



Climate Justice: *Transdisciplinary and Cross-cultural Conversations*

University of St Andrews, 29-30 May 2024.

How can the disparity between global climate impact and uneven responsibilities be squared with the ideal of climate justice? How do epistemic infrastructures (such as: IPCC, and global agenda and goal setting mechanisms) interact with communities on the global and local levels? How are climate policies and priorities inflected by questions of distance (across space and time)? And how can we inspire action and responsibility-taking toward flourishing collective (human-nature and planetary) futures?

Co-hosted by the Centre for Ethics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs (CEPPA), this conference addressed these questions with short presentations and discussion from scholars from St Andrews and beyond, spanning multiple cultures and disciplines.

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We thank Tasneem Mirza, Simon Hope, Marco Grix, Roger Merino, Billy van Uitregt, Mariaelena Huambachano, Quân Nguyen, Stephen M. Gardiner, Te Kahuratai Moko-Painting, Krushil Watene, Althea Davies, Tania Mendo, Nina Laurie and Tahseen Jafry for their intellectual contributions. We also thank Mara Van Der Lugt, Krushil Watene, and James Rae for organising the event, as well as for precious comments on this document. We also thank Sarah Bennison and Laura Pels Ferra for important feedback.

Tasneem Mirza (Economist, Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme) - Human Development and Intergenerational Equity.

Tasneem Mirza provided us with some helpful context on the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the political context in which political processes about climate change operate today.

The UNDP provides regular reports on the progress of the Human Development Index (HDI) worldwide. The HDI is a wellbeing metric based on the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum on the Capabilities Approach. Looking at their reports we see that the HDI steadily increases all the way until 2020 when the COVID pandemic hit and that it has stagnated ever since. This trend is not exclusive to HDI, it has also affected decrease of property, hunger, and the progress of climate goals, among other metrics. Overall we can see that we are regressing on the 2030 Sustainable Development goals, and at the moment 80% of the goals are unlikely to be met. The reasons for this are multiple and varied but Mirza highlights the rise of populism, the ongoing wars, and climate change.

When it comes to climate change we are reminded that the people extracting and reaping the benefits of climate change are not the same ones that are going to be bearing the cost of it. Arab states, south Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa are going to see a very significant increase in deaths, while western countries are actually going to see a decrease in them. As a helpful metric to measure these inequalities and adapt the HDI to them, the UNDP has developed the Planetary Pressure-adjusted HDI (PHDI): each country's human development index is reduced in accordance to the planetary pressure they exert (a combination of per capita carbon emissions and material footprint).

Simon Hope (University of Stirling) – Climate change is a struggle without end.

Simon Hope seeks to understand how our relation to the concept of autonomy might change as time passes and the demands of what counts as a just solution to climate change become more stringent.

Western liberal political philosophers often put autonomy at the foundations of their ethics: human beings are inherently autonomous and it is thanks to this autonomy that they can find meaning in their actions. With this in mind consider these three points: (i) There are now no second chances to adapt or mitigate climate change; therefore justice imposes some demands onto us. (ii) Changes in political systems inevitably influence the lives of citizens and their practices. (iii) Demands of climate justice cannot be achieved exclusively today, but will extend into the future in an open-ended fashion.

If we accept these three considerations we can make two (more controversial) claims: (1) The demands of justice that climate change imposes on us will make it so that we can no longer understand what it means to be autonomous. The idea here is that we will often not be allowed a choice in what to do: there will only be one right course of action open to us if we want to do the right thing about climate change. This will basically render us choiceless in many of the actions of our lives. (2) A significant branch of the ethics of climate change is being led astray by relying on a concept that we can no longer make sense of.

Marco Grix (University of Auckland) – Practices and Climate Justice

Marco Grix asks us to consider what role practices play in our lives, and more particularly, in our ethics. He argues that, while practices tend not to be talked about explicitly, they actually play a very important role in both our lives and our ethics; and therefore we should pay more attention to them.

He defines practices as a series of suitably complex, actualized individual or socially habituated activities that are dispersed across time (and across space and individuals for social ones) are properly causally related, and are subject to norms. Practices shape how we communicate about sports, how we earn a living, how we eat lunch etc. They are essential parts of what it means for us to flourish as human beings.

Practices are also extremely site-specific, as they are based on the particular settings and circumstances that they exist in. Imagine for example what the practice of hunting for bison might mean if you live in a densely urban space where no one knows what a bison is. In turn, practices' dependence on the sites in which they exist makes them vulnerable. Grix here asks us to think of the Pacific nations whose islands are disappearing due to rising sea levels. For these people it is not only their land that is at risk: the practices that they find meaning in are also at risk of disappearing.

This suggests two further reasons to care about climate change. First, that the variety of ways humans have learned to live will, as a whole, suffer a loss. Second, that many people will be forced to change their ways of life and reorient their conceptions of value, which, as the history of colonialism shows us, is often impossible.

Roger Merino (Universidad del Pacífico) – Decolonizing Ecological Democracy.

Roger Merino's work is trying to find the role that scientist and indigenous communities should play in ecological discussions in democratic systems. He argues that the work of scientist is typically conceived as depoliticized: either they are seen as direct representatives of nature (which is justified by a conception of science as a provider of superior insights), or more removed from the process, as advisors or providers of evidence (which still frames science as an objective form of knowledge). Either way, what is missing is an admission that science is itself a political way of knowing.

A consequence of this is that Indigenous knowledge is not taken seriously. We should conceive of Indigenous wisdom not only as an epistemological point (or a difference in epistemologies) but as a different ontology: it is a different way of viewing the world, a different way of being in the world that is reduced if looked at as just a different epistemological approach. For example: Amazonian anthropology has shown how Indigenous peoples conceive both human and natural beings as persons entangled in social dynamics of respect and survival. Whereas modern multiculturalist ontology assumes a unity of nature and a multiplicity of cultures, indigenous perspectivism presumes a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity. Then, the crucial difference

is not the different epistemologies or knowledge systems over nature, but the fact that there are different ontologies over the very essence of the beings of the world.

In the end, not acknowledging the inherent politics of the scientific method means that neither scientists nor indigenous people are placed in the best possible positions to partake in ecological debates. A better way is possible. Indigenous people need to be included in both 'pre-political' and political processes to negotiate ontological differences and create ontological coalitions.

Billy van Uitregt (Victoria University of Wellington) - Antarctic governance and reimagining Antarctic futures.

Billy van Uitregt's work focuses on how to bring Māori knowledge and interest into the Antarctic Conservation Programme. Humans are very recent to the Antarctic ecosystem (only in the last 125 years or so) but we soon realised that we had to take steps to protect it. Two treaties are in place to ensure this: the Antarctic Treaty and Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. As the closest inhabited landmass to Antarctica, New Zealand plays a big role in the application of this treaty.

To be able to better see how Māori interests can be brought into these processes we can look at other landmark cases where Indigenous people have successfully reached the negotiating table. While not perfect, the Arctic Council is a good example: here Indigenous people have a seat at the negotiating table but no voting rights. Looking at how this was achieved, a key lesson emerges: to effectively influence policy and law, indigenous voices need to be collectivised and organised to effectively align indigenous knowledge with environmental outcomes.

To achieve this, Indigenous people must work outside the structures of the nation state before engaging with those inside the structures. To facilitate this work, van Uitregt and others met with people from other Indigenous communities to get to know each other and 'explore their ontological differences' (their different ways of looking at the world, at themselves, their conceptions of value, their overlaps and differences). Among other things they celebrated 'AJD', a Kuaka bird that spends the summer months in the Whanganui estuary where van Uitregt and others met, and who has become an accidental symbol of their collaboration. AJD and other migrating creatures show that there were always already close links with distant regions such as Antarctica, thus providing an important basis for environmental action and preservation.

Mariaelena Huambachano (Syracuse University) – Seeding a Movement: Insights From Indigenous food Sovereignty.

Mariaelena Huambachano asks: 'How do we re-gain food security and production over capitalism? And how do we protect it from climate change?'. Her answer: Indigenous food sovereignty.

Indigenous food sovereignty is defined as the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. This movement is in part a response to settler

colonialism and aggressive, industrial capitalism which has disrupted local food cultures and ways of knowing, substituting those for practices that benefit settlers and big (often foreign) companies at the cost of the health and wellbeing of local populations.

The movement is closely related to reclamations of Indigenous knowledge in food security: it is often the communities that have been living in and cultivating a territory for years or even generations that have the best insights about what methods work best to create nourishing produce without straining the land. Furthermore, Indigenous knowledge is within a community, with the community's ancestors (from whom they inherit knowledge), and across borders. An example of this last one is the kūmara, a treasure food crop of not only Māori people but Andean peoples. The kūmara is a type of sweet potato found in the lands of the Māori and Quechua people. Seasonal activities in kūmara production, such as harvesting ceremonies, food rituals and festivals foster and renew collective agricultural knowledge. Altogether, and most importantly, Indigenous food production creates a sense of identity for these communities. It also increases biodiversity, as these communities' wisdom and practices are key in safeguarding food security, and governments and the UN must recognize such knowledge.

Quân Nguyen (University of Edinburgh) - Grassroots: Never Trust a COP.

Activism is ever present in COPs and it tends to be seen as helpful, and contributing to the debate. Quân Nguyen nonetheless argues that there are many troubling aspects with the way the the UN, COP delegates, and the media engage with this activism, which should make us reconsider whether activists should partake in the protests at all.

He highlights the following problems:

i. *Epistemic exploitation* occurs when a marginalised person or member of community is used to gain information or knowledge by someone who is from a privileged position, who might or might not be involved in the system that makes the other person marginalised. The COPs and the UN are very complex organisms and so are the negotiating processes that happen therein. Learning about them and how to navigate them takes a lot of effort and time, more so for grassroots activists, and members of marginalised communities who lack power in these spaces. This labour is often exploited by other agents who use these activists to gain information or knowledge about these systems while being in a position of power that would allow them to more easily research this information.

ii. *Epistemic deference* occurs when someone with power 'passes on the mic' to the most marginalised person on stage. While often well-meaning, this is problematic as it creates a new leadership structure in the marginalised community, and contributes to an elitist mindset that these activists are fighting against. Furthermore, if a grassroots activist spends a lot of time as a spokesperson in elitist circles they will end up adopting their vocabulary and mannerisms such that they can no longer relate to their communities.

iii. Undermining propaganda is a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of an ideal yet is in the service of a goal that undermines that ideal. When Indigenous people are invited to the UN, they are not invited to have their opinions weigh into the decision making or the negotiations in the way that a country's opinions are being listened to (which is what they want). It is as a form of performative action on the part of the UN, a way of 'covering their backs' against criticism that they don't listen to Indigenous voices.

iv. *Hermeneutic injustice* occurs when marginalised communities are being kept away from the hermeneutical resources they could use to understand and grasp what is happening to them. When attending COPs, activists often report experiencing a peculiar feeling they cannot name: why are they not being listened to? What is being done with their ideas? Why are they not having an impact while supposedly being in the best space to do so? The answer: they are being denied access to the hermeneutical resources they need to make sense of their situation.

With this in mind, we can conclude that while there are valid reasons to go a COP as an activist, we should be more wary of participating than we are right now.

Stephen M. Gardiner (University of Washington, Seattle) – Beyond Institutional Denial: A Global Constitutional Convention for Future Generations

Despite numerous attempts by political institutions to address climate change, these efforts have fallen short. For one thing, the framework and goals put in place through the UN process (including the Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Accords, and the Paris Agreement) are inadequate to protect humanity (and other species) from severe climate threats. For another thing, proposed solutions to the climate crisis often exhibit an overly optimistic view regarding their implementation, and so display a dangerously irresponsible moral complacency.

One driver of flawed institutional design lies in the diverse ways the climate crisis exacerbates human tendencies towards moral corruption. One such tendency is the misplaced trust in institutions to deliver beyond their predictable capabilities. Another tendency, pulling in a different direction, is that the continuous failure of these institutions tempts us to abandon the pursuit of meaningful reform.

One way to move beyond over-reliance and distrust is to support the creation of institutions that can realistically address the governance gap towards future generations. The UN Summit for the Future represents a positive step in this direction by acknowledging institutional failures, advocating for significant changes, and recognizing critical ethical norms, including human rights, anti-poverty measures, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the UN effort faces significant challenges, including the risk that it may be captured by forces lacking intergenerational concern, and so facilitate only minimal action and inadequate institutions.

To achieve more meaningful progress, Gardiner recommends establishing a deliberative forum that he calls a *Global Constitutional Convention for Future Generations*. Gardiner provides a set of guidelines for forming such a convention which guard against capture by hostile forces. They

include that the constitutional convention should operate autonomously, free from the influence of institutions driven by the immediate demands of contemporary governance. Such autonomy will encourage mutual accountability and functional adequacy, which are crucial for addressing the needs of future generations effectively.

Esme Murdock (San Diego University) – LandCestors: Black and Native Climate Dreaming

In order to survive a climate apocalypse, Esme Murdock argues that we need to learn from those who have already survived several. While typically the last survivor of an apocalypse is portrayed as a white man, African and Indigenous people, due to colonialism, have been through a dramatic and radical end of their land and practices many times. A feature of colonialism that is often overlooked is how it disables the way in which the colonized can interact with the environment, because colonialism restructures it. This has happened in some cases because the land has been radically changed by colonial practices, such as deforestation, and in other cases because colonized people have been taken away from their land, as has happened to Afro-American slaves. Colonized people live in a “terrotory”, a traumatic landscape built on the remains of Indigenous lands and bodies. Knowing one’s environment is a crucial part of one’s identity: therefore, this effect of colonialism is particularly catastrophic. Thus, insofar as we worry about catastrophic climate change, we should worry about the catastrophic climate changes that colonized people have suffered. Additionally, we can learn to face climate change from colonized people: Indigenous people may be more resilient given the past catastrophes they have suffered, and have experience in adapting to a hostile, traumatic environment.

Te Kahuratai Moko-Painting (University of Auckland) - Maramataka and Climate Science

Te Kahuratai Moko-Painting’s work focuses on Māori Mātauranga (Māori knowledge), in particular “Maramataka” (Māori stellar-lunar-ecological calendar). A study on Māori people shows that how Indigenous people think about their land provides them with important resources on how to be resilient about climate change. Māori culture revolves around the concept of “Whakapapa” (literally: to place in layers), a way to comprehend the universe as interconnected. This genealogical concept shapes Māori language, knowledge and culture. Interconnectedness allows Māori people to locate themselves in connection to their environment, and effectively intervene in case of climate catastrophes. In fact, in Māori culture volunteers have proven to be more effective than their governments in preventing and repairing environmental damage. Maramataka is a good example of this; through it, Māori people orient their lives, crops, fishing, and travel, allowing them to live peacefully with nature. While this knowledge is helpful for climate resilience and crucial for the identity of Māori people, it is constantly threatened by the impositions of colonizers. For example, the colonizer’s laws see the sea as a barrier between lands, while the Māori see water as a connection between cultures that they can easily traverse using their knowledge of astronomy. Thus, laws imposed by colonizers have created an artificial separation between cultures. Māori language, knowledge and culture

are an effective way to deal with climate change as Indigenous people: this language, knowledge and culture needs to be preserved.

Krushil Watene (University of Auckland) - Bridging Distance: Pacific Philosophy and Antarctica

The problem of climate change impacts different cultures, generations, and species. Thus, Krushil Watene argues, we need to think about responsibility towards different cultures, generations, and species. Many Indigenous philosophies, such as Māori philosophy, offer helpful conceptual frameworks to do so.

The standard approach in contemporary political philosophy and ethics is to begin from human well-being and then extend to others. But that is not how responsibility works: value begins in many places and takes many forms that cannot always be encapsulated in this reductive approach. In contrast, Indigenous philosophies create complex narratives that stretch back (and forward) in time and space and bringing them together to make them immediately effective. On this framework, the relationship between people goes beyond the people one gets to know within one's lifetime, and spans across time as well: Māori people conceive the continuation of generations as a series of never-ending new beginnings, and each generation necessarily sets the course for generations to follow. These relationships of interconnectedness form the basis for responsibilities in Māori communities: understanding Māori culture is likely to allow us to effectively conceptualize the relationship towards our environment, and towards future generations. Māori culture stresses that we have duties of stewardship towards nature, which are also duties of reparation when disruption or injustice happens. But they are also duties of continuing stories of relationships: this means caring about future generations and preserving the memory of the events that lead to their presence.

Althea Davies, Tania Mendo and Nina Laurie (University of St Andrews) - The Co-Production Imperative: Doing More than More than Giving Voice to the Future Generations of the Climate Impacted?

While children are definitely victims of climate change, their role as agents of change is often overlooked. This is shown by a case study in Piura, Peru. This region is affected by the unpredictable effects of El Niño, as the irregular and intense changes that happen in the Pacific Ocean. While El Niño has disruptive consequences in most of Peru, it has a positive effect on Piura. Piura is normally very arid, but the effects of El Niño create lagoons, where communities in these regions can thrive, have much greater food productivity. Studies on the climate effects on ephemeral systems such as lagoons are lacking, but can be potentially important. During the pandemic, a group of scientists gave local children training in marine biology and encouraged them to understand the fauna of the lagoons. This brought *children to interview their elders to learn more about livelihoods and climate impacts and adaptation, and to discover unexpected species of fish in the lagoons, such as fish typically found in the Amazon*. The children reported gaining a better understanding of nature, and that they derived from their research a sense of innovation and opportunity, as well as an expanded vision. Disaster management is often aimed

at adults. But the Peru experience shows that children can be trained as people who can help with adaptation. They are of course victims, but they also have potential as a resource.

Closing thoughts

The conference had a general discussion, focused on the following two threads.

‘Should Indigenous knowledge be acknowledged as scientific or ‘a science’ in order to counter discrimination and related imbalances in knowledge politics?’ First, calling the western way to generate knowledge “science” delegitimizes Indigenous knowledge to the advantage of western knowledge. However, not all of western knowledge is scientific: philosophy, art, ideology are important part of western thinking, but are not scientific, even though they influence scientific thought deeply. Indigenous knowledge has a more explicitly integrated approach between different domains, but this is not a reason to think that Indigenous knowledge is less reliable than western knowledge. Indeed, indigenous people have proven to be more effective in maintaining their environment than western people are: although indigenous people make up only 5% of the population, they are stewards of 80% of the world’s biodiversity.

Second, western people seem to collectively forget major catastrophes like climate change and pandemics: they do not enter collective memories in the same ways wars do. Western people struggle to keep track of these harms and make them intelligible. In order to do so, it may be helpful to learn how non-western people conceptualise their relationship with the environment.

Tahseen Jafry – About Climate Justice: What does it mean and what lies ahead?

Efforts towards a climate-just Scotland face numerous challenges. Despite high standards of living achieved through fossil fuels, historical ignorance of their environmental impact complicates responsibility allocation. Population growth and industrialization have spurred carbon emissions, creating a cycle of demand and environmental degradation.

With only a 14% chance of keeping global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius, Scotland struggles to meet reduction targets. The 2023 summer was the fifth warmest and wettest ever measured, highlighting the urgent need for climate action. Vulnerable groups, including the homeless, elderly, and infants, face increased risks from heatwaves and flooding, exacerbated by poverty and inadequate housing.

Climate adaptation often focuses on the Global South, and rightly so. But historical and future injustices must be addressed in the North too, such as in some particularly disadvantaged areas of Scotland. Trust in institutions is low among these disadvantaged communities, complicating efforts to take collective action against climate change.

The Mary Robinson Centre, funded in 2014, examines the intersection of climate and social inequalities. Climate change impacts mental health, biodiversity, crop yields, and coral reefs.

Despite progress towards renewable energy, the pace is insufficient, with trillions needed to meet 2030 and 2050 goals.

Scotland must confront climate inequality and build trust to create a just future. Efforts should focus on inclusivity and addressing the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized populations.