Climate of Arrogance, Disengagement and Injustice

At the time of writing the Paris COP21 conference is a few weeks away. Maybe they will agree to a robust framework of emissions reduction and adaptation motivated by a precautionary ethical principle (Hartzell-Nichols 2014), development assistance (Light and Taraska 2014) and maintaining social ecological stability (Shockley 2014). It is hard to be optimistic about that or the overall climate change situation (Spash 2015). Indeed the situation is one that has been argued to support an ethical priority for civil disobedience (Kyllönen 2014). Even if by some miracle a secure agreement were in place now to effectively limit warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels the resulting inevitable damage would still pose huge challenges of stable and just adaptation. How frustrating then that denialism about anthropogenic climate change is still a potent force. Surely denialists as such must be fools or knaves or both who deserve nothing but contempt?

Not necessarily. In the first paper of this issue Matt Ferkany provides a careful analysis of the vice of arrogance in relation to various forms of climate change denial. He defends an 'interpersonal' conception of arrogance as consisting in a belief in one's own superiority and forms of reasoning and action dismissive of others' interests and opinions (Ferkany 2015). He presents an Aristotelian account with humility as the virtuous mean between arrogance on the side of excess and pathological insecurity and self-deprecation on the side of deficiency. In these terms many familiar kinds of denial do express arrogance, for example that of the 'motivated lay denier' whose worldview commits him or her to political beliefs incompatible with steps required to tackle climate change and who finds his or her own lack of relevant expertise no reason to refrain from noisily dismissing the methods and conclusions of climate scientists. However, as Ferkany points out, denialism is not always a sign of arrogance; it might signal a different vice (dishonesty, say) or merely ignorance. Nor does arrogance turn on the content of belief, other than that in one's own superiority. It is possible to be an arrogant (e.g. motivated lay) castigator of denialists – to believe oneself superior whilst simply dismissing their reasons for believing differently.

Yet given the real urgency of the situation it is difficult to avoid angry impatience – with denialists, sluggish politicians and the trundling ineptitude of international negotiation processes. It is easy to slip from this into dismissive superiority. But, of course, the massively complex situation calls for more than denouncements, arrogant or otherwise. Take one familiar reaction to climate change: 'it makes no difference what I do, so I might as well carry on regardless'. On its own this thought cannot be grounds for climate inaction without discounting responsibility. If it really *makes no difference* whether I (or some circumscribed 'we') contribute to some great harm then it makes no difference whether I ('we') bear any responsibility for it (see Hailwood 2011; justifying inaction on such grounds also looks mistaken for other reasons, see Rendall 2015, Spash 2015). Unfortunately there are plenty of obstacles in the way of

our taking responsibility for actions and policies regarding climate change in a constructive way: recognising our role in producing climate change and participating in concerted action that looks more like part of the solution than the part of the problem. Some of these are obstacles of moral psychology; difficulties in the way of cultivating the habits and virtues apparently called for by the unprecedented situation, as explored in recent work by Marcello di Paola for example (di Paola 2013, 2015). Part of the solution here lies in the right kind of education and Ferkany makes various suggestions regarding the role of education in promoting humility and countering arrogance.

A related obstacle is the relative subjective importance of other immediately pressing problems. Public attitudes to climate change apparently fluctuate, not just because of the influence of denialists, but in the face of other headline-grabbing crises, such as the financial crash. In the second paper of this issue Stuart Capstick and his colleagues provide a nugget of optimism in this area (Capstick et al. 2015). They present evidence of significant continuity of commitment to basic pro-environmental principles (e.g. nature stewardship) and chart some increase in the normalisation of such pro-environmental practices as re-cycling and refraining from driving. These phenomena 'lie beneath' the more volatile attitudes to climate change suggested by polling data. Their study is based on a discourse analysis of data from various qualitative research programmes undertaken in Britain between 1997 and 2000. It brings out how reliance on quantitative research can give a misleading impression of the degree of volatility of general attitudes to climate change. But the underlying progress glimpsed by Capstick et al. seems slow and needs to be viewed alongside evidence presented by Alex Lo in the following paper (Lo 2015).

Assuming that the adversarial nature of current democracies, in which electorates and their representatives respond to the climate situation more or less arrogantly in accordance with their pre-existing political beliefs, is a serious impediment to progress, what is the situation in more authoritarian contexts? Lo provides a Q-method survey of Chinese student discourses around climate change, in which he detects varying levels of concern about climate change, confidence in the science, commitment to economic growth and development, technological optimism and mistrust of non-technological (e.g. political) remedies. He emphasises a shared ambiguity, or ambivalence, on the political issues. Even those most alarmed by climate change tend to be neutral or undecided about the required political institutions and mechanisms. These Lo labels 'prosaic environmentalists': 'environmentalists' because they are alarmed by the environmental implications of climate change; 'prosaic' because they tend not to question the prevailing political economy. As he notes, such 'ambiguity' is perhaps unsurprising in the Chinese context. He points to the increasing role of the internet as a site of informal political activism as potentially leading to change on this front; a topic given some recent attention in *Environmental Values* (Jaspal, Turner and Nerlich 2014), but needing further research.

If this is the situation with Chinese students (who might reasonably be assumed to be amongst the most informed and engaged segment of the vast Chinese population) then doesn't the refuge of 'it makes no difference what I – or we – do' seem all the more attractive to the rest of us? Another obstacle to embracing responsibility and avoiding such quietism is a lack of effective mechanisms for aligning personal responsibilities and action with efficacious social and political activity. What Lo calls 'prosaic environmentalism' is hardly confined to China and there is no magic wand to make it adequate simply for being outside that context. We all need mechanisms of effective political engagement.

These need to be just and just not only in terms of distributive outcomes. What counts as a just outcome is legitimately contestable and even apparently counter-intuitive views of distributive climate justice, regarding emissions 'grandfathering' for example (see Knight 2014), may be supported with strong arguments, which should not be simply dismissed. Political mechanisms and processes of governance need to be inclusive and enable meaningful engagement by the wide range of stakeholders in the situation with diverse values, perspectives and experience (see e.g. Blue 2015, Mabon and Shackley 2015). This is the topic of the fourth paper, in which Marco Grasso and Simona Scacchi point out that current international climate governance places the 'powers, capabilities and possibilities of participation' largely in the hands of rich countries and so lacks procedural justice (Grasso and Scacchi 2015). But what would it be to *have* procedural justice here? They argue that only a conception of '*pure*' procedural justice, which imposes no criteria of just outcomes outside of running the procedure, has the open texture and capacity for trans-contextual justification and application required by the plurality of stakeholders and values in play. By encompassing this plurality the just procedure will likely reduce currently entrenched power asymmetries and bring a deeper engagement with civil society by disrupting state monopolisation of the process.

This association of climate justice with a widely inclusive process of governance encompassing the currently powerless chimes with Chandra Lal Pandey's argument in the final paper of this issue (Pandey 2015). Pandey's focus is the role of ENGOs in international climate conferences. ENGOs, notably large, hierarchical and media-savvy Greenpeace, have played an increasing and somewhat useful part as participant observers supplying information and lobbying delegates. Yet the agenda they have helped shape has delivered little satisfactory progress on emissions reduction. This will remain the case, Pandey argues, as long as they remain focused on being (secondary) players at the big conferences. Rather they should follow the lead set by organisations such as 350.org and use their energies and resources to stimulate grassroots awareness of climate change and injustice and coordinate activism to pressure governments in the direction of climate sanity. It does make some difference

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what the big ENGOs do; just not much so far. They could make much more of a difference by doing more to help the rest of us to do so too.

SIMON HAILWOOD

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