

Climate Change, Irreversible Change and Changing Perspectives

This issue is about change and changing/new perspectives. The papers represent a rich array of perspectives across moral and political philosophy, environmental ethics, politics, sociology and economics yet all are written in a way to be of interest and accessible to readers from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds. Perusing the papers made me think of the many different facets of ‘change’, including the subtleness of change, the challenges of change and the reluctance to change.

Two subtle changes relate to the journal. Have you noticed that we have a new associated editor? Alex Loftus joined the Team of Editors earlier this year. Alex’s main interest is the conditions of possibility for radical change; his research in the areas of radical geography, urban political ecology, water politics and Marxist thought. Another subtle change is that the journal broadened its social media presence from the White Horse Press facebook page¹ to Twitter. Katie McShane and I started to tweet last summer from our @J_EnvValues twitter account sharing links to new book reviews, articles in print and announcing new issues as well as occasionally retweeting comments and work that catch our eyes. In fact, as I write this I notice it is our first anniversary today.

Social media is not everyone’s cup of tea but it can make a real change in terms of broadening one’s network, sounding out feedback to ideas, finding out about a wide range of issues across the globe, spotting gems of publications, enjoying powerful visual art and registering interesting events and case studies. Through Twitter a colleague and co-tutor on a module made contact with Brent Toderian – who played a prominent role in making Vancouver one of the leading green cities – and invited him to join a BCU Masters class via skype. This skype session highlighted the power of personal narratives. Reading the Vancouver action plan showed an ambitious framework of targets which can act as an incentive for Vancouver residents and businesses and as a template for other cities; yet hearing the story first hand with its ups and downs, finding out more about the specific context that helped the city progress on its green journey and Brent highlighting what he felt was really important provided lively inspiration and more grounded (rather than PR-style) insights well beyond the content of the *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan*. It was the discussions with Brent rather than the action plan that stayed in our minds and has influenced our own work and approaches.

In my previous editorial (Carter, 2013) I looked at ‘evidence’, and again evidence features as a topic in this issue. The article on fracking by Jaspal *et al.* identified and starts filling the gap of social and psychological evidence in

1. <https://www.facebook.com/thewhitehorsepress>

the assessment of impacts caused by fracking. Fracking is a hot topic across the USA and Europe with an increasingly cautious if not outright anti-stance taken by many citizens and some politicians. In the UK, the topic swept onto the political agenda in a storm and is strongly pushed by national government who were also instrumental in putting a stop to the EU formulating environmental regulations for fracking (see e.g. Carrington, 2014). This may not come as a surprise at a time of flourishing neoliberalism, but the apparent lack of a national public debate on whether fracking is actually a favoured energy option for the country is worrying. Jaspal *et al.* conducted their research using the 50 most watched YouTube videos on fracking (most of which were of US origin). The article therefore also illustrates that analysis of social media has become part of accepted research methods and, as you may have realised from reading newspapers or checking papers online, can be incredibly fast and powerful in making news and drawing attention to a topic, maybe even facilitating change in attitudes and behaviour. Based on the material of the videos, the paper provides an excellent summary of prominent environmental and economic impacts along with an analysis of the social and psychological impacts and how pollution affects sense of place and identity, a theme also picked up in pollution studies of other fossil fuels².

Sense of place and attachment to place are also considered by Plumecocq in her article on the political use of rhetoric to instil behaviour change. She highlights how conventional tools, such as economic incentives and regulation, ignore the influence of emotions on moral judgements that underlie political choices. Her argument for needing to examine rhetoric as a political economy tool in its own right takes you to think about the processes of persuasion, broader influences on collective representation and shared values. Using a case study of an ex-mining region in the North of France with a legacy of massively polluted soil and water resources (not too dissimilar to expected long-term impacts from fracking), Plumecocq puts the questions of ‘what is really at stake?’, which in turn may act as a trigger to changing behaviour and attitudes.

Brady’s article also pays attention to land use and associated landscape changes but looking well into the future. Her focus is on the long-term impacts of climate change from an aesthetics perspective rather than, or complementing, a more typical perspective on the topic rooted in ethical and moral philosophy. Does aesthetic value matter? Brady thinks so, arguing that aesthetic value influences conservation agendas and policies and may help adopt a moral attitude and greater emotional depth towards the environment. Our future environment should help us flourish in the future just as much as it inspires and nourishes us in many ways today. Brady argues clearly and beautifully how ‘future aesthetics’ links to ethics and moral value but that aesthetic value is not trumped by moral considerations. She does so by including anthropocentric

2. For example, for coal ash disposal, see Castán Broto *et al.*, 2008.

and non-anthropocentric value theory, looking at processes and outcomes, environmental change and environmental harm.

Reducing environmental harm and increasing distributive justice is the focus of Knight's paper looking at emissions grandfathering from a political philosophy perspective. He critically unpacks the question of whether expensive taste (i.e. nations that have achieved and become used to a high level of wealth but with the associated high level of negative environmental impact) requires compensation and if so under which conditions. Knight systematically works through the associated issues, considering to what degree greenhouse gas emissions are instrumentally bad (contributing to harmful climate change) and instrumentally good (enabling beneficial activities and outcomes), voluntarily incurred or involuntarily, and prompts attention to equality for opportunity of welfare. His arguments are carefully laid out and justified step by step, but one point I found myself disagreeing with was his statement that 'For high emissions, there is no consequence of human suffering "right here right now" as there is for slavery' (Knight, 2014: 581). What about, for example, asthma sufferers and other air pollution related health impacts? Impacts are first suffered in the areas of release before joining the global cocktail of emissions and increasing climate change forcing.

Irreversible change deserves particular attention. Jaspal *et al.* noted the clear outcry from residents near fracking sites over the irreversibility of change associated with fracking. Similarly, looking at the change in composition of the atmosphere over the past 150 or so years, irreversible change seems certain. Risk-based approaches are insufficient, unable to deal with many uncertainties and unknown interactions of natural and human-made ingredients and environmental processes influenced by human activities/impacts all over the globe. We only partly understand and insufficiently appreciate the complexity of it and have got ourselves locked-into pursuing economic growth rather than human wellbeing. Our assessment approaches are fallible and our policies and legal system full of loopholes and contradictions that create some perverse outcomes. Climate change is an international and intergenerational issue but environmental governance is essentially tied to national legal systems. Pollution of the common environment (e.g. air and seas) endanger ecosystem integrity and reveal existing structural injustices in our governance system. The paper by Kyllönen is positioned in that kind of territory where global environmental justice requires some form of civil disobedience. In arguing for 'atmospheric fairness' using the case of the 'Kingsnorth six', Kyllönen draws on Rawls' theory of justice (Rawls, 1972) and justification of civil disobedience (Rawls, 1999). With no fundamental change in sight in terms of policies, politics and reducing environmental impact, we are likely to see more debate in the future about the question whether illegal actions or damage to private property are justified based on the greater good. Civil disobedience has not only gained much media attention linked to the case of Edward Snowden but

has also penetrated academic action-research. For example, trespassing in fieldwork was the focus of a symposium held at St Hilda's College, University of Oxford, discussing trespassing territories, social boundaries and entering 'extra-legal' zones³ with a commentary on the event and key papers in the *Times Higher Education* (Matthews, 2014).

So considering the array of challenges in a rapidly changing world, what does really matter? To me, it is something I have learnt from Buddhist teachings and nature: the importance of being mindful and having respect for all sentient beings – human and non-human – and to respect the integrity of ecosystems. I found Kyllönen's (2014: 601) reference to humanitarian duties linger in my mind, though I dropped the 'unnecessary': 'The duties include the positive duty of mutual assistance and the negative duty of not inflicting [...] harm and suffering'.

CLAUDIA CARTER

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3. See <http://www.sthildas.ox.ac.uk/trespassing-fieldwork-symposium>