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Climate Change and the Intuition of Neutrality

Francesco Orsi

Some of the current and future consequences of climate change on the human population are relatively easy to put into some sort of ethical perspective. The catastrophic events related to increasing global temperature (will) cause innocent deaths, diseases, homelessness, and food shortage. In order to prevent such consequences, many people are or will be forced to move to safer lands. Either way, their lives are dramatically affected for the worse. Moreover, most of those who can be said to causally contribute to climate change and its short- and long-term bad consequences (roughly, the industrialized world) seem to stand to benefit from such contribution (they are better off for it), whereas most of those who now or tomorrow will suffer its consequences are only worse off for it. Such facts require a more complex ethical analysis, but still one that employs familiar notions of foreseeable harm, reparation and intra- and inter-generational justice.

Other facts relating to climate change, however, require far more speculative ethical reflections. In his writings on population ethics and climate change, John Broome has urged us to face directly the fact that both global warming and the measures that might be taken to reduce its impact will, in all probability, reduce the size of timeless human population: '[t]he timeless population includes Julius Caesar, me, and all the people who are yet to be born' (2005: 404).[1] The deaths mentioned here will naturally remove from the timeless population all the descendants of the dead person. The migrations alluded to will likewise affect the size of the population. And so on. Therefore, it seems that climate change will contribute to the absence of countless people who would otherwise have

[1] See Broome (2004: chs 10–12) for a fuller account. For the purposes of this chapter, I will discuss Broome (2005).

existed. Now, if this is an additional bad consequence of climate change, then such badness, given the enormous numbers involved, threatens to 'swamp' the badness of the killings of actual people.

Such 'swamping' can mean a number of things. First, in the unlikely event that climate change will in fact add members to the timeless population, and such addition is to some extent a good thing, then such goodness will outweigh the badness of the deaths actually attributable to climate change. This seems to be rather counterintuitive. Second, more realistically, if the measures taken to reduce the impact of climate change will also reduce the size of the timeless population, then this is a bad consequence that must be weighed against the goodness of saving many actual lives. Given the enormous numbers of people who would otherwise have existed, reducing the impact of climate change might turn out to be overall bad. This, again, is not something we are inclined to accept, unless perhaps in the remote event that reducing the impact of climate change, while saving lives, will still lead to a gradual population collapse up to the point of human extinction (discussed subsequently).

Maybe these scenarios are too unlikely to be seriously considered, and the badness of reducing timeless population will simply add to the badness of actual deaths, so that there will be even more good reasons to fight against climate change. Still, the former bad consequence will 'swamp' the latter: if bad at all, then the absence of a potential infinity of humans that would otherwise exist might be worse than even the millions of deaths of actual people. This consequent still seems intuitively false. Intuitively, we ought to care more about, and focus our efforts more on, preventing the actual million deaths brought about by climate change, than on preventing the infinite absences. Preventing actual deaths will predictably also affect the size of timeless population, but this seems, at most, like a fortunate side-effect of our efforts. By contrast, if the reduction in size of timeless population were bad, then preventing actual deaths would mainly matter as an effective means to avoiding what is worst. Putting things like this seems like getting them the wrong way around.

In the following sections, I critically examine the so-called intuition of neutrality as discussed by Broome. In the light of his objections, I urge an alternative normative interpretation of neutrality in terms of an exclusionary permission to disregard the

value of adding lives, and argue that it is an intuitive and plausible option. Subsequently, I explore the justification and the limits of such a permission, showing how it deals with the prospect of human extinction. The last section clarifies how the exclusionary permission dispels the 'swamping threat' to our assessment of climate change.

The Evaluative Intuition of Neutrality: Formulations, Objections, Diagnoses

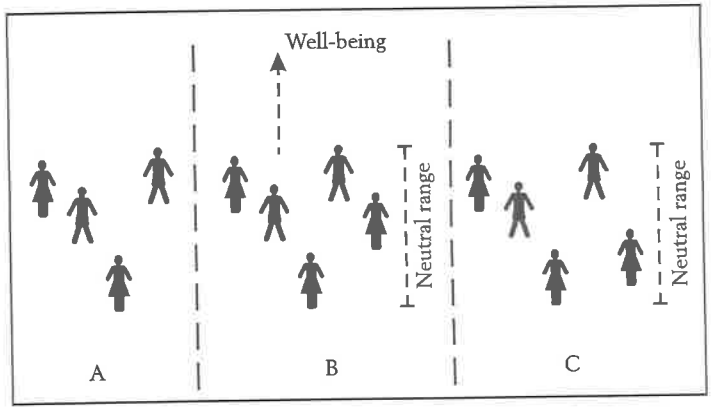
What seems to lie behind our caring more about actual deaths (than about the timeless population size) is a consequence of a common sense view that Broome calls the intuition of neutrality. The subtractions to timeless population that climate change (and the fight against it) will produce — the absence of people who would otherwise exist — simply don't seem to matter: they are evaluatively neutral, neither good nor bad. The same goes for potential 'additions': fighting climate change may also add people to the timeless population, but this doesn't seem like a consequence worth caring about, nor does it make saving actual lives additionally better. In Broome's words: 'Our intuition is that the size of the population is ethically neutral, because we think adding people to the population, or subtracting people from it, is neutral' (2005: 404). The intuitive neutrality of size changes in population seems to follow from the intuitive neutrality of adding or subtracting individuals. According to Broome's: 'A world that contains an extra person is neither better nor worse than a world that does not contain her but is the same in other respects' (ibid.: 401).

Of course we recognize that a new person can make the world better if, for example, it brings happiness to her parents, or can make it worse, by making new demands on our planet's finite resources. The 'same in other respects' phrase is meant to equalize these indirect effects of a new person's existence. But what about the intrinsic goodness or badness of the extra life? The intuition of neutrality seems to hold, quite regardless of whether the extra person will be happy or miserable. Of course, when faced with the possibility of a terrible extra life, most will agree that adding that person's life will make that world worse; and possibly, adding an extremely happy life will make that world better. However, it seems that for a vast range of levels of well-being the existence of the extra person is neither good nor bad: it is good to make people

happy, but making happy people is rather different (see Narveson 1973). So here is Broome's qualified statement of the intuition: 'Adding a person whose wellbeing is in the neutral range is neither better nor worse than not adding her' (2005: 406).

Setting the boundaries of the 'neutral range' of well-being is, of course, controversial. But this is not the main problem. Broome's objective is to show that, whatever the inherent difficulties in the neutrality intuition, any attempt to further specify the notion of neutrality in evaluative terms determines the failure of the intuition. This is serious; the stakes are high, as Broome notes: 'only this intuition allows us to be confident even that global warming is a bad thing' (ibid.: 405). So, let us consider two worlds A and B (see Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1



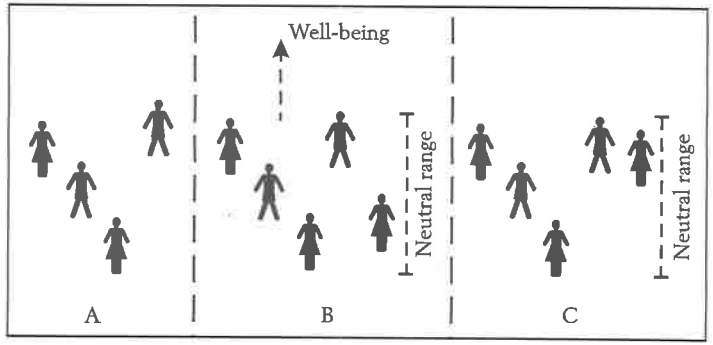
Source: Broome (2005).

A and B are equal in every respect, except that B contains an extra person within the neutral range of well-being. One reading of the intuition says that if A is neither better nor worse than B, then A and B are equally good. Adding the extra person is equally as good as not adding her. Now consider a third world C, in which the extra person is at a slightly lower level of well-being than in B, but still within the neutral range. By neutrality, A and C are also equally good. Given the transitivity of 'equally as good as', it follows that B and C are equally good. But this is unintuitive: since the extra person in C is at a lower level of well-being than in B,

B is better than C. So, an apparently false conclusion follows from interpreting neutrality as equality of goodness.

Another option is to read neutrality as incommensurability in value. Since incommensurability is not a transitive relation, in Figure 10.1 one can consistently say that B is neither better nor worse than A, A is neither better nor worse than C, and that B is better than C. Broome's main criticism against this interpretation is that neutrality as incommensurability is objectionably 'greedy'. The argument starts from considering three further worlds A, B and C (see Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2



Source: Broome (2005).

A has four people within the neutral range of well-being. B has five people within the neutral range. C has the same five people as B, but a man is worse off than in B (and than in A) and a woman is better off than in B, though both are still within the neutral range. Now, given neutrality, B is not worse than A (Situation 1 represents B and A as incommensurate). Suppose that C is better than B: for example, the woman's well-being is increased more than the man's well-being is decreased (Situation 2: C lies above B). It follows that C cannot be worse than A (Situation 3: C must lie above A) (see Figure 10.3).

Figure 10.3

1	2	3
BA	C B	C (B)A

Source: Prepared by the author.

The problem is that if adding an extra person within the neutral range is neutral, then C does seem to be worse than A. C contains one extra person within the neutral range: that's neutral. But C also contains a man who is worse off than in A: that's bad, or at least makes C worse than A, as far as that goes. A neutral thing plus a bad thing should make C worse than A. But in Figure 10.2, we have concluded that C could not be worse than A.

Now, one way to put the point is simply that the neutrality intuition generates contradictory claims. Broome's greediness objection is, however, slightly more complicated. By generating the claim that C is not worse than A, the neutrality of adding an extra person in C seems to have 'swallowed up' or neutralized the badness of the man's being worse off in C than in A. Likewise, A seems intuitively to be better than C: the extra person is subtracted (neutral), the man is better off than in C (good). But we have already concluded that C cannot be worse than A. So the neutrality of subtracting the extra person 'swallows up' the goodness of the man's being better off in A than in C. This neutralizing effect is what Broome calls greediness. And this is odd: the neutrality of a feature should leave things evaluatively the way they would be, were the neutral feature absent. If C would be worse than A, were the extra person absent, then the presence of the extra person, if neutral, should not overturn that assessment.[2]

To finally fix the nail in the coffin, Broome points out that 'if neutrality is greedy, it cannot do the work we need from it' (2005: 409). Consider global warming. The neutrality intuition is supposed to support the claim that alterations in the size of the population are not what matters in assessing climate change, and our

[2] According to W. Rabinowicz, this idea expresses 'strong neutrality', and as such it should not be greedy by definition. But neutrality as incommensurateness is not a form of strong neutrality, therefore there is no reason why it should not be greedy (2009: 398–99, and fn. 15). In a reply, Broome agrees on the distinction, but still finds the implications of greediness (such that the goodness of saving lives might be swallowed up by the effects on population numbers) 'incredible' (2009: 414). I take him to mean, correctly, that neutrality as incommensurateness (even if conceptually coherent) does not do the justificatory work that the intuition of neutrality was supposed to do (the point is explained in the subsequent section in the text).

response to it. Relatively well-off existences will be 'subtracted' both by climate change and our response to it: but as long as such existences would lie within the neutral range, this fact should not make climate change additionally bad, nor should it make trying to fight against it bad either. When looking only at population numbers, what matters is, principally, the innocent deaths that climate change will cause and which we can prevent. However, it is, in principle, possible that the badness of deaths might be neutralized by the neutrality of changes in the population size, in the way described earlier. Given sufficient neutral population changes, and a sufficiently wide neutral range, a world plagued by the disastrous consequences of climate change might still not be worse than a world without it. As Broome says:

> The change in population caused by global warming will probably be large, whichever direction it goes in. Therefore, if this change is neutral, I think we have to expect its neutrality to swallow up the bad effects of global warming. We shall be forced to conclude that global warming is probably not bad, but neutral (2005: 410).

This conclusion seems both unacceptable and paradoxical: by their neutralizing effect, those very facts which were supposed not to count at all might, in principle, dominate our evaluative assessment of climate change!

Broome's first diagnosis is that the problematic feature in the neutrality intuition is the idea of a neutral range, as opposed to a single neutral level of well-being. In the equality interpretation, the problem stemmed from supposing that extra persons, occupying different positions within the range, did not make the world any better or worse. In the incommensurability interpretation, the problems also stemmed from supposing that somebody could be made better off (or worse off) and still lie within the neutral range. By contrast, if there is a single neutral level of well-being, then adding a person whose life lies above that level will make the world better. And changes in well-being will correspond to ways to make the world better or worse. However, the idea of a neutral range seemed crucial to the neutrality intuition: that a new person would be happy doesn't make adding that person good. Barring extremes in happiness and misery, there is a wide range of levels of well-being that we can simply ignore when considering potential new additions to the human population.

There seems to be a dilemma here. If neutrality is spelled out in terms of a neutral range, then the difficulties pointed out by Broome seem invincible. But if neutrality is reduced to applying to a single neutral level, then it does not reflect a shared intuition, nor does it do its job; for any prospected change in population size, we need to ascertain whether the lives added or subtracted would be above or below the single neutral level. We actually need to count them in our deliberation. Such considerations, given the enormous numbers involved, would threaten to dominate over the tangible effects of climate change on actual existing people. On the original version of the intuition, we could safely assume that population changes would lie within the range, and thus ignore such population changes.

A second diagnosis is hinted at by Broome, when he underlines that the difficulties apply to an evaluative reading of the intuition, where 'neutral' means 'neither good nor bad'. He leaves it open that a normative or deontic interpretation of the intuition might do better (Broome 2005: 412–13). Indeed, the way out of the dilemma that I propose in the next sections takes its lead from Broome's remarks. To develop a normative interpretation means to accept that common sense is confused by its own lights when affirming neutrality as an evaluative intuition: remember that the evaluative intuition was shown to have counterintuitive consequences.[3] But a normative interpretation cannot simply be a matter of stipulation: rather, it must possess an intuitive force comparable to the original, while avoiding its patent problems. *Inter alia*, this means that a normative interpretation will need to make sense of a normatively neutral range of well-being as opposed to an evaluatively neutral range, which was shown to be untenable.

[3] Perhaps, a further psychological diagnosis might help to make a normative interpretation more palatable. The intuition of neutrality strikes us as plausible when stated in abstract evaluative terms. But as soon as we try to draw out its implications by picturing worlds against one another, the very presence of a new added person with a certain level of well-being inclines us to perceive an evaluative difference between the worlds, and one which is not naturally captured by incommensurateness (even if other things are equal, there must have been a change, for the better or worse!). If so, evaluative neutrality (either as equality or as incommensurateness) can hardly be said to be intuitive.

Any alternative interpretation of neutrality, thus, will have to meet at least the following conditions:

(*a*) it must be coherent and not 'greedy' (unlike the evaluative reading),
(*b*) it must have an intuitive force comparable to the evaluative reading,
(*c*) it must provide a flexible approach to assessing population changes brought about by climate change (this will matter when considering the possibility of human extinction).

A Normative Model for Neutrality: Exclusionary Permissions

Broome already hints at a particular normative reading of neutrality:

> Think about a couple who might have a child. Our intuition is that their having a child is neither better nor worse than their not having one. But we now know this intuition is mistaken except in the special case where the child happens to live at exactly the single neutral level. So if the couple have a child, that will generally be either better or worse than their not having one. Suppose it is better. Then the couple are in a position to make the world better by having a child. But even so, we might think they have no moral responsibility to do so. We might think they are doing nothing wrong if they choose not to. This normative conclusion about rightness and wrongness may be part of what the neutrality intuition is pointing to. Possibly the intuition might be given a coherent interpretation in these normative terms. And possibly it may apply to grand issues such as global warming as well as to a couple's decision about a child. Global warming will be very good or very bad because of its effect on population. But possibly we may have no moral responsibility towards population, and we may be entitled to ignore the goodness or badness of this effect (2005: 413).

As the last sentence makes clear, a normative reading will put us in a position to claim both that certain outcomes, like changes in the population size, are good or bad, rather than evaluatively neutral, and that it is permissible for an agent to ignore such goodness or badness. The idea may at first sight look paradoxical: how can what is good or bad be permissibly ignored? After all, one might say, if certain things are good then they ought to be promoted or favoured in some way, and if certain things are bad then they ought

to be minimized or disfavoured. Ignoring either seems to be impermissible. However, we do have a model in the theory of reasons which can dissolve the air of paradox: Joseph Raz's exclusionary reasons.

An exclusionary reason is a reason to disregard certain reasons and not act on them. So it is a kind of second-order reason. As a good exclusionary reason it will truly justify the agent in ignoring certain first-order reasons. As such, it does not override first-order reasons, nor does it undermine their status as reasons: it simply justifies excluding them from our deliberation. Raz's own examples of exclusionary considerations include promises to act only on certain reasons, orders of an authority (indeed, for Raz, norms in general), and conditions such as fatigue, where an agent acknowledges the good reasons for and against a certain decision but, given her temporarily unreliable mental state, prefers — justifiably — to give up the task of balancing them and coming to a decision (1999: 37–39).

The normative interpretation of neutrality requires the notion of an exclusionary permission: a consideration that does not mandate, but permits ignoring the reasons stemming from the intrinsic goodness or badness of adding new lives within a certain level of well-being. As Raz says: 'Exclusionary permissions differ from exclusionary reasons in that they do not entail that one ought to disregard the excluded reasons. They merely entitle one to do so' (ibid.: 90). Raz's working example is the analysis of supererogation. Even if donating money to Oxfam would be better than spending it for our family, and thus what we ought to do on the balance of reasons, we are permitted to disregard or exclude such reasons and not act on them. An act is supererogatory when we ought to do it on the balance of (first-order) reasons, but we are permitted not to act on the balance of (first-order) reasons (ibid.: 94).[4]

So, an exclusionary permission to ignore the goodness or badness of adding lives would entitle us to disregard changes in population size brought about by climate change and by the policies enacted to reduce its impact. How does the exclusionary model meet the three requirements mentioned earlier? First, exclusionary

[4] Supererogation is only Raz's example: I am not suggesting that taking into account changes in population size is supererogatory, although we could imagine situations where it would be.

permissions are not 'greedy'. Consider again the three worlds A, B and C (see Figure 10.2). Remember that on the evaluative interpretation of neutrality as incommensurability, we were forced to conclude that C is not worse than A, where this was contradicted by the intuition that C is overall worse than A (because C contains one bad feature and a neutral one). For Broome, the evaluative neutrality of adding a person in C seemed to swallow up the badness of a person being worse off in C than in A. This is both implausible on its own right, and a strange upshot of neutrality; the neutrality of a feature should keep things the way they would be, were the neutral feature absent.

On the exclusionary model, the badness of a person being worse off in C than in A — the reason to prefer A to C — is not swallowed up by the fact that we have a permission to disregard the presence of an added person in C, provided that her level of well-being lies within the range in which the exclusionary permission is applicable, what we can call the normatively neutral range. What we are permitted to exclude is the value of the added life, not the change for the worse of the one person existing at both worlds. The point is that C might be overall worse, or better than, or as good as A, depending on the well-being of the added person; in any such case, we are permitted to disregard such value differences as determined by the addition of a new person within the relevant range. The exclusionary model indeed does not even depend on the possibility of comparing the overall value of A and C.

Looking at the issue of climate change, on the exclusionary account there is no danger that the goodness of effective climate change policies or the badness of climate change will be swallowed up by the neutrality of their effects on population size. Neutrality here means precisely that we are permitted for the most part to disregard such effects, and such a permission cannot swallow up positive reasons to fight climate change.

Second, the exclusionary account seems to retain much of the force of the original intuition. The central (and problematic) feature of the evaluative interpretation was the notion of an evaluatively neutral range of well-being levels. Broome's arguments show that we need to abandon such a notion: at most, there will be one single neutral level of well-being, if any sense can be made at all of a life that is neither worthy nor unworthy of living (for example,

contrary to hedonistic views, a life devoid of good and bad experiences seems to fall below that level). But the idea of a neutral range as opposed to a single neutral level can and should be kept. The exclusionary permission will entitle to disregard a vast range of well-being levels as reasons to add or to refrain from adding new lives. Such a 'permission range' will have rough limits; intuitively, we would not be permitted to ignore lives that are exceptionally good or exceptionally bad. We have some non-excludable (but still defeasible) reason to create the former, and some non-excludable (but still defeasible) reason to prevent the latter.

Perhaps some might think that the 'permission range' should not include positively bad lives: even if we might be overall permitted to create bad lives in some special circumstances, surely we are not permitted to disregard altogether their badness: we have a non-excludable reason to give it some weight in our deliberation. On the other hand, it seems that reasons to create (less than exceptionally) good lives can be excluded altogether. Now, this is a matter of substantive moral debate that need not concern us here. The exclusionary account simply provides a coherent framework to express our intuitions — if intuitions suggest a moral asymmetry between creating good and bad lives here, the 'permission range' will be defined accordingly. Whether such asymmetry is defensible requires an investigation that falls outside the scope of the chapter.[5]

Returning to practical issues, since we are dealing with a permission here, we are still entitled to take account of changes in population size, and we would still have good reasons to do so. This is in the spirit of the original intuition of neutrality: the idea was not that it would be wrong to consider changes in population size, or that adding people within the neutral range must not matter, but simply that it does not matter. To be sure, the original notion of new lives 'not mattering' suggests the absence of reasons to care about adding them, whereas the exclusionary model acknowledges

[5] A deontological approach might justify the asymmetry by distinguishing strict requirements of non-maleficence (do not create evil) and looser reasons of beneficence. But so can rule-consequentialism distinguish permissions not to create good lives (justified by various benefits, explained subsequently) and requirements not to create bad ones (justified by the obvious, immediate badness of such acts).

the presence of (first-order) reasons, albeit ones that are permissibly excluded. I think this residual tension with the original intuition is a price worth paying for defenders of the intuition, in the light of the difficulties of the evaluative version, and the implausibility of rejecting neutrality altogether.

The third condition requires the exclusionary account to be flexible enough to deal with all sorts of population changes. Is the fact that a new good (or bad) life will be added or subtracted always excludable as a reason? Are potential parents among the few remaining members of a certain ethnic group permitted to ignore the fact that they might create new lives, thus perpetuating the existence of the group? Can the few remaining members of the human species ignore the possibility of perpetuating the species?[6]

Exclusionary Permissions: Grounds, Scope and Human Extinction

To approach this kind of an issue we need to say more about the structure of exclusionary permissions. Two points need emphasizing — an exclusionary permission is based on some ground, and it has a limited scope, that is, it entitles one to disregard some but not all reasons for or against a certain action (Raz 1999: 40, 91): 'the scope of an exclusionary reason [or permission] is the class of reasons it excludes' (ibid.: 46). On the topic of grounds, what could justify a general permission to disregard reasons stemming from the possibility of creating good lives (and bad ones, if we deny the asymmetry discussed earlier)?

Different approaches to moral theory might provide different answers here. For instance, on a person-affecting view one could argue that such a permission is justified in virtue of the unique position of power or privilege that living, actual agents enjoy with respect to the non-existent, potential, future generations. Even if such potential lives would be good for their owners, and consequently there might be reasons to make them actual, still there is nobody actual to whom we owe it that such lives be created. Hence, this is a permission to disregard goodness-based reasons to create

[6] See Broome: 'If the intuition of neutrality is correct, it tells us that extinction is neither good nor bad, provided the future people who will exist if humanity does not become extinct, live within the neutral range' (2010: 112). I argue that once interpreted as an exclusionary permission, neutrality does not entail anything regarding the value of extinction.

them. Notice that this does not imply absolute moral discretion with regard to future generations. For example, we may still owe it to them that, if we create them, then we make sure that their lives will be good. Alternatively, one could argue in the spirit of Samuel Scheffler's agent-centred prerogatives that it is the personal perspective of each of us that grants us such a permission to disregard altogether at least certain ways to make the world impersonally good. Finally, on a consequentialist basis it seems that a permission to disregard potential good lives is justified insofar as everyone having the freedom to pass up such opportunities to make the world impersonally good maximizes overall value. One of the values that such a permission, generally internalized, might (and does seem to) maximize is precisely the enhanced quality of life of those who are actually born, for no other reason than that living in a less crowded family (or a less crowded world) normally is an advantage. If we have reason to create good lives, then overall conformity to such a reason might well be made more likely by a generalized permission not to create good lives whenever one can.[7]

Some justifications might be theoretically more or less plausible than others, but, in fact, it does not ultimately matter which one is the best. The crucial question is whether they allow a permission that is flexible enough to respond to some extreme scenarios in the intuitively right way. The scenarios are those in which the very existence of a certain group or of the human species itself is endangered. In these cases, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that the existence of future people is a possibility we are permitted to disregard altogether. However, here considerations of scope help us to see that the exclusionary account is not committed to the permissibility of letting humanity go extinct. The scope, or class of reasons that are excluded, specifically have to do with the goodness of potential lives for the people that would be added. Insofar as such considerations of goodness are concerned, we are allowed to disregard them and to choose, not to create new lives on that basis. But other reasons to create new lives fall outside the scope of the exclusionary permission, and, thus, may not be permissibly ignored.

This is the case in the extinction scenario. Here what matters is not the goodness of future lives, but rather the possibility there

[7] See Mulgan (2006) for a rule-consequentialist account.

might not be future human lives at all. Intuitively, we are required to take this possibility at least as a *pro tanto* reason to create enough new human lives, and to make sure, now, that such scenarios will not occur in the future. So the exclusionary permission simply does not apply in such cases, and does not conflict with the requirement.[8] Of course, the requirement might conflict with other considerations, such as the relative loss of freedom that policies aimed at preventing extinction might cause.

All three justifications sketched here leave room for the requirement not to let humanity go extinct. The person-affecting approach might claim that we owe it at least to our contemporaries to make sure that their lives, efforts, achievements etc. will be possibly remembered, appreciated etc. and not fall into the oblivion of human extinction. Possibly, we also owe it to the future generations that if we create them, then they can hope to be remembered, appreciated etc. (while still not owing them that they exist). The agent-centred prerogative approach likewise might focus on our personal interest in preventing human extinction; in any case, the scope of the prerogative is itself limited, and should not justify ignoring disasters such as human extinction, even supposing that such disasters are only impersonally bad. Finally, if human extinction implies the irreversible extinction of the greatest values (among which the very possibility of appreciating values), then consequentialism, too, gives us obvious reasons to prevent such a disaster and perpetuate the species.

The upshot of this section is that the exclusionary account of neutrality, given the limited scope of the permission, does not entitle us to disregard the extinction of humanity. Moreover, it is compatible with a number of theoretical justifications, which leave room for a requirement to prevent human extinction. Thus, their plausibility as approaches to questions of population ethics is somewhat enhanced. Since the exclusionary account can receive support from any of them, the account itself comes out as stronger as well.[9]

[8] The relevant (positive) consideration here is 'a new human being might exist'. This consideration is, barring religious views, normatively irrelevant in itself: something that we do not need a specific permission to exclude.

[9] I take it that it is not inconsistent to discard the evaluative intuition of neutrality while reintroducing the notion of value in providing the grounds of exclusionary permission (for example, in a rule-consequentialist justification). However, one might argue that a value-based defence of a permission to disregard the value of potential lives is bound to be unstable, and makes the exclusionary permission only contingently valid. This is true, but also the degree of intuitiveness of the original neutrality intuition can vary in varying global scenarios, where the potential lives might, after all, matter. So, neither the intuition nor the exclusionary permission are meant to be set in stone.

Conclusion

The exclusionary account seems to provide a viable alternative to the evaluative intuition of neutrality. Remember that the intuition of neutrality protected us from three 'swamping' threats: (*a*) in the unlikely event that climate change will, in fact, add members to the timeless population, and such addition is to some extent a good thing, then such goodness can outweigh the badness of the deaths actually attributable to climate change. (*b*) If the measures taken to reduce the impact of climate change will also reduce the size of the timeless population, then this is a bad consequence that must be weighed against the goodness of saving many actual lives. Given the enormous numbers of people who would otherwise have existed, reducing the impact of climate change might turn out to be overall bad. (*c*) If bad at all, then the absence of a potential infinity of humans that would otherwise exist might be worse than even the millions of deaths of actual people. This consequence seems intuitively false. Intuitively, we ought to care more about, and focus our efforts more on, preventing the actual million deaths brought about by climate change, than on preventing the infinite absences.

The exclusionary account of neutrality leaves the value of changes in timeless population intact. To this extent, the swamping threat is still present. However, a permission to exclude such value and the relative reasons completely silence the swamping threat from a normative point of view. Of course, being a permission and not a requirement, humanity may still, in principle, choose to prioritize changes in population size when deliberating about climate change. But that is insufficiently likely to be seriously considered a shortcoming of the exclusionary approach. Nor is it plausible to suggest an exclusionary requirement here: at the individual level, this would seem to limit too much one's freedom in reproductive

choices. (We want to be able to decide who will be born on the basis of their well-being!)

Broome noted that only the intuition of neutrality allows us to be confident, given that global warming is a bad thing (2005: 405). The exclusionary account allows us to salvage both the intuition and our confidence that global warming is overall bad, that is, something we have overall excellent reasons to fight against. As I have tried to show, the reasons to fight against global warming — its effects on the actual people that do and will suffer from it — would conflict with reasons that are always permissibly disregarded. This difference in normative status is itself an excellent reason to choose to attend to the former.

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Part IV
Ramifications