DIMENSIONS OF INTRA- AND INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE IN THE DEBATES ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY (EDITED BY SILVIYA SERAFIMOVA)

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Sustainability is not only a fascinating topic, but also a phenomenon that involves increasingly complex interactions between multiple agents and groups whose interrelated obligations and responsibilities raise a number of important normative questions. *Dimensions of Intra- and Intergenerational Justice in the Debates about Sustainability* (Sofia: Avangard Prima, 2020, 250 p.) is a 250-page-long interdisciplinary edited volume that, according to the editor, goes through the process of unmapping and, consequently, re-mapping the space of the Anthropocene in order to provide "more room for sustainability in all its embodiments" (p. 24), i.e. the interrelated economic, social, environmental and moral dilemmas pertaining to the topic of sustainable development, but with an added focus on "intra- and intergenerational justice between humans, and justice towards nature (Stumpf et al, 2015)" (p. 24-25). It is comprised of three parts which reflect the three main conceptual standpoints: 1) exposing the baseline theoretical framework and addressing several ethical, epistemological and hermeneutical aspects of the discourse; 2) outlining the practical issues encountered in the context of policy-making (with examples from the field of biodiversity, recycling, and the sustainable distribution of food); 3) exploring the possibility of additional sustainability dimensions which can be expected in the combined futures of both technology and ecological justice, as well as aid dimensions' potential to contribute to the conceptualization of new vocabularies of sustainability. The authors' various backgrounds, spanning across geography, natural resource governance, science and technology, sociology, politics, philosophy, theology, epistemology, environmental science, and women's studies, make for a truly wide range of perspectives. The members of this diverse team have produced a total of ten papers, plus an illuminative introduction by the editor Silviya Serafimova, who is an internationally acclaimed specialist in

environmental ethics herself, known for works such as *Ethical Aspects of 20ᵗʰ Century Norwegian Environmental Philosophies*.

The book begins with Gunnar Skirbekk's paper "Human Dignity and the Vulnerability of Life. Man between Animal and Robot" – the only contribution written in German in a volume otherwise almost entirely dominated by the English language. Skirbekk examines the idea about human dignity in the context of a comparative analysis between regular, biologically and existentially vulnerable humans existing at present times, and the potentially invincible "super-humans" of the future (p. 41-50). Evaluating biotechnological modifications in moral terms enables Skirbekk to assess the requirements for considering a particular type of being as a moral agent, moral subject, or moral discussant. Seeing as the expansion of our moral world's boundaries is tied to topics like inclusion (p. 32-33), ethical gradualism (p. 36-38), the distinction between individual versus generic properties (p. 39-41), as well as between human versus person (p. 33-36), the clarifications provided by Skirbekk can be considered an important step towards our fuller understanding of what it is that we seem to value in human interaction – the concept of bio-embodiment and its normative validity are crucial to Skirbekk's analysis, and especially to his understanding as to why robots are non-eligible as moral co-discussants. He grounds his defense of human dignity on the notion that, rather than being an obstacle, the vulnerability of human life is actually a key premise when we are trying to argue in favour of our collective responsibility to future generations. The assumption that humans are inherently crisis-prone or crisis-dependent, shaped by our tendency to fear certain outcomes or suffer defeat, informs our ability to adopt different perspectives, engage in meaningful conversations about life, and take responsibility regarding a shared future (p. 50-51).

Next in line is a contribution that further develops the theme of redefining humans and the human perspective, but in the context of the relationship between humankind and nature (or the human as a microcosm and the surrounding world as a macrocosm). The analysis draws on the work of Martin Buber, and especially on the notion about the two-word pairs "I-I", "I-You", "I-It". Forrest Clingerman feels that the "I-It" dichotomy is most representative of the conscious, deliberate ways in which humans objectify nature whilst simultaneously exhibiting an ever increasing hubris in the shape of anthropocentrism (p. 56-58). The clash between micro- and macrocosm represents a lack of balance with dangerous political, economic, material and moral implications for humankind, and a problem that can only be solved on a hermeneutical

level via the successful renegotiation of our relationship with nature. Reimagining an altogether different narrative, where nature is not less important than humankind, would be crucial to that purpose. Structuring our attitudes towards nature around the "I-I" two-word pair would not contribute to that goal (p. 60-63), as it carries the risk of effacing the importance of the macrocosm in favour of a self-replicating microcosm that "absorbs" all of the moral and existential focus, effectively disregarding the true significance of nature and ascribing to it the status of a mere "reflection" of humankind.

The third paper in the volume comes in the form of a dialogue authored by Andrea Saltelli and Paul-Marie Boulanger, which addresses several of the pressing epistemic challenges related to climate change, e.g. the role played by epistemic authority in shaping climate science's public image, and the epistemic aspects of the notion that climate change requires solutions that are based both on responsible engagement and on sound, scientifically grounded strategies for action. Media representations of science are discussed alongside the importance of climate change debates on an inter- and intranational level, and a warning is issued against intimidation tactics and the creation of an exaggerated sense of emergency, which are examined within the framework of Hans Jonas's conception of the hermeneutics of fear (p. 84-85), and regarded (by Saltelli) as mostly counterproductive. The role of the "public intellectual" is also discussed (p. 89), and its interpretation is based upon the understanding that, since environmental justice is linked with social justice in a more general sense, the public intellectual ought to advance its goals by promoting a respectful dialogue based on arguments, rather than engaging in a narrow-minded, petty exchange of insults (p. 90). The paper concludes by putting forward the question "what would a future historian say?", and responding that people in the future would likely be baffled by the fact that our contemporaries had all of the relevant information regarding climate change made readily available to them, but nevertheless still chose not to face the risks and act accordingly.

Next in the line-up is Ragnar Fjelland's paper on the four conditions that need to be met in order for humankind to be at peace with nature, which basically correspond to Barry Commoner's four ecological laws. Appropriately titled "How to make peace with nature", the paper suggests the following course of action: 1) to realize that everything is connected to everything else (p. 102); 2) to understand that "nature knows best" (p. 104); 3) to rid ourselves of our neomania, or the belief that what is new is necessarily always better than what is old (p.

105); 4) to fight economic inequality and reduce the gap between rich and poor (p. 107). The main message to take away from Fjelland's contribution to the volume is that no technical solution can help us if we are unable to achieve and maintain a state of peace between ourselves and our habitat.

Following this poignant message, the first part of the book gives way to the second one, in which policies and practical solutions are inspected more closely. Part two opens with an interesting case from the world of fish management and fish rewilding, penned by Markku Oksanen, Outi Ratamäki and Timo Haapasalo. The authors' combined expertise in – respectively – philosophy, environmental law and policy, and natural resource management brings us an insightful analysis of not one, but several important discourses: the farmer discourse (p. 118), the rationality discourse (p. 119), the knowledge discourse (p. 120), the ecological sustainability discourse (p. 120), and the naturalness/nativity discourse (p. 121). This analysis is coupled with a careful look at the two relevant Finnish acts (The 1982 Fishing Act and The 2015 Fishing Act, see p. 117 and p. 119), and followed by a well thought-out response to the question whether there is any actual room for rewilding. The conclusion is that, while restoration is about giving nature a chance, (re)wild(ed) fish populations "call for restoration processes, with all of their uncertainty" (p. 124).

After this, we get a chapter on hydropower and its sociocultural impacts on the Sámi Indigenous people, who were negatively affected by hydropower development and production in the Arctic. Tero Mustonen from the Snowchange Cooperative and Stefan Mikaelsson (member of the Sámi Parliament of Sweden) combine their efforts in this thought-provoking piece, where both case studies clearly show that the Sámi communities land-based life, identity, language and knowledge transmission have all suffered as a result of the accumulation of mercury. The paper provides a three-level evaluation of the empirical data collected from the Finnish case (p. 131) and the Swedish case (p. 134) by a wide range of methods, including a geographic and CBM analysis, interviews, literature reviews, community-based monitoring, and others. In addition to exposing the damage sustained by the Sámi community and way of life, Mustonen and Mikaelsson have also documented the Sámi people's reaction to the crisis (p. 142-146) – their coping strategies and their desperate fight for survival as a culture that is "mostly invisible" to local authorities and deprived of land rights in Sweden and Finland alike (p. 147).

Continuing the topic of sustainability practices in Finnish Lapland, Jarno Valkonnen and Teemu Loikkanen's paper on waste citizenship in a circular economy relates the results of a project called "Waste Society" (p. 152). The twenty interviews provided therein were conducted with various persons that were all somehow involved in waste management in a professional capacity – for instance, as employees in municipal waste management companies (p. 158), private waste disposal companies (p. 160), and even NGO's (p. 162). The interviewees were asked to present their opinions on the duties, responsibilities and rights assigned to the so-called "good waste citizen", a concept describing the behaviour of an engaged and committed participant in the circular economy which aims to transform the role of waste from a non-reusable surplus to a potentially valuable resource through practices such as recycling and sharing (p. 151). The image of the waste citizen is founded on awareness, personal responsibility and a pro-active attitude towards planning and consumption behaviours and processes, as well as reflecting on their political implications. These virtues have contributed to the formation of a new sense of justice when it comes to waste management, since consumption leaves a footprint that affects others, and using waste as a material resource is a question not only of economy, but also of policies (both on a local and a global scale).

The next contribution comes from Heather Tribe and uses methodology borrowed from feminist and peace studies in order to examine how gender and food insecurity are linked in the context of the food system in the Waitākere area in New Zealand. What makes Tribe's analysis especially interesting is how it also incorporates the phenomenon of climate change alongside other factors such as gender-based violence and gender inequality when exploring the vulnerabilities of the system in question. The challenges posed by the ill-distribution are every bit as complex as their roots, as illustrated by the fact that gender inequality, for example, "serves both as a driver and a consequence of food insecurity" (p. 175). As climate change continues to alter the ecological and agricultural conditions in that part of the world, women can be expected to experience even more severe forms of economic marginalization, especially during humanitarian crises, where socioeconomic disruptions or natural disasters are involved (p. 176-177).

With this article, the second part of the edited volume concludes, giving way to the section titled "Prospects for new vocabularies of sustainability". This is where we encounter a piece on the sustainability dimensions of blockchain technology, written by Boris Grozdanoff

as a warning about the great responsibilities which accompany the equally great opportunities provided by every instance of a brilliantly devised new technology. Grozdanoff defines blockchain's ethical dimension as a "double-edged sword" (p. 211), as the malicious or benevolent use of the technology would depend entirely on the values encoded by the ethical agents who have deployed it. Careful planning before implementation is essential in order to prevent social disruption or abuse of power. If we manage to avoid these, we can reap the benefits of a guaranteed history of inscriptions and complete security of structured data (p. 201), applied across multiple fields of human activity like government, banking, administration, cloud or database services, etc. To sum up, the ethical challenges involved in the use of blockchain all boil down to the biases of software system architects and other agents (e.g. ethicists) who participate in the process of devising and implementing the technology, thus effectively making it sustainable in two capacities – either as "so effectively malevolent" or as "so effectively good".

Finally, as an excellent conclusion to the volume, we get to read Silviya Serafimova's thoughts on "strong" ethical gradualism and its role in securing intra- and intergenerational justice. As the author herself sums it up, one of the main challenges when considering which form of gradualism is most appropriate for extending the normative validity of ecological justice onto non-humans is "to avoid replicating inter-human moral agency, while discussing the moral status and the moral treatment" of these beings (p. 236), as that could lead to a sort of ethical anthropocentrism, which only favours beings that share similar features with us and disregards or mistreats beings who do not exhibit, for example, sentience, agency, or other human-like traits and behaviours. According to Serafimova, "strong" gradualism (a concept that draws on Skirbekk's theory of ethical gradualism) can help us bridge that gap and avoid potential mistreatment of non-human beings by introducing the obligation for us to act morally on behalf of other creatures for their own sake. Fulfilling this obligation is a crucial element of intra- and intergenerational justice for human as well as non-human generations, but in order to minimize the inevitable complications of human-non-human interaction, it needs to be grounded into a particular type of empathy called "mature empathy" (p. 239), which is characterized by the ability to evaluate and take into account the vital needs of a different "other" with the help of imaginative projection (i.e. imagining how the "other" would have gone about getting her own needs met in this situation). Its deeper form – proto-sympathetic

empathy (p. 233) – on the other hand, approximates Schlosberg's notion of "ecological reflexivity" as a process of devising regulations and collective obligations guided by a sensitivity towards others.

Each and every contribution to the volume represents a unique and valuable perspective on sustainability that reveals all of its theoretical and practical complexity in a deeply engaging manner. Rather than simply shedding light on a topic that has already gathered abundant attention from the academic community and various political organizations alike, the authors and the editor have succeeded in exposing the moral as well as the practical risks of ignoring recent developments in the sustainability debate. The book is an outstanding achievement and a definite must-read not only for ethics scholars, but also for anyone with an avid interest in climate science, policy-making, epistemology, and the social sciences.