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The Politics of Sustainability
Philosophical Perspectives

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The Politics of Sustainability

Responsibility for future generations is easily postulated in the abstract but it is much more difficult to set it to work in the concrete. It requires some changes in individual and institutional attitudes that are in opposition to what has been called the 'systems variables' of industrial society: individual freedom, consumerism, and equality.

The Politics of Sustainability: Philosophical Perspectives seeks to examine the motivational and institutional obstacles standing in the way of a consistent politics of sustainability and to look for strategies to overcome them. It argues that though there have been significant changes in individual and especially collective attitudes to growth, intergenerational solidarity and nature preservation, it is far from certain whether these will be sufficient to encourage politicians to give sustainable policies priority over other legitimate concerns. Having a philosophical approach as its main focus, the volume is at the same time interdisciplinary in combining political, psychological, ecological and economic analyses.

This book will be a contribution to the joint effort to meet the theoretical and practical challenges posed by climate change and other impending global perils and will be of interest to students of environmental studies, applied ethics and environmental psychology.

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7   Sustainable action and moral corruption

Roland Mees

The concept of moral corruption has been pointed at as the root cause of our failure to make progress with acting towards a sustainable future. This chapter defines moral corruption as the agent's strategy not to form the intentions needed to overcome the motivational obstacles of sustainable action. Moral corruption is considered similar to Kant's radical evil; it causes our practical identities to be divided. The question then arises: how could we possibly strive for moral integrity, while simultaneously being infected with the 'disease' of moral corruption? It is argued that we have an indirect motive for sustainable action in wanting to prevent our practical identity from falling apart.

1. Introduction: the problem with motivation for sustainable action

A common experience these days is that conversations between proponents and opponents of environmentally friendly action end abruptly, when the sceptic touches upon the motivational aspect by asking: 'what's in it for me?' In common sense language, this means that in matters concerning sustainability, we seem in some way to be seriously hampered in making the step from *worth doing* to *doing*.

Within the spectrum of human action, those actions related to accepting certain restrictions with the aim to preserve the planet for people who will live in the distant future seem to be most vulnerable to overriding motives that pull us in a different direction than the one we cognitively agreed to (Ott 2004; Baumgartner 2005; Birnbacher 2009; Gardiner 2011). That is, whatever reasons we have to support environmentally friendly action, at the motivational level we have to deal with the potential psychological inconsistency between what practical reason commands, and the actions that we in fact carry out. This happens, for example, when we increase the rate of depletion of natural resources, despite the fact that we are perfectly aware that these resources are finite, and people in the distant future will also need to benefit from them.

The problem of motivation in ethics arises, since normative statements cannot, by themselves, force agents to act in conformance with them. 'All they do is to prescribe, or recommend, a certain course of action. In order to make someone act accordingly they have to rely on further factors' (Birnbacher 2009:

273). The motivational problem of sustainable action for us as individual human agents then, *could be formulated as the problem of overcoming the potential* psychological inconsistency between our *moral judgement* in favour of some environmentally friendly action, and the *action* that we in fact carry out following up on that judgement. Dieter Birnbacher (2009: 285) argues that next to normative statements indirect motives are needed to solve the problem with motivation for sustainable action, since they aim at objectives in the present or in the near future from which current people benefit.

In his analysis of the motivational problem to care for the distant future, Stephen Gardiner has pointed at the concept of moral corruption as the root cause of an agent's attitudes of complacency and procrastination when it comes to taking environmentally friendly action; even when such action is supported by the agent's moral judgement (Gardiner 2011: 45). In his book, Gardiner's goal is mainly to *explain* the global environmental tragedy (3). The book analyses the causes of the problems we face globally in the context of an ethics of the distant future, and presents the research in a way that is also accessible to a non-academic agent, who would want to implement a policy of sustainability under real world conditions. As to the main problem of moral corruption, however, the book remains relatively silent, and it does not say anything about potential solutions or ways in which it could be dealt with.

This chapter will start with an argument of why people in high-income OECD countries, that are supposed to contribute to the goals formulated for example, by the UNFCCC, must consider the motivational problem for sustainable action first. It will then analyse why the problem of caring for the distant future is so difficult from a motivational point of view. I will show some psychological obstacles that we, as agents in highly industrialised countries, have to overcome in order to strengthen our motivation for environmentally friendly action. I will then continue by giving a more detailed formulation for the concept of moral corruption than provided by Gardiner (2011: 307). Subsequently, I will discuss the concept of moral corruption in relation to the ethical concepts, weakness of will and radical evil.

I will then argue how we can overcome moral corruption by giving an account of the effect of moral corruption on our practical identity as socialised moral agents. As it turns out, moral corruption causes our practical identity to be divided, and this leads to a discussion of moral corruption in relation to the concept of integrity. I will argue that morally corrupt agents, who consistently disregard their obligations towards future generations, face difficulties in being called persons of integrity. As a way to avoid moral corruption and keeping up our striving for integrity, I propose to use our best endeavours for sustainable action. I conclude by revisiting the common sense sceptical question this chapter started with.

2. Why should we deal with the motivational problem first?

The problem of motivation for sustainable action can be illustrated by considering the UNFCCC framework (including its successor the Kyoto Protocol) as a

commonly shared moral judgement being embodied in a contract between 192 states. It has now been in place for two decades. Various scientific reports have indicated that the realisation to date of the goals laid down in the UNFCCC is far from where it should be (IPCC 2007). Given the lack of major progress to realise the objectives of the framework since 1992, it could be argued that agents who are responsible for taking the necessary actions (for example those politicians who signed the framework), face some form of motivational problems in following up on the moral judgements entailed by the UNFCCC, and in any event, could be subject to strong ethical criticism (Gardiner 2011: 404).

The starting point of my argument in this chapter is not only with those politicians, but also with most people in highly industrialised countries who share *some* responsibility to act in accordance with the goals laid down in the UNFCCC. That is, the lack of progress in living up to the UNFCCC is not only a moral burden for those who are responsible in their role as politicians, but for many of us. My argument for this claim is as follows.

First, suppose that scientists are right in their judgement that current greenhouse gas emissions are too high to keep global warming within the level aimed for by the UNFCCC.[1] Based on the scientific projections, this means that any responsible policy would require that at some moment in the not too distant future, global emissions of greenhouses gases should peak and from there on start decreasing substantially for at least a couple of decades. This global course of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must continue until the desired levels are reached.

Second, if for example the parties of the UNFCCC agree that action is required, and the rough task of the burden is clear, then who is responsible for making it happen? Here, it could be objected that the institutions in the developed countries have never been set up with the idea that they should be able to handle problems of the magnitude and complexity of the global climate change problem that came about over many generations. Nevertheless, many of these institutions have been created by following a process of delegation of individual responsibilities and powers, since the problems of each and every individual could be solved more effectively when the institution can organise the implementation of their solution (Gardiner 2011: 432). In other words, in the liberal democracies that the high-income OECD countries happen to be, there is a principal-agent relationship between voters and politicians, respectively. This implies that in the case that politicians have been given the authority to propose and implement plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and they fail to do so, then these politicians can be held accountable and be the subject of moral criticism.

On the other hand, the delegation of responsibility and powers from the individual voters to the institutions do not discharge the individual agents fully of their responsibilities in the case that the politicians fail to do their job. With or without responsible politicians, the problem of climate change still remains, meaning that if delegation to the agents does not work, then the responsibility to solve the climate change problem falls back on the principal, i.e. the individual citizens. Hence, in the event that delegation to politicians fails, the

individual citizens are likewise subject to moral criticism. This means that citizens in high-income OECD countries cannot entirely waive their responsibility for failing to meet the goals of the UNFCCC.

It could then be argued, that doing something about the motivational problem to care for the distant future for individual agents is simply unfeasible. What might remedy the problem instead is to create new institutions or change existing institutions in high-income OECD countries so that they can help steer our behaviour towards more sustainable action. The recently published psychology of nudging could serve as an example in this regard. Citizens of a particular country could gently be stimulated ('nudged') to decrease their energy consumption by showing them – in an anonymised way – the annual energy bill of their neighbours. Generally, this will indeed stimulate the lowering of energy usage, though not as a result of moral reasoning, but as a result of psychological manipulation (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

There is, however, a fundamental difficulty with the view that the creation of new institutions (such as nudging) should be preferred to solving the motivational problem for individual agents. The difficulty is that it mixes up what the primary problem is, as well as what the secondary problems are. Choosing the way of creating new institutions, or changing existing ones to solve the motivational problem of individual agents, presupposes that we are motivated to do so. In order to accomplish the action to create new institutions or change existing ones, one has to be convinced that executing this is valuable in itself in the first place. At least a politically relevant coalition of agents has to solve the motivational problem for itself first, in order to start creating new institutions or changing existing ones. Solving the motivational problem for individual agents, therefore, is the first problem to be solved, and the question of creating or changing the institutions that steer our actions towards more sustainable ones comes thereafter.

The above arguments justify that this chapter focuses, in the first place, on the motivational aspects. The paper puts in the centre, the motivational problem of those agents who ought to contribute to the reduction of the global emission of greenhouse gasses. In the following sections, a short phenomenology of the motivational challenges of sustainable action will be presented, followed by the analysis of a concept that could be seen as one of the major roadblocks on the way towards a sustainable world: moral corruption.

3. Motivational characteristics of sustainable action

In this section, I will study more closely the nature of the motivational problems that agents encounter when their actions concern the distant future. In order to facilitate this, I undertake a phenomenological analysis of the full spectrum of morally non-trivial human actions that require intensive moral deliberation by the agent, and have an impact both on the agent herself, as well as on their environment; the magnitude of the impact varying with the action. The action X under consideration could, for example, be: becoming a vegetarian regarding red meat by any agent; developing and marketing products with a substantially reduced ecological footprint by the product manager of a medium-sized family owned business; implementing a policy to put severe tax penalties on the use of fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy sources by the prime minister of an OECD country; but also, closing a loss-making factory in an area with high unemployment by the CEO of a multinational company.[2]

Below I will consider certain aspects ('dimensions') of action X that will help us to clarify why sustainable action is so difficult from a motivational point of view. By scoring all actions with respect to the dimensions mentioned below, we will be able to distinguish between sustainable actions and other actions, in the sense that the extraordinary nature of an agent's motivation for sustainable action compared with other morally relevant actions becomes apparent. The agent's action (X) will be classified along the following dimensions.

Effectiveness

The degree to which the agent is causally effective in successfully carrying out action X. It is meant to distinguish between actions that can be initiated and executed entirely by the agent herself; and actions where the agent can only exercise a marginal influence on whether the action succeeds. The extent to which the action can be carried out fully by the agent, is given by three values: high, medium and low.

Coordination

The complexity of coordination needed for the agent to execute X. Independent from the question of effectiveness, the level of coordination with other people or institutions required to perform the action can vary considerably. Coordination is a main factor that discriminates between the private and public roles of agents. Even when the level of effectiveness an actor can exercise is high, the level of coordination can vary from low to high, depending on the field in which the agent operates. The degrees of this dimension are again, given by the values high, medium and low.

Geographical scope

Geographical scope within which action X directly affects current people. This dimension specifies whether the action has a local impact, confined purely to the immediate surroundings of the agent; has a regional impact (i.e. province, country or group of countries); or even impacts many countries and people around the globe.

Effect on current people

The degree to which action X goes against the immediate self-interest of current people (other than the agent) affected by X. This dimension indicates the level

of resistance the agent will likely encounter while executing X, whether there will be a high, medium or low level of resistance.

Effect on the living conditions of future people

The degree to which action X will have morally significant effects on the living conditions of people in the distant future. Equally important for a moral judgement about the agent carrying out X is the question that to what extent future people will be worse off compared to the situation of not performing X.

Possibility for free rider behaviour by the agent

Shifting the moral problem of not achieving the ultimate end of action X to future generations by not executing X with negligible negative consequences for the agent. Perhaps this is the most severe temptation for agents to not undertake environmentally friendly action: the low price they have to pay in terms of diminished self-interest if they do not undertake X in relation to the potentially large collective impact that inaction will have for people living in the distant future.

Although obviously, evaluating human actions along these dimensions does not at all pretend to say something empirically definitive, I would still like to make the following observations that, in my view, concur with the conclusions other authors have drawn based on conceptual analyses and references to empirical psychological studies (Ott 2004; Baumgartner 2005; Birnbacher 2009). Actions, which aim to care for people who will live in the distant future, can be characterised by:

- the environment, in which the agent operates, seems to be such that the agent can hardly be causally effective;
- the environment has a high degree of complexity, which requires strong social coordination capabilities of the agent;
- a geographical scope that is at least regional; effects on current people and future people that are at least medium to high;
- there is a high possibility for free riding, showing that agents who perform these actions will hardly be forced by their immediate surroundings to undertake the actions, but to rely mainly on their own will power and persuasiveness to be efficacious.

The above-mentioned characteristics suggest that agents, who want to undertake actions to care for the distant future, especially in their professional roles, face considerable practical difficulties compared with agents in other roles executing other actions. Agents who undertake sustainable action will need to overcome (at least) three types of psychological obstacles. First, they face the task as agents to change something in the world for which they prima facie will not be praised,

since it goes against the immediate self-interests of current people. Second, the action to be executed is hard work, i.e. it requires the agent's utmost dedication and competence in order to follow through with it. Third, since the ultimate end to be achieved with the action will be to the benefit of people who will live in the distant future, the agent will need to overcome her own sceptical attitude, fuelled by the first two obstacles, inviting her to go back to the original moral judgement that formed the starting point for her sustainable action by questioning: 'is it worth it?' Moreover, as a result of our 'asymmetric causal power and time-dependent interests' (Gardiner 2011: 184), we as current people are susceptible to our motivation not being strong enough to overcome these types of psychological resistances when those actions are concerned, which aim to preserve the planet for people who will live long after us.

Our potential failure to overcome the practical and psychological difficulties of taking environmentally friendly actions gives rise to confining the investigation into the problem of motivation for sustainable action, as discussed so far, to considering the formulation of the concept of moral corruption. This will be my focus in the next section.

4. The concept of moral corruption

Given the observations made in the previous section regarding the motivational difficulties of taking action in favour of the interests of people living in the distant future, I propose to define moral corruption as: (1) pursuing a strategy; (2) with the objective to keeping up one's current, perfectly convenient status quo; (3) by deliberately and persistently not forming those intentions that are necessary to overcome the motivational challenges of taking action to care for people living in the distant future, both in the private and in the public sphere (e.g. in one's professional role as a teacher, police officer or banker).

Overall, one can say that morally corrupt agents do their utmost to not be confronted with questions about their commitment to ethics of the distant future. This means that morally corrupt agents do have moral prescriptions about taking environmentally friendly actions as part of their shared background assumptions, and they know that they possess these assumptions somewhere in what we call their conscience; but they have decided to leave this part of their life world aside, not letting it exercise any influence over the practical considerations they deem relevant for justifying their actions. In short, morally corrupt agents are deaf to principal moral questions regarding sustainability and climate change, and they are conscious of the risk they take that their deafness to these questions may result in the irreversible corruption of their moral character, thereby potentially losing a few moral virtues. That is, corruption is not only a moral concept, but also a causal or quasi-causal concept (Miller 2011: 10). Some of the terms used in this definition need further clarification.

First, moral corruption should be understood as pursuing a strategy, very much in the same way as one chooses a strategy in the context of decision theory. That is, one does not give up easily when attempting to achieve a certain goal that has

a high utility to the agent (to be defined in the next paragraph). More specifically, if after having carried out action X, action Y is required to reach that particular goal, the agent will be strongly inclined to undertake Y; even when Y involves a morally blameworthy situation for the agent. It also means that one's endeavours are strategic in the Habermasian sense, that is, the agent has set herself unilaterally on a course of action in which she wants to achieve a specific goal, without having made this course of action subject to the inter-subjective critique of other people; for example those people affected by the strategy that has been set (Bohman and Rehg 2011: 14).

Second, the strategy of the morally corrupt agent is aimed at preserving their current *convenient status quo* in the high-income OECD countries. As Gardiner points out, it is an almost universal characteristic of decisions by agents about their ordinary consumption patterns that these are focused on the short and medium term at most, and that their spatial scope is limited to local circumstances (2011: 58–9). It means that people currently living in Western industrialised countries define their good lives in terms of certain social-economic, material conditions to which they want to hold fast. They seem of the opinion that whatever happens, their wealth should be impacted only minimally, if at all, very much as it was expressed by the former president of the USA, George H. W. Bush, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992: 'The American way of *life is not negotiable*'.

Third, the principal characteristic of morally corrupt agents is that they do not form intentions to act in order to preserve the planet for future generations, which is in my account, why global accords negotiated by politicians remain in the eyes of the public, weak and without substance. Morally corrupt agents know very well 'that intentions involve characteristic kinds of motivational commitments. Intentions are conduct controlling, in the sense that if you intend to F at t, and nothing changes before t, then (other things equal) you will F' (Wilson and Shpall 2012: 32). The reason why they do not form intentions to overcome the motivational challenges of acting in the interest of future generations (Section 3) is that if one intends to do F, one is already *in progress* towards doing it. In that sense, deliberation is over: one has begun (Setiya 2011: 8). This is exactly what morally corrupt agents try to prevent.

The definition of moral corruption given above should be understood as a concept, analogous to how Christine Korsgaard elaborates on the four types of vices in Plato's *Republic* (Korsgaard 2009: 165). It does not make sense to go out on the street and look for primary examples of morally corrupt agents, or to look in one's organisation for agents that more or less fulfil the characteristics of the definition. Rather, we should acknowledge that our motives to take action to live up to our obligations to people living in the distant future might be morally corrupted in a way similar to how Plato describes people *striving for a good*, i.e. aristocratic constitution: they have to fight against the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical tendencies that try to overrule the aristocratic governance of their soul. Many people living in high-income OECD countries have to face moral corruption as a serious obstacle to take action to care for the distant future. Moral corruption is a 'shadow' of moral agents, with which they are confronted when they feel hampered in acting in the interest of people who will live in the distant future.

5. Moral corruption versus weakness of will and 'radical evil'

The following section will deepen the understanding of moral corruption by discussing it in relation to other well-known concepts in ethics: weakness of will and Kant's 'radical evil'.

The formulation of the motivational problem to care for the distant future at the start of the chapter as 'the problem of overcoming the potential psychological inconsistency between our *moral judgement* in favour of some environmentally friendly action, and the *action* that we in fact carry out following up on that judgement', might suggest that this problem falls within the 'classic' formulation of weakness of will as *akrasia*. This formulation says: 'weak-willed or akratic action is (free, intentional) action contrary to one's better judgment … Rather than the two – action and judgment – being in concert, there is a dissonance or lack of correspondence between the two that marks off the action as akratic' (Stroud 2010: 55). Given that, according to the classic definition, the agent's action at t must be synchronous with her unfavourable judgement at t about that same action, it should be clear that moral corruption is not an example of this form of *akrasia*. On the one hand, the morally corrupt agent has agreed to the judgement that carrying out an environmentally friendly action is the right thing to do. On the other hand, she has decided that it is not up to her to carry out that action. Therefore, she has never formed an intention to do the action in favour of the environment. The morally corrupt agent does not even arrive at t, where a discrepancy between her action and her judgement could be observed, since she has not formed an intention to act in an environmentally friendly way in the first place.

So far, we have dealt with the essentially synchronic definition of *akrasia*. However, Stroud gives still another definition of weakness of will, namely that 'it is a species of irresoluteness, or failure to follow through on your intentions. It is a failure to do what you have decided you will do – a failure to stick to your plans' (Stroud 2010: 60). Here, it seems that we get to a critical feature of a morally corrupt agency: although these agents might have agreed to the moral judgement that caring for the distant future is the right thing to do, they – deliberately and persistently – have never formed an intention to act according to that judgement. In that sense, they have never failed to carry out their intention to care for the distant future. They never decided to take action in favour of the distant future. This means that also according to this second definition as an essentially a diachronic phenomenon, moral corruption cannot be regarded as a form of weakness of will.

This is not to say that morally corrupt agents make no future-directed intentions at all. As I have construed them, these are as a rule, strongly willed agents who know perfectly well that having certain clear future-directed intentions are

necessary for them to accomplish their strategies; if only in order to coordinate their activities with other agents. That is, on the one hand they form future-directed intentions with regard to the strategies they have chosen; and on the other hand, they do not make any plans or intentions with regard to actions to take care of the distant future. Morally corrupt agents are aware that when they abandon prior intentions, they may be criticised for that on rational grounds. This is one of the reasons why they do not form intentions to act in favour of the environment: they could be accused of weakness of will if they did not manage to execute their plans. Morally corrupt agents do not make a commitment to care for the distant future, by forming an intention or adopting a plan to do so because this binds them to realise that plan, which is not their objective. Being regarded by other agents as someone who has failed at self-management is something morally corrupt agents particularly want to prevent.

If moral corruption cannot be considered as an example of weakness of will, which other ethical concept could we bring into connection with the phenomenon of moral corruption? As morally corrupt agents have set themselves on pursuing a strategy to keeping up their convenient status quo, it seems that they have freely chosen maxims of their will that are not universalisable to all human beings. That is, they have decided on a principle to guide their actions that potentially could be at odds with the principle of morality, e.g. the categorical imperative.

In his account of the evil nature of the human being, Kant indicates that human agents both integrate the principle of self-love and the moral law into their maxims. According to Kant, the deciding feature of 'radical evil' is the agent's action to reverse the moral order of her motives by putting the principle of self-love above the universal law. In subordinating the moral law and making her motives and inclinations of self-love a prerequisite for following it, the agent voluntarily and consciously chooses to take her inclinations to be reasons for action (Kant 1974: 33–34). On my account, this comes closest to what morally corrupt agents do.

In addition, drawing on Plato's account of evil, Korsgaard notes:

> the bad or evil person is powerful, ruthless, unconstrained. The evil person is prepared to do *whatever is necessary* to get what he wants, and determined to let nothing stand in his way. He is clever enough to circumvent the law, and both willing and able to outwit, outsmart, or if necessary outshoot whoever and whatever comes between him and the satisfaction of his desire
> Korsgaard 2009: 170 (emphasis Korsgaard)

The morally corrupt agent has decided that she will leverage her powerful position in society and use her (considerable) instrumental intelligence to achieve the goal of keeping up her convenient status quo. She does not really choose a maxim, which means that she does not make laws for herself. In that sense, morally corrupt agents have deliberately given up their autonomy and freedom in order to pursue their strategy (Korsgaard 2009: 173). This might, however, have consequences for the way these agents constitute themselves as the cause of their actions.

6. Moral corruption and our self-constitution as agents

In the previous sections, we have given a phenomenological analysis of the motivational challenges specific for taking action in the interest of people living in the far future, and we have formulated a concept of moral corruption, based on this analysis. Thereafter, we have compared the concept of moral corruption with two concepts that have a much longer history in ethics: weakness of will and radical evil. It turns out that moral corruption should not be viewed as an instance of weakness of will, but as an example of defective action that might have consequences for the way we conceive ourselves as moral agents.

As a result, we see ourselves faced with a few inconvenient questions: can current people claim to be moral agents, that is claim to be acting morally as agents with regard to a certain class of actions (for example those affecting current people or children or grandchildren), and at the same time act defectively with regard to another class of actions, namely those regarding people living in the distant future? Is there a view on human agency that combines acting responsibly towards current people and our immediate offspring, and irresponsibly towards people living in the distant future? Finally, how can we possibly strive for moral integrity, while being infected with the 'disease' of moral corruption?

As defined above, being morally corrupt means pursuing a strategy with the objective of keeping up one's convenient status quo, by deliberately and persistently not forming those intentions that are necessary to overcome the motivational challenges of taking action to care for the distant future, both in the private and in the public sphere. Given the motivational challenges, current agents in high-income OECD countries have to overcome, the twenty year history of the UNFCCC has proven that it will be highly unlikely that these agents will undertake a meaningful effort to carry out an action to care for people living in the distant future; even if – if people in the affluent countries do not change their behaviour – the level of urgency to do so increases every year in the sense that keeping global warming below 2°C becomes more and more difficult. That is, they primarily see the difficulties for themselves (and the strategy they are pursuing) of carrying out such an action, instead of mobilising the best capabilities they have in order to bring the ideal of a world in which people of the distant future will be able to live under similar conditions as people currently living in the affluent countries a step further. With Stephen Gardiner, we might be tempted to conclude that there is only room for expecting an ethical tragedy, i.e. a scenario in which humanity will not be able to save itself, and the only hope is that humanity will be saved by causes external to it.

There is, however, one last card I want to play that could allow us to cope with moral corruption. This is to reflect on how we ought to understand ourselves as moral agents in relation to the concept of moral corruption. As Korsgaard argues,

to act is 'to determine yourself to the cause of a certain end. So to act *self-consciously* is to conceive *yourself* teleologically – as the cause, that is, the *first* cause – of a certain end' (Korsgaard 2009: 41 (emphasis Korsgaard)).

Suppose that a very experienced and talented agent A, being one and the same person, would be in the position to take up all the roles and carry out all of the actions mentioned in Section 3. Suppose also that A would act in a morally responsible way concerning her actions that affect current people, and in a morally corrupt way with respect to actions that concern primarily people living in the far future. This means, according to Korsgaard, that A will conceive herself as a first cause of the ends that affect current people, whereas for ends that affect people in the distant future, A will not conceive herself as any sort of cause. More specifically, as a result of A's free riding regarding the ends that affect people in the distant future, A will these ends, but does not will the means to those ends. In particular, morally corrupt agents do not say that they do not will the ends to preserve the earth for future generations, but they keep questioning the means and do not propose actions that better promote the ends than those actions on the table for deliberation and decision; since they have decided not to form any intentions that are required to overcome the motivational burdens of taking environmentally friendly action. As A has judged in favour of environmentally friendly action, but does not form those intentions necessary to carry out that action, A acts according to Kant's hypothetical imperative regarding actions that concern current people; whereas this imperative, in A's eyes, does not apply to actions that affect people living in the distant future.

Translating this into the self-constitution of agents means that A constitutes herself as the cause of the ends of current people, whereas she does not constitute herself as the cause of ends that affect people living in the distant future. At the same time, when A deliberates about her actions and which ones to choose, she regards her choices as hers, as the product of her own activity, because she regards the principle of choice as expressive, or representative, of herself – of her own causality (Korsgaard 2009: 75). In particular, A views her choices regarding the ends promoted for current people and those for future people as an expression of her practical identity. The actions promoting the ends for current people are constitutive of A's practical identity, whereas actions in favour of the ends of people living in the distant future do not constitute A's practical identity, since she will the ends, but does not will the means, and consequently, has chosen not to form intentions to carry out those actions. That is, A's practical identity is constituted by the actions that she carries out that aim for an end to the benefit of current people, and by her *action not to form intentions to act* with the objective to save the planet for future generations.

What effect then, does this division between sets of ends and corresponding actions have on A's practical identity? The effect on A's practical identity of actions promoting the ends of people in the future that resides primarily in the private sphere (e.g. becoming a vegetarian), in first instance, could be considered as somewhat remote, since only her private surroundings will hold A accountable; in this example, for eating lots of red meat.[3] However, actions that A undertakes in her role as a professional leader might have a far greater and immediate influence on A's practical identity.

As a result of preserving her convenient status quo in the highly industrialised countries, A has deliberately chosen not to make public the reasons for which she does not undertake actions that further the interests of future people. This means that in a way, A socially cooperates with other agents, as she will share those reasons for actions concerning the ends to be promoted for current people, whilst remaining silent on her reasons not to take action in the interest of future generations.

Since A cannot control whether there will be certain actions required of her and her organisation that further the interests of people living in the far future, her difference in treating the interests of current and future people leads to problems in the practical deliberation about common courses of action in A's social interaction with other agents. This is so, because it is not clear a priori whether other agents will understand A leaving out certain types of arguments from the discourse about these commonly shared courses of action. In the course of their deliberation, it might appear to other agents, who do not distinguish between ends in favour of current people and future people the way A does –that is, who do not follow a strategy of moral corruption like A – that A does not share with them certain types of reason, which could make it difficult for them to agree with A about what should be done in a situation in which certain actions are required.[4] Given this, it follows that A will find it difficult to engage in relations of reciprocity with other agents, since they 'must be prepared to share their ends and reasons; to hold them jointly; and to act together. Reciprocity is the sharing of reasons, and you will enter into it only with someone you expect to deal with reasons in a rational way' (Korsgaard 1996: 196). This is what A fails to do.

Coming back to the question about the effect of moral corruption on A's practical identity, we can now say that it causes a division of A's self into parts: one that is constituted by the actions carried out to promote the ends affecting current people, and another that is formed by the action not to form intentions to act in the interest of people who will live in the distant future. Morally corrupt action, as I have defined it, is an example of defective action in the sense that it fails 'to constitute their agents as the unified authors of their actions' (Korsgaard 2009: 32).

Moral corruption causes A's self to be divided, which raises the problem that A cannot unambiguously claim that her actions are issued from her constitution by giving herself a law (Korsgaard 2009: 160). Assuming that A performs a leadership role, the other agents with whom A socially interacts will be disorientated, not knowing at a certain moment in time with which part of A's divided self they are dealing. Since A has a leadership role, as a result of which there will be strong reciprocal relations between A and the other agents, this uncertainty for the other agents affects their motivation negatively to act in accordance with any mutually agreed course of action in a given situation. For A and the other agents, it seems impossible to establish a unity between them, that is, to form a single common will. A's divided self hampers her and the other agents from meeting in

the noumenal world (Korsgaard 2009: 190). As it seems fundamental for us as human beings that we understand ourselves as self-conscious agents, as noumena *and* as participants in the social-communicative relations with other human beings, we might question A's ability to be an efficacious moral agent at all.

To what conclusion does this account bring us so far? The least we can say about the self of a morally corrupt agent is that it is divided. On the one hand this self is constituted by actions that pertain to the interests of current people and on the other hand it is formed by the agent's strategy of keeping her current, perfectly convenient status quo, which is being achieved by persistently ignoring the obligations we have to people living in the distant future. The next section will discuss the question of whether we can be held responsible for such a divided self.

7. Integrity and our 'best endeavours' as a way to cope with moral corruption

The conclusion of Section 6 leads us directly to the question of how our reflections about moral corruption, and the divided self that have resulted from it, could be related to a conception of integrity. In this paper I understand integrity to be a complex and thick virtue term, namely:

> a capacity to respond to change in one's values or circumstances, a kind of continual remaking of the self, as well as a capacity to balance competing commitments and values and to take responsibility for one's work and thought.
>
> Cox et al. 2003: 41

Integrity so understood means that there certainly is a connection between living with integrity and living a morally good life. 'Integrity is a complex aspect of character that serves to link or dissolve disparate goals, values, emotions, aspects of self and periods in one's life' (Cox et al. 2003: 56).

Can agents be morally corrupt as defined in this chapter, and simultaneously strive for integrity in the above sense? Recall that being morally corrupt means pursuing a strategy with the objective of keeping up one's convenient status quo, by deliberately and persistently not forming those intentions that are necessary to overcome the motivational challenges of taking action to care for the distant future, both in the private and in the public sphere. In other words, with respect to treating the interests of current people and future people, the least we can say about morally corrupt agents is that they operate with different moral standards. As we have seen in Section 6, as a consequence morally corrupt agents develop two sorts of self: one that cares for the interests of current people including those of the agent herself, and one that deliberately and persistently does not care for the interests of people who will live in the distant future.

Deliberately and persistently not forming those intentions that are necessary to overcome the motivational challenges of taking action to care for the distant

future means that one of the selves of morally corrupt agents has the potential to act in good faith regarding current people, whereas their other self does not act in good faith with respect to people who will live in the far future. The morally corrupt agent does not seem to be able to form a moral point of view from where she can evaluate her actions regarding current people and future people based on an integral set of normative standards. For professional leaders, of whom we have legitimate expectations about their consistency (e.g. politicians, CEOs), this seems to be a defeater of integrity (Cox et al 2003: 112).

Alasdair MacIntyre argues that moral agents are justifiably and uncontroversially held responsible for their actions that are intentional (MacIntyre 1999: 312). As morally corrupt agents have compartmentalised their intentions regarding current people and future people, it could be argued that these agents can be held responsible for their divided selves as well. Morally corrupt agents actively refuse to form intentions that could lead to actions in the interest of people who will live in the distant future. These agents have deliberately closed their minds to certain possibilities of action, which could be expected of them both in their private and professional roles. As MacIntyre argues:

> This divided self has to be characterised by what it lacks. It is not only without any standpoint from which it can pass critical judgement on the standards governing its various roles, but it also must lack those virtues of integrity and constancy that are prerequisites for exercising the powers of moral agency.
>
> MacIntyre 1999: 324

I conclude that our integrity is at risk when we consistently do not care for the distant future whilst living an active life as a present moral agent. Persistently not living up to our obligations to future people, does negatively affect the circumstances in which future people will live, it also casts doubts over us current people, when we still believe that we can be regarded as persons of integrity. Not striving for a sustainable world in the sense of being a morally corrupt agent, that is not being able or willing to find good reasons and forming the intentions needed to voluntarily carry out those actions needed to fulfil the obligations we have to people in the distant future, will hamper us in viewing ourselves as candidates for being persons of integrity.

What then, ought we to be doing as current moral agents in high-income OECD countries, which could release us from the suspicion of moral corruption, whilst keeping us candidates for being attributed the virtue of integrity? The answer I propose is: giving ourselves the law to use one's best endeavours to act in a sustainable way. It means that current agents should demand themselves to execute all those reasonable courses of action that further the interests of people living long after us. Simultaneously, the requirement that an agent uses her best endeavours means that the agent should give reasonable consideration of her own interests. That is, the agent must consider her own interests in order to be able to continue using her best endeavours for sustainable action. For example,

it is not implied that the agent runs into financial ruin as a result of carrying out sustainable action.

The requirement of best endeavours imposes an obligation to act in good faith and to the extent of the agent's own total capabilities.[5] What current agents in the affluent countries, as a minimum, *can do and ought to do* as part of using their best endeavours is form those intentions needed to overcome the motivational obstacles that we have found to be among the reasons why sustainable action seems difficult to accomplish. The forming of the right intentions, that is those intentions that favour undertaking action in the light of sustainability, is something very many agents in high-income OECD countries *can do and ought to do* Thereafter, obviously, it will also be a matter of contingency whether these intentions become reality. Having a plan to act in good faith in the interest of future generations, however, is a minimum we can ask from ourselves.

8. Returning to 'what is in it for me?'

We started this chapter by referring to a typical conversation between a proponent and an opponent of some environmentally friendly action, in which the sceptic utters her reason for not forming those intentions necessary for the action under discussion by asking 'what is in it for me?' We started by arguing that solving the problem of motivation for sustainable action is the first thing people in high-income OECD countries should do. We continued by giving a phenomenological account of the motivational challenges that one faces when one intends to undertake a sustainable project with a scope that goes beyond merely one's private sphere. Based on this description, we formulated a definition of what it is to be a morally corrupted agent. Moral corruption turned out to be a particular sort of defective action, one that forces our practical identity to become divided. An agent with this divided self cannot claim to be a person of integrity, since the agent herself can be held responsible for her own self being compartmentalised. Finally, I proposed that agents in affluent countries set themselves the law of using their best endeavours to further the interests of people who will live long after us.

In reply to the question 'what is in it for me?' we now can say: an indirect motive for undertaking sustainable action is that you will have the possibility to remain undivided, being deprived of moral schizophrenia, and even remain a candidate for becoming a person of integrity understood as a virtue. You can achieve this by fighting the tendency towards moral corruption that we all have, through making your best endeavours in the sense of 'leaving no stone unturned' to will those sustainable projects that preserve the planet for generations of human beings who will live in the distant future. Given the lack of progress in meeting the goals of the UNFCCC by people currently living in the high-income OECD countries, we not only *can do* something about our moral corruption, we also *ought to do* this to prevent our practical identity from falling apart.

Notes

1   The UNFCCC, Article 2, states: 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system'. Although the Copenhagen conference (2009) did not agree on the target to keep the global temperature rise below 2°C, recently thinktanks such as the International Energy Agency have started to base their projections on this scenario.

2   Note that it is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a detailed analysis here. For an elaborate analysis of the motivational aspects of environmentally friendly actions in relation to other human actions, I refer to my forthcoming PhD thesis.

3   There are good reasons, however, to argue that our consumption patterns are under moral scrutiny as well. By our behaviour as private consumers in the economy, we directly influence the 'what', 'how' and 'when' of the production methods of corporations that produce the goods and services we have just bought. There is a causal chain between our reasons for buying certain goods and services and the actions that agents in corporations carry out to further the ends of current people or those of people living in the distant future. Hence, our practical identities are constituted by our consumer patterns as private individuals as well. Due to the space limitations of this chapter, however, I will not develop this argument further.

4   In common sense language, other agents may refer to A as having a 'hidden agenda'

5   I draw here on the literature concerning the meaning of 'best endeavours' or 'best efforts' in UK and US case law, e.g. Miller (2006).

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8   Ideology and practice of the 'Green Economy'

World views shaping science and politics

Joachim H. Spangenberg

Even for persons with shared values, their world view or ontology choices make a significant difference when it comes to developing or endorsing policies. For instance, while an environmental economics ontology trusting in solutions from yet unknown technologies, from commodification of nature and from market forces is not a suitable basis for solving sustainability problems, an ontology of nested systems, with the environment the metasystem as in ecological economics, fits as the basis for developing substantial sustainable development strategies. Changing the world view is a necessary condition for successful sustainability policies, and transparency regarding the basic world views is crucial.

1. Introduction

Moral ideals – for all the limitations they face in shaping living conditions – are considered one of the main determinants of human individual and political behaviour. However, it is not only ideal principles that determine which motivation to act results from them, but also the world view, the ontology held by decision makers (for the purposes of this chapter, world view, pre-analytical vision, metaphysics and ontology do not need to be distinguished) which is determining the practical conclusions from moral principles and ethical attitudes.

This can be illustrated by the vexed relationship of ecology and economics, in particular the turn of concerned ecologists to economics (as 'the language of power') in the search for more attention for their worrying insights, and the attempts of concerned economists to broaden their discipline's pre-analytical vision to include the thus far neglected environment. This apparent convergence, however, tends to hide the deeply different world views that are characterised by mutually exclusive topologies. As a result, the relationship remains an uneasy one; solutions suggested by economists do not necessarily find support amongst ecologists (or for that, the population at large, as far as it has not undergone an economics education, like the majority of the political, business and cultural elites) and vice versa. However, while without understanding the basically diverging ontologies it is not possible to understand the reasons for the differing conclusions, and to make an informed choice as condition of any democratic process, the world views behind the positions are hardly ever made explicit.