

**“Goodness itself must change” –
Anthroponomy in an age of socially-caused, planetary environmental change**

Jeremy David Bendik-Keymer

Abstract

Given the reality of socially-caused, planetary-scaled, environmental change, how – if at all – should our ethical concepts change? It has been a hallmark of environmental literature in recent years to insist that they should or even must. It will be argued that, yes, our ethical concepts should change by exploring the changes needed for *the* core ethical concept of goodness. Goodness, it will be argued, must change to reflect a change in priority from personal intentions to the right relation between an agent and the collective to which he/she belongs. This relation, which is called herein *the civic relation*, centers on taking responsibility for the *structure* which produces unintentional, aggregate effects at the level of planetary ecology. Examples include a fossil fuel-based infrastructure, isolationist nationalism that undercuts international climate agreements to decarbonize energy, and the lack of a political forum to respect the rights of future generations. More generally, goodness according to the civic relation must express an *anthroponomic orientation* to life – a sustained, life-long attempt to build the practice of the collective self-regulation of humankind as a whole. Of the many consequences of this meta-ethical change in goodness, one is that it addresses the banality of evil today.

Keywords: anthroponomy, meta-ethics, climate change, goodness, banality of evil, civic relation

For Susan Neiman

Are we changing our *geological* era? There is much debate about whether we are in the “Anthropocene.” It has been argued by this author that we should not think so, but rather understand that we are in a situation of *socially-caused*, planetary, environmental change. Not all humans –nor even the human as such – have caused our fearful new world. But still many of us, wittingly or unwittingly, with consent or without it, support *in practice*, social processes that have.¹

In this article that addresses, we might say, bioethics in the broadest sense as the ethics of life on Earth, a basic problem in *meta-ethics* will be addressed, the study of the nature of our ethical concepts. The question will be asked: if we consider socially-caused, planetary, environmental change – change of a sort that is totally novel in the history of humankind – should our ethical concepts change at all? This is a question Peter Singer

1. I resist the term “Anthropocene” for a number of reasons and use this more difficult but accurate set of descriptions instead (Bendik-Keymer, 2016a; 2016b). For a book with such a wonderful premise –reframing the Enlightenment now as a planetary, ecological task – Byron Williston’s *The Anthropocene Project: Virtue in the Age of Climate Change* (Williston, 2015) strikes me as surprisingly confused in its main framing. If the Enlightenment did not make us aware that social processes historicize humankind, then what did? But to take this signal Enlightenment point is to pay close attention to the fact that it is not the *anthropos*, precisely-speaking, but specific social processes – notably industrialization – that have caused climate change and a host of related ecological issues on the scale of the planet. On this Enlightenment point, see Susan Neiman’s work (Neiman, 2002). Williston’s focus is comparable to Neiman’s in many respects. See her book on Enlightenment virtue today (Neiman, 2009).

first asked in *One World* (Singer, 2004) and which Dale Jamieson suggested in 1992, since repeating it more systemically in 2014 (Jamieson, 2012; 2014). It will be argued herein that, *yes, our ethical concepts should change – and the first one to change should be the overall ethical concept itself, namely, the concept of goodness. Goodness itself must change.*

The argument will be made for this conclusion through a set of interlocking theses. While initially terse, they will become clearer as the article proceeds –patience on the part of the reader is appreciated:

1. *Goodness must change as a concept, not simply in application.*
2. Goodness’s *form* must shift from intentions to what is called here *the form of power.*
3. Goodness must be realized *primarily* through collectives, and only *secondarily* through personal character.
4. *Personal character should be framed within* the right relation between the personal and the collective, which I call *the civic relation.*
5. Different in form from classical, interpersonal justness (Aristotle, 2002, book V), the civic relation should condition justness’s everyday focus.
6. Accordingly, intentions will be sound *only within* the constraints of the civic relation.²
7. Furthermore, their soundness must cohere with will be called *the anthroponomic orientation* to daily life.
8. This orientation is an *identity-stance* whereby one minds humankind’s need to self-regulate as a whole and searches for ways to promote – or not interfere with-it.
9. The orientation is illustrated by *responsibility to address the core ethical problems posed by planetary environmental change*, generating a clear moral identity.

The present paper is organized to cover these points in the order just presented – including clarifying them as they are addressed. After these theses have been covered, several consequences of them will be addressed, which increase the practical importance of the argument:

- A. On the basis of this re-conceptualizing of goodness, some form of political responsibility will be inseparable from general moral responsibility.
- B. *Primarily*, moral reflection will address where politics and morality meet: (active) *citizenship*. *Secondarily*, morality will address personal life.
- C. Moral identity’s frame will change, including the civic relationship with the collective that decenters much of the discourse of personal integrity

2. If I think I’m doing something good but am violating or omitting obligation in the civic relation, my intentions *aren’t* sound. I can’t manifest sound intentions avoiding or violating my duties, for instance, to far future humans. My intentions are flawed, not utterly worthless. The civic relation constrains intentions through what is “befitting” (Vogler, 2009). But the civic relation differs from fitting patterns of justice is that its form is not interpersonal in a sense I will later explain. You can’t reduce the civic relation to justice’s logic (cf. Thompson, 2006).

preoccupying discussion of moral character both in academic virtue ethics and in everyday, neo-liberal life (Harvey, 2007; Brown, 2015).

- D. Headway will be made challenging *the banality of evil* – human thoughtlessness submerged in mass scale, instrumentally segmented, political systems (Arendt, 2006). (Arendt took this, rightly, to be *the* defining moral problem of modern life.)
- E. The banality of evil will be possible *only when* someone hasn't changed her character to reflect her responsibility for the form of power in the collectives to which we belong, i.e., only when she hasn't adapted her *concept* of goodness.
- F. Or, what it logically implied, *to challenge the banality of evil, we ought first to fashion moral identities in which our goodness is a function of being responsible for the form of power our society takes.*³

Allow me to proceed through these theses and their consequences in the order just presented.

Thesis 1: Aggregate collectives and unintended consequences

To change in *concept*, not simply in application, is to invoke John Rawls's distinction between "concept" and "conception" (Rawls, 1999).⁴ The *concept* of justice articulates its logic – e.g., what each is due. *Conceptions* of justice specify the interpretation of the concept's core features – what each is due as an equal, rather than, e.g., by religious affiliation. The central thesis in this paper is that in being adapted to morally significant, socially-caused, planetary environmental change, goodness must change in its *concept* so that any *conception* accounts for our *form of power*. In other words, Rawl's meta-ethical distinction concerning justice is employed and applied to the concept of goodness. Since the concept of goodness must change, so must any conception in a given culture. That is the idea, stated at the outset. It will be explained further over the course of this article.

Specifically, it will be argued that the *way* the concept of goodness must change is by changing the relationship between *personal intentions* and *collective consequences*.⁵ The way this changed relationship will be framed is through a *placeholder term*, a term to hold a theoretical space open for future analysis and research. This term is called *the form of power*. It will be argued, simply, that rather than having *personal intentions* be primary to the concept of goodness, *the form of power* should be, with personal intentions being *secondary*. The form of power is focused on collective consequences. What this shift in *priority* between personal intentions and collective consequences will involve is the subject of much of this article.

The next section explains the form of power. Here, reasons why goodness must change will be given. The argument of the present paper begins by considering that various social processes have changed our planetary environment. No one intended these

3. For instance, our society stumbles on what Stephen Gardiner (2011, chapter 5) calls "the Pure Intergenerational Problem." That problem will accordingly illuminate a form of power that our social structures must avoid.

4. The Legal Theory Lexicon (2004) credits William Gallie (1955).

5. I would be interested in how Vasil Gluchman's (2003) ethics of social consequences would interpret this argument for adapting the concept of goodness to planetary-scaled, socially-caused, environmental change.

changes. For much of human history, we *could* not have anticipated it. Climate change, species extinction, ocean acidification, soil erosion, global toxicity ... – they are unintentional; most couldn't have foreseen them.

Each change has a different story. Climate change accelerates on fossil fuel; species die with transformed habitats; soil erodes in fields and cuts. *All* issue from aggregate collectives. Commonly in practical philosophy, collectives are *intentional*. In a soccer team, each player has her role – her *part*. Each coordinates that role mereologically to accomplish a collective goal: win the game well. Aggregate collectives, however, are *unintentional* and not mereological. The members of the collective likely won't know each other. They will rarely coordinate action. They can live in an atomistic fashion, yet be aggregated collectively. Their *collective* is a *collection*.

All the examples of socially-caused planetary environmental change defining our situation result from aggregate collectives. None of us coordinate with hunter-gatherers 11,000 years ago during the North American mega-fauna extinctions. We are not a group agent. Yet as humankind aggregated over time passing on social processes in the use of weapons for killing at a distance, fishing more intensively, habitat development, and monocultural agriculture, we collectively *and unintentionally* caused sharply elevated extinction rates. Such aggregate collectives shaped by specific social processes can “do”

Accordingly, the changes on which the present paper will focus have two salient, moral features. The first is *unintended consequence* resulting from social processes bundling together our actions and producing our effects on Earth. The second is found in our collective form – it is an *aggregate*, not an intentional collective. These features interlock: aggregate collectives cause unintended consequences.

Losing intentionality is significant, as is focusing on collectives. Traditionally, goodness is the *state of character* of someone *intending* well. There are surely notable exceptions. Plato (2004) wrote that goodness, while a state of character, appears in soul's form. Yet goodness of soul manifests in the virtue and reason of *actions*. That is a core concern of Socrates (Plato, 2002). Moreover, character and intention are central to both Aristotelian and Kantian ethics. Goodness among Aristotelians is a function of aiming at the good through virtuous living (Aristotle, 2002, book I). Kantian goodness appears in the form of one's intentions – as good will (Kant, 1998, first and second sections). Goodness has traditionally been *teleological*, expressed by our *ethos*.

The problem is that unintended consequences aren't teleological, and aggregate collectives are hardly related to our ethos. They aren't ethical identities. A common feature of environmental problems today is that *apparently good people belonging to apparently good communities* cause them. The planetary environmental challenges we face are largely the result of classically good people. They have well-intentioned character in decent communities.⁶

Here, then, comes the crux of the present paper's reasoning for why goodness itself must change:

1. *Either* we reconcile ourselves torturously to a tragic goodness in which well-meaning people produce horrific results *or* goodness itself must change.
2. But only changing goodness preserves its gist – that it is something *good*. “Tragic goodness” is, when you think about it, *bad*.

6. See the decent, single mother (Bendik-Keymer, 2012a). “No one intends for the world to become warmer; no one intends for water to be polluted” (Vogel, 2015, p. 200).

3. Therefore, goodness itself must change.

It must be repeated: the *concept* of goodness must change – not simply its application. If goodness is primarily a matter of good character expressing good intentions – the classic concept – it may still have many different *conceptions*, and all of these must accordingly change. For instance, Kant and Aristotle disagree in *conceptions* of goodness, Kant’s being a matter of *the form of the will* and Aristotle’s being a matter of *the teleological ordering of a life*. Yet both share the same *concept*: the intentions (teleology) of a state of character (ethos) are the primarily locus of goodness. Thus, both of their conceptions must change.

Today, goodness is, paradoxically, tragic *unless* we shift focus from intentions to unintended consequences and from character (even that of communities bound by an ethos) to aggregate collectives. *Not* shifting makes no sense. Goodness should be good. So goodness should *primarily* be understood through unintentional collectives. This is to change its very concept.

Theses 2 & 3: The form of power

Aggregate collectives affect Earth’s environment raising ethical problems, e.g., injustice to future generations and the world’s poor, disregard for non-human life. Aggregate collectives are *powerful*. Their “ability to affect” is profound (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2009b).

What is termed herein *the form* of our power is, simply, *the way our life is structured so as to have the effect that it does*. This form includes political organization, formal and informal economies, apparatuses of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, even inherited psychology underlying identifiable tendencies in human action which has not been checked or supplemented by our institutional arrangements.⁷ As has already been said, it is a *theoretical placeholder* for future work. That it is comes from *moral reasons*. Because we are focused on the aggregate consequences of social processes and the way that they are arranged and persist by practical support, if not consent, we *can* lump together, from a moral point of view, disparate social features into a bundle where their precise interrelationship to produce the effects that they do needs to be sorted out through socially conscious action. It is not the place to sort out these precise relationships – indeed, they differ from society to society – but it is the place and the time to bundle them under the placeholder of the form of power. If socially-caused planetary, environmental change can be traced back to aggregate collectives, the form of power is the concept for the *various social structures* by which these collectives cause unintended consequences through their cumulative on the planetary environment.

The question, then, is why goodness should be tied to the form of power, and what does such a re-conceptualization involve? To take the first question, imagine – for the sake of argument – the faces of children a hundred years from now. Because they are children’s face, they are plain and expectant. They have done nothing to bring about the environmental degradation stunting the possibilities of the poor among them. And we didn’t *mean* to do anything to stunt these children’s lives. Yet we collectively brought

7. The form of power includes the “storms” Gardiner (2011) analyzes as well as the short-term thinking and primate tendencies summarized in Matthew Ridley (1998). What makes these tendencies *social processes* is that we have not *corrected* for them institutionally, which we can presumably do (cf. Vogel, 2015; Hirsch & Norton, 2012).

woe to them. It is as if we each threw one piece of trash onto the largest mountain of landfill in the world and then doomed children to live within it. Imagine children scampering through rusty tins and rotting fruit, teeth yellow already.

The consequences are tragic. They are just an image. Still what we in our inherited world have caused is very, very bad. It is very nigh impossible to think of much worse than to stunt the lives of children as a class – the class of poor, future children. Our actions are a part of a form of power causing morally aberrant likelihoods – stunting of future children. Even risking such wrong without addressing it is wrong (Shue, 2010)! So we are mired in moral wrong from collective, unintentional action.⁸ We are carrying forward a situation that Iris Marion Young (2011) called *structural injustice*.

Hence, here, then, is what anyone loving true goodness *should* consider, on reflection. Personal intentions do not *primarily* matter. They *appear* good, but their truth is murkier. Character, accordingly, does not *primarily* matter. Well-meaning people everywhere contribute, infinitesimally and unknowingly to large scale, long-term wrong (Bendik-Keymer, 2012a; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2010; Jamieson, 2014).

How can we talk about *goodness* when the concept of it allows us to ignore the wrong in which we are complicit? Goodness cannot possibly be complicit in massive moral wrong. If one claims that it is, then one is not referring to *goodness*.

Accordingly, what should matter primarily are the *structures* by which we cause unintended consequences. *Those structures need to be good* for goodness to be satisfied. Otherwise, decent though we try to be, we will remain complicit in wrong. The only mitigating factor would be when we try to change bad structures.

Goodness, then, should be tied to the form of power. The form of power determines, for instance, whether we will do right *by* future generations and the global poor and *in light of* the value of non-human nature.⁹ Once again, this simple reasoning wraps up this stage of my argument.

That being said, we should avoid misunderstanding what the reasoning shows here. It may not be as grandiose as it could seem; in fact, the shift is somewhat subtle. We can see this by underlining the question of priority that has been emphasized so far. *Tying goodness to the form of power does not eliminate the traditional features of goodness – intention and character. It re-orders them.* They become *secondary* to the form of power. It becomes *primary* along with related concepts.

Call the traditional concept of goodness, “small-scaled goodness,” and the adapted one, “planetary-scaled goodness”:

Small-scaled goodness

Intentions (locus of goodness) → unintended consequences (addressed through better intentions).

Character (structure of goodness) → social organization (forming character).

8. In my system (Bendik-Keymer, 2013), *morality* is the domain of interpersonal right and wrong within *ethics*, the domain of pursuing the good. Ethics need not be interpersonal. Hence it is broader than morality. Future generations are personal via “people-traces” born of “people-projections” (Bendik-Keymer, 2012b).

9. This shadows the first “storms” Gardiner (2011) identifies –the intergenerational and the global storms. Gardiner doesn’t address *the ecological storm*, focusing instead on “the theoretical storm.” But *all* the storms involve vagueness. It hardly seems vagueness is a separate, moral storm. Rather, it is a feature of the storm. *Pace* Gardiner, the third storm is ecological. There is enough widespread support for the intrinsic value of non-human life to support this view (cf. Bendik-Keymer, 2006, lecture 6).

Planetary-scaled goodness

Aggregate effects (locus of goodness) → personal and collective intentions (sound only by cohering with responsibility for aggregate effects).

The form of power (structure of goodness) → character (sound only by cohering with responsibility for the form of power).

What makes the planetary-scaled concept different is the role that unintentional action has in it. The form of power is locked to the total effect of aggregate collectives. Aggregate collectives are unintentional by definition. The form of power is a concept of *unintentionality*. It explains the total effects of what we do, not mean to do. Beginning with the unintentional and an aggregate of agents lacking calculative order (Vogler, 2009; Anscombe, 2000) between them is an untraditional approach to goodness. Yet it is morally necessary.

One shouldn't object that planetary-scaled goodness maintains the primacy of intentionality. Personal and collective intentions are sound only by not contributing to bad aggregate effects, yes. *But this isn't to focus on intentions*. If we did, we would ask, "what should my intention be so as to not contribute to bad overall effects?" But the individual contributions to aggregate collective effects are so diffuse, miniscule, invisible, etc. that it is the *structures* of the form of power, those which *pattern* countless reiterations of miniscule effects that are the *actual loci of causality*. The *patterns* not the intentions cause the problem. Thus the intentions aren't primary. The form of power is.

It is helpful to take account of how this subtle but substantial shift in the meta-ethical determinations of goodness could be re-interpreted by the currently traditional moral theories (Sterba, 2000) taught in most Anglophone ethics programs –consequentialism, (neo-Kantian) deontology, and virtue ethics. By doing so, we can see both how the change of planetary-scaled goodness is subtle and also how it could shape a reinterpretation of the tradition of modern moral philosophy as it has developed up to this day.

So, to begin, take consequentialism. Attention *first* to the form of power motivates a *rule-consequentialist* perspective at the level of aggregate collectives. According to this perspective, the intentions expressed here are ethically sound only in so far as they conform to *rules that pattern acceptable aggregate effects*. The focus is first on the aggregate now.

Then consider Kantianism. The Categorical Imperative includes the "law of nature" formulation (Kant, 1998; Barger, 2001). We must consider the overall effect of a universally held intention. Couldn't the patterns formed by our maxims and leading to bad aggregate effects be addressed by the law of nature formulation? After all, my maxims could be guided by the maxim, "*I will act so as resist, change or disagree with patterns involving aggregate effects undermining human rights and natural value.*" But the focus would still be on the aggregate – an un-Kantian origin.

What of *befitting style* reasons for action – those characterizing the reasons virtues track? They take up *patterns* (Vogler, 2009, chapter 5) appropriate for human life in a given society. These reasons can express rule consequentialism, Kantianism, or some other normative basis. Could we say, "Our intentions are ethically sound only cohering with the patterns crucial to human flourishing?" Why couldn't these *patterns* be those

that do not contribute to moral wrong through the unintended consequence of our aggregated actions? They could be. But the *primary* focus would be the aggregate collective.

Theses 4-6: The civic relation

So the reasoning seems to show that we shouldn't jettison traditional ethical concepts. Rather, we should *re-conceptualize* them. Specifically, we should shift our focus first to aggregate, collective effects. Call this *re-orientation*. It avoids the misperception of creating entirely new ethical concepts. Accordingly, sine of the most central, traditional ethical concepts is the concept of personal character and its goodness. We should re-orient that. In this section, it is proposed that we do so through what will be called *the civic relation*.

The moral need now is to *link the personal to the aggregate collective*. We might think of this as *mooring* the personal in the collective. Persons need, morally, to be tied to collectives in a way that the tradition has not standardly understood. The mooring does not pass through a group agent. The mooring works by shaping our intentions. We have to structure our lives in light of the aggregate collective. Specifically, the reasoning seems to show that we have to live our lives in such a way that we take responsibility for patterns producing the tragic consequences of aggregate collectives.

Here is where the form of our lives and the form of power become linked – the next stage in the present paper's0 argument. It would seem that, in order to become responsible in a new, planetary-scaled way, our lives should become involved in changing the *causal situation* that is producing the unintended, aggregate effects. This causal situation is structured by the form of power. *Therefore, personal character needs to be shown by taking responsibility for the structure.*

Accordingly, the claim is made herein that the *form* of our lives should become responsible for constructing a form of power that does not produce tragic, aggregate consequences. Until we have constructed such a form of power, we must *reform* our society. People may team up to do this, but the work is so vast, multi-faceted and long-term as to fail to produce standard collective intentionality; traditions are not teams, nor is humankind. Our work, to be successful, has to be at the level of collective patterning. Thus, we must understand ourselves as moored to collective-level, institutional change of the patterns producing our planetary situation. Since the effects *exceed* societies – aggregating across societies and over time – good people today must be moored to institutional change *through* their society that reaches to reform the form of power of *extra-societal, de facto* collectives contributing to tragic consequences. The form of our lives must model this long-term, planetary-scaled responsibility.

For example, we could specifically take our integrity to depend on working to reform the systems of extraction-driven, cradle-to-grave, mass production that have come to characterize modern society since the Industrial Revolution (Braungart & McDonough, 2002; Marcuse, 1991). Then, we would work through our societies, but aim to connect up with the world.

The civic relation is the normative form in which my personal character is moored to aggregate and unintentional consequences of the collective to which I happen to belong. By it, I am responsible for those consequences through being responsible for the form of power that I have inherited (cf. Young, 2011).

In this way, the civic relation gives the *basic form* of justness so that how I am just must be contextualized through it, even while the core values of justice – e.g., the moral standing of children centuries from now – explain why the civic relation is itself so important. The new concept – the civic relation – shapes the *form* for the virtue of justness, while the values of justice provide justness’s moral content. That is the re-orientation of justness.

Justness has traditionally focused on *wrongs between agents* (Thompson, 2006). Agent A *does an injustice* to agent B. One problem with planetary-scaled environmental change is that this logic cannot hold. No single agent A – personal or collective – can be said to wrong some agent B (Jamieson, 2014; Gardiner, 2011). *It is the nature of aggregate collectives to exceed the logic of agenthood*. Yet the troubling thing is that there does, intuitively, seem to be some matter of justice involved. My actions *do* contribute to expected harm to future children. As Iris Marion Young puts it, “thousands or even millions of agents contribute by [their] actions in particular institutional contexts to the processes that produce unjust outcomes” (Young, 2011, p. 111). And yet these agents are not themselves a group agent – far from it. Nor can any one of them, *qua* agent, cause the injustice. Still, the aggregate, acting within the well-worn grooves of institutional and social patterns, causes something that appears to be morally wrong: risk to vulnerable children in future generations. Once again, concepts need to be re-oriented.

The civic relation, as a form for my life, moors me to an *unintentional* collective and its effects. By the civic relation, I act toward that collective – to which I belong in fact – *as if* it were an extension of my agency. In effect, I make the collective an *object* of my agency through my responsibility for its form of power. In so doing, Justness has been assigned by this author a particular form suited to problems of large and long scale. Justness is then thought through the form of power. Most technically, the civic relation brings *justness* under the form of power such that *if* the aggregate collective to which I belong is causing wrong, it becomes a matter of *justice* for me to reform it.

As Young has shown, practically the only way to affect the background conditions patterning systematic moral wrong is through reforming the patterning institutions themselves. Such action is almost always decidedly political. It is *civic*. She holds, rightly, that responsible people should “... take public stands about actions and events that affect broad masses of people, and ... try to organize collective action to prevent massive harm or foster institutional change for the better” (Young, 2011, p. 76). Private action will be indifferent. It won’t un-work the unintentional, aggregate consequences risking moral wrong. Civic action, rather, is called for.

The *civic* relation thus provides the form of life crucial for *personal* character. Everyone should have the character to express the civic relation in her daily patterns. Our manner of justness should be civic. Through the civic relation, I become responsible for the institutions that pattern the behavior of the collectives to which I happen to belong.

Theses 7-9: The anthropomic orientation

We might, understandably at this point, want to specify how the form of the civic relation ought actually to shape one’s life. The concept of an *orientation* is helpful in doing so. In this section, the form of life marked out by the civic relation will be specified and done so by introducing the last new concept of the article – what has been called, *the*

anthroponomic orientation, after the term “anthroponomy,” the collective self-regulation of humankind as a whole.¹⁰

The concept of an orientation provides a way to locate responsibility within personal intentions given the skewing logic of aggregate collectives that has opened the fault-line in this article along which traditional concepts have fallen to one side, to be re-oriented. You can see how by retracing the steps of the argument so far:

Beginning with *unintended consequence*, the focus will move to what caused them: *aggregate collectives*.

It was the intention here to give a placeholder for their structured, causal power and called it, *the form of power*.

Then it was necessary to know how the concept of goodness should change. It was argued that underlying personal character should be *the civic relation*.

How, then, does the civic relation *reach into* ordinary life?

Today, any person is submerged within an aggregate collective that exceeds its society globally and historically. Any person cannot specify the exact nature of the moral wrong to which she is contributing far into the future and far around the globe. Our responsibility, accordingly, is for the aggregate collective to which we belong as a matter of fact. This responsibility must be primary and our other responsibilities conceptualized in a way that is coherent with it. Here is where the concept of an orientation is helpful in allowing us to understand how personal intentions can be sound within the civic relation.

An orientation is an *identity stance*, where identity is “thin” (Walzer, 2006). When I try to live well, I should *position my life toward* a world for which I intend to be responsible, all the while knowing that I alone cannot discharge what is needed for that responsibility. The expression of my responsibility will remain underdetermined and in need of ongoing reconceptualization and specification. So oriented, I open up – and hold open – the cultural specifics of my identity to the largely unknown, emerging, and gradually informing demands of whatever I am oriented towards, as these demands exceed anything I can individually do.

For the purposes here, an orientation (cf. Bendik-Keymer, 2002, chapter 5; Laden, 2001; Korsgaard, 1996) is *an identity stance positioned toward the moral wrong risked by my aggregate collective’s form of power*. To keep ahold of it is to make the civic relation a feature of my everyday life with its myriad personal intentions. It is to not let my personal intentions *violate* or *ignore* the civic relation *on the whole*, even if specific intentions have nothing to do with the civic relation. It is to keep the relation in mind *generally speaking*, a feature of having sound personal intentions that cohere with myself when I look back at night or the week’s end. Here isn’t a neurotic foreclosure of other responsibilities, but a *moral context* for my life’s overarching acceptability to me.

What should we call this orientation? For moral reasons, it seems that it must be called *the anthroponomic orientation* – an orientation toward *the collective self-regulation of humankind as a whole*. Without this collective self-regulation, some of us will decide on

10. Whereas – for *moral* reason – I disagree with the rush to use the term “Anthropocene” to characterize socially-caused, planetary, environmental change, I do think there are *moral* reasons to use “anthroponomy” to characterize the only acceptable *solution* to the problems caused by specific social processes. The solution must be legitimate for all of humankind, in some reasonable sense that has yet to be clarified. I am working on this project now – the project of anthroponomy. A number of my talks can be found online that address it.

effects that affect others far around the planet and into the future. Given a planetary-scaled problem, we need planetary-scaled legitimacy and equal respect. This is why the civic relation ought to be anthroponomic, and the orientation expressing the civic relation in personal life should be called “the anthroponomic orientation.”¹¹

Anthroponomically oriented, my moral background is *the responsibility as a member of humankind to regulate ourselves as a whole*. Within this background and in light of this horizon, I search for ways to promote – or not interfere with – this responsibility. I understand that such collective self-regulation of humankind can only materialize through institutional change patterning human action on a planetary scale in ways that will create a good form of power. So I become an active *citizen* seeking to make humankind’s form of power wholly satisfy our moral responsibilities to far future generations, the globally poor, and regarding non-human life. *Although this is not my only civic goal, it is my primary one, as the setting sun illuminates trees from behind*. Other goals are checked against anthroponomy when I periodically consult my life to find its coherence.

That, a tiny bit more specifically, is how the concept of goodness must change.

Consequences A & B: We tighten the connection between moral and political life

Goodness now has these five conceptual features in its concept: *unintended consequences, aggregate collectives, the form of power, the civic relation, and the anthroponomic orientation*. The first consequence of the argument made here employing these features is that *politics takes priority over private morality*. In so far as “morality” has come to mean an a-political, private domain in major parts of the modern tradition, politics takes priority over morality as such. In my own view and that of Allen Thompson (Thompson & Bendik-Keymer, 2012, chapter 1), however, such a division between morality and politics doesn’t survive scrutiny. One of the most significant consequences of reflecting on our planetary situation today is that contrary to being extra-political, the moral must become part of the political.¹²

This argument points to where the two join in active citizenship. Active citizenship is the domain where personal intentions meet up with responsibility for collectives, where traditional moral virtues come to bear on governance, law, and other traditional *foci* of politics. The civic relation implies active citizenship. Joining morality and politics, the civic relation’s priority in moral matters ensures that active civic engagement is the underlying context of moral life. We can no longer be moral and a-political, if ever we could. On the contrary, to be moral is to be actively political.

11. I disagree with both Martin Görke (2003, pp. 216–217) and G. M. Teutsch (1988). Teutsch proposed the term “anthroponomy” to refer to the location of ethical judgment within a human perspective –an epistemic condition on valuation. This position is better called “anthroponoesis” –human mindedness. Being anthroponoetic is a condition on being anthroponomous. Oddly, Görke (2003, p. 348, endnote 107) identifies the correct understanding of anthroponomy in Kant, who in the “Doctrine of Virtue” of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 1996, A47) identifies anthroponomy with the capacity to regulate humankind with “self-imposed laws.” I would differ from Kant only in not speaking of a *capacity* but of an *actual process* (cf. Vogel, 2015 – too, on practical processes of collective responsibility).

12. To be fair, few moral philosophers in the tradition jettison the relation between morality and politics. The consequence detailed here refers to a cultural reference in neo-liberalism (Brown, 2015).

Consequence C: Being political now becomes a matter of integrity – if ever it weren't

If to be moral is to be actively political, *moral identity* depends on *civic identity*. Active citizenship becomes the context *for* my moral identity. Thus someone with sound moral identity can no longer be just the private do-gooder. Rather, the person of sound moral identity must be oriented anthropomically. She must work on behalf of humankind for humankind to become collectively responsible, for instance, to far future humankind, the global poor, and regarding non-human life. She may lead *us* – “little platoons” (Scruton, 2012)¹³ – our *government*, or *us to lead* our government – but she has to be politicized in this way or she lacks a sound character.

Having integrity means living on moral principle (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2009a). Thus it is perfectly consistent to have personal integrity *only by* being an active citizen who is involved in her community anthropomically. Yet such a foundation to integrity is, on the surface of it to many, novel. Much more common for many would be to see integrity in the person who, e.g., keeps her word, does her job by the book, does not double-cross people, etc. – that is, in someone who can be counted on in word and in deed to maintain interpersonal norms. But this is not a person who appears *necessarily* politicized. Yet the changed concept of goodness entails that we be *necessarily* politicized. Otherwise, we lack integrity.

Consequences D-F: Happily, we find a frame of thoughtfulness for dealing with the banality of evil today

The last consequence of the reasoning presented here speaks to the main challenge of evil in the modern age, at least according to Hanna Arendt. Since this challenge is so important, I think it is worth mentioning here, even if only briefly. Perhaps a later study can be done to expand on the claims here.

As reported by Hanna Arendt, Eichmann's defense in Israel was an appeal to integrity. Eichmann claimed that his wrong was pardonable because he acted as a man of professional integrity. He did his lawful job (Arendt, 2006, p. 135ff.). This was suspect to the core, since professional integrity involves respect for persons, non-harm, and certainly a prohibition against the murder of innocents. It is also different from personal integrity. Yet Eichmann's case raised this specter:

Can we our lives with professional integrity, *yet remain thoughtless, submerged in mass scale structural injustice?*

Arendt called this problem *the banality of evil*, and she was prescient.

The traditional concept of goodness isn't well equipped to oppose the banality of the evil in our current, planetary situation. Most of us go about our business reproducing the conditions for planetary-scale moral wrong. Few are like Eichmann – he was genocidal-but we are submerged in a tragic machine (Vogel, 2015, chapter 7). It is even maintained by a concept of goodness that doesn't claim responsibility for our aggregate collective's form of power!

One of the very best consequences of goodness's new schema is that it opposes the banality of this evil. As Gardiner has shown so well, today's business as usual threatens the poor, powerless, and future humankind. It risks natural value on Earth. Moreover, it

13. Scruton's seeming is opposite, Vandana Shiva (2005) agrees: self-regulation needn't imply the regulative state. The principle of subsidiarity points locally for best results.

threatens to mar us morally, making our lives retrospective sites of justifiable regret, shame or guilt (Gardiner, 2011, chapter 10). But given the reasoning of this article, we have (at least the placeholder – the rough conceptual space for) a clear moral identity that defends us against the thoughtlessness that plagued Eichmann.

Take the case of responsibility to future generations. We are responsible for humankind's form of power. I have argued that our responsibility is anthropomic. By this form of life, we should try to live from year to year with an open-ended intention to contribute to humankind self-regulation. Thus our *identity* would depend on justice to future generations. And this would counter the banality of evil in this case.

*

Humankind taking responsibility for humankind – this moral identity doesn't allow me to lose myself in the crowd or in the office. I can't ignore my society's institutions anymore: They become my responsibility too. This is *anti-Eichmann identity*, ordinary goodness against structural injustice's banality. Anthropomic civic engagement – humankind's matter of personal integrity – is where goodness itself has changed.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Allen Thompson, Ronald Sandler, Paul and Helmut Hirsch; Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz; *Introduction to Philosophy (on Structural Injustice)*, Fall 2011, Case Western Reserve University; The Buffalo Workshop on Adaptation, 2012; James Hatley, an anonymous reviewer for Fordham University Press (where this text was initially slated to go before the entire section to which it belonged was cut for thematic focus on restoration, despite high marks for quality), Simon Hailwood, and Vasil Gluchman.

Jeremy David Bendik-Keymer is the Beamer-Schneider Professor in Ethics and an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio (USA). He is the author of many articles and several books, including *The Ecological Life: Discovering Citizenship and a Sense of Humanity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); *Solar Calendar, and Other Ways of Marking Time* (Punctum Books, 2017); and the co-edited volume *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future* (MIT Press, 2012). His maternal family hails from Slovakia.

Corresponding author:

Jeremy David Bendik-Keymer, Department of Philosophy, Case Western Reserve University, 11130 Bellflower Rd., Cleveland, Ohio, 44106 (United States of America)
Email: bendik-keymer@case.edu

References

- ANSCOMBE, G.E.M. (2000): *Intention*, 2nd edition. New York: Harvard University Press.
- ARENDRT, H. (2006): *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- ARISTOTLE (2002): *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by C. Rowe. New York: Oxford

University Press.

BARGER, R. (2001): Summary of the Law of Nature formulation. In: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [online] [Retrieved January 8 2012] Available at: <http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/categorical-imperative.html>.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2002): *Conscience and Humanity. A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Chicago Department of Philosophy*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2016b): Decolonialism and Democracy: On the Most Painful Challenges to Anthropomy. In: *Inhabiting the Anthropocene*, [online] [Retrieved November 20 2016] Available at: <https://inhabitingtheanthropocene.com/2016/07/27/decolonialism-and-democracy-on-the-most-painful-challenges-to-anthropomy/>.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2012b): Do You Have a Conscience? In: *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership*, 1(1), pp. 52–80.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2006): *The Ecological Life: Discovering Citizenship and a Sense of Humanity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2016a): The Fundamental Ethical Adaptation: Anthropomy. In: *Inhabiting the Anthropocene*, [online] [Retrieved November 20 2016] Available at: <https://inhabitingtheanthropocene.com/2016/06/08/the-fundamental-ethical-adaptation-anthropomy/>.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2013): The Moral and the Ethical: What Conscience Teaches Us about Morality. In: V. Gluchman (ed.): *Morality: Reasoning on Different Approaches*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 11–23.

BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (2012a): The Sixth Mass Extinction is caused by us. In: A. Thompson & J. Bendik-Keymer (eds.): *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 263–280.

BRAUNGART, M. & MCDONOUGH, W. (2002): *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*. New York: North Point Press.

BROWN, W. (2015): *Undoing the Demos: Neo-Liberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books.

GALLIE, W. (1955): Essentially Contested Concepts. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, new series*, 56 (1955–1956), pp. 167–198.

GARDINER, S. (2011): *A Perfect Moral Storm: the Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*. New York: Oxford University Press.

GLUCHMAN, V. (2003): *Human Being and Morality in Ethics of Social Consequences*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

GORKE, M. (2003): *The Death of our Planet's Species: A Challenge to Ecology and Ethics*, trans. by P. Nevers. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

HARVEY, D. (2007): *A Brief History of Neo-liberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

HIRSCH, P. & NORTON, B. (2012): Thinking like a Planet. In: A. Thompson & J. Bendik-Keymer (eds.): *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, chapter 16.

JAMIESON, D. (2012): Ethics, Public Policy and Global Warming. In: A. Thompson & J. Bendik-Keymer (eds.): *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 187–202.

JAMIESON, D. (2014): *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate*

- Change Failed – and What It Means for our Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- KANT, I. (1998): *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by M. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- KANT, I. (1996): *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by M. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- KORSGAARD, C. (1996): *The Sources of Normativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- LADEN, A. (2001): *Reasonably Radical: Deliberative Liberalism and the Politics of Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- LEGAL THEORY LEXICON (2004): Concepts and Conceptions, [online] [Retrieved January 5 2012] Available at: <http://legaltheorylexicon.blogspot.com/2004/03/legal-theory-lexicon-028-concepts-and.html>.
- MARCUSE, H. (1991): *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2nd edition. Boston: Beacon Press.
- NEIMAN, S. (2002): *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- NEIMAN, S. (2009): *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- NEW OXFORD AMERICAN DICTIONARY (2009a): Integrity. Apple Inc.
- NEW OXFORD AMERICAN DICTIONARY (2009b): Power. Apple Inc.
- PLATO (2002): *Five Dialogues*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube & J. M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- PLATO (2004): *Republic*, trans. by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- RAWLS, J. (1999): *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- RIDLEY, M. (1998): *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Penguin.
- SCRUTON, R. (2012): *How to Think Seriously about the Planet*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- SHIVA, V. (2005): *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Boston: South End Press.
- SHUE, H. (2010): Deadly Delays, Saving Opportunities: Creating a More Deadly World? In: S. Gardiner, S. Caney, D. Jamieson & H. Shue (eds.): *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 146–162.
- SINGER, P. (2004): *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- SINNOT-ARMSTRONG, W. (2010): It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations. In: S. Gardiner, S. Caney, D. Jamieson & H. Shue (eds.): *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, chapter 18.
- STERBA, J. (2000): *Three Challenges to Traditional Ethics: Environmentalism, Feminism, and Multiculturalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- TEUTSCH, G. M. (1988): Schöpfung Ist Mehr als Umwelt. In K. Bayertz (ed.): *Ökologische Ethik*. Munich: Schnell & Steiner, pp. 55–65.
- THOMPSON, A. & BENDIK-KEYMER, J. (eds.) (2012): *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- THOMPSON, M. (2006): What Is It to Wrong Someone? A Puzzle about Justice. In: R.

- J. Wallace, P. Pettit, S. Scheffler & M. Smith (eds.) (2006): *Reason and Value: Themes in the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 333–384.
- VOGEL, S. (2015): *Thinking like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- VOGLER, C. (2009): *Reasonably Vicious*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- WALZER, M. (2006): *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- WILLISTON, B. (2015): *The Anthropocene Project: Virtue in the Age of Climate Change*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- YOUNG, I. (2011): *Responsibility for Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.