowest that is at all feasible. This is now generally understood to be stabilisation by 2050 at no more than 2 degrees above the mean temperature at pre-industrial times. (We should note that it has already gone up considerably and that some of

the further rise is inevitable because of the emissions already released.) Anyway it is now understood by most scientists (though this figure is not mentioned in Attfield's paper and was not then agreed) to be approximately 80% reduction for industrialised countries. The adoption of this principle would mean drastic cuts in emissions in a country like the UK by 80% by 2050—preferably, as George Monbiot says, by having the major reductions earlier rather than later. To aim at less would be to exceed our entitlement at the expense of others (Monbiot 2006).

Attfield accepts that since some countries, mainly because of their poverty, have average emissions well below the stated levels, there can be some trading in carbon emissions, but rightly argues that this must be done in such ways as to ensure that the meeting of basic needs in poorer countries is safeguarded, and that trading does not merely get used to cancel debts. This is a theme he is keen to stress generally, particularly in the later paper (Attfield 2008), that our commitment to emissions reduction should be consistent with taking seriously our obligations to the world's poor generally, not merely in response to poverty either incurred or increased by climate change.

Reference to trading in carbon emissions may remind people of the language of the Kyoto Protocol, but Attfield is rightly highly critical of the Kyoto Protocol. He accepts that it may have been the best that one could have expected at that time given negotiation realities, but nevertheless it is deeply flawed as providing an adequate basis for carbon reduction. This is because it is arbitrary to choose carbon emissions at any given date—in Kyoto's case 1990—, and because such a process is deeply skewed in favour of rich countries who already had a disproportionate level of emissions in 1992. We can add, as has become even more apparent in later reports from scientists, that it is entirely inadequate as a total level needed. Attfield rightly points out that what we want is a principled basis for reductions, not the choice of an arbitrary historical date.

He also rejects another historical approach, namely the aggregate historical emissions principle. This is that since the industrial countries in the last two centuries have been doing almost all the emitting, they should be penalised for this and make substantial reductions whilst allowing the developing countries a fairer share in the absorptive capacities of the planet for the purposes of development. Attfield rejects this "historical" principle both on pragmatic and on principled grounds. The pragmatic one is that there will be interminable disputes about quantities of past emissions. The more general problem with the principle is that it conflates causal responsibility with moral responsibility, since for a long time carbon

emissions were regarded as a part of the natural cycle rather than disrupting it (Attfield 2003: 20). It also allows the past to set the patterns of greenhouse gas emissions for the indefinite future, it does not pay sufficient attention to future needs, and it does not hold to account properly what newly industrialising developing countries may be doing—an issue now of some significance when one looks at the carbon emissions of countries like India and China.

Attfield's move here is reminiscent of a move in another area which indicates his general preference for ethical principles not based on historical factors, namely his reply to Robert Elliot over "faking nature" (Elliot 1992; Attfield 1994). Elliot argued that areas of land that are allowed to revert to an unmanaged state, for instance after logging, are not "wildernesses" since they lack the relevant historical pedigree of never having been interfered with by human beings and thus lack the value of wilderness, whereas Attfield argued that wilderness is constituted by the current character of wildness, that is biota in an area interacting with each other in a wholly unmanaged state, and the value of wilderness resides in these current values. (I believe this to be indicative of a wider cleavage, not always noted, between those who see history as relevant and those for whom the character of current states of affairs are relevant: consider the difference between Rawls' structural account of justice and Nozick's historical account of entitlements (Rawls 1971; Nozick 1974): consider also questions about whether human identity is constituted by current relationships or by history and tradition (related to our positions *vis à vis* communitarianism and the importance of family history for a person's identity).) I am sympathetic to Attfield's approach in both cases concerning aggregate emissions and wilderness, and thus to his wish not to base what we ought to do about climate change on historical factors, as the aggregate emissions approach does.

On the other hand, if we grant that the "polluter pays" principle has relevance and also recognise that it is in a sense a history-based principle which makes our responsibility extend at least as far back as agents *ought to have been aware* of their causal impacts and therefore have some moral responsibility, then quite an important aggregate emissions story can be told in terms what has been happening in the last twenty to thirty years. Attfield notes in the second paper that in practice "the international community can reasonably require the big polluters significantly to reduce their emissions" (Attfield 2008: 3). I will return to this issue later.

Attfield is aware that criticisms can be made of basing allowable emission levels on population levels. Would this not reward countries

which expanded their populations and encourage population growthsomething which environmentalists argue we have good reasons not to do? This can be dealt with by basing the emissions total on current adult populations or by stipulating that no country could be benefited with population increases beyond an agreed percentage after an agreed starting-date. Attfield also considers a criticism that carbon emissions trading would simply lead to reduction of third world debt and leave existing structures unchanged. His reply is that such a policy would need a proviso that basic needs emissions would be made untradeable as Henry Shue has argued (Shue 1994), or that in other ways the policy ensures that basic needs of poor countries are properly met. Attfield's later paper (Attfield 2008) makes more of this "development" objective.

Finally in this first paper (Attfield 2003), Attfield makes the point, familiar enough to anyone who knows his other writings on environmental ethics, that if independent value is accepted for the lives of nonhuman creatures, and if our emissions policies endanger them, for instance in destroying their habitats, then our principle needs to take this into account as well. In a later paper (Attfield 2009) he argues that taking biocentric considerations seriously will lead to significantly different policies.

Contract and Convergence + Millennium Development Goals or Greenhouse Development Rights?

In the later paper (Attfield 2008), Attfield positions his reflections in relation to a recent *White Paper on the Ethics of Climate Change* (Brown 2006). Attfield was himself part of the group involved in preparing this, though he notes his own position is in some respects different from the official line. The White Paper seeks to locate its position firmly within the framework of principles which have been accepted in UN documents and declarations on sustainable development, such as: the responsibility of states not to cause damage to states outside their jurisdiction; the "polluter pays" principle; the acceptance of common but differentiated responsibilities, with the idea that developed countries should take the lead; and the precautionary principle of not waiting until there is scientific certainty before tackling problems.

Before turning to the question of who should bear the burdens, Attfield asks the question: "who are the beneficiaries?" and his answer is, as partly noted before, "all the affected parties (whether bearers of human rights or not), where affected parties include all creatures, human and nonhuman, of the present and of the future, and where future creatures include all those

who in one scenario or another could be brought into being" (Attfield 2008: 3). I quote this in full both for two reasons. First, it is quintessential "Attfield", giving in carefully worded summary form many of the features of his approach to environmental ethics—human and nonhumans, any future generations, caution about rights discourse in this area, and a position *vis à vis* the Parfit challenge. Second, it illustrates how Attfield's ethical basis is not necessarily going to be that of many others, including others involved in producing the White Paper, some of whom may be, for instance, enlightened anthropocentrists rather than biocentrists. I shall return to this issue later.

Attfield recognises that the key issue is finding a sustainable system for burden-sharing. He considers again the aggregate emissions approach, and notes again some of problems with this approach. But he adds the argument that if we are concerned with a sustainable regime, we need to look at what current agents are doing according to the "polluter pays" principle; and, importantly, this must include developing countries as well. These countries may not have been historically involved in causing the problems, but they now need to participate in an equitable greenhouse gases reduction system. "Once developing countries can generate enough electricity to satisfy the basic needs of their populations, this responsibility, it can reasonably be argued, involves these countries in stabilising their emissions rather than relying exclusively on reductions made by currently developed countries" (Attfield 2003: 3).

Turning directly to the issue of international equity considered in the White Paper, Attfield notes that the various approaches are of rather unequal quality, but gives support to the most prominent *principled* approach—that of "equal per capita emissions allocation" based on the idea that all human beings should be entitled to "an equal share of the atmospheric commons". This is what the White Paper favours, along with, as a particular interpretation of this principle by Aubrey Meyer, the contraction and convergence account in which there would be contraction of total emissions moving eventually to convergence of human entitlements (Meyer 2005). This approach is widely supported e.g. by Monbiot (2006) and Singer (2002). There are, Attfield notes, two criticisms of this, one which he regards as a flawed criticism, the other a criticism which whilst valid can be answered with a further qualification.

Some argue that this would put too big a burden on rich countries, so it is preferable that all countries should be expected to reduce emissions, under the Comparable Burdens Principle, by requiring reductions as a percentage of GDP. Rich countries would thus do more than poor

countries because they have bigger GDPs. The main ethical problem Attfield has with this—quite rightly in my opinion—is that it would require poor countries to forgo the use of available resources, even if these resources could instead have been used to provide for the unsatisfied needs of their populations.

The other criticism is that the redistributive element would quickly diminish, so the problems of underdevelopment (poverty, malnutrition and disease) would not be addressed, which would be both ethically unacceptable and demotivating so far as poor countries are concerned. Attfield thinks this problem can be dealt with, and he deals with it after he considers an alternative approach. This is called the Greenhouse Development Rights approach (as advocated by Baier, Athanasiou and Kartha 2007) which basically states that the combined costs of greenhouse gas mitigation and promoting development to meet basic needs should be shared by everyone at or above a certain level of development, and all human beings are thus recognised as entitled to development in terms of a quality of life at or above this same level. One implication of this is that "rich people in poor countries would have responsibilities toward funding the total effort, as well as those in developed countries" (Attfield 2008: 5). I give this quotation in full because it includes an important consideration not often noted: that there are, as Paul Harris also argues, many very rich and high-polluting individuals in poor countries as well (Harris 2009). The significance of this, and more generally the importance of what well-off individuals do, is something I want to return to in my later discussion.

Attfield is clearly much attracted to this approach, not least because it includes a serious interest in issues of development. Nevertheless he recognises that the Contraction and Convergence theory could be combined with a serious commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (the 2000 MDGs), and if so, the practical consequences could be broadly similar to the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) approach and so similarly ethically acceptable. He appears to be open-minded about which of these to commend, and notes a point, which to my mind would be valid even if he had come down in favour of one rather than the other, that since a strong post-Kyoto agreement is so crucial for humanity, no purist approach insisting on the universal and unadulterated adoption of one approach rather than the other is appropriate, and that more than any one such approach is more likely to succeed.

Part II

Discussion

My discussion will fall into two broad areas. First, I want to look at the theories and principles involved, looking both at what the fundamental ethical principles and theories are here and also at the more pragmatic principles which have a reasonable chance of being used in international negotiations. Second, I want to say something about the pivotal role of individuals in all this—something Attfield does not say much about in these papers but rather more in the third paper I mentioned (Attfield 2009)—since I believe that this perspective perhaps provides a corrective to what seems to be commonly an unduly state-centred analysis of the ethical issues involved. I see this as a constructive addendum to Attfield's approach.

The extent of the plurality of principles: two types of plurality

First I would like to push at Attfield's discussion a little over the issue of levels of pluralism involved. In the first paper (Attfield 2003) he acknowledges that a number of different ethical theories—consequentialism, Kantianism, any theory that is concerned with preserving the enabling conditions for human well-being—can endorse "the equal share in the absorptive capacity of the planet" approach. In the second paper's discussion (Attfield 2008) he acknowledges that both the Contraction and Convergence (CC) approach supplemented with MDG commitments and the GDR approach may both need to be accepted. Here it is worth making explicit that we are dealing with pragmatic principles at a level other than that of theory or general moral principle.

What strikes me about the latter plurality is that they may (but need not) come out of broadly similar more theoretically principled positions. The point is this. Both the augmented CC approach and the GDR approach take it that there are two important moral desiderata: cutting down emissions to one's fair share of the global commons and meeting the basic needs of all people. The difference is about how to operationalise these two commitments. If on the other hand we ask why people might accept these two commitments, it seems to me that at another level we may have a number of different ethical theories that accept them, as Attfield notes. Having made this distinction of levels, I want first to consider the range of theories that might support the ethical principles and the range of

pragmatic principles that might implement them; and second I want to raise an issue of interpretation of how to understand the two commitments to curbing carbon emissions and to poverty reduction.

A wide variety of ethical theories supporting the ethical principles

What Attfield says about a number of theories supporting a given ethical stance seems to me to be important not merely in this case, but for the realistic possibility of the emergence of any kind of global ethic as an ethic that is acceptable to a wide range of persons from all over the world. A global ethic as something global in the scope of its acceptance (rather than global in the scope of its content for any given believer in it) is not something universally agreed—that is an idea that is very unlikely to be realised—but rather one that is widely accepted and genuinely available to people from all over the world, and is not subject to cultural bias or ethical imperialism (see e.g. Dower 2005; 2007). The speed of the emergence of such an ethic—as more than a very feeble lowest common denominator—is crucial I think to the project of getting serious cooperation globally on climate change mitigation. So for both practical and theoretical reasons I feel Attfield ought to be more generous about the kinds of theories that could—and will—endorse the fundamental principles of a fair share of the absorptive capacity and commitments to poverty reduction.

I have in mind his scepticism about human rights and contract approaches. I appreciate his concerns about the limitations which these approaches suffer in accounting for our obligations to future generations, but feel that in both cases, such a theory can be so presented as to accommodate this.

I have never been entirely clear why rights discourse, in order to have any grip, has to identify actual living people whose rights are the source of our obligations to them; if future people will have rights, then it seems to me that we are generally *inter alia* obliged to create the conditions in which these rights can be realised. At any rate the present issue here is not whether such a theory of rights is intellectually acceptable—Attfield may think that it is too weak to be a rights claim—but whether people who accept the rights approach themselves *believe* that their theories of rights generates obligations in respect to people not yet living—and it is clear that many people do believe this.

Likewise with regard to contract theories. I confess I once argued precisely for the problem that contract theories had in accounting for

obligations to future generations (since they are not around to be parties to current contracts) (Dower 1983), but in fact a lot depends on just how the contract conditions are specified. Again we need to note that, whatever intellectual difficulties we may have about an ethical theory, if those difficulties are not felt by their proponents and they think that they have a sound basis of supporting a basic principle, then surely we have to say "so be it".

A similar point can be made about ethical theories that do not include either of the two features of Attfield's thinking—the independent value of nonhuman life and the moral relevance of distant future generations. I happen to agree with him that an adequate ethical theory needs to acknowledge these two dimensions. But I am also aware that a lot of environmentalists may be either enlightened anthropocentrists or hold the view on future generations that we are only required to consider the next two or three generations—and such views can generate acceptance of a principle which whilst not exactly the same as Attfield's would generate much the same powerful practical commitments.

(As we noted earlier, Attfield actually argues that it is only if one accepts biocentric values that certain measures to protect the environment will be seen as important, for example, protecting a wilderness not seen as crucial to human well-being (Attfield 2008). A similar point can be made about accepting obligations to distant future generations of humans, for instance over the long-term hazards of nuclear waste. However, my response is that: first, there may still be a basically similar principle accepted—equal entitlement to the atmospheric commons—only a difference in scope of the domain of the beneficiaries is accepted as the basis for working out the entitlement, and second, since it is only in a small proportion of situations that the consideration of nonhuman biota and distant generations leads to either more being demanded or conflicting things being demanded, we should focus on—and celebrate—the vast areas of common agreement on what is required—in contrast to the standard "business as usual" approach of standard assumptions or the acceptance of the adequacy of relatively superficial change.)

At any rate it certainly would be helpful to getting widespread agreement on such ethical principles if we could accommodate a wider range of ethical theories than Attfield appears to allow, if the programme of serious change is to be a realistic possibility (but this is not say that all ethical theories would support it—far from it).

"Polluter Pays": ethical principle or pragmatic principle?

Another twist to this is how we interpret the "polluter pays" principle. In many ways this hovers in an intellectual space between being an ethical principle in its own right and a pragmatic principle. If it is seen as a practical principle—the general following of which would lead to the right agents generally accepting their obligation to act, and thus the conditions are achieved in which the "fair share of the atmospheric commons" is reached—then it belongs to the latter discussion of practical principles which, alongside others, needs to be included because they are widely accepted, and it will make a serious contribution to solving some of the problems. If on the other hand it is seen as a more basic ethical principle, then it is in a sense a principle which either supplements or replaces the "equal share of the atmospheric commons" principle. As an ethical principle it is not simply an aspect of the latter. The latter is, as Attfield has pointed out, not a historical principle, but the "polluter pays" principle is in a sense a historical principle (in Nozick's sense: Nozick 1974) because it attributes moral responsibility for past actions at least as far as culpable contribution to bad effects is concerned. My point here is not however to argue that this principle ought be regarded as a separate ethical consideration, but that as matter of fact it is a principle that many people find very persuasive, and insofar as the widespread acceptance of this supports by and large a wide range of climate change mitigation actions, it is to be welcomed.

Variety of Pragmatic Principles

In regard to pragmatic principles and organising concepts, Attfield is surely right that we need to accept different options. The reason why we cannot expect everyone to accept one principle is because "horses are for courses" and different organising principles will appeal to different groups of actors. As Attfield implies, one group of people may prefer an integrated conception such as the GDR approach does, others may find the Contraction and Convergence approach more manageable albeit supplemented with concerns about development goals as well. One may accept one of them but also accept that others are not to be knocked if they indeed grab other thinkers. Attfield notes that the White Paper looks at a number of different approaches of various values; likewise Paul Harris discussed six major principles that are involved in discussion in the EU over serious climate change policies (Harris 2008). Their being of different value needs to be acknowledged, but at the same time we also have to

work on the basis that people are motivated by the conceptions which they have, for whatever reasons, come to accept. So in such a case, we have to weave a complex course between arguing against what we see as inadequate conceptions, and at the same time acting to maintain the motivating force in different actors, who may, if criticised too strongly, just give up their efforts rather than convert to what one regards as a better basis.

Interpretations of the two ethical commitments

How should we interpret the commitment to the two principles Attfield identifies concerning climate change and world poverty? Let us take the commitment to development goals first. Clearly if we could overnight get everyone up to a decent standard of living—that is, escape extreme poverty—that would probably have been done ages ago. But it is not simple, as the history of international assistance has shown. In any case the effectiveness of even effective aid is arguably undermined by the way the international economic system operates, by the punitive effects of debt servicing and so on. Getting major changes meets resistances and takes time. But in any case the extent to which commitment to reduce extreme poverty can be harmonized with progressive reduction in greenhouse gases emissions is rendered more difficult and controversial if we candidly face and answer the question: what is necessary to generate poverty reduction on a wide scale (beyond the targeted and limited efforts of NGO agencies)? There are really two difficulties here.

First, unless poorer countries commit themselves to radically egalitarian policies—which they show no signs of wishing to do any more than rich countries have done—then the likely way in which serious poverty could be alleviated is by some general growth in these countries. As part of that general growth economic growth for the very poor will occur either through a trickle-down process or thorough modest redistributive measures. But it is this general growth in poorer countries that is likely to continue to add pressures on the environment especially if it does not involve new green technologies they will not have without extensive technological transfers from the North. This is quite apart from the possible (though in my opinion not inevitable) increased negative impacts of poor people on the environment as they become less poor. (It is not inevitable, since extreme poverty has its own kinds of negative environmental impact.) Unless there is a dramatic and conspicuous move

in rich countries radically to reduce their levels of material affluence and associated carbon impacts, poorer countries will not see reason to do so.

Second, in any case, apart from the generally accepted causal connections between poverty reduction and general increase in affluence in poorer countries, many will argue that even if the North radically reduces its levels of material affluence, poor countries which missed out on this have a right to a much better level of material well being, well above the level needed for escaping from the conditions of extreme poverty. This is a serious ethical challenge, since to some extent this is a morally reasonable expectation, and it will not be realised without further environmental damage unless there are appropriate new technologies facilitated by the North. On the other hand, without a serious and explicit questioning of the lifestyles of India's or China's or other poorer-but-not-so-poor countries' well-off people—alongside a serious questioning of the same in rich counties as well—there is little realistic chance of change. I come to that issue shortly.

Turning to the interpretation of the commitment to the equal share in the absorptive capacity of the planet, it is generally accepted that this is a progressive commitment. That is, it is generally held that what we need to do is to achieve a target of cutting our emissions by 80% by 2050. But, as Monbiot points out, it makes a big difference what kind of curve is achieved between now and then—significant cuts earlier on, or the majority of cuts coming later on (Monbiot 2006). Indeed it is clear that if our commitment is to aim at stabilising greenhouse gases at c. 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels (the consequences of which appear bad enough anyway), then more cuts will be needed later, if the reductions in the curve take place later.

What factors determine what governments do about this? On the one hand, there is the international compliance issue—if other countries generally make significant changes it is easier for any given country to make the same kinds of changes—easier both in the factual sense of it being more likely and also in a normative sense that governments will feel—and maybe justifiably—that they are not required to put their own country's citizens at an undue disadvantage by accepting more than what other countries are doing. On the other hand, there is the democratic issue of what electorates within countries are prepared to authorise. What electorates are prepared to authorise depends on what their own priorities are, over issues liked penalties, incentives, rationing, or voluntary life-style changes, and how they understand their own responsibilities. This is the main focus of the rest of the chapter.

Mediated responsibilities

In the third paper that I mentioned, on mediated responsibility, Attfield identifies a number of ways in which our responsibilities are mediated, and in at least two important respects this applies to climate change ethics (Attfield 2009). One is the sense in which one's actions are part of a set of actions the cumulative impact of which is seriously negative: it is not so much the effect of one's own individual acts as the effects of the class of acts of which they are instances: Attfield quotes Parfit in this regard (Parfit 1984: 70; 78-82), but in fact the idea had already been elegantly expressed by J. S. Mill when he said that the wrongness of an action was in virtue of its belonging to a class of acts which are generally injurious to society (Mill 1910 [1859]): Mill's example was lying, but it equally applies to our frequent acts of fossil fuel emission. It is an important part of what I have called "the ethic of unintended consequences" (Dower 2007). The other form of mediated action is where, whilst we do not directly do some damage, other people do some damage in actions they would not perform but for the fact that we perform the action we do. Most of the impacts on the environment we are responsible for are cases of other people doing things so that we can do the things we wish to do, whether, for instance, it is getting electricity for our gadgets, or having food and other goods transported from far away for us to consume or use. These are cases of the ethical significance of what is done on our behalf to enable us to do, have or be what we want to do, have or be. These senses of mediated responsibility as applied to climate change clearly show how each individual is implicated in his or her general behaviour in climate change issues and suggest a robust account of what is required of each individual as an agent, to which I turn shortly.

In the second half of the paper he turns to the problem of politics: he argues rightly that countries also have mediated responsibilities, over their direct contributions to climate change or their being part of causal chains that involve other countries elsewhere in the world doing what induces climate change, but notes that the problem of getting countries to take their responsibility seriously is tied up with the fact that countries are, especially if they are democracies, meant to do their citizens' bidding. The democratic issue is merely one important aspect of a more general problem that in most countries governments are meant constitutionally to give priority to their current nationals, and this goes against a robust pursuit of global targets based of the long-term interests of all people now and in future generations. What of course we need to encourage is higher levels of

cooperation between countries which see that it is in their own interests to take measures to cut back on carbon emissions.

The main thesis of this article seems to be right, but I want to take the line of thought further and link it to the earlier papers in providing a mild corrective to the explicitly state-centric approach of these papers and indeed in most people's discussions of the ethics of climate change.

The democratic issue

Let us take the second issue first. How do we get round the following democratic paradox? From a global or cosmopolitan point of view, the idea that political communities—large of small—should be governed democratically seems a sensible thing to claim, but it has of course the consequence that in any given democratic polity if the majority clearly don't want their governments to pursue a cosmopolitan policy, then in one sense they ought not do so, even if from the point of view of an individual citizen who is cosmopolitan they clearly ought to, for instance on climate change policies. The solution as I see it lies in the increasing acceptance in electorates of the global or cosmopolitan point of view (on climate change, world poverty issues etc). Now the truth is that if governments are going to make really significant and perhaps painful steps to contribute to new policies (and maybe ahead of international consensus), then this will require electorates that are well informed and generally persuaded that this is what their governments ought to be pursuing and that they are therefore willing to accept the consequences of tough policies—tax incentives, rationing or whatever.

This I want to suggest is not likely to happen unless individuals are in significant numbers willing to make judgements about their own responsibilities as moral agents to contribute to the process of changing the public culture *vis à vis* climate change. We need clearly to distinguish between conforming to laws and moral norms and acting as ethical vanguards. That is, we need to distinguish between the idea of agents conforming to new laws or to new socially sanctioned mores about acceptable carbon emissions behaviour—and perhaps a lot of people would now be willing to conform to laws and mores *re* climate change behaviour IF they become well established—and the idea of agents who are willing to put significant amounts or time, effort and money into campaigning for these changes and/or making personal life-style decisions to cut back on their carbon footprint voluntarily and well ahead of the established or prevailing norms of behaviour.

The moral commitment of individuals

There are two points to be made about the latter kinds of moral commitment. First, I contend, without these kinds of vanguard actions by significant minorities, the wider changes in law and social mores will not happen, or will not happen on the scale and with the pace that is required. This is of course an empirical claim, and all I can say is that I think it is plausible. But second, and more significantly, there is the question of how we assess such behaviour. We may commend it but do we see it as in a sense supererogatory—something some people may do but well beyond the call of duty—or should we rather see it as some kind of duty which, in principle, applies to anyone, though most people do not accept it? My own view is that we should regard it as the latter, because as a matter of fact it is really what we all ought to be doing if we have much chance of achieving the long-term changes we have in mind. Let us be clear: if this is the case, we do not have to draw the conclusion that most people are to be blamed because they do relatively little to change their ways. We may indeed blame people whose life-styles are clearly carbon-profligate, but it is counter-productive to blame those who are "on board" to some extent.

In short, my own view is that the ethics of climate change should not merely focus on what countries ought to achieve but also on what individuals ought to do, independent of and prior to any legal compulsion or social sanction so to do. This is for two reasons: first, without this focus and a consequent change in what individuals do and believe, the necessary changes in countries' policies will not be enough; second, it is the cumulative impact of individuals' behaviour that will make the difference. This applies as much to the behaviour of rich individuals in developing countries as it does to rich individuals in developed countries. One of the merits of the Greenhouse Development Rights approach is that it expects contributions from everyone above a certain level of material development. This applies of course to vast numbers of people like most of us here who are relatively well-off, but it applies particularly to the very wealthy, not just because there are a large number of rich individuals in rich countries whose lifestyles are carbon-profligate, but also because there are now quite a number of really rich individuals in so-called developing countries—in India and China for instance—whose private jets, to use an extreme example of a whole range of life-style choices—do the same damage as the private jets of the rich anywhere else. The trouble with a preoccupation with countries—important as this is—is that (a) it takes away attention from the fact that there is an awful lot of carbon-profligate behaviour in poor countries as well as rich countries (even if the per capita level is still

low) and (b) it averts our attention from the issue of the distribution of wealth and of carbon emission levels within all countries, rich or poor.

The level of commitment for individuals

There is a further issue, if we accept that individuals ought to change their behaviour prior to and independent of law or social sanction: how much and in what ways should we do so? We saw earlier that what governments, it is now argued in the climate change lobby, ought to do is move *progressively* towards 80% reduction of carbon-emissions by 2050. If it is asked why they shouldn't make the reductions *immediately* (which would clearly be much better for the environment if it were generally done), the answer will be that it is not politically realistic: it takes time to make radical changes in an orderly and fair way in a large political community, democratic electorates have to be won over, international compliance is required and so on. This may be so, though we need to note that the rate of possible change is by no means fixed, and that the speed and manner of changes made by governments is partly a function of what other countries' governments also influenced by their electorates do, and also crucially of what their electorates actually want them to do and want them to do because these citizens come to accept new *moral* priorities (in this sense, "can implies ought" not the other way round)—hence my earlier emphasis on changes in individual thinking and action.

But if we turn to the individual, what should we say about him or her? Is it only realistic that I can only cut my carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 (actually for any particular individual it might be anything, such as 50% or 200%)? Hardly. For many people, if they had the will to do so, they could do it tomorrow. It would involve some rather painful decisions—decisions which most of us with lifestyles that are carbon-intensive are not really prepared to take just like that. There are now facilities—e.g. web-sites—where people can do carbon-inventories for their own lifestyles and know how much they have to do to reduce their carbon emissions (including their share of what is done by others to enable them to do what they do) to the level strictly equal to their entitlement to the atmospheric commons as discussed earlier. Of course I know well that it is not as simple as this: as things stand, there are lots of individuals—usually the very poor, some in countries like the UK but most in poorer countries—who, through no choice of their own, are well below their per capita entitlement, so I can argue that I can exceed my entitlement, especially if I am prepared to offset my carbon emissions in various ways—putting money into

renewable forests, paying for a solar panel or loft insulation or whatever, or if I do other morally compensating things like helping with third world development. We can also argue—maybe special pleading if you will—that some of what we do is trying to contribute to positive changes (academics going to environment conferences are good at this kind of argument).

All these moral calculations are relevant—at least for making us feel not too bad about ourselves—but I do wonder if they get to the heart of the issue. This is because most of us do not, really in our heart of hearts, believe that something like an entitlement to an equal share of the atmospheric commons acts as a simple generator of a precise duty that applies strictly and immediately at the level of individual action, or that we can only avoid it if we engage in a lot of moral casuistry to get round it. For one thing it is too abstract to have that kind of moral grip; second, it is dependent on a lot of scientific assumptions the parameters of which are likely to change over time; and third, the moral idea here is more of a desideratum or ideal standard we have a duty to move towards, but not strict duty. In a way our response to this is similar to our response to Peter Singer's famous argument that in response to world poverty we ought to give money (and time and energy) to the point of marginal utility. With this likewise we can add qualification after qualification to temper it, but in the end it represents a kind of ideal rather than an ethical duty in the strict sense.

Whether or not we should treat the ethical demands of climate change mitigation as being on a par with the ethical demands of helping alleviate poverty is one of those key questions that need addressing as part of this debate. At any rate on one of the approaches that Attfield favours—Greenhouse Development Rights—the two demands for poverty reduction and climate change mitigation go together and this seems right. Whilst I am inclined to think—and I am still thrashing this over—that the moral demands to address world poverty and to adjust our lifestyles in the face of climate change are not as extensive in either case, as Singer argues or as a certain interpretation of atmospheric commons entitlement might have it, I am clear that in both cases our moral responsibilities are much more demanding than is commonly supposed, and require of us actions that go well beyond what law or social custom dictate, and that the ethics of climate change needs to pay as much attention to this question of what individuals should do *here and now*, as to what targets countries ought to set themselves *for the future*—partly because the earnest with which countries both set targets and then pursue them is largely a function of

what lots of individuals—you and me—prioritise now in their own lives. With this "constructive amendment" to his general approach to the ethics of climate change I hope Attfield will be largely happy.

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