

Climate Migration, Moral Dilemmas, and Moral Motivation

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Our descendants will live in a world markedly unlike our own; our carbon emissions, along with those of generations now dead, are in the process of transforming that world, with profoundly damaging consequences for those who will follow us in time. Some of us have become convinced that these physical changes will constitute a wrong done by the past and the present to the future—or, more precisely, to the humans who will have to make their lives within the physical world we leave behind. I agree with this conclusion. In the present essay, however, I want to briefly describe a distinct form of intergenerational wrong—one premised not upon the physical world we leave to our descendants but to the forms of political relationships those physical circumstances will make difficult or impossible.

I want to illuminate what that wrong might entail, by discussing the place of ethical dilemmas within the moral analysis of migration policy and migration practices. Rainer Bauböck and others have used the concept of a “hard dilemma” to analyze some of the moral issues facing those charged with the administration of migration control regimes.¹ A hard political dilemma, as it is used here, is not simply a political question demanding skill and subtlety in policy design. Rather, it entails a conflict between significant forms of moral value, such that any particular policy solution might involve a moral loss, or what Bernard Williams describes as a moral remainder—which is to say, a moral wrong whose wrongness resists being excused or justified by the good we intend our action to accomplish.² The focus on such dilemmas has some significant moral advantages: it reflects the moral

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complexity of moral decision-making about migration, rather than insisting upon any single moral conclusion or perspective; and it helps supplement a top-down theoretical structure with one beginning inductively from on-the-ground decision-making. In this essay, I show that engagement with moral dilemmas can be of use even to those whose primary ambit is theorizing about justice. If theory has any role to play in guiding decision-making about migration practices, then abstract theorizing can be made more responsive and accurate by means of an encounter with the moral dilemmas that such practices might engender.

I will begin by laying out a particular vision of how a moral dilemma might emerge from within a theory of justice—in particular, by means of the notion of political “justification.” I argue that a theory of justice may encounter a situation in which any particular policy decision cannot be justified with reference to some affected party—which I take to be an example of a hard moral dilemma, given that any such policy decision will authorize a morally unjustified action. I will then discuss how climate migration, given its scale and probable effects upon income distribution, is likely to give rise to a dilemma for the liberal state. I will end by discussing how these facts may demonstrate the need for theorizing about further forms of injustice. I conclude the essay by describing a particular sort of injustice between the future and the present: one beginning not with goods or with freedoms, but with the sorts of virtues that might become necessary for participation as a normal cooperator in an ongoing system of justifiable governance.

MORAL DILEMMAS IN POLITICAL LIFE

I begin by examining the concept of the moral dilemma. I have emphasized that these dilemmas are not simply ones involving moral trade-offs, or difficulties in practical implementation; instead, these dilemmas are “hard” because they involve choices in which all available options sacrifice some morally significant value.³ This notion of a moral dilemma reflects the thought that moral agents may find themselves in circumstances under which there is no option that does not involve some significant moral loss. Philosophical debate about such dilemmas has tended to focus on whether they are real or merely apparent. In the present context, though, I do not want to discuss the metaphysical reality of the moral dilemma, but the moral phenomenology that undergirds that debate; the recognition that one is, in specific circumstances, unable to fulfill what one takes to be a central moral obligation. It is, I think, enough for my present purposes that one takes the

phenomenology here as plausible; to experience an apparent moral dilemma is a wrenching experience, and even if a suitably skilled philosopher could explain why one does not truly engage in wrongdoing by choosing one particular obligation, this particular way of escaping from the force of the dilemma would require us to find such a philosopher and be capable of understanding their words—a fact which, as I will discuss later, makes even apparent moral dilemmas unpleasant things to experience.⁴

Moral dilemmas, of course, may emerge for any number of our agents; but my focus will be on the agency of those charged with political decision-making about the migration policy of a territorial state. A focus on moral dilemmas in migration policy can provide a bottom-up approach to the ethics of migration, redirecting the field away from abstract theory and toward specific moral issues, such as legal status for the undocumented⁵ and the morality of search and rescue for migrants at sea.⁶ An engagement with moral dilemmas, however, can also help improve political theorizing in the more typical or top-down mode—by demonstrating, perhaps, the contexts or circumstances in which such theory might find itself unable to provide unequivocal moral guidance. If there are circumstances under which a theory of justice cannot provide moral guidance to those charged with the administration or evaluation of migration policy, for instance, then our theories of justice may need to be adjusted, to account for the sorts of moral loss described above.⁷

I think there are cases in which a theory of justice might leave those seeking to follow its guidance in such a situation of moral loss, and I want to defend this contention through an engagement with the idea of political justification, as the central concept with which liberal-democratic politics seems to demonstrate the moral permissibility of coercion. Politics in the ordinary sense has some conceptual relationship with coercive force, in at least the limited sense that force is always potentially present in the mandates issued by a territorial state; the state, as Max Weber describes it, has a monopoly on force, or at least upon the legitimate use of such force. This force, though, must be capable of being justified to the individuals against whom it is brought to bear, and liberalism as a theoretical perspective is marked by a particular picture of what would count as sufficient moral justification to those individuals. Understood in this way, the moral dilemma I wish to discuss takes the following shape: A state—or one who administers force on behalf of the state—is in the grip of this dilemma when it faces circumstances in which it must do *something*, but faces the reality that none of the things it is able to do can be fully

justified in regard to all the people to whom its actions must be justified. This is a moral dilemma for those charged with the administration of politics; for brevity, I will refer to this type of dilemma going forward as a “political dilemma.”

How, though, could such a dilemma come into the shared world of politics? I think the answer might be developed with reference to John Rawls’s particular theory of justification, if only because of his admirable clarity about what such justification could *not* entail. I do not think anything I say here demands an acceptance of Rawls’s own theory of politics, though, and imagine that similar ideas could be developed with reference to any number of competitor visions of liberal politics. Rawls’s analysis of the “separateness of persons,” though, is well suited to explaining why a state might find itself in a situation of having to do one of two things, each of which entails coercion *toward* a particular person that cannot be justified *to* that person. These facts emerge, in the Rawlsian method, because such coercion’s beneficial effects upon any particular other party do not constitute a sufficient justification *to the one coerced* for what they are facing. Put more simply: the fact that this coercion is terribly good for my life and its prospects does not in itself offer you a justification for that coercion as applied toward *you*.

We might understand these ideas better through an examination of Rawls’s account of moral motivation. Rawls contends that one key moral problem with utilitarianism is that it demands a sort of sympathetic identification between persons, such that we ground the obligations of politics directly upon the human capacity for empathy and mutual care. Rawls, in response, argues that the capacity for such moral sentiment is limited and fragile:

A rational person, in framing his plan, would hesitate to give precedence to so stringent a principle. It is likely both to exceed his capacity for sympathy and to be hazardous to his freedom.⁸

We are called upon to reject utilitarianism, in short, because we—through our representatives in the original position—would find a politics that begins with altruistic motivations to be unrealistic. Humans are limited in their sympathetic capacity to consistently care about the pains of others, and a stable politics must instead find its justification through some other part of the human motivational set.⁹ Rawls suggests that the proper home for liberal justification, instead, is to be found in the human capacity to be motivated by “reciprocity”—a capacity that is

moralized, to be sure, but that reflects the human ability to value the *particular* others with whom we engage in regular institutional interaction:

The idea is that, given certain assumptions specifying a reasonable human psychology and the normal conditions of human life, those who grow up under just basic institutions—institutions that justice as fairness itself enjoins—acquire a reasoned and informed allegiance to those institutions sufficient to render them stable. Put another way: citizens' sense of justice, given their character and interests as formed by living under a just basic structure, is strong enough to resist the normal tendencies to injustice. Citizens act willingly to give one another justice over time.¹⁰

The ideas that are particularly important to see, here, relate to how we understand the process by which coercion is justified. We justify this coercion not based upon altruism, but with the human tendency to develop a moral sentiment to continue fair cooperation with those with whom we have already cooperated—especially when, as in the case of a territorial state, we have presumably cooperated with these individuals over the course of a life and the various changes such a lifetime entails. This motivation is, of course, still a moral sentiment; it reflects the human capacity to be motivated by fairness in the terms of cooperation. But we must recognize that this capacity is more restrictive, morally speaking, than the general demands of altruism; it is cultivated *over time*, as we see our claims treated well by fellow participators, and so develop the habit of accepting the claims of those fellows as morally powerful as well. We do not have to develop the moral will to be motivated by human interests and needs to be good citizens of a liberal polity; we must, instead, simply develop the habits and practices of good citizenship, including the will to treat fairly the claims of those with whom we already share a set of institutions. Rawls's term for these dispositions, "civic friendship," is instructive; friendship is, perhaps by definition, both an active and an exclusive concept. It is active, because one must do things with and for one's friends, just as one does things with and for those with whom one shares a political community. And it is exclusive, for the simple reason that a friendship extended to the entirety of humanity seems difficult to comprehend; one who claims to be everyone's friend is likely either lying or failing to understand what friendship genuinely entails.

MIGRATION, RECIPROCITY, AND SYMPATHY

These thoughts might be enough for us to understand how the political dilemma I have in mind could develop, and how it might relate to the issues of migration and

exclusion. A state, I argue, may arrive at circumstances in which it cannot justify exclusion to the outsider, but also cannot justify to the sedentary citizen the policy by which the needy outsider is admitted. To see that such circumstances are a genuine, rather than merely theoretical, possibility, it is helpful to examine some of the facts surrounding climate migration.

Though there is a developing literature on the normative questions surrounding climate migration,¹¹ I want here to note only the predicted effects of rapid environmental change upon human migration. The numbers are striking; on one influential estimate, up to 1.2 billion people will have to emigrate by 2050 if the expected effects of climate change upon agriculture and physical geography come to pass.¹² Approximately 90 percent of these migrants will be from lower-income countries, given the proximity of many such countries to the equator and the relative concentration of high-income countries in northern latitudes.¹³ Many migrants will be fleeing the desertification of Central Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Such migrations have already begun, to some degree, but the full effects of this movement upon social and political institutions have not yet become apparent; at present, approximately 70 percent of those fleeing changing climatic conditions have sought refuge in a neighboring country.¹⁵ At some point, however, climate migration to the high-income states of Northern Europe and North America is likely to increase, as the regional and systemic effects of climate change become more pronounced.¹⁶ The precise degree of the international migration prompted is still subject to enormous disagreement, and any particular vision of the future here is necessarily speculative. In the present context, though, we might simply note that the international effects have the potential to be dramatic in both the scope and scale of the migration produced.

These facts, of course, only describe the abstract features of climate migration; the numbers, the origins, and to some degree the destinations. What we might term “the human facts,” however—the effects of these migrations upon human relationships, including those mediated by political institutions—are perhaps more likely to cause problems in the long run. There are, of course, any number of ways in which these migrations are likely to be disruptive to the people forced to migrate and also to those sedentary residents of the states in which refuge is sought. I will here discuss only four of these, with an eye toward understanding the size of the problem and the ways in which that problem will trouble the notion of a civic friendship as discussed above.

The first way is that migrants from lower-income countries tend to have both lower educational qualifications and lower levels of cultural and linguistic competence in their chosen countries of resettlement than typical citizens of those countries.¹⁷ I mention this fact not to deny the moral claims of these migrants to resettle in such countries; as will become clear, I believe many climate migrants have a clear justice-based right to resettle in higher-income societies.¹⁸ I mean only to acknowledge that a significant increase in migrants from low-income society is likely to have a substantial impact upon the labor market of the society to which they migrate—and these impacts are unlikely to be evenly distributed among all members of that society. This gives rise to the second fact I would note in the present context: Migrants with lower cultural competence and educational attainment tend to compete with—and accept lower wages than—the least-advantaged sedentary members of the society in question.¹⁹ Cultural competence, here, refers to those sorts of culturally specific tools necessary for participation in a society and its institutions; they range from linguistic skills to more subtle forms of local knowledge about how employment is located, acquired, and preserved. Even theorists who generally defend the economic benefits of migration for the society into which migration is sought tend to acknowledge that such benefits are not distributed equally; the lowest quartile of income earners tends to be economically disadvantaged by any increase in immigration rates to that country.²⁰ The third fact to note here is that, in all high-income countries over the past fifty years, income inequality has been widening, often dramatically so.²¹ The final fact I would note is that the effects of this gap are not simply economic but social as well. The absolute life expectancy of the least advantaged in the United States, for instance, has been falling throughout the past decade—a fact that is genuinely unprecedented given advances in public health and medical science. There may be no single explanation for this last fact, but one prominent view argues that early deaths are often associated with feelings of social marginalization and exclusion, especially among that set of less educated workers who are no longer able to earn the same standard of living as their parents before them. We might express part of the damage of present-day income inequality as its effect on self-respect, which Rawls takes to be the most important primary good, grounding the individual's sense that their plans are worth pursuing and that they are capable of pursuing them; certainly, the often-premature deaths of the unemployed and underemployed might be explained with reference to that primary good, or some concept not too distant from it.²²

How, though, might these facts give rise to a political dilemma? Such a dilemma might emerge, I suggest, when a relatively well-off state—or some agent charged with its migration policy—faces the expected wave of people seeking refuge in that state. On one projection, this set might be as large as thirty million migrants seeking entry into the United States alone, within the next thirty years.²³ This set of migrants will be greater in number than any previous wave of migration into the United States; and, being displaced mostly from agricultural labor, they will often be without the qualifications that might bring them directly into higher-income brackets, or allow them to compete with the highly educated sedentary members of society. Instead, they will compete for wages and jobs and housing with those sedentary members already facing down increased income inequality, and the associated feelings of social marginalization that inequality seems likely to produce. These newly arrived workers, moreover, will be those who possess no antecedent history of reciprocal cooperation with the least well-paid members of the sedentary poor. What would the legitimate state have to do under those circumstances?

While it is possible that any actual state could develop any number of policy responses, for the moment we can take two idealized sorts of responses as options. I do not claim that no alternative responses might come into being; nor do I claim that skillful political agents would not be capable of navigating between these responses, as circumstances permit. I do claim, however, that many responses will resemble, to a significant degree, one of these two responses, and will share in the moral difficulties the chosen response entails. The first of these policy options begins with the imperative of “inclusion” for those displaced by climate disruption. The justification for inclusion is strong; it reflects the centrality of the migrant’s claim to be provided with a territorial base capable of supporting a recognizably human life. The migrants’ countries of origin are becoming, in some cases, literally uninhabitable, and the causation for that alteration rests, to a significant degree, with the decisions and policies of the wealthier states of the world. How could these states not allow them entry? The alternative policy, of course, would be to insist upon the “exclusion” of the migrants, based upon the interests of the least advantaged sedentary members of the society. If the introduction of the migrants would be significantly damaging to some set of sedentary citizens already facing what must be understood as unjust marginalization and social exclusion—so damaging, perhaps, that it could not be justified to those citizens, based upon the motivational limits for liberal policy described above—then that policy would surely be impermissible as regards those impoverished current citizens. These

current citizens, in many cases, live in countries whose civic friendship is already being placed under pressure; certainly, the United States in particular is facing a significant reduction in the sorts of social trust that undergird democratic community. To insist that these citizens accept an influx of newcomers, and compete with these newcomers for employment and for housing, would seem to make an objectionably bad situation significantly worse.

I suspect that many of us will have strong reactions to at least one of these idealized sorts of responses. For the moment, however, I am less interested in the overall decision made by the state than I am about what it is that the state is doing to those whose claims it *rejects*. If the state must choose between these responses—and, again, I do not claim that of necessity this is true, in at least the stark dichotomy presented here—then at least one set of claimants is going to have their valid moral claims ignored or unfulfilled; and this, I believe, may in fact make the justification of coercion toward that claimant morally impossible, on at least the terms available to us in the Rawlsian story described above.

Imagine, for example, that the state chooses inclusion. The low-income workers present in the state are told that they must accept a new influx of competitors for their already-inadequate supply of jobs; they will go from being often less employed and less well off than their parents to being *significantly* more impoverished than they already are. If the sedentary low-income workers seek to take matters into their hands—by, perhaps, engaging in the sorts of border-exclusion entrepreneurship seen in recent years in Arizona and Texas,²⁴ in which private individuals sought to apprehend and deter undocumented migrants—then they are liable to be coercively, even violently, prevented from doing so. What justification can be offered to the existing workers here for the decision they face? The most obvious principle, I think, would be one that relies simply upon the moral pull of the bare humanity of the migrants in question; the migrants are facing something worse than social injustice, given that they are often facing literal death or circumstances in which death is entirely too likely. But this justification, as Rawls notes, relies upon altruism and morality, rather than reciprocity and civic friendship. Instead of being told that they cannot have the particular policies they would want because of the competing claims of fellow citizens—those with whom they share a civic friendship and have cooperated in the past—those already least well off in a society are told they face negative consequences because other people, nonmembers of our reciprocal institutions of politics, stand in need of help. This pattern of justification,

though, seems to demand more of the low-income citizen than liberalisms of Rawls's stripe take as being rightly demanded of its citizens.²⁵

The alternative, of course, is equally—if not more—horrific. If the migrants face the coercive apparatus of exclusion at the border, they are facing coercion—indeed, they are facing threats of deadly force—and liberalism demands a justification for that. To say that someone must be returned to a circumstance in which he or she will die, though, is a rather difficult thing to justify *to him or her*—it would seem, if anything, to demand even more altruism and self-denial to accept this justification than is needed for the low-income worker. (Indeed, the prohibition on *refoulement* in international law seems to reflect the idea that such a demand is never a morally reasonable one to make.) The climate migrant at the border of a wealthy country has claims that are difficult to reject, and coercion against the body of such a migrant seems difficult—if not impossible—to justify.

The problem, then, emerges from the fact that it seems like the state *must do at least one of those things*, and must, therefore, engage in something that at least *seems* impossible to justify toward one of the affected agents. If moral dilemmas exist in political life, then we might want to assert that the state here faces such a dilemma. It faces two competing and seemingly incompatible moral obligations; it must do justice to its citizens, and refrain from acting so as to make their existing injustices worse, and may not justify its decision here with reference to moral motivations too demanding and tenuous to be a part of our ordinary liberal theorizing; *and* it must refrain from doing wrong to those nonmembers who find themselves within its coercive grasp, including those climate migrants who are made vulnerable by a changing planet. It is, I believe, a bad thing to force another agent into a moral dilemma, whether that moral dilemma is taken to involve genuine wrongdoing or merely something like compunction. In leaving our descendants with the particular dilemma I described, we leave them in a more difficult and dangerous political world than even we inhabit. Indeed, I think it is possible that we leave to those descendants what might be described as an iterated series of moral dilemmas, which include dealing with the nascent appeal of anti-liberal and autocratic forms of governance that might begin to be endorsed by those who will not receive moral justification from the state in question. Following the ideas of Jason Stanley, we might argue that it is possible that—as liberal democracy faces more and more circumstances in which it cannot easily live up to what it claims to value—citizens will begin to lose their grasp on why politics ought to be a site for rational justification, rather than simply a contest of strength and power.²⁶ Being a good

liberal may be more difficult in the future than in the present; and the liberal project itself may cease to be attractive as alternative and authoritarian modes of political life provide to the sedentary poor that which they cannot get from liberal democracy.

CONCLUSION

There are, of course, any number of ways of disputing that the problem I describe here is real. We might insist that the philosophical problem itself is merely illusory—or, at any rate, a problem that liberalism can account for with tools already available to us. Alternatively, we might argue that there are political means by which we can change the world, so that the problem I have described might not come into being. I genuinely hope that one of these methods might prove successful, given the nature of the dilemma I outline here. I am, however, not yet convinced that either of these modes of escape is likely to succeed. I hope the dilemma I describe can be escaped; I am not confident that we will find that escape an easy one.

I want, by way of conclusion, to make the following claim: that the successful pursuit of any particular solution to this problem will require our descendants to be *exceptional* at some particular task—more excellent, indeed, than we ourselves had to be. We have bequeathed to them a sort of puzzle—one that is and can be expected to be baffling to us—and we have made it the case that a failure to solve this puzzle would be devastating in its consequences, either to the survival of our descendants or to the political form of governance we take to be morally defensible. What I say here is intended to demonstrate this proposition and not the stronger contention that the puzzle is, itself, insoluble.

One service that might be done by engagement with hard dilemmas of migration policy, in other words, might be to develop a revised notion of what sorts of injustice exist between generations. I think we may be wronging the future, in short, by requiring our descendants to be much better than we had to be in order for their lives to be lived within a justifiable political system. Any solution to the dilemma discussed here might require the citizens of a future society to exhibit greater virtues than we ourselves had to demonstrate. Our descendants will have to be better people than we were called upon to be; better, perhaps, at being motivated by the pain of the outsider, to overcome the motivational limits implicit in liberal justice, or better at scientific or political innovation, to avoid the circumstances in

which these demands come to fruition. What these future citizens *cannot* do, I think, is to be no better than we ourselves found necessary.

This, however, seems to demand a new way of thinking about intergenerational injustice. There is injustice not only in the broken physical world we leave our descendants but also in the fit between that world and the theories of politics we have used to live justly within that world. All political philosophy has some concept of what a person is, and what that person would have to be like, for political justice to be possible. There is a certain implicit notion of moral motivation and its limits that is present within most theories of political justice—one that specifies how good people must be in order to be adequate cooperating members of the just community. There may be injustice, though, in demanding that our descendants demonstrate virtues we ourselves found unnecessary or even impossible to acquire. Those of us alive today—particularly those of us who are nearer to the end of our lives than to our beginnings—are leaving a world to our descendants in which many things are more difficult for them than they were for ourselves; from buying a house to getting a stable and well-paying job, the young face worse circumstances than those of us now growing old. These facts are indicative of a profound injustice; but the circumstances of climate migration will provide the next generation with an even more difficult test. Injustice generally gives rise to a demand for action. In the face of this injustice, however, it is unclear whether, or how, the generation now coming of age in the world can respond rightly. The very least we can do, though, is to recognize the dilemma we leave to generations yet to come, and to—if nothing else—acknowledge the full range of wrongs implicit in the world we leave behind.

NOTES

- ¹ Rainer Bauböck, Julia Mourão Permoser, and Martin Ruhs, “The Ethics of Migration Policy Dilemmas,” *Migration Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2022), pp. 427–41.
- ² Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973), ch. 11.
- ³ Bauböck et al., “The Ethics of Migration Policy Dilemmas,” p. 430.
- ⁴ William D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 28.
- ⁵ Sarah Song and Irene Bloemraad, “Immigrant Legalization: A Dilemma between Justice and the Rule of Law,” *Migration Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2022), pp. 484–509; and Lukas Schmid, “Responding to Unauthorized Residence: On a Dilemma between ‘Firewalls’ and ‘Regularizations,’” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 22 (April 2024), pp. 1–18.
- ⁶ Itamar Mann and Julia Mourão Permoser, “Floating Sanctuaries: The Ethics of Search and Rescue at Sea,” *Migration Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 2022), pp. 442–63.
- ⁷ B. A. O. Williams, “Consistency and Realism,” supplemental volume, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 40, no. 1 (July 1966), pp. 1–22, academic.oup.com/aristoteliansupp/article/40/1/1/1771281.
- ⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1971), p. 573.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 500.
- ¹⁰ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 142.

- ¹¹ Jamie Draper, *Climate Displacement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); and Jane McAdam, "Moving beyond Refugee Law: Putting Principles on Climate Mobility into Practice," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 34, no. 3–4 (October/December 2023), pp. 440–48.
- ¹² Gaia Vince, "The Century of Climate Migration: Why We Need to Plan for the Great Upheaval," *Guardian*, August 18, 2022, www.theguardian.com/news/2022/aug/18/century-climate-crisis-migration-why-we-need-plan-great-upheaval.
- ¹³ Kristy Siegfried, "Climate Change and Displacement: The Myths and the Facts," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, November 2023, www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/climate-change-and-displacement-myths-and-facts.
- ¹⁴ Abrahm Lustgarten, "The Great Climate Migration Has Begun," *New York Times*, July 23, 2020, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html.
- ¹⁵ Siegfried, "Climate Change and Displacement."
- ¹⁶ Anatol Lieven, *Climate Change and the Nation State: The Case for Nationalism in a Warming World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- ¹⁷ Maria Vincenza Desiderio, *Integration Refugees into Host Country Labor Markets: Challenges and Policy Options* (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, October 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCM-Asylum-Desiderio-FINAL.pdf.
- ¹⁸ I refer to those fleeing climate disruption as migrants, rather than refugees or asylum seekers, because of the particular history of these latter terms as partly artifacts of a particular legal and political tradition. Those fleeing climate disruption share many traits with refugees and asylum seekers but are not understood to have the same legal rights granted to refugees and asylum seekers; I will therefore use the broader language of migrant, while acknowledging that migrants fleeing climate change are comprehensible as involuntary migrants, rather than economic migrants. I am grateful to the editors of this journal for urging me to be more precise on this point.
- ¹⁹ Ana Rita Gomes, Oscar Afonso, and Paulo B. Vasconcelos, "Impact of Refugees on Wages and Economic Growth in a Model with Inflation," *Applied Economics* 56, no. 12 (March 2024), pp. 1381–1407.
- ²⁰ George J. Borjas, *Immigration Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- ²¹ Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Ruth Igielnik, and Rakesh Kochhar, "Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality," ch. 1 in *Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer than Half Call It a Top Priority* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, January 2020), www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality.
- ²² Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- ²³ Lustgarten, "The Great Climate Migration Has Begun."
- ²⁴ David Neiwert, *And Hell Followed with Her: Crossing the Dark Side of the American Border* (New York: Hachette, 2013).
- ²⁵ It is possible, of course, that one could insist that the program of inclusion ought to be accompanied by greater economic redistribution, to alleviate the burdens on the least well advantaged members of society. This is, of course, true; but it is worth noting that this response would require the well off to acknowledge the moral interests of both the local and the global poor—and the wealthy have been, for the past several decades, ever more unlikely to be moved by such appeals. See Hyunjin J. Koo, Paul K. Piff, and Azim F. Shariff, "If I Could Do It, So Can They: Among the Rich, Those with Humbler Origins Are Less Sensitive to the Difficulties of the Poor," *Social Psychology and Personality Science* 14, no. 3 (April 2023), pp. 333–41.
- ²⁶ Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018).

Abstract: Theories of liberal justice depend upon ideas of how much we can expect ordinary people to be motivated by the moral interests of others; there are limits to the motivational power of such notions as altruism and sympathy. This means, however, that the theories of justice we have may have difficulty in understanding how to rightly respond to the moral claims that might emerge in the face of widespread migration in response to climate change. This essay argues that liberal states may face a dilemma in response to this migration—one in which a state must do what cannot be justified toward either the migratory or the sedentary. This claim, further, might represent a new site of intergenerational injustice, in which future generations are given political problems to which our best theories of political justice can provide little assistance.

Keywords: justice, climate change, climate migration, intergenerational justice, moral dilemmas