

Power, Political Responsibilities and Climate Change
 “Sustainability, Limitarianism and Political Responsibility”

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comments very welcome

ABSTRACT: Tackling climate change and bringing about a transition to a zero carbon economy require a radical transformation of the social, economic and political institutions that structure our lives. It calls for, among other things, the overhaul of our cities, towns, and buildings and infrastructure; putting a price on carbon; mass electrification; and, the extensive deployment of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, tidal, wave, hydroelectric, and geothermal energy. It requires investing in clean energy and facilitating clean energy transfer; preventing deforestation and engaging in reforestation; and the radical re-evaluation of existing practices and social norms. It is also imperative that this transition is a just one, one in which (in my view) any burdens are distributed in ways that reflect who has caused the problem and those with the greatest ability to pay.

All this requires concerted political action. But what kind of political action is required? Who has what political responsibilities to bring about this change? What political responsibilities do you or I have? One common refrain is that (an unspecified) ‘we’ need to bring about an (undefined) ‘structural change’. This is along the right lines, but it is also far too abstract and vague to be action-guiding. We need to know: What specific courses of action should be adopted? By who? On what basis? And, how can the relevant duty-bearers identify these duties?

In addition to this, one important lesson from the research in political science and the literature on energy transitions is that the necessary change can occur only through the construction of inclusive coalitions and networks, and cooperation with others both within and across national boundaries. However, the formation of such political networks and coalitions has further normative implications. For example, agents have duties to effect a just transition to a sustainable world, but many who are committed to this in a broad sense disagree on many issues – the appropriate climate target, the root causes of the problem, what policy measures should be adopted, and what means may be used. How do we negotiate these disagreements in ways that are fair and legitimate and result in effective political action? Some will argue for the need to ‘compromise’; others will object that this results in insufficiently radical action. How should we adjudicate such claims?

My aim in this paper is to provide some answers to these questions. I argue that Erik Olin Wright’s theory of social transformation provides a fruitful framework for thinking about these issues. With this in mind, and drawing on the social scientific work on the politics and political economy of carbon, energy and energy transitions, I outline an account of agents’ political responsibilities.

I define ‘political responsibilities’ as ‘responsibilities to take action to change the social, economic, legal and political frameworks within which we live in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change on just terms and secure loss and damage for those harmed.’. [a deliberately broad definition of the ‘political’].

In what follows I focus on mitigation (but a full account would include ‘adaptation’ and ‘loss and damage’).

I: Political Responsibilities

To address climate change requires extensive political action. We therefore need an account of political responsibilities – one that provides answers to the following questions:

Q1: What kinds of action should such agents engage in? If someone says ‘people should take political action to prevent climate change’ what kinds of actions and behaviours should be included? (the **content** question)

Q2: What kinds of agents bear political responsibilities? Are political responsibilities borne by governments, firms, trade unions, religious organizations, individuals, universities, other agents? Some or all of the above? What’s the unit of analysis? (the **unit of analysis** question)

Q3: Which specific agents have political responsibilities? Suppose that we think (in answer to Q2) that individuals have political responsibilities, do *all* individuals have them or just some? (the **agent** question)

Q4: *Who* should discharge *which* tasks? (the **task attribution** question)

Q5: How should the *burdens* of discharging political responsibilities be distributed among the relevant agents? Equally? Should some bear greater burdens? Furthermore, How much can be reasonably required of duty-bearers? (the **burden distribution** question)

II: Normative Criteria

Four Desiderata or Criteria for a Theory of (Climate) Political Responsibilities

1st: Harm-Prevention Justice: We need an account of responsibilities such that if people discharge their designated responsibilities then those whose interests are jeopardized by climate change will receive the level of protection *to which they are entitled*. The responsibilities must be such that compliance with them ensures that people receive the level of protection to which they are entitled [justice to potential victims]

2nd: Duty-Bearer Justice: An account should not yield responsibilities that are unreasonably demanding (an absolute standard) or distribute burdens unfairly (a comparative standard) [justice to potential duty bearers]

3rd: Determinacy: An account should yield determinate responsibilities (not vague or uninformative ones). This does not mean that it should issue in a single correct course of action. Determinacy \neq uniqueness. Determinacy is compatible with identifying several equally good courses of action. What it opposes are vague statements that provide no guidance on what the agent should do.

4th: Identifiability: An account should yield responsibilities that one can reasonably expect the bearers of those responsibilities to be able to identify and to ascertain what their responsibilities are. (It would be wrong to propose responsibilities that the bearers could not themselves identify, or could only do so in difficult or onerous ways).

III: We Lack An Account of (Climate) Political Responsibilities

Many are just silent on this.

§1. Others say things which are pretty vague and indeterminate. For example:

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong:

Our political duty as citizens is “to get governments to do their job to prevent the disaster of excessive global warming” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2010, p.344)

John Broome

“In your political actions, you should play your part in getting your government to act as it should” (Broome 2012, p.65).

Response: too vague and ill-defined (so fail criterion 3). If someone asks ‘What should I do?’ it is not at all clear what actions they should undertake (criterion 3), or how they could figure it out (criterion 4).

The same point could be made of Stephanie Collins's discussion of duties ("The Coordination Principle) in *Group Duties* (Collins 2019, ch.4). Her Coordination Principle includes 7 principles, 3 of which are subdivided into 2 further clauses. Her conclusion is that when 5 conditions are met there is a duty on the part of members of a group

"to be **responsive** to the others with a view to the outcome being produced or to the collective being formed (Collins 2019, pp.117-118: emphasis added).

Response. It is very unclear what being "responsive to the others" means or requires. Her Coordination Principle gives us no concrete guidance (criterion 3) and gives us no method for ascertaining the content (criterion 4).

§2. Some do come up with more specific statements. For example, Elizabeth Cripps on "promotional duties". She writes

"consider an individual living in (say) the UK, faced with the problem of climate change. She could **campaign and vote** for candidates for local and national office who are committed to promoting international and national mitigation and adaptation efforts.[fn8] In the absence of such candidates, she could **stand** herself or encourage a suitable candidate to do so. She could petition her local MPs and MEPs to change their policies. She could **send emails** to the UK Prime Minister, the US president, the UN Secretary General, the President of the European Commission, or the President of China. She could write them **open letters** in national or international newspapers or on social media sites. She could donate to campaign organizations such as Friends of the Earth. She could sign and **circulate petitions**, in person or online. She could **join or organize marches** at international summits. She could **write articles, set up websites**, and otherwise call for adherents to the kind of norm-changing 'global citizenship movement' suggested by Dale Jamieson.[fn9] The list is by no means exhaustive, but it serves to illustrate the scope of possible actions." (Cripps 2013, p.143: emphasis added).

Comment:

Objection 1 Why these? Cripps gives no evidence that that these would work and/or that they are the best courses of action (criterion 1).

Objection 2: For that we would need an empirical analysis of what needs to be done and then consider who can and should do it. We need a theory of social change and an explanation of how these actions would bring about the desired change. Anything that is done without that is *ad hoc*. We need a more systematic account.

Furthermore

Limitation 3: we need an account geared to agents other than individuals, as well as to individuals. (Not an objection to Cripps's account per se because I don't think that she is attempting to give an account of other agents' duties. But it does mean that it does not give guidance on what firms, trade unions, churches, central banks, etc etc ought to do.)

IV: The Politics of the Just Transition

How then do we think about this systematically? I want to make the case for eight theses. To introduce the first: Given that we are seeking to identify the responsibilities to bring about a transformation in our social, economic, legal and political world it is vital to have an understanding of how this transformation can come about. To approach this issue I suggest that we do two things.

Step 1: We need an analytical framework of how transformations (and energy transitions) occur. As Erik Olin Wright argues in *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010, Pt IV) an account of social transformation should specify

- the **political obstacles** to change and the forces maintaining the unjust status quo;
- the **political opportunities** for change that exist within the existing framework;
- how the **obstacles and opportunities are likely to evolve over time;**
- the **strategies** that agents can use to overcome the obstacles and exploit the opportunities to bring about the necessary change.

Step 2: To apply this to climate politics, we need to draw on the social scientific literature to identify the relevant **political obstacles** and **political opportunities** and **how these are likely to evolve**, as well as the **political strategies** for change available.

In short, my first Thesis is this

Thesis 1: Deriving the Content

Providing an account of agents' political responsibilities to bring about a just transition to an ecologically sustainable world requires an empirically informed account of (1) the political obstacles to such a transition, (2) the political opportunities available, (3) the changing nature of the obstacles and opportunities, and (4) the kinds of political strategies most likely to succeed.

The Argument for this: The problem with the accounts previously mentioned is that they lack *a theory of social and political change*. But the latter is indispensable. Without an account of how the requisite political change can come about it is impossible to give an account of political responsibilities that is effective (so compliant with criterion 1), determinate (criterion 3), and derivable (criterion 4).

This point can be generalized to all existing philosophical accounts of how agents should 'cooperate' to prevent some social evil or injustice. So it applies to the seminal treatments by Virginia Held (1970), Donald Regan (1980) and Iris Marion Young (2010).

* For example in his pathbreaking *Utilitarianism and Cooperation*, Regan, directs people to co-operate with other co-operators (Regan 1980, pp. x & 11 and chapters 8-12) ... *but co-operate in doing what exactly?* We cannot answer that question without a theory of social and political change that specifies what opportunities people have for effecting change, what stands in their way, and what kinds of actions available to them are best for bringing about the relevant change.

* In her justly influential *Responsibility for Justice* Young says of "all who contribute to processes producing unjust outcomes" that they have a responsibility "to work to transform those processes." (Young 2011, p.109). She adds: "[o]ur forward-looking responsibility consists in changing the institutions and processes so that their outcomes will be less unjust." (Young 2011, p.111).

Agreed, but again ... what specifically should they actually do? And, how can they identify what they should do?

V: What does this mean in practice for the politics of climate change?

Let's put **Thesis 1** into practice.

§1. What are the Political Obstacles to a Just Transition?

Obstacle 1. One key obstacle is fossil fuel companies (and utilities, labour unions). Obstructionism from those with what Colgan, Green & Hale (2021) call "climate-forcing assets".

- Leah Stokes (2020) shows how utilities and fossil fuel companies have delayed, prevented or watered down climate legislation (such as greater use of renewables) in a number of US states (including Texas, Arizona, Kansas and Ohio).
- Matto Mildemberger (2020) has shown how labour unions and fossil fuel companies in the US, Australia and Norway (among other countries) have blocked climate legislation. Carbon, he argues, gets "double representation".
- For more on obstructionism see Brulle (2018, 2021); Geels (2014), Hess (2014), Meng & Rode (2019), Oreskes & Conway (2010).

Obstacle 2. A second key obstacle is inertia and carbon lock-in, that is, our economy and our urban infrastructure lock-in dependence on fossil fuels (Seto et al 2016).

Obstacle 3. Prevailing ideologies, existing social norms and cultural practices (Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) & Frank (2020, ch 9). See, eg, what André Gorz called the "social ideology of the motorcar" in *Ecology as Politics* (1980 [1975]) and Matthew Paterson (2007) *Automobile Politics*.

Obstacle 4. dysfunctional political systems – ill equipped for global problems.

§2. What are the Political Opportunities to Bring About a Just Transition?

#1. There are potential coalitions – climate change legislation could enjoy electoral support because of

- (a) Some might favour policies designed to transition away from fossil fuels because increasingly people's lives and livelihoods are being harmed by climate change. They have what Colgan, Green & Hale (2021) call "climate-vulnerable assets".

- (b) Some might support policies designed to transition away from fossil fuels if that leads to the creation of ‘green jobs’
- (c) Some might support policies designed to transition away from fossil fuels if and because policies are designed and implemented that recycle revenues from carbon taxes to compensate them.¹
- (d) Some might favour policies designed to transition away from fossil fuels because they are concerned about air pollution (Scovronick et al 2019, 2021; Shindell & Smith 2019; Vohra et al 2021; Hart & Feldman 2021). Vohra et al report that there are 8.7 million premature deaths per annum as a result of fossil-fuel caused fine particulate matter (Vohra et al 2021, p.4).
- (e) Some might favour policies designed to transition away from fossil fuels because they are opposed to the extraction and transportation of oil. Think of indigenous rights movements and anti-extractivist movements (Estes 2019 & Riofrancos 2020).

#2. Powerful actors within many political systems increasingly support climate legislation:

- (a) insurance companies because they’re terrified about having to make huge payouts (Tooze 2019a,b);
- (b) many major investors are concerned about assets threatened by climate change. See, eg actions of Climate Action 100+ (including Blackrock and J.P. Morgan) (Condon 2020a,b). Though of Blackrock’s recent weakening of this commitment.
- (c) some companies benefit from climate mitigation regulations because it gives them a competitive advantage over their rivals (Kennard 2020).

#3. Some agents can use the existing legal and political architecture to press for change – (a) climate change litigation and (b) using mechanisms like the “global stocktake”.

§3. Changing Nature of the Obstacles and Opportunities

#1. As the climate worsens, those whose financial assets will be harmed by climate change (“climate-vulnerable assets”) will increase and become more vocal (Colgan, Green & Hale, 2021). The global pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine both affect the obstacles and opportunities.

§4. What are the Kinds of Strategies that might be employed?

Srivastav & Rafaty (2021) provide a very helpful typology of different strategies:

- #1. “Antagonism” – taking on the fossil fuel industry (divestment, protests, litigation)
- #2. “Appeasement” – compensate (some of) those adversely impacted by climate legislation (eg retraining of workers laid off as a result of climate transition; investment in green jobs)
- #3. “Co-optation” - Work within rules of the game – try to induce those blocking climate legislation not to do so (eg lobbying, campaigning)
- #4. “Institutionalism” - Change rules of the game (eg reforms to lobbying and campaign finance, disclosure of climate risks, binding limits, cut fossil fuel subsidies).
- #5. “Countervailance” – support those seeking to implement clean energy systems (eg invest in renewables, clean tech).²

To sum up: The account that has been developed so far can help answer Q1 on p.1 (on the **content** of agents’ political responsibilities). We have some idea of what needs to be done politically. We need agents who will adopt **strategies** that

* exploit the **opportunities** available to (inter alia) construct electoral and other coalitions to create an energy transition, redesign towns and cities, and

* take on the **constraints**, such as the cultural practices that support unsustainable patterns of consumption, and the blocking strategies of vested interests (both domestically and globally).

VI: But Who has What Political Responsibilities?

But *who*, we might ask, has *what* political responsibilities? We might know ‘what is to be done’ but not *who* should do it.

¹ See Bergquist, Mildenerger & Stokes (2020); Klenert et al (2018). On the other hand see Mildenerger et al (2022).

² See Srivastav & Rafaty (2021) especially their helpful short description on p.5.

I: Working Back from What Needs to be Done

I will begin with the 1st criterion. The goal is a zero carbon world in which the burdens and benefits of realizing that are shared equitably. We should work back from that, asking what would best realize that. [the use of a reverse-engineering approach]

My proposal is this:

Thesis 2: Power and Responsibility

Those with the capability to help bring about a just and ecologically sustainable world have a responsibility to exercise that capability in ways that do not thwart that objective (negative component) and also that further that objective (positive component).³ [the duty to use power responsibly].⁴

The thought: if (in line with criterion 1) we are committed to preventing climate change and doing so requires a radical change in society then there is surely a strong case for thinking that those with the capability to effect the change have a *pro tanto* responsibility to use their power to do so. Since they have this power they have a duty to exercise it responsibly.

But what if an agent lacks power? This takes us to the next thesis:

Thesis 3: Enhancing Power

Those who lack the capability to help bring about a just and ecologically sustainable world have a *pro tanto* responsibility to join or support a body that does have the power and authority to do so (or to create a new one if nothing appropriate is available). [the Duty to Augment or Enhance Power / duty to create a ‘counter-power’]

To illustrate:

The thought here is that

- If you are a student then you may lack power but you can (in line with **Thesis 3**) join a body that does have power (a student union or a political party) and augment its power (and campaign for divestment), and
- If you are someone with legal expertise then you can support/assist/advise legal campaigns litigating fossil fuel companies (eg Urgenda (2019); Milieudefensie/Friends of the Earth Netherlands (2021)); provide legal advice to developing countries
- If you are a worker ... then you can join a union and press it to campaign for green jobs.
- If you have a pension then you can press your pension fund to divest from fossil fuels
- If you're a church (leader) ... then campaign among your members; use your financial resources responsibly. See the Vatican's *Journeying Towards Care for Our Common Home: Five Years After Laudato Si* (June 2020)

³ In an earlier paper I termed this the ‘Power Responsibility Principle’ (Caney 2014).

⁴ An important complication. There are special cases where it is not straightforwardly the case that an agent who has power has the responsibility I am referring to. For example: consider (a) a case in which an agent should not have such power in the first place or consider (b) a case in which an agent may legitimately have this power but it lacks democratic legitimacy to exercise its power in this way. One might thus revise Thesis 2 to include a clause barring cases where

(a) A has power but should not [unjustified power]
or wher

(b) A justifiably has power but lacks the legitimacy to use it to promote these particular objectives (to promote climate policies). [illegitimate use of justified power]

(I am still thinking about this, but flag it up as an issue.) Consider three potential examples:

Example 1: Blackrock has enormous power (Congdon 2020a,b): As Congdon asks, Is it right for it to use its economic might to pressure companies to change their behaviour?

Example 2: Philanthropists have enormous economic power, but shouldn't the transition to a sustainable world come about through the democratic exercise of political power? For excellent broader discussion see (Saunders-Hasting 2018, 2022).

Example 3: Central banks are increasingly playing an activist role in the climate emergency (Langley & Morris 2020). Are they illegitimately straying from their democratically agreed mandate? (For instructive discussion see van't Klooster (2020, 2021).)

- If you are a major investor then you can withhold your finances from climate-endangering companies (eg Blackrock)
- If you are an academic ... then you can work with others to make the university more sustainable (including divesting from fossil fuels, going zero carbon, funding research into clean technology)
- If you are a journalist then you can inform citizens of which parties or organizations are supporting the transition to a sustainable world and which not; you can cover work on renewables.

Note an important kind of capability – epistemic capability.

- Epistemic Capability: Many might not know what kind of power/capability they have. They may not know that their pensions are invested in fossil fuels, say. They have a capability but do not know that they have this capability. This is where ‘epistemic capability’ comes in: Some may have a better understanding of where people’s capabilities lie. They have an epistemic capability: and with this comes a responsibility to disseminate this kind of information.

And so on.⁵

Note 1: This satisfies the Determinacy and Identifiability Criteria. People can read off their responsibilities from their capabilities.

Note 2: There is a variety of kinds of power (economic, ideological/ideational, political: Mann (2012)).

Note 3:

Thesis 4: Pluralism:

One implication of the two preceding theses is that the content of an actor’s political responsibilities is likely to vary considerably between different actors – because they will have different capabilities; they will face different constraints; and they will have different opportunities available to them.

VII: Looking at it from the Point of View of Putative Duty Bearers

The focus so far has been on what needs to be done (criterion 1), but we should, of course, also take into account the interests of putative duty-bearers (criterion 2). This takes us to the next thesis:

Thesis 5: Duty-Bearer Justice.

Any ascription of political responsibilities should not impose excessive burdens on duty-bearers (absolute component) or impose unfair burdens on duty-bearers (comparative component). (criterion 2)

Please insert here your preferred account of just burden sharing. [Familiar Distributive Criteria: (1) those who have caused environmental harm should bear greater share of the burdens; (2) those with the greatest ability to shoulder the burdens should bear greater burdens. For my views on this: Caney (2005, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2018).]

Note: we might have to balance trade-offs between (one interpretation of) criterion 1 (*protecting the planet and realizing the kind of just sustainable world that persons are entitled to under full compliance*) and criterion 2 (*just burden sharing in the transition*).⁶

VIII: Taking Stock

So far I have

- proposed a method for deriving the **content** of political responsibilities. Agents should figure out what constraints there are to moving to a just sustainable world, what opportunities there are, and design strategies in light of those (**Thesis 1**);

⁵ Note that this is distinct from Robin Zheng’s (2018) account of responsibilities to change the system. It makes no reference to social roles (and complying with one’s social role). It appeals rather to agents’ capacities (to exercise power and to create and enhance power).

⁶ For some thoughts on how to address such trade-offs: Caney (2016 a,b).

- argued that those with (greater) power or capabilities have (greater) responsibilities to use that to bring about a just transition (**Thesis 2**);
- argued that those who lack power or capabilities have responsibilities to join/support/strengthen agents-that-do-have-power (**Thesis 3**);
- argued that political responsibilities can vary from one agent to another. Different people (union leaders, students, CEO, urban planner, estates manager, student, academic, social influencer, member of religious association, lawyer, ...) will have different responsibilities (**Thesis 4**);
- noted that there are limits on what can be required of people (**Thesis 5**).⁷

We're not done.

IX: Organization, Coalitions and the Creation of Power

Next thesis.

Thesis 6: There is a duty to build coalitions and work in concert with others.

Why?

One lesson of the political science literature is that political success (in passing climate legislation, funding clean energy etc) depends on building coalitions (Roberts et al 2018, pp.305-306; Breetz, Mildemberger & Stokes 2018; Hess 2014; Meckling, Kelsey, Biber & Zysman 2015; Tooze in Levitz 2020). Realizing a just transition will not happen unless environmental actors work in concert. [a corollary of Criterion 1 on effectiveness, then, is that agents have duties to work in concert.]

This has implications within the state and at the global level

* *within the state*: environmental movements need to work together with each other, form alliances with other potential allies ... within limits. Success is not possible without building political coalitions.⁸

* *at the global level*: **Thesis 6** supports the case for 'climate clubs'⁹; for participation in "pledge and review" schemes (as in the Paris Agreement);¹⁰ and, more generally, for strengthening the "transnational regime complex for climate change" (Abbott 2014).¹¹

Note, though, that membership of campaigning organizations and political coalitions brings with its own normative implications. I here draw attention to two

⁷ Note how this framework diverges from that proposed by Iris Marion Young. Young proposes 4 considerations that should guide people: (i) their "power", (ii) their "privilege", (iii) their self-interest, and (iv) their "collective ability" (Young 2011, pp.144-147). My account shares with her account an emphasis on the role of power and collective ability. However, it goes further than Young's treatment because it explains *why* these generate responsibility – because they're needed for effective action. Furthermore,

- unlike Young's account, on my account the burdens that people should bear should take into account the extent to which they have culpably caused or exacerbated the climate crisis;
- unlike Young's account, on my account the burdens that people should bear should not be a direct function of the extent to which they have *benefited* from the emission of fossil fuels (a key element of Young's 2nd consideration);
- my account rejects Young's 3rd consideration as a basis for responsibilities;
- my account does not limit responsibilities to change a structure to those who participate in it.

One final remark: my criteria in Section II (esp criterion 1 on ensuring that justice is done to potential victims and criterion 2 on fairness to duty-bearers) can, I think, shed light on Young's 4 proposed considerations. Some of her suggestions (her (i) and (iv)) are I think best seen as criteria concerned with effectiveness and ensuring that justice is done to potential victims (my 1st criterion); and others (her (ii)) are I think best seen as being concerned with fairness among duty bearers (my 2nd criterion). So, while I do not endorse all of Young's considerations my criteria provide a framework which we can employ to make sense of, and evaluate, her four considerations.

⁸ See Breetz, Mildemberger & Stokes (2018), Hess (2014), Meckling et al (2015) & Roberts et al (2018).

⁹ See Hovi et al (2017), Keohane & Victor (2016, p.573) & Nordhaus (2015).

¹⁰ See Keohane & Victor (2016, p.574).

¹¹ For proposals on how to reform the existing multilateral negotiating processes see Caney (2016, 2022).

X: Two Corollaries

§1. The first is this:

Thesis 7: Duties of Inclusivity and Representativeness

Members of political organizations and coalitions to create a sustainable world have a responsibility to be inclusive and representative

There are two reasons for this

R1: *Epistemic* – political coalitions that seek to create a more sustainable world need to be representative of society more generally, otherwise they are likely to be insufficiently sensitive to all the morally relevant implications of climate politics.

R2: *Political Legitimacy* – political coalitions that purport to speak for humanity have a duty to be representative of that humanity and reflect people’s diverse backgrounds and beliefs. [Some green movements have been criticised heavily on this score.]

§2. To introduce the second corollary consider two points

2.1. *Disagreement*. First, those committed in some sense to avoiding dangerous climate change disagree on many matters.

- Target: There is disagreement about the appropriate target: Some call for 1.5C, some 2C and some even higher.
- The Underlying Causes: There is disagreement about the root causes of the ecological crisis. Some hold that the root cause is capitalism; whereas others seek to preserve and reform capitalism. Compare for example, David Harvey or Nancy Fraser with Mark Carney.
- Growth: There is disagreement about economic growth. Some call for green growth; some, however, are sceptical that we can have growth without emissions. These critics call for degrowth. Their critics in turn argue that degrowth would perpetuate world poverty and is politically infeasible.
- Policies: Even among those who might agree on some of the above questions, there is considerable disagreement about the appropriate policy responses. People disagree, for example, about nuclear energy, carbon taxes, reforestation, biofuels, fracking. And then there is geo-engineering.
- Political Means: some endorse traditional political processes. Others think that the time has come for what Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow have termed “contentious politics” and call for acts of civil disobedience (Malm 2021).

§2.2. *Creating a Coalition*

This disagreement matters because political success – at local, state-level and trans-national levels - requires *some* cooperation and it will be undermined by infighting and fragmentation. There is ample evidence of environmental campaigns failing because of failure to maintain a united front (Hadden 2015; Hale 2020). For an illustrative example see David Roberts’s coverage of the failure to pass Initiative 732 (I-732) in Washington state in 2016.¹²

These two considerations pose (at least) two challenges:

First, there is a *practical challenge* – how, if at all, is it possible to create a political constellation of forces that can bring about the radical change needed? [the importance of building a broad coalition]

Second, there is a *normative challenge*. Building coalitions often requires compromise and some ‘give and take’. But then with this in mind: How can we create the necessary political coalition without diluting the radicalness of the programme? How can we avoid reaching a compromise by watering it down and ending up with greenwashing? [the importance of not diluting the programme].

The point can be expressed thus: Individual agents need to strike a balance between, on the one hand, (i) coalition-building which may necessitate some compromise (the worry being that unless they do this all we will have are squabbling factions unable to achieve anything)

and

(ii) the importance of adhering to one’s fundamental commitments (the worry being that compromise may come at the cost of radicalism, and may result in a diluted programme which is little more than greenwashing).

¹² <https://www.vox.com/2016/10/18/13012394/i-732-carbon-tax-washington>.

A key question then is: When should agents compromise, and when should they not? What constitutes a morally defensible (or even required) compromise? And what not?¹³

Thesis 8: The Pursuit of Justice where Cooperation is Necessary
Members of political organizations and coalitions have a duty to create forms of political cooperation that can (i) enjoy the breadth of support needed for effective action while at the same time (ii) not diluting its radicalism.

Question: But how do we do this? How should we adjudicate the tension between (i) and (ii)

§1. Thought 1: Consider again criterion 1. A key guiding ideal should be ‘what best realizes ecological sustainability with a just distribution of burdens and benefits’. This is what grounds the political responsibility so clearly should guide our deliberations:

* In some cases this may counsel compromise. It might, for example, do so where there is no prospect of a more radical option and pursuing radical results in no benefits (or even comes at a loss). It may also give people reason to abandon their ‘ideally best’ policy. For example, there is evidence that some policies (eg feed-in tariffs and renewable portfolio standards) that economists deem to be less efficient than other measures are more politically successful ... and an imperfect policy that is realized is better than a perfect policy that is never realized (Meckling et al 2015, p.1170).

* In other cases it may counsel intransigence ... if that helps pull others towards a more ambitious goal. Think here of positive “radical flank” effects: (Freeman 1975; Haines 1984; Schifeling & Hoffman 2019; Aklin & Urpelainen 2018).

§2. Thought 2. One corollary of thought 1 is that agents should not be short-sighted. When compromising it is important to avoid

- Climate policies that may reduce emissions now but reinforce the status quo and undermine the prospects of a more radical transformation [a potential example – fracking (reduces emissions compared to oil and coal) but entrenches fossil fuel use and has harmful side-effects (Newell 2021, pp.6-7).]

If compromise is required it is best to find common ground on

- Climate policies that both reduce emissions in the existing energy system and that enable (or, more modestly, are consistent with) a more radical transformation in the future.

This builds on, but revises, André Gorz’s analysis of “non-reformist reforms” (Gorz 1964, p.12). Reformist-reforms operate within the logic of the status quo and militate against more radical reforms. Non-reformist reforms are reforms that facilitate more radical transformation.

§3. Thought 3. It is worth noting that ‘working in concert’ does not mean ‘having a united programme with total agreement on all aspects of what should be done’. In practice cooperation often takes the form of what have been termed ‘advocacy networks’ – loose coalitions of separate organizations (Keck & Sikkink 1998).¹⁴ This enables the possibility of cooperation/working together on the one hand and staying true to their commitments on the other.¹⁵

¹³ These dilemmas are not new. See, for example, the debate in the 1980s and 1990s in European Green parties (especially Die Grünen) between the so-called ‘realos’ and ‘fundis’. Or see the long-standing debates in the Left dating back to Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg - if not earlier - on the choice between ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’. Or consider struggles for the eradication of racial injustice. In *Black Power*, Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton draw attention to the perils of forming coalitions and criticise what they take to be the “myths” underpinning some arguments for coalitions, as well outlining the bases for “viable” cooperation (Ture & Hamilton 1992 [1967], chapter III).

¹⁴ Some distinguish between ‘transnational networks’, ‘transnational coalitions’ and ‘transnational movements’: Smith (2008, p.117ff).

¹⁵ Note, there’s a related dilemma

Thesis 9: Those committed to a just and sustainable world have to determine with whom to cooperate.
On the one hand, [a], there are reasons to work with people right across the political spectrum [effectiveness]
On the other hand, [b] there are reasons to draw a line and not work with adherents to some political perspectives [no compromising the values of freedom, equality and democracy].

§4. Thought 4. It is also important to note that forming a coalition need not generate a pressure to ‘water down’ proposals. Groups that disagree on the kinds of issues identified above can still agree on many things

- (i) the importance of not building new coal mines
- (ii) the need to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies,
- (iii) ceasing oil exploration,
- (iv) improved insulation,
- (v) electrification
- (vi) eliminating harmful transport and cooking emissions ... air pollution

Groups can, and do, also converge on radical action (blocking a pipeline) for a variety of different reasons.

Central Point: there’s a duty to work in concert, and, working in concert in turn generates further normative demands

- (a) representativeness and inclusive coalition formation
- (b) negotiating the need for a broad coalition without compromising a radical agenda.

Question: Why does all this matter?

Answer: you and I and others need to be able to identify the **content** of climate political responsibilities (Q1) and knowing the content requires knowing this.

XI: Concluding Comment

Discussions of climate justice frequently discuss ‘what ought to be done’ but often shy away from discussing who should bring it about and how. But, who has what political responsibilities to bring about the radical transformation that is required? In this talk I have sketched some answers and, in doing so, I have made a plea for a much closer engagement with the social scientific literature on the politics of climate change.

More fully, I have

- outlined how one can identify the **content** of climate political responsibilities (Thesis 1) followed by Theses 6, 7 and 8)
- set out **who** should discharge **which** responsibilities (Theses 2 and 3) and noted that the duties will vary depending on the capacities and constraints facing agents (Thesis 4)
- set out how concerns about fairness can be included (Thesis 5).

I would very much welcome comments, criticisms and suggestions for improvement.

Thank you!

XII: Background Material

Here are some earlier papers in which I explore some of these or related issues:

‘Addressing Poverty and Climate Change: The Varieties of Social Engagement’, *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol.26 no.2 (2012), 191-216. [discusses the different ways in which academics can contribute to campaigns to eradicate global poverty and climate change]

The issue: Are there political perspectives with whom one should not form a shared platform? Someone might think that no one should be excluded. I disagree, but won’t pursue that here.

‘Two Kinds of Climate Justice: Avoiding Harm and Sharing Burdens’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol.22 no.2 (2014), 125-149. [defends the Power/Responsibility Principle ... with great power comes great responsibility.]

‘The Struggle for Climate Justice in a Nonideal World’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: Volume XL “Ethics and Global Climate Change”*, vol.XL no.1 (2016), 9-26. [an exploration of nonideal climate justice reasoning - with four illustrations]

‘Climate Change and Non-Ideal Theory: Six Ways of Responding to Noncompliance’ in *Climate Justice and Non-Ideal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) edited by C. Heyward and D. Roser, 21-42 [outlines what options an agent has when others fail to discharge their climate responsibilities].

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Section VII (Thesis 5) concerns how the burdens of tackling climate change ought to be distributed. The work I refer to there is:

‘Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change’, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, vol.18 no.4 (2005), 747-775.

‘Environmental Degradation, Reparations, and the Moral Significance of History’, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol.37 no.3 (2006), 464-482.

‘Climate Change and the Duties of the Advantaged’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol.13 no.1 (2010), 203-228.

‘Just Emissions’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol.40 no.4 (2012), 255-300.

‘Climate Change’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), edited by S. Olsaretti, 664-688.