Climate Change and the Motivational Gap

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Contents

Abstract

The chapter proposes first a definition of motivation and its intrinsic challenges, e.g., the expression and maintenance of motivation in a consistent form. Specific attention is devoted to the main obstacles toward the establishment of an intergenerational climate-change-sensitive motivation. The chapter explores then what could be considered the most relevant conceptual contraposition with respect to the adoption of climate-change-sensitive behaviors, both from an individual and institutional perspective: the dialectic between indifference and solidarity. We will examine how these concepts lead to different motivational perspectives that, in turn, ground and

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direct diametrically opposed behaviors. Subsequently, we will explore the main implications of these motivational perspectives, in terms of moral and institutional effects and within an intergenerational framework. Finally, the chapter proposes a normative path for overcoming the motivational gap that the simple contraposition between indifference and solidarity could do nothing but perpetuate.

Keywords

Motivation · Indifference · Solidarity · Intergenerational justice

Introduction

Even though motivation plays a prominent role in the moral domain, a specific philosophical attention to this concept and its correlative challenges is pretty recent. If we should find a mature definition of the concept of motivation devoted to our reference domain – the practical philosophy and the moral agency – we must refer first to the work by Thomas Wolff, *Phsycologia Empirica*, that the German philosopher published in 1740. In that work (and precisely in the § 877), we can read the paradigmatic statement according to which "the motive is the sufficient reason for volition and nolition." From this effective definition, we can derive a few useful implications for the present context.

First, motivation is by definition and from its conceptual origin a bridging concept between philosophy and psychology (at that point, namely, at Wolff's time, surely not yet emerged as autonomous discipline, being rather addressed as a fundamental chapter of metaphysics).

Second, properly speaking, motivation concerns the practical domain, not the epistemological and cognitive one.

Third, starting from that first framing, it is possible to articulate a well-grounded distinction between *motive* and *motivation*: While *motive* can be understood as the cause or the condition of any single specific action, *motivation* is a dynamic factor able to activate and guide an organism toward a selected goal or achievement within a (mostly) expected time frame. Accordingly, if *motive* chairs the determination of a single action, *motivation* chairs the determination and stabilization of a series of motives in turn determining a series of action. Consequently, motivation gives shape to an agent's conduct that can be extended and experienced in a short-medium term.

In what follows, we will focus on the concept of motivation and not on motive. We will set apart the elaboration of the concept within the psychological domain, in order to concentrate on the philosophical accounts elaborated in the most recent debate. More specifically, we will focus on philosophical accounts related to climate change by concentrating on the obstacles that a philosophical theory of motivation has to address in this field.

In order to frame those obstacles, we must primarily precise the main factors constituting the very idea of motivation from a moral-philosophical point of view. There is a quite shared agreement on a four-step track, describing the motivational path from the first acceptance of a practical rule to the action.

The first moment is the *acceptance* of a rule, meaning the judgment about its rightness or justification. The second moment is the *adoption* of that rule, meaning that endorsement of the rule as a motive for action. The third moment is the *application* of that rule, meaning the selection of one or more specific situations in which applying the rule can be appropriate. Finally, the fourth moment focuses on the very *action*, meaning the translation into a concrete act – or in a series of acts – of what is required by that principle and is in line with its acceptance, adoption, and application (Birnbacher, 2009).

A series of questions might arise from this preliminary framing. The first point is related to the possibility of achieving a sharp distinction among the four factors. Second, even if there is a general agreement about the constitutive interdependence of all factors we mentioned, it is questioned if there exists or not a sort of ranking among them.

But there are further obstacles to be inserted in the picture, if we consider two specific points related to our discourse: (a) the motivation to act in favor of distant future recipients of our action and (b) the need to consider motivation within the climate change perspective.

Obstacles to an Intergenerational Climate-Change-Sensitive Motivation

In considering the link among the motivation to act, the systemic challenge set by climate change, and the profile of a subject able to act considering (temporally) distant recipients, there are at least five main difficulties we must deal with.

Misalignment

First, we should consider the *misalignment* between the acceptance and the adoption of a rule in the form of a principle for acting.

It may be not so difficult to isolate a series of claims, which can be translated into rules, that may reach a kind of overlapping or even universal consensus. In other terms, who is in favor of such a statement is implicitly sustaining to be able to determine a core of principles that are of universal evidence, rationality, and validity and that, in force of this distinctive status, could not be put into question by no rational being.

However, even if these principles exist, their acknowledgment does not imply their immediate adoption as a motive of action. There might be a number of conflicting and opposite motivations that could block the only apparently obvious move from the first moment (acceptance) to the second one (adoption).

This is a difficulty pertaining to the universe of motivation as a whole. Nonetheless, it becomes surely more acute when considered within the intergenerational domain, in which the *acceptance* and the *adoption* might be part of two distant moments in the life of a subject or even, by extremizing, in the lives of different subjects or groups that do not experience any form of shared temporal continuity.

Uncertainty

The *second* difficulty has to do with differentiated forms of *uncertainty*. The first form of uncertainty is *individual*. Let us consider anyone of us as a free person with several interests, aims, and life plans, and trying to establish a kind of overall ranking and order among them in our daily life. We must face our personal difficulty and ambivalence in constructing and keeping a unique motivational path – and the specific motivation for acting in favor of distant others in climate change scenarios is just one among several others. Additionally, we are aware that our personal hesitation and insecurity might generate a nonstable series of motives and corresponding actions. Furthermore, we acknowledge that, to get some significant effects related to such big challenges, we should keep ongoing a strong motivational effort for a long time. Being unsure about the quality and the strength of my climate change-sensitive motivation in the medium-long term, I could be tempted to give up from the very beginning. If we are not sure about our level of commitment *vis à vis* future recipients, we could realize that our initial commitment would be pointless: It might be safer to pursue other goals.

A different level of uncertainty is *group uncertainty*. Even if I would adopt that rule converting it in a principle for my own agency, who could reassure me that others would follow the same rule? As climate change is systemic challenge, we could hope to get some results in facing it only if we could reach a systemic triggering of an adequate motivational path. Otherwise, my personal commitment would be useless. Consequently, the impossibility to reach a high level of certainty about the group or societal commitment might prevent me from adopting any motivation of this kind.

A further form of the same difficulty can be called *effectivity uncertainty*. This is a comprehensive form of uncertainty including both individual and collective uncertainty. We are used to think that, in front of already present tragedies or of already present and experienced damages, we can mobilize our best motivational resources (from the individual and collective, as well as from the economic and institutional point of view) and try to realize the best and most efficient management of the consequences experienced now (Pirni & Buizza, 2022). Shall we hope to experience the same conduct *vis à vis* future – and so far, just possible – damages and at present not completely realized effects deriving from modeling and forecasts that, by definition, are open to failure? Not surprisingly, the answer is uncertain.

Individual Causal Inefficiency

The *third* difficulty, the *individual causal inefficiency*, refers to a famous claim raised by Hiller (2011). Let us take into consideration a common action like the individual daily commuting from A to B with a highly emitting CO_2 car for the simple pleasure to drive. My individual action is neither sufficient, nor necessary for causing climate change. Additionally, imagine that driving is for me a very pleasant activity and if I would decide to renounce it, I would experience a reduction of my personal well-being (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2005).

If so, I can conclude that I have no duty to reduce my individual CO_2 emission, simply because even if I would renounce commuting, climate change would follow its internal dynamic. If I decide to abandon or strongly reduce that activity, I give up a source of good for me, without benefit for others.

From an overall perspective, anyone of us would agree on the assumption that climate change is a massive problem that deserves attention by the most powerful (political and economic) actors all over the word. Therefore: Which is my possible role in that challenge? What can I do, concretely? Apparently, nothing. From this point comes one of the most dangerous consequences in the moral domain: If I cannot do anything concrete, no one of my actions is morally wrong toward climate change, and I have no kind of responsibility toward that phenomenon (if I cannot cause anything relevant from a systemic point of view, I am not morally responsible at that level of what I did, I am doing, or I will do).

This objection to moral individual responsibility has been widely discussed (Baatz, 2014; Pellegrino, 2018; Broome, 2012; Kagan, 2011; Corvino & Pirni, 2022). One of the most explored responses makes appeal to the political sphere. In my opinion, the invitation to promote political parties and options in favor of policies explicitly devoted to counter climate change is not enough, though.

This at least for two main reasons. The first is a kind of performative contradiction: There is a substantially universal agreement about the fact that climate change is the massive result of a systemic individual behavior over the last three centuries and that, unfortunately, it is still dangerously accelerating during the last decades. Assuming that individuals could not do anything else means that they would never have been able to originate what now exists and what we are experiencing. Second – and this is an objection for both the political and moral sphere –, many empirical researches have demonstrated the costant decreasing trend of trust *vis à vis* the political actors all over the world. Completely trusting the politicians in the domain of climate change would imply either a surprising new countertendency that should be deeply analyzed or a new and subtle typology of self-deception from the individual point of view.

The Link Among Risk Perception, Preference Management, and Taking Action

While the difficulties above have to do with the first two moments of the motivational path (*acceptance* and *adoption* of a rule), the next two will be dealing with the other two moments, related to the *application* of the rule in form of a principle for action and to the very *action*.

The *fourth* difficulty revolves around the difficulty of tracing the most effective *link among risk perception, preference management, and taking action*.

Such a difficulty is related to a very strong and multifaceted motivational gap, expressed by several "dragons of inaction" (Gifford, 2011), namely, psychological barriers that limit up to blocking the taking-actions moment. This has to do with two kinds of perception of risks: the *experience-based* and the *description-based* perception. While the perception of direct – or at least directly referred – experience can

trigger a strong and pretty stable motivation in taking action in conformity of the perceived risk, any account based on a just outlined or framed description of possible future risk is tremendously less effective in pursuing the same goal (Gardiner, 2011; Jamieson, 2014; Weber, 2006).

In other words, if the – to now, just minimally experienced – direct perception of climate change as a risk is not able to directly trigger the most robust, shared, and stable motivation to act to prevent it and if taking action when such a risk will be widely and massively experienced will be almost totally useless in order to limit the damage (and perhaps even to sufficiently manage it), we have to admit that we are facing a kind of strong and resilient moral issue.

Starting from the intention of solving that issue, we should be aware of not entering in another and (only apparently less) pernicious moral risk: that one related to *paternalism*, i.e., to the more or less conscious attempt to foresee the collective preferences and foremost those coming by future people, trying to "normalize" and insert them within formerly established strategic lines and top-down paths. This risk would limit up to implicitly excluding the possibility to integrate new preferences, needs, and plans of life coming from the future generations (Meyer & Roser, 2009). The linear implication is that this risk, when consolidated as a strategic line orienting policy, would strongly limit the legitimate possibility of the future agents to reshape the allocation of resources and budgets.

Notwithstanding, a possible way for addressing that issue seems to be related to the possible managing of individual and collective preferences and preventing or limiting the consolidation of those preferences able to block climate-change-sensitive actions-plans (Bykvist, 2009; Markowitz & Monroe, 2021). This has to do with a comprehensive framing of the issue of *feasibility*, meaning a substantial positive orientation by individuals toward (patterns of) action that are presented with details and proofs of evidence (or by referring to surely negative results if not addressed) and good possibility and percentage of positive outcome.

We could conclude on this point by affirming that, if the problem related to how to manage and organize individual and collective preference is surely a challenge, we could easily agree on the fact that such a challenge is strengthened when we refer to present and future agents, trying to combine the possibility to capture the preferences of both *already-present-agents* and *not-yet-present ones* and to turn those preferences toward an unique coherent motivational plan action-oriented (Corvino, 2021; Markowitz & Monroe, 2021).

Moral Corruption, Reciprocity, and Procrastination

The *fifth* difficulty has to do with *moral corruption*, *forms of* (direct or indirect) *reciprocity* among subjects acting on different time frames, and *procrastination* of taking action.

Moral Corruption

In climate change scenarios, "moral corruption" (Gardiner, 2011, pp. 6–8, 45–48, 301–396) is the result of three distinct but not divergent factors (or "storms") that

concur in generating and shaping "the perfect moral storm": The first two storms have to do with serious asymmetries of power. Specifically, the first, *the global storm,* focuses on what the world's affluent nations do, i.e., orient, shape, and strongly determine the world's agenda, by considering primarily their own interests and only residually the poorest nations' ones. The second storm is *intergenerational*. Its key feature is that the current generation possesses a greater power than the later ones: Present generations can seriously affect the possibility and prospects of the future ones, up to putting in place the very condition of human extinction, while any reversing of the situation is logically and pragmatically impossible. Finally, the third storm is *theoretical* and deals with massive inadequacy of the theories in countering the first two storms.

Moral corruption constitutes the cross-point and the final product of those storms and occurs when those involved in a complex moral problem – like realizing concrete actions against climate change as a whole – profit from the existence of an intricate web of responsibilities to justify evasion from any form of responsibility and, by avoiding acting, for acting in favor of the preservation of the *status quo* (Harris, 2019, Heilinger, 2019).

This series of considerations lead to a further specification of moral corruption: what we could qualify as a *weak satisfaction*. This difficulty must deal with the linkage above outlined among the (unstable) motivation to act, the (fluctuant) perception of climate change as a challenge related to the present generation, and the need of considering (temporally) distant recipients of my action. The framing of this challenge can be referred to both the individual and collective perspectives through a unique issue: What do we owe to the future generation and why? Or, put in another way: Why should I renounce something now, in order to allow distant people to profit off my renounces, having in mind that my "net renounce" here and now might not produce a "net benefit" in this or other places and in other times?

Reciprocity

A source of the weak satisfaction – and of the corresponding weak or unstable motivation – is a difficulty in reciprocating. In the moral domain, we are used to reciprocal motivation, by reproducing a very basic mental schema: I do something for you, in force of pretty well-grounded expectation that you will do something for me. In other words, my motivational effort in starting to do something "for you" – namely, by imagining taking action in your favor – is from the very beginning ideally (even if just partially) "compensated" by the foreseeing of your (future) taking action in my favor. This pattern potentially inaugurates a virtuous chain of reciprocity that continuously triggers and strengthens my – and the other's – motivational path.

Nonetheless, there are some relevant difficulties related to this point. Among others, Barry (1977) questioned the robustness of the obligation lying on the recipients of an action to give something back to the agent, just from the fact of being (perhaps by chance) the recipient of her action. In sum, the simple or not requested "receiving" does not ground the duty to "give back." Other objections come if we consider not just the horizontal perspective (the most typical situation contemplated in questions of distributive justice) but the vertical, meaning diachronic or intertemporal one (Hubin,

1976; Gosseries & Meyer, 2009, Sikora & Barry, 2012; Fritsch, 2018; see below, section "The Subtler Obstacle: Intergenerational Indifference"). This difficulty can be addressed by articulating the very meaning of reciprocity and introducing different models for framing it (Menga, 2021, pp. 137–169). Gosseries (2001, 2009, 2023) introduced three different models of reciprocity (ascending, descending, and double). By reconsidering the point from the motivational side, there are at least three challenges on this point.

First, the distinction between *direct or indirect reciprocity.* If we can agree on the existence of a certain level of obligation toward the future generation or the previous one that entered or might enter in our direct possibility of experience and reciprocate, we remain skeptical about the possibility of maintaining the same level of motivation to act *vis à vis* people belonging to a temporal domain which is not directly entering in our possibility to act.

Second, the *perceived equivalence*. What can we hope can be exchanged between generations that will maintain the same value perception in the transition between giver and recipient? That is, how can we be sure that what we decide to save and transfer, as having an objective value for us, will be understood as having the same (or an equivalent) objective value for those who receive it? (Kaplan et al., 2017).

Third, the perspective of *procrastination*. This is a sort of more or less implicit consequence or side effect of the reciprocity's issue. Because of the relevant difficulties in reciprocating agency, we can be tempted to postpone, meaning to analyze better and indefinitely extend the evaluation moment on what to do, consequently avoiding any concrete action.

Procrastination

There exists a quite wide debate on procrastination. Primarily, we should distinguish between first- and second-order procrastination (Andreou, 2007a, b; Andreou & White, 2010). The first order of procrastination occurs when an individual agent postpones the actions that could help her in realizing what she perceives to be morally compelling (e.g., postponing the day to quit smoking). The second order of procrastination occurs when she postpones the implementation of any willing "coercive solutions" coming from her own will that might prevent postponing those same actions (e.g., postponing the day when a smoker asks her partner to adopt "coercive measures" against her, such as hiding her cigarettes or preventing her to smoke with any means, in case she is unable to quit smoking alone).

Bringing the discussion back to our theme, we do acknowledge to have specific duties to reduce climate change (Baatz, 2014; Grasso, 2015), but nonetheless we continue postponing action that we consider in favor of that reduction. Any attempt for overcoming the procrastinating behavior starts from a twofold preliminary point: (a) the self-perception of being a procrastinator by the single agent and (b) the comprehensive awareness of the pernicious effects she tackles by recursively reproducing the procrastination loop. Then, such an attempt should produce individual mechanisms for significatively raising the "moral costs" deriving from procrastinating behaviors in order to make these less convenient and profitable from the first-person point of view (Corvino, 2021). The subsequent consequence of this is

the rediscovery and strengthening of the preliminary motivation to adopting climate-change-sensitive behaviors without finding moral excuses for postponing no one of the last two moments of the motivational path, i.e., the *application* of and the *action* in accordance with a principle we previously decided to *accept* and *adopt*.

The *Motivational Impasse* and Three Ideal-Typic Reactions: Eco-anxiety, Indifference, and Solidarity

The conclusion we can derive from the above is the following: motivating agents to effectively take care of the future appear to be an undoable task. More specifically, prospecting patterns of action in favor of future recipients might appear too general, broad, and "motivationally cold." Additionally, as a contribution to the strategy for containing climate change and its effects, the prospected achievements are too distant and uncertain. Therefore, activating climate change-sensitive behavior might appear pointless.

In front of such a conclusion, which might be depicted as a *motivational impasse*, we may acknowledge different forms of reactions. In what follows, we shall try to articulate three forms, or three ideal types of reaction.

The *first ideal type* has been called *eco-anxiety*. Eco-anxiety primarily refers to the observation of ecological and climate problems by a single subject and her consequent evaluation about the intrinsic uncertainty of a solution. It may include many kinds of manifestations, and they can change over time. Most of them are framed as healthy reactions *vis à vis* threats and loss, and only the strongest forms of them are to be considered from a pathological point of view. A general overview may address this ideal type as a complex system of "coping and changing" (Pihkala, 2022), including at least three major dimensions – "action," "grieving" (or "emotional engagement"), and "distancing" (Reser & Swim, 2011, p. 112; Mosquera & Jylhä, 2022).

The *action* dimension has to do with the so-called "practical anxiety" (Kurth, 2018), meaning proenvironmental behaviors and community building of many kinds, i.e., thinking about what the best course of action would be, as well as concrete attempt for "doing something" on my behalf, also by underestimating (consciously or not) any kind of obstacles against the achievement of individuals and group's aim.

Grieving (and other emotional engagements gathered under this label) refers to the need to tackle changes and losses by experiencing individual emotional reactions or by putting in place practices of sharing feelings not only of sadness, but also of eco-guilt, gratitude or/and anger, meeting with people in specific or symbolic date or place of remembrance, writing and sharing notes about one's feelings, and so on (Norgaard, 2011; Pihkala, 2021). Grieving may also give shape to ethical tasks, by encouraging the sharing of positive engaging emotions (Mosquera & Jylhä, 2022; Solomon, 2004). Problems may raise when this behavioral domain becomes too intense or overwhelming in an individual everyday life, up to strongly marginalizing the other two dimensions within the schema above proposed.

Finally, *distancing* has to do with the need to rest from the entire process that the individual obtains by self-care or avoidance behavior. This kind of practice is not to be seen as a signal of a maladaptive stand *vis à vis* what is happening, though this interpretation underestimates the healthy dose of distancing, mostly as a first reaction toward a state of affairs just happened. Nonetheless, if distancing behavior becomes the prominent way for reacting toward the external world, if it becomes a stable behavior instead of being temporally relativized and pragmatically incapsulated among the other two dimensions of the coping and changing scheme, it becomes pathological (Stoknes, 2015).

The *second ideal type* is *indifference*. As a first approximation, indifference is a kind of side-product of eco-anxiety. In a more schematic way, by imagining an ideal triangle among *action*, *grieving*, and *distancing*, we might affirm that indifference lies in an ideal intermediate point between *grieving* and *distancing*. This preliminary positioning evokes some implications.

First, we are implicitly affirming that indifference is an ideal type (whose intrinsic strength we will explore in the next paragraph) that can also be explained within the constitutive schema of eco-anxiety or can be understood as a strengthened form of the same eco-anxiety. *Second*, even if, at a first glance, indifference seems to be a linear and "natural" evolution of the *distancing* domain, its specific concretization also implies some form of emotional engagement and attempt to raising proactive arguments about its own legitimacy.

Third, by considering indifference as bordering on the grieving (or the emotional engagement) domain, we acknowledge a constitutive emotional side of that typology of reaction that however connotes it as a negative emotion: an emotion that systematically downsizes – up to canceling – any action aimed at the other person.

Being indifferent means something different from a healthy "self-care," but also from the "simple" willingness to give expression and to share an emotional awareness. In short and as a first approximation, indifference deserves and covers a specific place between *individualism* inclining to selfish behavior and *collectivism* inclining to the need of expressing one's thoughts in common.

Finally, the *third ideal type* is *solidarity*, which lies between *action* and *grieving*.

Solidarity always implies an emotional engagement. It is pretty unplausible to imagine a concretization of an action that has been considered by all involved subjects as a solidaristic one but is not accompanied (anticipated, flanked, or followed) by several emotional reactions. This is true also if such an accompaniment expresses through "subtle languages" made up of simple glances or minimal gestures between the subjects involved, regardless of the role they played in that specific action.

But solidarity is not only a mental fact, or a simple belief that does not give place to action with an even minimal impact in a specific context. Rather, the behaviors inspired by solidarity seek for the more effective impact *in* and *for* the reference context.

After this preliminary outline, we should not forget that these three ideal types were intended to give shape to corresponding typologies of reaction *vis à vis* the comprehensive motivational impasse above outlined. Now, by considering the *eco-anxiety ideal type* only as part of the background framework of our discourse, in what follows

we will be addressing the *indifference ideal type*, trying subsequently to counter it by introducing a reshaped account of the *solidarity ideal type*, understood as the most effective – and not ingenuous – mode for overcoming indifference. In doing that, we intend to articulate an argumentative pattern flexible but strong enough to countering the motivational impasse and all preliminary obstacles, outlined at the beginning, by finally linking our discourse to the climate change domain.

The Subtler Obstacle: Intergenerational Indifference

In order to enter in the specific domain of indifference, let me present some stipulative clarifications which shall orient our understanding toward a unique comprehensive meaning.

Prima facie, a human being who is described as "indifferent" is an agent who does not care about differences, a person who is acquainted with a sole parameter of judgment, an irreplaceable set of values that her agency path is to be harmonized with. An indifferent agent is a person who does not care about "others" – and, fundamentally, about the multifaceted contribution that might come from them. Seen in this way, i.e., as selfishness, indifference is obviously morally wrong.

Nonetheless, indifference seems to receive a sort of "moral discount" when it amounts to indifference directed toward future people. We are referring to an indifference focused on future human beings, that is, individuals or groups that we will not have the chance to meet in person, individuals who will be not able to share their knowledge, judgment, or presence with us. This is what we call *diachronic indifference*.

This kind of indifference might receive a moral excuse. On the one hand, we could raise good normative arguments to maintain the need of abandoning the indifferentist behavior toward contemporaries. On the other, avoiding indifference toward future people may be too demanding and implicitly implying too higher moral standards. How would it be possible for anyone to feel guilty for being indifferent toward persons who are unknown to them?

Unfortunately, this kind of indifference represents one of the most relevant challenges of our time. By eschewing consideration of future individuals and groups, we run the risk of seriously damaging future generations – just to mention some crucial domains: environmental sustainability, which includes climate change as a global, inescapable issue, and the sustainability of welfare systems, like healthcare and the pension systems, first (Pirni & Corvino, 2019).

Hence, intergenerational and diachronic indifference must cease to receive moral discounts.

Contrastive Motivations

Let us consider a basic situation in which an agent deals with a clear claim of justice. In order to introduce a situation that is closer to the abovementioned rationale, let us

consider an intergenerational variant of the same claim, following a quasi-syllogistic reasoning.

Prima facie and as *first major premise*, we know that the duties of justice constitute a relevant part of one of the most largely shared and accepted ideas of public good. As *second major premise*, we know that justice has to be demanded for everyone; still, a particular attention is to be given to the weakest, the most vulnerable individuals and groups, to those who have been damaged or will (might) be damaged by our (individual or collective) acts or omissions – and this with specific reference to the climate change.

Also, as *minor premise*, we know that future generations appropriately correspond to the idea of weakness, vulnerability, and damageability above alluded to. Finally, as syllogistic consequence and *conclusion*, we know that we have duties of justice toward future generations, and we have to consider these ones as a part *pleno jure* of our individual and public duty (Pirni, 2021).

Yet, such very common awareness and knowledge is not enough per se; it does not sufficiently motivate us to systematically orient our action in favor of future generations, nor it does introduce such subjects within the range of recipients of duties of justice that have to be respected and fulfilled without exceptions. In other terms, we know that we should be motivated to act to accomplish this kind of duties too, yet we are extremely good at finding good motivations to skip them, or at least to postpone them in favor of other and "more inescapable" duties that occupy and completely fill our individual and collective ability to act.

We might wonder why this happens so commonly. A tentative answer should consider how we are constructed as moral subjects, that is, to take an action that is endowed with moral relevance. Accordingly, we should understand why objective "good reasons" – or rational arguments constructed following an accurate logical interdependence among single premises and passages – very frequently are not enough to become "one's own reasons": sources of motivation of one's own agency, namely, motivations to act (Mordacci, 2008, pp. 17–32).

In turn, to understand such crucial issue implies a quick *détour* within the debate between *internalism* and *externalism*. Before dealing with such debate as much as it is relevant here, we should clarify a basic meaning of the concept of "reason" that we are using, in order to better enlighten the distinction between "good" reasons and "one's own" reasons abovementioned.

In this regard, the defining account given by Scanlon is still of particular relevance: "a reason is a consideration that counts in favour of something" (1998, p. 17). In other terms, "having a reason" means "having a motivation," or having articulated and selected "a force," a mental state which is able to move a single agent toward taking or avoiding a specific action.

Still, in moral theory, we are used to distinguish between two kinds of reasons. On the one hand, there are reasons which are able to justify a choice or a practical judgment. These are reasons that sustain the adoption of certain behaviors that are able to show the validity of a specific choice and to offer a clear argument to adopt that choice as principle of the consequent action. On the other, there are reasons which are in charge of explaining why we favored that choice over another, and

why, due to certain specific circumstances, we decided to act in a certain way in that specific moment.

Several ways have been proposed to give shape to such a distinction: *justificatory reason* versus *operative reasons* (Scanlon, 1998), and *external* versus *internal reasons* (Williams, 1981). In the present context, we will adopt the distinction between *justificatory reasons* versus *explanatory reasons* introduced by Mordacci (2008, pp. 22–23). Naturally, each distinction is drawn accordingly to specific features. Yet, as a common ground for all those distinctions, three main elements are to be kept into account at the very least.

First, we should consider the justificatory reasons as reasons that are valid in every time and space: We could say that such reasons are endowed with a universal validity (recalling our example: the duty of justice toward the most vulnerable people is valid independently from the specific place or time in which such claim is raised). Conversely, the explanatory reasons are inevitably contextual ones: An explanatory reason is related to a "here and now," to a specific time frame and to a determined spatial context.

Second, in line with that first framing, we should maintain that, while the justificatory reasons are basically reasons for and from the third-person point of view (they indicate a state of affairs whose validity is predicated as such for each rational agent), the explanatory reasons are grounded in the first-person point of view, namely, from my own point of view.

Consequently – as *third* point of distinction – we are used to define the level devoted to the justification as the normative one, namely, the sphere where we are in search for the validity to the moral norms, while the level of explanation corresponds to the descriptive one, namely, the sphere in which we isolate the motivation according to which that specific agent did that specific action.

Within this framework, we might recall the above-introduced distinction between *internalism* and *externalism*, which originated from the paradigmatic works by Falk (1986) and Frankena (1976). To put it in very synthetic terms, from an *internalistic* point of view we could maintain that the justificatory reason has an intrinsic motivational strength for each agent, or: The knowledge of a duty, together with its correlative mental states, is self-motivating.

Conversely, from an *externalistic* point of view, the awareness about the moral norm is not sufficient to motivate the individual to act or not to act: The justificatory reasons are not per se motivating, and they do not immediately trigger the agency. Rather, they can play such role as soon as those reasons couple with motivations – such as emotional or psychological factors – which are basically independent from any form of moral validation.

As it is well known, both points of view have to cope with strong objections. Against *internalism*, first: In case we give it for granted that the awareness about a duty is self-motivating for the moral agent, how can we explain the non-moral behavior? Namely, why do we not live in a world inhabited by moral agents in the fullest sense of the term?

In turn, against *externalism*, let us imagine we have a moral awareness about the good which is grounded in strong arguments, but let us admit being motivated –

and to act being moved – by something we cannot give a justificatory account thereof. That being the case, we would have to conclude that we are used to act accordingly to invalid motivations, namely, motivations that we are not able to justify by articulating rational arguments. We would experience a constant tension between what we must rationally sustain and want, and what we effectively do, in accordance with occasional mental states or random motives. The rational feature of any human agent would play a very limited role, up to become motivationally irrelevant: No moral perspective would accept such a consequence (Mordacci, 2008, pp. 29–32).

By rephrasing the point in our terms, on the one hand, we have to deal with a pretty long list of possible *internalistic*, quasi-syllogistic ways to describe intergenerational commitments and duties toward future generations. On the other, in order to reaffirm such approaches and to realize the correlative actions, we have to fight against several *externalistic* approaches that regard negative emotions, like diachronic indifference, as the most effective ways to motivate an agent or a group to act or not to act. The pragmatic strength of an *externalistic* approach is pretty evident here, as the difficulties to adopt effective political decisions and individual/collective behaviors to counter climate change are not ceasing to demonstrate, just to give an example (Pellegrini-Masini et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, we have to admit that the deliberative process which is internal to a rational agent is a more complex thing, and that a simple counterpositioning between two approaches – or two definitions of "reason" – might not grasp its multifaceted comprehensive structure. In other terms, the moral identity or the authenticity of each rational agent is the result of an irreducibly individual way to find a synthesis, which is lead by our practical reason, among different motivational sources (Koorsgard, 1996, pp. 100–101). Being an individual, that is, being a "self," means to be able to grasp "the importance of what we care about" (Frankfurt, 1988) by deliberating and selecting among different motivational sources: This is the result of a rational individual process which mediates among divergent motivations and that selects and joins the ones which are considered along a line of coherence from the first-person point of view.

Now, our argument can be reshaped as a contrast, or a struggle among moral motivations to be addressed within a line of individual rational coherence. In order to let this deliberative process function at its best, offering different options to the same faculty of will is more than welcomed, as well as enriching the overall picture by inserting alternative opportunities within the deliberative process which is always on the move.

Reconsidering Solidarity Versus Indifference

As we noticed, the indifference ideal type can play a relevant role within the (de-) motivational sphere. But this driver for orienting – or blocking – the individual motivational path is not the sole one operating in a specific moment. Rather, as any other driver, it is part of a complex net of drivers and reasons enabling, focalizing, or

deflecting the individual effort toward a certain outcome. Let us then enrich the list of possible "reasons" (motivations), to be evaluated from the first-person point of view. Such an attempt will overcome the dualistic logic which distinguishes between *explicative reasons* and *justificative reasons* presented above, to try and verify the conceptual strength of a mental status which we would tend to evaluate as a positive emotion: solidarity.

We cannot enter here in a wider account related to solidarity, with specific reference to its ontological, phenomenological, and historical points of view (Pirni, 2021). We must here limit our attention to the effects that the emotion of solidarity may play as compared with indifference. In order to do that, let us start from a minimalistic take of solidarity as a whole.

Solidarity is a movement toward the other, as a push to be of help to the other in need, or the willingness to share the same goal with someone else (Sangiovanni, 2015). Prima facie, that movement is not thought to bring about any enduring consequence: It is an emotion, a mental state which is destined to be replaced by – or to stay in struggle with – other mental states, like the senses of inadequacies toward other people, self-confinement, self-interest, and so on.

To exercise solidarity means to live one's own life with the awareness that we share a destiny with the entire community of living beings: It means being aware of the radical vulnerability of the human. It means, in other words, to consider solidarity as an authentic *passion* for that community which decides to build up a different pathway to that of egotism (Pirni, 2018).

Yet, the problem we need to face, once we decide to embark on the pathway that takes solidarity as an emotion seriously instead of that of indifference, is to oppose indifference in its diachronic declination, as the one we are considering here. To frame this point, it could be useful recall a relevant etymological root of the word "solidarity" and its ethical implications.

The history of the concept "solidarity" is rooted in the legal neo-Latin term *solidarius*, which comes from the Law of Obligations. Such concept, in case of a debt incurred by a plurality of subjects, indicates the debtors *in solido*, that is, those that are responsible each for the entire sum that is owed. This same definition appears as one of the possible meanings of the term *Solidarité* under the relative item of the *Encyclopédie,* which in turn takes it entirely from the item *Solidité* of the *Dictionnaire universel du commerce* (Cunico, 2017, pp. 183–189). In this way, thanks to the pervasive influence that the *Encyclopédie* will have in the entire European culture, the first term absorbs the significance of the second too, even if such constitutive cobelonging between *solidarity* and *solidity* is not that well-known. But what matters the most here is a sort of exclusive and special relationship of reciprocal obligation that holds together the members of a same group of debtors, so that each of them is coresponsible *vis à vis* each other, to the point that they could be responsible for the entire debt.

Solidarity, then, expresses an obligation, a bond, though a limited one. I accept to be responsible for a debt contracted together with other individuals – but just if I feel a particular connection, if I feel close to such other individuals, which means: Solidarity seems to describe both a motivational source and a limited normative

obligation, based on a preliminary knowledge and on preliminary bonds which from the outset appear hardly to be enlarged and reproduced.

Also, such aspect of solidarity proves itself as totally *synchronic* and *horizontal*: I am sympathetic with those who belong to a certain group I identified, who share a certain *time* (the moment when the debt was contracted) and a certain *space* (the place where such agreement took place and where it applies), while I might be equally totally indifferent *vis à vis* many others. In order to efficiently counter the diachronic indifference, let us then explore the possibility to ground a *diachronic* and *vertical* dimension of solidarity.

Overcoming the Motivational Gap: A Twofold Path

Grounding the Diachronic Solidarity

The basic awareness related to the scope and content of any form of solidarity is a reciprocal obligation that consists in being open to help anyone in actual or potential (namely, future) need.

We are not assuming here that the duties toward future generations should have a priority over the duties toward the present ones. However, the former cannot be excluded. Rather, both should be included within a unique (morally binding) frame – and this assumption is exactly the starting point for a possible justificatory path for diachronic solidarity.

Recalling the previous point, the reciprocity of the obligation of solidarity stems from the legal dimension. In turn, the legal reciprocity reproduces the structure and paves the way to an ethical dimension, articulated in a diachronic and intergenerational sense.

If we accept the coresponsibility of the joint payment, expressed by the term *solidarius* and if we declare ourselves available to "pay for everyone," then each generation will have a strong interest in leaving to the upcoming ones the least possible debt. Moreover, it will in principle prove to be able to pay even for those debts contracted by the members of the "future" humanity. *Prima facie*, it may indeed seem counterfactual (or even absurd) to be asked to pay for debts which have not been contracted yet. The point here is to leave the widest possible set of opportunities to future generations (that is, neither depriving, nor reducing their individual and collective goals). If we keep such regulative ideal in mind, we place future generations in the position of taking up the least possible amount of further debts, to be added to those we will not be able to honor and that will therefore necessarily need to be paid up by them (Palombella, 2007; Casadei, 2012; Brännmark, 2016).

If we frame the issue in these terms, then the question over the presence of solidarity obligations in a diachronic sense relates to such theoretical paradigms which are based on the idea of an "indirect reciprocity" (Gosseries, 2001). These positions share a fundamental assumption: Each generation takes up the obligation to pass on to the future generations what it received from past generations, in terms

of goods, opportunities, and achievements in the largest sense of the terms. Thus, a chain of obligations is consequentially created.

However, such theories is subjected to a series of objections from an *externalist* perspective, as far as it proves unable to coherently justify the creation of an obligation in the future, if not appealing to a source of motivation which is external – i.e., justified through other (historical, cultural, religious, and juridical) means – to that framework. Such objections seriously undermine the possibility to carry on with such a normative commitment and with the correlative duty of justice with respect to future generations.

The most relevant objection to this view regards the causal implication linking the concepts of heritage as a "gift" received from the previous generation to the "duty" *vis à vis* the next generation. It looks counterintuitive that those who received a gift (the current generation) do not need to envisage any form of reciprocity *vis à vis* the giver (the past generation) but do feel obliged to an entity (the next generation) from which, potentially, they may not be able to receive anything from (Barry, 1991; Gardiner, 2011; Meyer & Roser, 2009). The foundation of such a duty is therefore to be found in an external motivational source, namely, in a collective preexisting practice that prescribes to deal with the interests of future subjects.

Yet, the existence of such a practice is necessarily subjected to *occasionalism* and *contextualism*: It does not guarantee a stable and constant motivational foundation, and it would risk to occasionally reignite diachronic indifference.

Moreover, the above-examined dialectic would reproduce itself even with respect to *internalism*: The reasons for the intergenerational obligation are not sufficient to constitute a motivation for action. Once again, they are "good reasons" yet hardly become "my reasons."

A Kantian Approach

In what follows, we would like to try a different path, for which the contribution that the moral Kantian theory may offer to the integration of an internalist perspective – with respect to the motivational foundation of the intergenerational duties of justice – deserves to be recalled.

An effective point of departure, from this perspective, can be offered by a selected reading of the *Metaphysics of Morals*. The title of paragraph VI of Kant's *Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue* claims that "*Ethics* Does Not Give Laws for *Actions* (*Ius* does that), But Only for *Maxims* of Actions" (Kant, 2012, p. 152). Paragraph VII specifies that "Ethical Duties are of *Wide* Obligation, Whereas Duties of Right Are of *Narrow* Obligation." Nonetheless, this does not mean that, being of wide obligation, the ethical duties may be considered as nonduties. This point is immediately made clear by Kant (2012):

> *But a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions* to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g. love of one's neighbour in general by love of one's parents), by which *in fact the field for the practice of virtue is widened*. (p. 153, emphasis added)

Kant suggests that we have a unique normative tie to evaluate and weigh all the alternatives even if, in the end, all the duties have to be undertaken with no exceptions: We can methodologically limit the pursuit of a duty by referring to the urgency of pursuing another one, but we cannot simply eliminate a duty, nor can we postpone fulfillment of it *sine die*.

Legal obligations always have a "strict" implication, namely, the duty to pay taxes belongs to such category and it is not subjected to any interpretation or exception – the same applies to the duty of the State to aid those who need such aid. Furthermore, legal obligations belong to the set of *horizontal* and *synchronic*, and thus *intragenerational*, duties: They are duties managed within a State which exists in the here and now and executed by or for the benefit of those who exist here and now. On the other hand, ethical duties are of a different kind and lead to a different destination: They are subjected to the same normative bond, yet they allow for a certain temporal *latitudo*: They cannot be fulfilled, yet an ideal ranking can be produced. As a first approximation, from the perspective of the self, it looks reasonable to expect that the duties *vis à vis* those who are closer to the agent will be honored first, and only then those *vis à vis* all the other subjects. This allows for what we have qualified as an *obligation ranking* (Pirni, 2019), though without weakening the normative bond to be respected. Such duties, however, seem to permit a determination in an inter-temporal facet that is, we would say, *diachronic* and *intergenerational*.

In order to clarify such point, let us consider again the claim summed up by the title of the paragraph VI above mentioned: "*Ethics* Does Not Give Laws for *Actions* (*Ius* does that), But Only for *Maxims* of Actions." Ethics does not compel in the same sense that law does, but it provides will with a maxim that is a subjective principle of action; that will itself is called to adjudicate whether to adopt or not. The bond between *individual freedom* and *universal moral law* this way is forged – that same bond that the *critique of practical reason* had represented in a paradigmatic form.

Nonetheless, ethics does not end up here. It indeed proposes to the individual will a principle on the basis of which to evaluate the opportunity of pursuing such subjective principle itself. We are here referring to what is commonly understood as a "universalization test," whose formula corresponds to the first formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 2010, p. 31; see also Kant, 2012, pp. 152–153).

Only the maxim which successfully meets the universalization test can become a categorical imperative. Still, what does it mean "to meet the test" in this case? It means, first, to perform an exercise that looks toward the future. The necessity for a temporal offset is indeed implicit in the test. At the moment 1, the operative possibility, a maxim in fact, which I decide to choose, faces me. That maxim I decide to turn into a motivational principle to guide my action only in force of the result of an exercise in imagination: Imagining that, in the moment 2, any being capable of reason could choose that as a principle of their action. In this sense, the test could be put this way: "do select here and now only that maxim that, in any possible time and place, could be chosen by any being capable of reason." Such a structure – which we would call *justificative reason* – implies, on the one hand, the creation of a duty, that is a normative bond endowed with a ground which is

exclusively internal to individual will and, on the other, a necessarily intersubjective validity that is diachronic and overcontextual: It must be valid for any "here" and "now" and for any agent capable of reason.

The idea of diachronic solidarity can be detached from the assimilation to indirect reciprocity – and its relevant objections – and it can become a *maxim* of diachronic and intergenerational solidarity that is a normative principle of action grounded in the practical reason of any human being, which completes the motivational structure of individual action.

It is now clear that the entire discourse hereby investigated can be traced back to this maxim, particularly with reference to the overcoming of a diachronic indifference, which results counterpointed both with respect to a motivational emotional matrix diametrically opposite to that (that is diachronic solidarity) and through the opening up of a normative internalistic order that justifies the validity and motivational reach of its own principles of action thanks to the diachronic, intergenerational, and universal perspective on these very same principles.

Conclusion

The chapter presents a normative framework to overcome the motivational gap, facing the attempt to consider future people in the context of increasing climate change. The chapter proposes first a preliminary framing of the concept of motivation and the motivational path from the first-person point of view. It offers then a detailed analysis of the most important obstacles to the deployment of the motivational path. Furthermore, the argumentative path proposes a triple ideal-typic reactions *vis-à-vis* the motivational impasse. Finally, it focuses on the subtler obstacle to climate-change-sensitive motivation: the intergenerational indifference.

Two arguments against this specific form of indifference are provided. The first is an account of the emotion of solidarity and the framing of the idea of diachronic solidarity as a (ethically and legally) grounded path for countering indifference. The second is a normative argument derived from a Kantian framework: the idea of a diachronic solidarity as a maxim and justificative reason, which plays a direct motivational role on the single subject toward future generations.

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