

The Effects of Morality on Acting against Climate Change

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ABSTRACT: Suppose you are a moral error theorist, i.e., you believe that no moral judgment is true. What, then, ought you to do with regard to our common practice of making such judgments? Determining the usefulness of our ordinary moral practice is exacerbated by the great number and variety of moral judgments. In-depth case studies may thus be more helpful in clarifying error theory's practical implications than reflections about morality in general. In this chapter I pursue this strategy with regard to a particularly important matter, namely climate change. First, I establish general conditions for when a moral judgement has any effect on those who accept it. Second, I show that the judgement that individuals in industrialized countries are morally obliged to act against climate change does not fulfil these conditions, and is thus neither beneficial nor harmful. Finally, I sketch several strategies for increasing people's non-moral motivation to act against climate.

KEY WORDS: error theory; moral motivation; abolitionism; conservationism; fictionalism; climate ethics; moral psychology

Suppose you are a moral error theorist, i.e., you believe that no moral judgment is true (see, e.g., Mackie 1977; Joyce 2001, 2007a; 2013; Lillehammer 2004; Pigden 2007).¹ What, then, ought you to do with regard to our common practice of making such judgments?

At first sight the answer to this question seems straightforward. If one denies that any moral judgment is true then one obviously ought to stop making such judgments. Instead of believing actions to be morally wrong, for example, one should only be opposed to them, dislike them or be willing to punish those who engage in them. Many error theorists have indeed recommended such an "abolitionist" stance (Burgess 2007: 438; Garner 1994, 2007, this volume; Hinckfuss 1987; Marks 2013). However, as even acknowledged by these

¹ Most error theorists have restricted the above claim to "simple," "atomic," or "positive" moral judgments (but see, e.g., Loeb 2007).

abolitionists themselves, it is by no means obvious—and hence requires argument—that adopting moral error theory forces one to give up on moral judgments.

Assuming the truth of error theory, one cannot possibly have *moral* reasons to stop making such judgments. The question of how to go on is, rather, exclusively prudential in nature, i.e., it depends on which course of action is most conducive to our individual or collective interests (see Garner 2007: 507; Ingram 2015: 228; Joyce 2001: 177). Many error theorists have recently argued that our ordinary moral practice serves our interests pretty well. In particular, “conservationists” claim that error theorists ought to make moral judgments in the same way as non-error theorists do (e.g., Mackie 2011; Olson 2014; Pigden 2007); and “fictionalists” recommend that error theorists at least *pretend* to make such judgments, i.e., that they treat morality as a “useful fiction” (Joyce 2001, 2005; Nolan et al. 2005).

Let us grant that conservationism and fictionalism are logically and psychologically coherent.² The appropriateness of the above three error theoretic recommendations (abolitionism, conservationism and fictionalism) then mainly depends on two issues: (1) on the nature of our interests, and (2) on whether making or not making moral judgments is more conducive to these interests. In this chapter I will be concerned with the second of these issues. So far this issue—the question of the usefulness of moral judgments—has typically been addressed in very general terms. Richard Garner, for example, tries to show that “there are more problems with morality [i.e., morality as a general social practice] than moralists and moral fictionalists usually admit” (2007: 511). And according to Richard Joyce, “morality [again, morality in general] can continue to furnish significant benefit” (2001: 205).

To my mind, the validity of such general reflections about the usefulness of moral judgments is doubtful. Moral judgments are omnipresent and multifaceted. They can be about actions, persons or states of affairs; they can involve thin moral concepts (such as “right” or “bad”) or thick ones (such as “honest” or “just”); they can be about issues as diverse as care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, or sanctity; they can be accompanied by realist or antirealist metaethical experiences; they can be caused by slow, voluntary and effortful reasoning or quick, automatic and effortless affective reactions; they can be made in private or in professional contexts; and so on (e.g., Greene et al. 2001; Haidt 2012; Sinnott-Armstrong & Wheatley 2012; Wright et al. 2013, 2014). Given this great number and variety of moral judgments, it seems that error theory’s practical implications are better investigated by

² Some metaethicists have recently rejected conservationism and/or fictionalism on grounds of their *not* being logically or psychologically coherent (e.g., Garner 2007: 512; Joyce 2001: 178-179; Lutz 2014: 354-355; Olson 2014: 187-188; Suikkanen 2013: 171).

(scientifically informed) in-depth case studies than by considerations about the usefulness of all of these judgments taken together.

In this chapter I provide such an in-depth case study with regard to a particularly important matter, namely climate change. Climate ethicists to some extent agree that (many) individuals in industrialized countries are morally obliged to act against climate change. For example, these individuals are said to have a responsibility to limit their amount of consumption, to use public transportation instead of cars, to switch to a (largely) meat-free diet (see, e.g., Peeters et al. 2015; Schwenkenbecher 2012), or at the very least to vote for political parties that can be expected to promote climate-friendly legislation (Malteis 2013; Sinnott-Armstrong 2005). My main hypothesis in this chapter is that the judgment that people in industrialized countries are obliged to act against climate change is neither harmful (as abolitionism suggests) nor beneficial (as conservationism and fictionalism suggest).³ The judgment rather does not have any significant effect on those who accept it at all.

My argument for the above hypothesis involves two main steps. In section 1 I outline general conditions for when a moral judgment has any effect on those who accept it. In section 2 I then show that the judgment that people in industrialized countries are morally obliged to act against climate change does not fulfill these conditions to any significant extent.⁴ This already completes my case for the ineffectiveness of the above judgment. Considering the threat that climate change poses to so many human and non-human beings as well as ecosystems, however, it would clearly be disappointing to end on such a pessimistic note. In section 3 I therefore sketch several strategies for increasing people's non-moral motivation to act against climate change.

1. The effectiveness of moral judgments

Moral judgments can affect our lives in so many different ways; it would be impossible for a chapter such as this to cover all of them. Fortunately, doing so is not even necessary. My aim here is to contribute to the debate between abolitionists, conservationists, and fictionalists. Proponents of each of these positions have (plausibly) emphasized different ways in which moral judgments might matter to those who make them. In what follows I will thus draw on

³ Needless to say, abolitionism does not logically entail that the above moral judgment is harmful, nor do conservationism/fictionalism entail that the judgment is beneficial. All three positions are concerned with the usefulness of moral judgments in general. They thus allow that the particular moral judgment that people in industrialized countries are obliged to act against climate change does not fit their analysis.

⁴ Sections 1a and 2a of this chapter are based on/elaborate on findings reported in Pözlner 2015.

these well-established views.

Very roughly, abolitionists, conservationists, and fictionalists assume that moral judgments mainly tend to be effective in two ways: (1) by immediately prompting corresponding actions; and (2) by affecting our thoughts and utterances (which may then motivate further action). Let me explain and motivate these two possible forms of effectiveness in more detail.

a. Immediate effects on action

Moral judgments often immediately lead persons to act according to them. Someone who judges that it would be morally wrong to sleep with his sister, for example, may for that very reason refrain from actually sleeping with her.⁵ But under what conditions do moral judgments have such an immediate behavioral effect?

The answer to this question to some extent depends on moral judgments' conceptual relation to motivation. In this chapter I assume an "internalist" account of this relation. This is not only due to internalism's plausibility (e.g., Blackburn 2000; Gibbard 2003; Hare 1952; Smith 1994), but also to dialectical reasons. As moral judgments turn out significantly more behaviorally effective according to motivational internalism than according to the opposing "externalist" account, assuming internalism helps to forestall one obvious objection against my arguments in this chapter, namely the objection that while the judgment that we are morally obliged to act against climate change may turn out ineffective on externalist grounds, it would not do so assuming internalism.

Motivational internalists believe that for a person to make a moral judgment entails that s/he has a motive to act in conformity with this judgment.⁶ Suppose one conceives of this motive as overriding, i.e., as stronger than any conflicting motive. Then the relation between moral judgments and corresponding actions could be determined on purely conceptual grounds. As a matter of conceptual necessity, any moral judgment would immediately lead to

⁵ Conservationists and fictionalists operate under the assumption that morality typically promotes our (egoistic or altruistic) interests. Accordingly, they have often characterized our moral judgments as a "bulwark against weakness of will" (Joyce 2007c: 208); a device for motivating ourselves to achieve we want to achieve.

⁶ If error theorists are right that moral judgments are constituted by beliefs then these judgments cannot be intrinsically motivating in the sense that they are necessarily *constituted* by motivating mental states. Beliefs, after all, are not motivating mental states. This may lead one to regard error theory as logically incompatible with motivational internalism. However, motivational internalism is most commonly understood in a non-constitutional sense (Tresan 2006; see also Björklund et al. 2012: 129-130). In order for it to come out true, moral judgments must only be necessarily *accompanied* by motivating mental states. And moral judgments *qua* beliefs can of course be necessarily accompanied by such states, for example, they can be necessarily caused by them. Conversely, as demonstrated by Joyce (2007b: 74-75), error theory (even fictionalist error theory) is of course logically compatible with motivational externalism as well.

corresponding action. But even internalists themselves widely acknowledge that this view is far too strong. Although moral judgments under normal circumstances⁷ entail motives for corresponding action, persons may fail to act upon these motives. In particular, they may fail to do so for either or both of two contingent reasons: (1) these moral motives are (very) weak, or (2) the persons' conflicting non-moral motives are (very) strong (see Birnbacher 2009; Zangwill 2015; but see McDowell 1978).

It is difficult to come up with meaningful generalizations about the strength of people's *non-moral* motives. These motives just vary too much, both from person to person and from issue to issue. That said, recent findings in empirical moral psychology at least allow for predictions about the strength of people's *moral* motives. On a plausible "dual process model," as most famously advocated by Joshua Greene et al. (2001, 2004), moral judgments can result from two different kinds of mental processes: (1) from slow, voluntary, and effortful reasoning; and (2) from quick, automatic, and effortless affective reactions,⁸ also referred to as "moral intuitions" (Haidt 2001).

Judgments arising from the reasoning system and judgments arising from the affective system have been found to differ in various respects. Most importantly for our purposes, "hot" (i.e., affectively grounded) judgments typically involve much stronger motives to act according to them than "cold" (i.e., reasoned) judgments (Haidt 2001: 824; Haidt & Kesebir 2010: 806; Lerner et al. 2015). For example, while few people are moved by their judgment that copyright infringement is morally impermissible, judgments about the wrongness of incest typically exert a very strong behavioral influence. Let us thus conclude that, other things being equal, moral judgments are much more likely to immediately lead to corresponding actions if they result from moral intuitions rather than from reasoning.

b. Effects on thought and talk

Besides immediately prompting corresponding actions, people's moral judgments can variously affect the ways in which they think and speak as well (which may then motivate further action). Abolitionists, conservationists, and fictionalists are notoriously divided about the nature and relative significance of these indirect effects. Here I will focus on those three kinds of effects which—rightly, to my mind—have so far received most attention.

⁷ Motivational internalists typically acknowledge that under certain rare conditions—such as apathy, depression or emotional exhaustion—moral judgments do not entail corresponding motivation at all (see Smith 1994: 120-121).

⁸ For the sake of brevity, I will henceforth refer to these morally quick, automatic and effortless affective reactions either as "affective reactions" or as "moral intuitions."

First, as pointed out by conservationists and fictionalists, (particular) moral judgments might matter because avoiding them is *difficult*, in the sense of requiring conscious cognitive effort, possibly even for extended periods of time (e.g., Lutz 2014: 357; Nolan et al. 2005). The sources of this difficulty can vary. Sometimes a person cannot help but make a particular moral judgment because s/he has held this judgment for many years, and is thus driven to it by the sheer force of habit. Humans may also have innate tendencies to judge particular actions to be morally right, wrong, good, bad, etc.—i.e., tendencies that develop in (almost) any environment, irrespectively of a person’s socialization, culture, beliefs, and so forth (see Lycan 1986: n. 29; Ruse 1998). Finally, particular moral judgments can also be difficult to avoid because they are constitutive elements of a person’s self or character (think, for example, of people who are vegetarians or who oppose abortion).

Second, as also pointed out by conservationists and fictionalists, (particular) moral judgments might have an effect on how we think and speak in virtue of their avoidance being *inconvenient*. Sometimes moral concepts allow us to state certain non-moral facts particularly economically (Lutz 2014: 357-358; Nolan et al. 2005). For example, if a political theorist claims of a certain social policy that it is “just,” his colleagues may unequivocally interpret him as expressing various complicated beliefs about the consequences of this policy on persons’ basic liberties, on the well-being of the least well-off among them, and on equality of opportunity. Moreover, avoiding particular moral judgments may also be inconvenient in that it may be regarded as “awkward and suspicious” (Lutz 2014: 358). Suppose a person publically refuses to agree that ISIS fighters are morally depraved. Chances are that this person will be confronted with some serious questions.⁹

Finally, abolitionists have often claimed that moral judgements affect persons’ thoughts and utterances by making them *less tolerant towards disagreeing others*. Richard Garner, for example, writes: “Morality inflames disputes.... If we hope to resolve conflicts by arriving at a compromise, our task will be easier if moral disagreements are seen as partial conflicts of interest ‘without the embroidery of rights and moral justification’” (2007: 502; see also Hinckfuss 1987 [excerpts in this volume]; Marks 2013: 45). While recent psychological research supports this hypothesis (e.g., Haidt et al. 2003; Skitka et al. 2005; Wright et al. 2008, 2012), it is important to note that it does not do so invariably. Persons’ tolerance for disagreeing others rather seems to decrease as a function of their metaethical interpretations of

⁹ Of course, this kind of effect presupposes that abolitionists are a minority. But we can safely assume that currently this condition is fulfilled. Apart maybe from psychopaths, who do so unintentionally, only few people refrain from judging at least some actions morally right, wrong, good, bad, etc.

moral judgements. If one interprets a moral judgement according to moral realism, i.e., as true in an objective (mind-independent) sense, this judgement indeed tends to make one less open towards diverging moral views. Judgements which are regarded as subjectively true or as expression of desires, by contrast, do not have a comparably strong effect (Wright et al. 2014: 37, 46; see also Goodwin & Darley 2008; Skitka et al. 2005, Skitka & Morgan 2014).

2. The effectiveness of judging oneself morally obliged to act against climate change

In order for a moral judgment to be able to have beneficial or harmful effects it obviously must have any effects at all. In section 1 I introduced and explained two main ways in which moral judgments might be effective. Such judgments tend to prompt immediate corresponding actions, I argued, if they are caused by affective reactions; and they tend to influence our thought and talk if they are difficult to avoid, inconvenient to avoid, or decrease our tolerance for disagreeing others. After these preliminaries we can now come to our actual object of interest: namely, the judgment that one is morally obliged to act against climate change. In this section I will suggest that for most people in industrialized countries this judgment does not fulfill any of the above conditions to a significant extent. The judgment must therefore be regarded as ineffective.

a. Immediate effects on acting against climate change

To begin with, for people in industrialized countries the judgment that they are morally obliged to act against climate change does not tend to be caused by affective reactions, and thus does not immediately prompt them to take such action.¹⁰

Converging evidence from psychology and neighboring sciences suggests that harmful actions trigger affective reactions to the extent to which these actions exhibit the following three features: (1) the harm is inflicted intentionally, i.e., the agent *wants* to harm the victim(s) (see Cushman 2008; Greene et al. 2001: 2107, 2004: 389; Guglielmo et al. 2009); (2) the victim(s) is (/are) perceived as socially similar (“one of us”), which at the very least requires that they can be identified as determinate persons (see Greene et al. 2001: 2107, 2004: 389; Tajfel et al. 1971); and (3) the action can be processed in a cognitively effortless way, i.e., it is simple (as opposed to complex), concrete (as opposed to abstract), and non-probabilistic (as opposed to probabilistic) (see Markowitz & Sharif 2012: 243-244; Weber 2006).

¹⁰ This non-affectiveness does not only lead to the judgment being ineffective; it also leads to many persons not making this judgment in the first place, i.e., to fail to see climate change as a moral problem.

It is easy to see that the problem of climate change lacks all three of the above intuition-triggering features.

First, nobody who emits greenhouse gases intends to do so. These emissions just happen to be causally implied by many ordinary (otherwise often innocent) actions that people perform—actions such as picking up one’s children from school, buying a new smartphone, or eating a burger (Jamieson 2010; Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 244).

Second, the victims of emission-generating activities are predominantly very dissimilar from people currently living in industrialized countries. Most of these victims live in developing countries (where people are less able to protect themselves from environmental threats, the frequency and intensity of extreme meteorological events is particularly high, etc.). Many of them will also only live in the (distant) future (where the effects of climate change will be more grave than they are today). Moreover, due to the attribution problem stated below, and our limited knowledge of the future, for at least some of the victims of climate change we cannot tell what they are or will be like at all (Gardiner 2011; IPCC 2014).

Third, climate change is also a highly complex, abstract, and probabilistic problem. Greenhouse gases become effective only years or decades after they have been emitted, and stay in the atmosphere for very long times, dispersing according to highly complex patterns. People generally tend to represent future events as rather abstract. Nobody personally experiences greenhouse gases, and many currently living people in industrialized countries have not yet been sufficiently noticeably exposed to their environmental consequences either. Scientists can only provide statistical data about whether particular droughts, floods, storms, and other harmful events are attributable to climate change. They also cannot tell precisely who is causally responsible to what extent for climate change (e.g., Jamieson 1992: 149, 2010: 436; Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 243-244; Van der Linden et al. 2015: 759; Weber 2006: 108).

Finally, humans’ lack of affective reactions towards climate change makes good sense from an evolutionary perspective as well. Many of our moral intuitions have been shaped by natural selection (e.g., Haidt 2001: 826; Ruse 1998). This happened thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands of years ago. At this time global and future-affecting environmental problems had not yet come into existence. For example, our distant ancestors could not affect the fate of people living in faraway places or in the distant future, they had unlimited access to land and other resources, and they could reproduce without giving any thought to overpopulation. Responding affectively to global and future-affecting environmental problems

therefore could not have possibly increased our ancestors' biological fitness—which means that it is could not become promoted by evolved psychological mechanisms (Jamieson 1992: 148).

Let me conclude our investigation of morality's immediate effect on acting against climate change by a quote from David Gilbert, which vividly depicts the problem that I just pointed out:¹¹

[G]lobal warming doesn't ... violate our moral sensibilities. It doesn't cause our blood to boil (at least not figuratively) because it doesn't force us to entertain thoughts that we find indecent, impious or repulsive. When people feel insulted or disgusted, they generally do something about it, such as whacking each other over the head, or voting. Moral emotions are the brain's call to action. Although all human societies have moral rules about food and sex, none has a moral rule about atmospheric chemistry. And so we are outraged about every breach of protocol except Kyoto. Yes, global warming is bad, but it doesn't make us feel nauseated or angry or disgraced, and thus we don't feel compelled to rail against it as we do against other momentous threats to our species, such as flag burning. The fact is that if climate change were caused by gay sex, or by the practice of eating kittens, millions of protesters would be massing in the streets. (Gilbert 2006)

b. Effects on climate-related thought and talk

Judging ourselves morally obliged to act against climate change fails to immediately prompt corresponding action. In addition, I believe that this judgment does not significantly affect the thoughts and utterances of people in industrialized countries either—or at least not in the three ways explained in section 1b.

First, people in industrialized countries can easily avoid judging that they are morally obliged to act against climate change. This claim is most obviously supported by the observation that many people simply do not make this judgment. In two recent psychological studies by Ezra Markowitz (2012), for example, as many as 58% (study 1) and 49% (study 2) of subjects indicated that they did not regard climate change as an “ethical or moral issue” (2012: 485). Moreover, even some of those who did regard it as a moral issue might not have accepted that they ought to consume less, use public transportation, eat less meat, etc. They may have rather moralized climate change in the (bizarre) sense of judging *not* acting against

¹¹ This passage is taken from Jamieson 2010: 438.

it to be obligatory (because, say, climate change policies would dampen economic growth or would imply government regulation and thus “lead into communism,” see, e.g., Devine 2011; Rochlin 2009).

That we can easily avoid judging ourselves morally obliged to act against climate change is also suggested by various other factors. To begin with, public concern about and discussion of climate change is still only developing (Pew Research Center 2014). Few people will therefore have yet acquired a strong habit of judging that they are morally obliged to act against climate change. Recall also that judgments about global and future-affecting environmental problems are unlikely to have promoted our ancestors’ biological fitness. As these judgments are not necessary byproducts of other adaptive traits either, they likely lack any innate basis. Finally, with the exception of some particularly environmentally conscious persons, the judgment that we are morally obliged to act against climate change also does not tend to be part of our identity or character (not least because this judgment lacks the affective import that is typically necessary for acquiring such an identity- or character-constituting status).

Second, for most people in industrialized countries, the judgment that they are morally obliged to act against climate change is not inconvenient to avoid either. One reason for believing so is simply that, as suggested above, ordinary people still only rarely think and talk about their climate-related moral obligations. But even where a proclivity to engage in such thought and discourse arises, this proclivity tends to be easy to resist. For one thing, the non-moral facts implied by moral judgments about climate change action typically do not require lengthy explanation (instead of justifying such action in terms of intergenerational “injustice,” for example, one may as well point out that while currently living persons accrue most of the benefits associated with emission-generating behaviors, future persons will suffer most of the corresponding costs). For another thing, refusing to judge that one is morally obliged to act against climate change will hardly get one into social trouble either (unless one’s family or friends include a disproportionately high number of environmentalists).

Finally, the judgment that one is morally obliged to act against climate change is also unlikely to considerably decrease one’s tolerance towards those who deny this judgment. Earlier I argued that if coupled with antirealist metaethical interpretations, moral judgments do not go a long way in decreasing tolerance. Scientific research about how people in industrialized countries regard the metaethical status of the judgment that they ought to act against climate change is admittedly indirect, sparse, and controversial (see, e.g., Beebe 2015;

Pözlner 2016b). However, there is at least some reason to believe that antirealism about this judgment is quite common. First, people generally tend to regard judgments about unintentional harms or harms suffered by socially dissimilar or unidentifiable persons as subjective or as expressions of desires (Pözlner 2016a: 100; see Goodwin & Darley 2008; Wright et al. 2013, 2014). And second, people also tend to view moral judgments as less objective if they perceive these judgments to be controversial (Goodwin & Darley 2012)—and many people (sadly) still perceive the judgment that people in industrialized countries are obliged to act against climate change as controversial (see Markowitz 2012).

3. Increasing people's non-moral motivation to act against climate change

Sections 1 and 2 showed that the judgment that we are morally obliged to act against climate change does not significantly affect the lives of people in industrialized countries. Neither does it immediately lead these people to actually take action, nor does it influence their thought and talk in three of the most common and significant ways. This result is clearly bad news in regards to preventing the global catastrophe that we are approaching. After all, people's relevant non-moral motives typically do not weigh in favor of action either (APA 2010; Pözlner 2015: 209-210). Due to the spatial, temporal, and social distance of the victims of climate change, for example, people do not naturally develop pro-social attitudes such as friendship or solidarity towards them (Birnbacher 2009: 282). They also generally shy away from the uncomfortable changes to their ways of life that acting against climate change would entail.

Some scholars have recently suggested that the effectiveness of moral judgments about climate change may be increased beyond its current low level—say, by getting people to focus on their characters rather than the consequences of their actions (see Jamieson 2007), or by grounding these judgments in non-liberal values such as loyalty, authority, and sanctity (Markowitz & Shariff 2012). Strategies such as these may indeed contribute to easing climate change inaction. However, even if employed extensively, their effect is likely fairly limited. Judgments about one's moral obligations regarding climate change tend to lack effectiveness mainly because they do not arise from moral intuitions (see sections 1 and 2); and whether humans intuitively register something as a moral problem is to some extent beyond our conscious control. For one thing, many moral intuitions are adaptations to past environments,

and thus often have some innate basis.¹² For another thing, where innate intuitions can be culturally shaped or complemented, this plasticity is largely confined to certain critical periods in childhood and adolescence (see, e.g., Haidt 2001: 827-828; Hauser 2006).¹³

To my mind, it is more effective to tackle climate change inaction by increasing people's non-moral motivation to take action. In this final section I will accordingly present four promising strategies of this kind: (1) educating people about climate change, (2) not linking climate change to negative emotions, (3) linking climate change to positive emotions, and (4) communicating climate change in simple and concrete ways. I particularly recommend strategies 3 and 4. This is because given these strategies' aim of rendering climate change an affective issue, they may not only increase people's non-moral motivation to take action, but may also have the side-effect of increasing moral motivation (within the limits pointed out above).

a. Educate people about climate change

Just as in the case of morality, the most important explanation for why so many people lack non-moral motivation to act against climate change concerns their affective mental states (see sections 3b, 3c, and 3d). But there are also several cognitive barriers to action. A significant proportion of people still deny that climate change is caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, or that it is even real (Pew Research Center 2014). Ignorance about the specific processes that cause or constitute climate change (action) is widespread too. For example, some people mistakenly confuse weather with climate, believe that reductions in the emissions of CO₂ would almost immediately cause global temperature decreases, or are unable to assess the climate-related effects of their own actions (e.g., Reynolds et al. 2010; Sterman & Sweeney 2002). Finally, many people also tend to exaggerate the uncertainty of scientific hypotheses about climate change, which tends to promote both self-oriented behavior and wishful thinking (APA 2010: 65; Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 244). The most obvious antidote to all of these cognitive barriers to climate change action is education. States, organizations and individuals need to inform the public about the scientific consensus about climate change (see IPCC 2014)—and as the following sub-sections will show, they need to

¹² Of course, the relationship between being an adaptation and being innate (in the sense of developing irrespectively of environmental input) is in fact less straightforward than the above claim suggests. Some adaptations do require environmental input to become manifest. Calluses, for example, evolved because they protect deeper layers of the skin. They are thus adaptations. Nevertheless, they only develop in the face of friction (see Schmitt & Pilcher 2004: 644).

¹³ Compare how humans are badly equipped to acquire new languages after certain critical periods in childhood.

do so in particular ways (avoiding negative but promoting positive emotions, and keeping things simple and concrete).

b. Do not link climate change to negative emotions

People's non-moral motivation significantly depends on their emotions. So far messages about climate change have mostly tended to evoke negative emotions such as guilt, shame, or fear (think about phrases such as "Time is running out," or "We are ruining the planet"). It is doubtful whether these emotions are motivationally effective. Humans generally attempt to avoid negative emotions, in particular emotions which imply that they are bad persons or have done something wrong. To sustain a positive self-conception, their guilt, shame and fear has accordingly led people to doubt the significance and certainty of climate change, downplay their own causal responsibility for it, and judge that they cannot significantly contribute to alleviating the problem anyway (see Stoll-Kleemann et al. 2001; Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 244-245). An analogous "guilty bias" has been identified on a societal level as well. According to Keri Norgaard (2009: 26-33, 2011), Western societies try to suppress negative emotions in relation to climate change by engaging in what she calls "implicatory denial." People are often well aware of the reality of the problem, of their contributions and of their moral obligations. However, their societies are governed by norms of conversation and politeness which forbid them from addressing climate change in public; and by emotional norms (like the norms of remaining in control, or being tough) which make them reluctant to even think about the issue.

c. Link climate change to positive emotions

People are much more likely to develop non-moral motivation for taking action when climate change is linked to positive, rather than negative, emotions. Some researchers have suggested that such motivation may be increased by raising hopes about keeping climate change under control, by evoking pride for individual or collective efforts which have already been taken, or by showing people the gratitude of beneficiaries of their climate-friendly actions (Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 245; Norgaard 2009: 46). Another powerful emotion that may be employed in promoting climate change action is love. As a first step, people may be encouraged and taught to extend their love for partners, children, friends etc. to people in developing countries and/or in the (distant) future. In the end it may even be made to encompass non-human nature. While it is psychologically difficult to develop such a universal love for nature, several strategies

may facilitate this development. For example, one might try to appreciate nature's beauty; to understand how humans depend on it and the different elements of ecosystems are connected to each other; and to cultivate awareness for the fact that non-human species evolved through the very same processes of mutation, genetic drift, and natural selection that brought forth *Homo sapiens* (see, e.g., Briggs 2009; Leopold 1986; Seamon 1984).

d. Communicate climate change (action) in simple and concrete ways

Climate change's affective non-salience obstructs people's non-moral as well as their moral motivation. In section 2a we learned that this non-salience is partly due to the problem's complexity and abstractness. My final suggestion for increasing people's motivation to take action therefore is to frame climate change in simpler and more concrete ways. For example, one might tell the stories of hypothesized future victims of climate change or present pictures of these victims, so that they no longer remain anonymous and easy to ignore;¹⁴ one might give individuals more specific instructions as to how they can mitigate or adapt to climate change (e.g., "Cut the standby power of your TV set!" instead of "Save energy!"); one might explain the precise effects of these particular measures (e.g., "By cutting standby power, your household can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 500 pounds a year, and can save up to \$1,000"); and one might draw attention to the effects that increasing greenhouse gas concentrations have already had and will have on people's immediate environment (see Markowitz & Shariff 2012: 246; Van der Linden et al. 2015: 759-760). An advanced model of how to motivate specifically intergenerational consideration, exhibiting these virtues of simplicity and concreteness and also incorporating our above lessons about positive emotions, is represented by John Passmore's idea of a "chain of love" (1980). In the context of climate change, this idea implies that climate change action should be framed as an act of caring for our own children and grandchildren. Given people's particularly close relationship to these individuals, seeing climate change action in this way may raise their emotional engagement, and hence their motivation to take action.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the question of whether moral error theorists have prudential reasons for making moral judgments. It did so in an unusual way. Instead of considering the

¹⁴ Of course, one must be wary of evoking too much guilt in presenting the victims of climate change in the above ways (see the second strategies).

usefulness of all of our moral judgments taken together, the chapter investigated the effects only of one particular such judgment: namely, the judgment that individuals in industrialized countries are morally obliged to act against climate change. In the face of the great number and variety of moral judgments, in-depth case studies such as this seem to be our best bet for advancing the abolitionism/conservationism/fictionalism debate.¹⁵ I thus hope for many similar studies to come, providing us with so much data that one day we can reliably assess the usefulness of the practice of making moral judgments in general.

Abolitionists, conservationists, and fictionalists sometimes create the impression that any moral judgment is either harmful or beneficial. The main finding of my chapter is that at least for the judgment that people in industrialized countries are morally obliged to act against climate change, this assumption is false. Whether a person makes this judgment or not does not tend to have significant effects on his/her life. My arguments also provide reason to believe that this diagnosis generalizes. After all, moral judgments about copyright infringement, passive euthanasia, and various other actions share at least some of the features that we found render such judgments ineffective as well. So might it be that morality in the end makes no difference to our lives at all (as argued, for example, by Zimmerman 1962)? And, hence, might it simply not matter for moral error theorists whether they make moral judgments?

This conclusion would clearly overshoot the mark. Many moral judgments lack the above effectiveness-decreasing features, and accordingly do affect people's actions, thoughts, and talk. The influence of these judgments may even be more far-reaching than is commonly acknowledged. Recent empirical studies suggest, for example, that people's moral evaluations can influence their ascriptions of intentionality, causality, and various other non-moral properties (see Knobe 2003, 2006; Knobe & Fraser 2008)—they influence our whole way of seeing the world. Like so many other features of moral judgments, their effectiveness thus rather seems to vary. While some of these judgments have a big influence on our lives, others do not matter much or at all. But, still, this is a result that abolitionists, conservationists, and fictionalists should keep in mind when they set out to assess whether morality is harmful or beneficial.

¹⁵ That is, of course, apart from examinations of the logical and psychological coherence of these recommendations.

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