

Global Climate Change Justice: From Rawls' *Law of Peoples* to Honneth's Conditions of Freedom

Shannon Brincat*

The problem of global climate changes has raised fundamental questions of justice in world politics centered around the vast discrepancies between the causes and the effects of global warming and the uneven levels of consumption/enjoyment of fossil fuels. The overwhelming majority of approaches in environmental ethics have focused on either distributive justice or rights-based frameworks. Climate change justice, however, can be explored through an alternative framework, an approach based on the recognition theory of Axel Honneth that has not been systematically engaged with in this field. A critique of John Rawls' *The Law of Peoples* as an exemplar of distributive approaches reveals a number of limitations inherent in Rawlsian models of climate-change justice. Honneth's theory of recognition is an advance on distributive models toward a notion of climate justice in which the conditions necessary for the "functioning and flourishing" of human freedom includes climatic stability as a basic social condition. The ideal of mutual recognition provides a basis for environmental protections, including but not limited to the global atmosphere as a necessary condition for the realization of self-autonomy for all human kind.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of global climate change, whether perceived as a crisis or natural environmental process, has raised fundamental questions of justice in world politics. Fierce disputes involving deeply held ethico-normative assumptions underlie all prescriptive policy debates, both domestic and international. The fact that the U.S. defection from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol was made on the arguments related to fairness¹ or that the 2014-IPCC report is replete with words such as *risk*, *resilience*, and *vulnerabilities*² exemplify the fundamentally normative character of global climate policy. Key points of contention focus on the likely outcomes of climate change and the historical responsibility for the impending crisis, presupposing at least four interrelated elements of the climate justice debate:

* School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD 4111, Australia; email: s.brincat@griffith.edu.au. Brincat's research focuses on recognition theory and cosmopolitanism; dialectics; tyrannicide; climate change justice; and critical theory. He has been the editor of a number of collections, most recently *Dialectics and World Politics; Recognition, Conflict and the Problems of Ethical Community* (New York: Routledge, 2015) and; the three volume series *Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013). He is also to co-founder and co-editor of the journal *Global Discourse*.

¹ See Robyn Eckersley, "Ambushed: The Kyoto Protocol, the Bush Administration's Climate Policy and the Erosion of Legitimacy," *International Politics* 44, no. 2-3 (2007): 306-24.

² See IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, IPCC WGII AR5 Summary for Policymakers, 2014.

- (1) that the burning of fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere contributing to the greenhouse effect,
- (2) that resultant climate change will affect ecological and atmospheric conditions across the planet, though its effects will be geographically uneven,³
- (3) that the impacts of climate change will, most likely, fall disproportionately on developing countries and poor peoples who have historically consumed less fossil fuels than Western and/or developed states,⁴ and
- (4) that climate change will undermine ways of life, including the “functioning and flourishing,”⁵ of both collective and individual communities and identities across the globe.

What emerges, then, is a travesty of global justice centered on the vast discrepancy between those responsible for climate change and those affected by it, a travesty that has arisen from the historically uneven processes of industrialization and the uneven consumption of fossil fuels.⁶ This problem of cause and effect is exacerbated further when we take intergenerational and biospheric obligations into account. The normative claims for the basic climatic conditions necessary for the “functioning and flourishing” of human communities, in turn, throws up unique questions pertaining to self-determination, questions that should be of the utmost concern for any democratic society: how can communities maintain their unique identities in the context of climate change? How can individuals flourish amid the projected crises of rising sea levels, ocean acidification, declining food production, changes to the water cycle, among others? Clearly, climate justice cannot be addressed without, at the same time, addressing the global issues of inequality and uneven development that has underpinned the crises—that is, without bringing in cultural, symbolic, and social forces that are equally responsible for, and causative of, climate change.

Unfortunately, the justice models that dominate the field—based predominantly on Rawlsian or general liberal principles—remain focused on either distribution of rights and responsibilities or rights-based notions of protection and vulnerabilities, and do not interrogate the multifaceted social-relational dynamics involved in climate change. While they accept, at some level, that climate change involves a

³ See Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: A Synthesis Report, A Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Third Assessment Report of the IPCC*, ed. R. T. Watson and the Core Writing Teams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴ See Wolfgang Sachs, “Climate Change and Human Rights,” in *Critical Currents*, special issue: “Contours of Climate Justice: Ideas for Shaping New Climate and Energy” *Politics* 6 (2009): 86; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: A Synthesis Report*, p. 12.

⁵ This notion is adopted from the excellent work of David Schlosberg. See David Schlosberg, “Justice, Ecological Integrity, and Climate Change,” in A. Thompson and J. Bendki-Keymer, eds., *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change: Human Virtues of the Future* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), chap. 8.

⁶ See P. Baer, S. Kartha, and T. Athanasiou et al., “The Greenhouse Development Rights Framework: Drawing Attention to Inequality within Nations in the Global Climate Policy Debate,” *Development and Change* 40, no. 6 (2009): 1121–38.

nexus between history, the equality of nations, and human rights, they rarely engage with the complex social-relations that animate their ethical models of distribution or rights,⁷ for example, those that focus on carbon-use inequalities between the core/periphery; those that examine procedural justice in global climate change governance; or those that look to the impact of climate change on future generations,⁸ rarely make the relational connection between the specific crises of climate change that they problematize and the wider social contradictions of which this forms but a part, either North/South inequality, the lack of democratic global governance, or existing patterns of distribution, respectively. In a word, they each fail to see these crises as fundamentally interrelated, with climate change being part of a multifaceted crises of human *intersubjectivity*. This lack of reflexivity in climate justice models has meant the under-theorization of the re-cognitive dimensions of ethical life that each theory presupposes in the specific aspect of the problem that they engage.⁹ It is on this ground that I argue for the broadening of climate justice to include what Hegel and Honneth refer to as “mutual recognition” as a necessary and prior social achievement to base the ethical regulation of the climatic environment for all humankind, inclusive of future generations.

The argument proceeds as follows. In the first part, I examine the various ways in which the Rawlsian framework, as an exemplar of distributive justice, has been used in climate justice debates and the limitations that attend such approaches. In the second half, I then deploy an alternative theory of justice, complementary to so-called capabilities approaches, that is derived from the Hegelian notion of recognition as developed in the social theory of Axel Honneth. While Honneth’s work has been noted in some accounts of climate ethics, it has not been engaged with in-depth.¹⁰ Recognition theory holds that individual identity formation and self-actualization — of individuals, groups, and peoples — are conditional upon the reciprocal recognition of respect and esteem by all others. In this manner, I argue that recognition theory can overcome some of the key limitations identified in the Rawlsian approach by offering a conception of justice that is not solely concerned with distribution or rights but in providing the psychological, social, cultural, and

⁷ See Sachs, “Climate Change and Human Rights,” p. 85.

⁸ See respectively, Phillip Anthony O’Hara, “Political Economy of Climate Change, Ecological Destruction and Uneven Development,” *Ecological Economics* 69 (2009): 223–34; Jeannie Sowers, “The Many Injustices of Climate Change,” *Global Environmental Politics* 7, no. 4 (2007): 140–46; Edward Page, *Climate Change, Justice and Future Generations* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2006).

⁹ What I mean by the term *re-cognitive* is taken from Hegel’s notion of ethical life. As explained by Gillian Rose, re-cognizing (*Anerkennen*) is both a “seeing-into” and the transition from identity to speculation. Here, recognition is seen to depend on the analysis of social and historical forms of mis-recognition, or what she calls “lack of identity.” *Recognition* is then, by definition, a “re-cognizing of identity.” This point is taken up later in the article. See Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 64.

¹⁰ For example, in nearly all of his works Schlosberg cites Honneth but does not explain this approach in any detail. See David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

material conditions necessary for the “functioning and flourishing” of collective and individual human freedom—*conditions* of which the global climate forms an integral part. That is, only through the more expansive notion of “justice as freedom”¹¹ advanced by Honneth, can we locate a robust foundation for climate justice that includes notions of climate stability as a prior and fundamental condition for the “functioning and flourishing” of all in world politics. As a basic condition, we move from a negative right of do no harm (consistent with liberal principles) to a regulative social ethic in which climate justice is a positive and universal duty. Recognition theory also offers an alternative conception to help understand the limitations of the existing framework for international negotiations regarding climate change. Typically, the international sphere is seen as oriented to questions of procedural justice given it is a realm in which policy formation is met with great power and wealth asymmetries. However, while such accounts help develop processes of fairness to resolve disputes and the just allocation of resources, they presuppose intersubjective agreement on the underlying norms that the procedure enacts. Recognition theory delves deeper into these normative assumptions. That is, for recognition theory, existing international institutions (and their practices or processes) responsible for climate change action display unique forms of misrecognition between states and peoples that restrict and distort the types of justice claims that can be made in regards to distribution—a form of global social pathology action display unique forms of misrecognition between states and peoples—a form of global social pathology. This misrecognition indicates the urgent need for further struggles to expand and improve the recognitive processes in these international institutions to satisfy the normative claims of justice regarding the material needs of all peoples for climatic stability, and to satisfactorily protect the environmental rights of all peoples.

THE LIMITS OF RAWLSIAN APPROACHES TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

John Rawls’ work is frequently encountered in distributive approaches to climate justice and for good reason, as one of the most elaborate theoretical constructions of its kind, the Rawlsian framework presents an ideal candidate for those concerned with the question of “just” forms of distributing the obligations and responsibilities for climate change. Moreover, Rawls’ *The Law of Peoples* has an explicit international or cosmopolitan focus that seems readily applicable in the global context of climate change.¹² This is not to suggest his is the only distributive framework found in this debate; for example, Simon Caney and Henry Shue do not adopt a

¹¹ Axel Honneth, “Justice as Institutionalised Freedom: A Hegelian Perspective,” in A. Sorensen, M. Raffinsoe-Moller, and A. Gron, eds., *Dialectics, Self-Consciousness, and Recognition: The Hegelian Legacy* (Malmö: NSU Press, 2009), pp. 171–200.

¹² John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Rawlsian-inspired approach but nevertheless treat climate justice primarily as an issue of distribution.¹³ Yet, focusing on Rawlsian approaches is justifiable not only by the sheer numbers of those that engage with Rawls—either positively or critically—in the literature, but because his is the most sophisticated ethic of distributive justice, a critique of this approach can illustrate the limitations that attend other models of distributive climate justice also. I begin by highlighting the absence of environmental concerns and the methodological nationalism in Rawls' theory of justice, before analyzing four Rawlsian models for climate justice that have been proposed and the specific limitations that each entail. From this position, it is possible to better grasp some of the benefits of basing climate justice on principles of recognition, as I argue in the final half of this paper.

GENERAL PROBLEMS IN THE RAWLSIAN FRAMEWORK FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Questions of the environment are largely absent in Rawls' work.¹⁴ This is a curious anomaly given that under the "veil of ignorance" and the "original position" (the thought experiment through which parties are to select the principles that will determine the basic structures of society impartially and rationally), Rawls could have easily stipulated that subjects are not to know their "characteristics," level of "natural resources," "economic development," or their surrounding environmental conditions.¹⁵ Not only would doing so have placed climate justice firmly within the deliberations of social actors, but would be more consistent with Rawls' normative ethical presuppositions of the "original position." Given that resources and development are largely determined by environmental conditions, their neglect creates an ontological hole at the heart of Rawls' system. In the absence of this foundation, Rawlsian ethicists have been forced to "reach" into his principles to make this connection, resulting in a divided and incoherent program for climate justice. For example, Peter Singer has posited that Rawls' "difference principle" could be used to regulate the distribution of carbon-emission quotas, whereas this same principle has also been examined by Derek Bell to protect the climate as part of the "global commons."¹⁶ For others, such as E. Page and S. Caney, Rawls appears as the foil by which more critical and expansive ethical claims regarding climate justice can be

¹³ See Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Simon Caney, "Two Kinds of Climate Justice: Avoiding Harm and Sharing Burdens," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2014): 125–49.

¹⁴ On this issue, see Simon Caney, "Survey Article: Cosmopolitanism and the Law of Peoples," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10 (2002): 95–123.

¹⁵ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 33.

¹⁶ See Peter Singer, *One World—The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), and Derek Bell, "Environmental Justice and Rawls' Difference Principle," *Environmental Ethics* 26 (2004): 287–306.

derived,¹⁷ whereas for Stephen Gardiner, his approach has been said to be in need of replacement entirely.¹⁸ Then there are those such as Robert Huseby and Lauren Hartzell who have deliberately moved away from *A Theory of Justice*, suggesting that it is only by amendments to *The Law of Peoples* that Rawls finds his proper place in climate justice debates.¹⁹

This is more than mere scholarly disagreement about the suitable entry point of Rawls into climate justice debates. Rather, it concerns the “human-nature” relation that underpins its ontological assumptions, and the incompatible theoretical frameworks that stem from it. Implicit within Rawls’ theory is an atomistic conception of human nature, abstracted from both the social contexts in which “real” people live and their engagement with socio-political praxis. The depiction of persons in the “original position” is heavily overloaded with assumptions that the interests of human agents are pre-socially defined and primarily based around the rational pursuit of egoistic interests. For Michael Sandel, the attributes Rawls ascribes to human beings are those of isolated and autonomous individuals who choose their goals via the purposive-rational calculation of their interests as if they “were making a decision to buy something.”²⁰ Such views are compatible with the Hayekian interpretations of Rawls’ model,²¹ both of which raise considerable difficulties for addressing the problem of climate change. This is because if one of the central concerns of Rawls’ thought experiment of the “veil of ignorance” is to establish through social practice, a “proper balance” of competing claims to equitably distribute things of negative or positive value,²² the absence of environmental conditions in their deliberations of those in the “original position” means social structures are skewed from the outset. Climate justice can only ever be extraneous and secondary to the self-interested allocations of each subject.

Alongside the absence of environmental concerns in Rawls’ work is a methodological nationalism premised around liberal statism. While the content of *A Theory of Justice* can, in principle, be applied in any social context, it is

¹⁷ See E. Page, “Distributing the Burdens of Climate Change,” *Environmental Politics* 17 (2008): 556–75; S. Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 18, no. 4 (2005): 747–57.

¹⁸ Stephen M. Gardiner, “Rawls and Climate Change: Does Rawlsian Political Philosophy Pass the Global Test?” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2011): 125–51.

¹⁹ Robert Huseby, “John Rawls and Climate Justice: An Amendment to *The Law of Peoples*,” *Environmental Ethics* 35 (2013): 227–43, and see Lauren Hartzell, “Climate change and global justice: Extending Rawls’ Law of Peoples,” ISEE/IAEP Environmental Philosophy Conference, May 2006, Allenspark, Colorado.

²⁰ This refers to Honneth’s analysis of Michael Sandel. See Axel Honneth, “The Limits of Liberalism: On the Political-Ethical Discussion Concerning Communitarianism,” in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. C. W. Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

²¹ For Hayek, Rawls’ principles do not rule out disparities in wealth and market inequalities. See F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: The Mirage of Social Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), vol. 2, p. xiii.

²² John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness,” *Philosophical Review* 67 (1958): 165.

premised as an internal ethic within a liberal state. Similarly, *The Law of Peoples*, while having an explicitly global ambit, explores the content of a liberal idea of justice for a “Society of Peoples” premised around those of citizens within a liberal domestic society. These statist assumptions render its application to climate justice unnecessarily restrictive, while its inherent political normativity renders it biased toward certain assumptions regarding modernity that it leaves completely unproblematized. For example, a fundamental component of *The Law of Peoples* is the notion of reciprocity that requires liberal states to adopt foreign policies that could be acceptable to all “reasonable,” “rational,” “free and equal” peoples.²³ In this logic, a “rational” society will pursue its interests as an equal within international society but being also a “reasonable” society, it will expect and respect only the same identical recognition of equality by other states. These criteria of reasonableness, equality, and reciprocal recognition are assumed to form self-constraints on a state’s pursuit of its own interests and could be used as a pillar of climate justice.²⁴ However, the potential of “reasonableness” in foreign policy choices is altogether neutralized because Rawls applies his principles of the “Society of Peoples” through the prism of methodological nationalism that stridently defends state sovereignty over its territory, institutions, environmental integrity, and population size. Yet these are precisely those features of the Westphalian international state-system that militate against “reasoned,” globally coordinated responses to climate change.²⁵ Quite simply, the state remains an altogether insufficient instrument for dealing with the complexity of the global climate or securing its future.

The limits that the Rawlsian framework places on international climate action are then not just formal but social. For example, Rawls believes that principles of justice can only hold within a common shared culture because it requires forms of solidarity and reciprocity found only amongst close interpersonal ties of citizenship and “shared community of fate.” This peculiar liberal communitarianism denies the viability of cosmopolitan justice that would ordinarily be assumed in global climate justice, not only because of the lack of an existing institutional structure, but because of the lack of a “shared identity” or “common ethos” to bind people effectively.²⁶ This contradicts the existence of embedded, albeit uneven, forms of cosmopolitan institutionalism in global governance attempting to work toward adaptation/mitigation strategies at the international level, however unsuccessfully.²⁷ Rawls’ rejection of a world state—a rejection that seems to include any and all

²³ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–37.

²⁵ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 3, 23.

²⁶ See David Miller, “Justice and Global Inequality,” in A. Hurrell and N. Woods, eds., *Inequality, Globalization, and World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 187–210, 190.

²⁷ Using Rawls’ own principles, Onora O’Neill has shown the contradictions of Rawls’ methodological nationalism by showing how obligations of justice (in both economic and social forms) is already present within arrangements of global governance institutions, proving the emergence of a shared human identity/morality. Onora O’Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 115–42.

forms of global governance to combat climate change²⁸—confines his theory’s application to the domestic sphere, curtailing the effectiveness of such an approach to global climate change which is beyond any states ability to affect. As captured simply by Honneth, “The obvious danger of focusing so strongly on the state is that everything outside the latter’s legal jurisdiction would remain immune to demands for justice. . . .”²⁹ Two examples, taken from Rawls’ discussion of the “global commons,” reveal clearly the ensuing contradiction in the context of climate change. First, because the global climate and the upper atmosphere do not form part of any state’s territory but form part of the “global commons,” Rawls simply ignores them as factors affecting the law of peoples. Rawls’ ontology excludes a fundamental condition of human life. Second, because of Rawls’ understanding of property as the maintenance of assets, the neglect of the “global commons” regarding the world’s climatic conditions is inevitable because no one people can be taken to have responsibility for it. Here, the “tragedy of the commons” is not because of assumptions regarding humankind’s predisposition to exploit finite resources, but because of Rawls’ notion of property rights that exclude any meaningful protection or husbandry of the atmosphere for the future. The lack of engagement with environmental concerns and the methodological nationalism within Rawlsian ethics are some of the general contradictions that render the framework highly problematic as a foundation for climate justice. As I show below, there are also a number of specific problems that attend those models that have attempted to do so.

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN RAWLSIAN MODELS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

There have been at least four ways in which Rawls’ work has been extended in specific models of climate justice. These include through the “Just Savings Principle,” private property, assistance to burdened societies, and human rights. Each holds particular problems that I examine before showing how these can be overcome by turning to a recognitive framework of climate justice in the next section.

The “Just Savings Principle” is a typical starting point for most Rawlsians because it coheres with the commitments to intergenerational justice expressed in the 1992 *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*.³⁰ For Rawls, each generation is to save, proportionate to its ability, for the next generation so that its “decent” basic structures are secured.³¹ That is, each generation is to ensure that its “just institutions

²⁸ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 36–39.

²⁹ Axel Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism,” in *The I in We*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 39.

³⁰ The “Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities.” See *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992), art. 3.1.

³¹ Rawls later reduced this commitment. See Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 65.

are firmly established” and all “basic liberties effectively realized.”³² Here, Rawls stipulates, *inter alia*, that nonrenewable resources should be “husbanded” for the future and that natural sustainability should not be undermined by existing generations.³³ The connection to climate change and duties to future generations seems obvious. Yet, in the context of climate change, much of the critical potential of the “Just Savings Principle” is lost because it applies only domestically and eschews any globally shared resource. Rawls stipulates that it does not include the resources or sustainability of “other” peoples, nor to the “husbanding” of the global commons, such as the planetary atmosphere. Moreover, just savings are only obligatory when achievable “without too much cost to ourselves” — an ultimately minimal and arbitrary measurement. Neither is there a duty to help sustain the resources of sustainability of external communities.³⁴ Consequently, securing the environmental integrity of one’s own territory for the enjoyment of future generations does not extend in ways relevant to the global processes associated with climate change that are not only caused unevenly, but whose geographical effects will be uneven. In this context, Beitz has challenged Rawls’ assumption that the nation-state is a self-sufficient unit for justice by highlighting its weaknesses as a responsive collective agent to problems such as climate change.³⁵ Given its strict domestic application, the “Just Savings Principle” is rendered purely aspirational. That is, Rawlsians can only hope that all peoples would spontaneously register how their interests overlap regarding the need to save the atmosphere and thus “observe their treaties and undertakings” (principle two).³⁶ In other words, Rawlsians must believe that states can, beyond their “rational interest” and without any responsibility for the “global commons,” come to a binding agreement on climate change. We move from an ethic to purely volitional conduct. Current inertia on climate change suggests this faith is utterly misplaced.

Restricted to domestic application, the “Just Saving Principle” may unwittingly provide a perverse justification for particular peoples to pursue the environmental security of its own future generations without considering, or even at the expense of, other peoples, for if the duty is only to the future of one’s own people rather than humanity, any wider duties implied in the ethic are subordinated to the interests of the insider group. Indeed, this approach would be consistent with the overarching nationalist framework of Rawls’ approach. Such a position has already been reflected by those who advocate for the pursuit of economic growth measures (without significant greenhouse gas reductions) as a means to help with adaptation policies.³⁷ For example, Wilfred Beckerman and Bjørn Lomborg have

³² *Ibid.*, p. 251.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 119.

³⁵ See Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 128.

³⁶ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 37.

³⁷ See Executive Office of the U.S. President, *Economic Report of the President*, February 2002, p. 218.

recommended that mitigation measures should be abandoned in favor of relocating environmental refugees and compensating them in some financial sense.³⁸ Eric Posner and David Weisbach, similarly, have claimed that the best way to combat climate change is to exclude measures designed to redistribute wealth, or address historical wrongs regarding climate change, in favor of market-driven adaptation methods.³⁹ Neither of these positions look to the particular needs of those suffering from climate change, but reduce equitable claims to market prerogatives and equate monetary compensation (distribution) as the totality of justice claims. Yet, one must think here of the Tuvaluese, for example, who do not seek the mere “promotion and maintenance of their just institutions” but their very existence and identity that is under threat by rising sea levels.

There is also a final and fundamental problem to such models: the “Just Savings Principle” does not help determine what we ought to do regarding climate change because it determines this post-facto, that is, as based on the consequences of climate change on existing institutions rather than promoting effective preventative/mitigation action in the present.⁴⁰ This conclusion is tied to the fact that Rawls insists that assistance to burdened societies is determined as necessary only when their institutions are threatened, or have failed. The known longevity of the carbon cycle and the time lag of its effects on climate highlights the problems of waiting for consequences to gauge a retrospective ethic and appropriate policy responses.

A second Rawlsian approach has been to view the climate as an asset, based around a particular passage of *The Law of Peoples* in which Rawls discusses the boundaries and institutions of private property through a Lockean understanding (i.e., a labor theory of appropriation).⁴¹ Whereas the “Just Savings Principle” is purposed toward the maintenance of just institutions, Rawls also sees the state as a responsible agent for the “territory,” “environmental integrity,” and “population.” The state (and, more specifically, its spatial geography) becomes an asset of the people, whose duty it is to preserve. Rawls explains his justification accordingly:

... unless a definite agent is given responsibility for maintaining an asset and bears the loss for not doing so, that asset tends to deteriorate. In this case the asset is the

³⁸ See Wilfred Beckerman, “Global Warming and International Action: An Economic Perspective,” in A. Hurrell, B. Kingsbury, eds., *The International Politics of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Bjørn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁹ See Eric A. Posner and David Weisbach, *Climate Change Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ See Robert Huseby, “Person-Affecting Moral Theory, Non-Identity and Future People,” *Environmental Values* 19, no. 2 (2010): 193–210.

⁴¹ This holds that ownership originates by an act of labor/appropriation over a natural resource. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), *Second Treatise*, chap. 5, sec. 28.

people's territory and its capacity to support them in perpetuity; and the agent is the people themselves as politically organized.⁴²

The problem is whether this understanding of property can include the global atmosphere because, in the Lockean tradition of property, the right in land/territory was conditional upon prior use and exists only so long as this connection can be made.⁴³ Yet Rawls refers specifically to the property within a territory of a people and not to the global commons, so that any analogy to be drawn from the domestic context of states cannot be leveled up to the atmosphere. As argued by Steve Vanderheiden, there is no natural "distribution" of atmospheric space so that the global climate defies such conventional theories of property as adopted by Rawls. By contrast, the atmosphere constitutes a case of a pure public good, properly held in common, that is fully international in character.⁴⁴ Given Rawls' rejection of any obligations attaching to the global commons, this second model forfeits any relevance to climate justice.

Outside of the "Just Savings Principle" or viewing the atmosphere as an asset, some have sought more inventive ways of expanding Rawlsian ethics to the needs of climate justice. One such approach has sought to expand the duties of well-ordered states to assist other burdened societies to join the "Society of Peoples" in order to collectively uphold "the Law of Peoples. This third Rawlsian model does not imply the existence of positive obligations of assistance to burdened societies *per se* but refers to the fact that the "Society of Peoples" has a limited responsibility to help burdened societies become able and willing to respect "the Law of Peoples" through assistance, sanction, and intervention.⁴⁵ For Robert Huseby, who has built on this line of thinking, the wish to "extend" the "Society of Peoples" may allow for the incorporation of climate justice because well-ordered liberal and decent societies are charged with having to take collective steps to secure a just and stable world and to prevent it from avoidably and severely deteriorating.⁴⁶ This is an extension of the right to assist burdened societies (i.e., those living under "unfavorable conditions") to include those harmed (either threatened or actual) by climate change. Such an argument seems to offer the best chance of linking Rawlsian ethics and climate change justice in such a way that a coherent reformist-policy program could develop. Moreover, Rawls has previously affirmed that an "all-inclusive" "Society of Peoples" is a long-term goal of his theory of justice, as is eradicating "great evils" such as genocide, grave oppression, and unjust war—of which climate

⁴² Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 38–39. On this point, see also Charles C. Beitz, "Rawls Law of Peoples," Symposium on John Rawls' *Law of Peoples*, *Ethics* 110 (2000): 669–96.

⁴³ James Tully, *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and his Adversaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 123.

⁴⁴ Steve Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 103.

⁴⁵ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 93, 106.

⁴⁶ See Robert Huseby, "John Rawls and Climate Justice," pp. 227–43.

change could be considered alongside as a similar egregious threat to humankind.⁴⁷ Such an argument has been fortified by linking with Rawls' affirmation of universal human rights in circumstances where climate change threatens to obstruct the human rights of citizens. The benefits of this type of model, a model that emphasizes human rights, are that it is less hampered by the methodological nationalism and purely domestic considerations that limit other parts of Rawls' *The Law of Peoples*. Here, well-ordered liberal and decent societies are said to have a duty to assist and even intervene when human rights of peoples are being threatened. Simon Caney has been a key voice in championing this link between human rights and climate change, arguing that current consumption of fossil fuels undermines human rights because it generates outcomes in which people's fundamental interests are unprotected, whether of fellow citizens, foreigners, or future generations.⁴⁸

Yet, despite the promise of these models to address climate change through assistance to burdened societies and/or the promotion of human rights, they suffer from shared fundamental limitations. Rawls construes human rights narrowly and in ways that exclude environmental rights.⁴⁹ Even if some of the human costs associated with climate change could be brought under the ambit of this provision (as a necessary condition for human subsistence, security, and/or property, for example), the anthropocentric nature of human rights means that wider ecological protections, such as biodiversity and habitat, would require other justifications entirely. In addition, Rawls' conception of the historical development of burdened societies and human rights lacks engagement with the political economy and power constellations that have generated the vast discrepancy in the use of fossil fuels. That is, they leave the social and economic conditions of developmental inequality that brought about the crises largely untouched. Focusing on assisting burdened societies as sites where liberal order has failed to penetrate (and therefore as sites of potential liberal intervention) sidelines questions of political economy, developmental injustice and neo-imperialism, regarding those burdened societies that are neither responsible for, nor have enjoyed the benefits of, fossil fuels. Moreover, the essential conditions for developing Rawlsian well-ordered liberal and decent societies are more likely to be found in advanced industrialized nations (i.e., high consumption levels of carbon) rather than developing/agrarian states, so that to delink this developmental logic from its environmental costs leaves a key determinant of the historical processes behind climate change unaccounted for. As argued by David Manuel-Navarrete, such reformist approaches that only seek incremental changes to combat climate change in effect support the developmental logics that lie

⁴⁷ Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 105–13, 126.

⁴⁸ Simon Caney, "Cosmopolitan Justice, Rights and Global Climate Change," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 19, no. 2 (2006): 255.

⁴⁹ Rawls' list of human rights, however, are limited: the right to life (subsistence and security); liberty (freedom from slavery, serfdom, forced occupation); conscience (religion and thought); property (personal); and to formal equality (natural justice). See John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 65.

at the root cause of global environmental pressures.⁵⁰ In these ways, the Rawlsian framework fails to adequately grasp the prior formation of social, cultural, class, and symbolic conditions underlying its claims for distributive justice. The Rawlsian framework for climate justice, then, is what Hegel would call *Potenzen*—a stage of climate justice which can be seen as an active and real part of the whole, but which mistakes itself as the whole.⁵¹

TOWARD A RECOGNITION FRAMEWORK FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

As we have seen, there are clear limitations to relying on a Rawlsian distributional or rights-based approach to climate justice. There are alternatives in the literature however, and a leading candidate is the so-called “capabilities” approach based on the work of Amartya Sen, Iris Marion Young, Martha Nussbaum, and others, which serves as a significant advance in climate justice, one that takes seriously recognition theory. As argued by David Schlosberg, a capabilities-based conception of climate justice seeks to extend the protection of the environmental system as necessary for the “functioning and flourishing” of peoples’ lives.⁵² He calls this a “plural yet unified theory” that involves: equity in the distribution of risks of climate change, recognition of the diversity of those affected by climate change, and the need for participation in management or decisions regarding climate change.⁵³

The capabilities approach begins by focusing on Rawls and the limitations of distribution, positing that it is incomplete theoretically and insufficient in practice. Schlosberg finds a concerted resistance in Rawlsians to engage with recognition as an element of climate justice, observing that Rawlsians either see such assertions as an attack on Rawls’ legacy, or that he has sufficiently accounted for recognition through self-respect as a “primary good” (a precondition for distributive justice).⁵⁴ Despite this general reticence to engage with what promises to be a complementary alternative, the key advantage of the capabilities approach is that it brings together distribution alongside claims for environmental rights, intergenerational rights, and recognition of individual and collective needs as necessary for human “functioning and flourishing.” As stated by Schlosberg, the capabilities approach

⁵⁰ See David Manuel-Navarrete, “Climate Change and Power: Isn’t It All about Politics?” *Environment, Politics and Development Working Paper Series*, Department of Geography, King’s College, London, 2010, Paper No. 32.

⁵¹ On this point, see Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 67.

⁵² This is in addition to protecting ecosystems. Schlosberg, “Justice, Ecological Integrity, and Climate Change,” pp. 166–68.

⁵³ See David Schlosberg, “Reconceiving Environmental Justice: Global Movements and Political Theories,” *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 3 (2004): 517, 521.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 519. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 440.

. . . can bring social and political recognition of specific and local vulnerabilities and the effects of climate change on the basic needs of human beings in various places and under different conditions. . . . [It is] a normative guideline for climate policies and offers quite concrete standards.⁵⁵

Following Young, Schlosberg claims that climate justice must focus on the political process as a way to address both the inequitable distribution of social goods and the conditions undermining social recognition.⁵⁶ Yet the problem for capabilities approaches is that these concrete standards are contested, even among this group. For example, Sen emphasizes the capabilities for fully functioning communities, placing participation as central to climate justice.⁵⁷ Nussbaum, in contrast, is more formalistic, positing that capabilities for a functioning life can be ensured through constitutional guarantees rather than deliberation.⁵⁸ Here, recognition is confined solely to “self-respect and non-humiliation,” conditions allegedly satisfied through free speech, association, and participation (in a representative rather than deliberative sense). This raises the same limits of Rawlsian approaches (discussed above) by leaving unexamined the deeper social pathologies embedded in climate change by a political program of necessary (and merely formal) but insufficient conditions for justice.⁵⁹

What emerges is a reduction of the notion of capabilities through a nominalist lens that emphasizes individual capabilities rather than the social conditions necessary for them to develop, or to be sustained. Given that capabilities grounds itself largely as a response to, or an extension of, liberal principles of fairness, this nominalism is unsurprising. Yet, on its own grounds, the capabilities approach can, and should be, far more expansive than has been advanced so far in climate justice literature. For example, Scholsberg condemns the increasing “individualist focus” of capabilities approaches but does not spell this out, let alone combat it. Standard criticisms of Nussbaum are raised, and Young’s work is used to indicate more positive duties that could form part of a capabilities approach through cultural recognition. Nevertheless, the capabilities approach is increasingly restricted to a defensive posture restating the minimum social conditions of “functioning and flourishing.” Indeed, Scholsberg more frequently expresses capabilities in a *negative* sense, that is, as looking to address individual and community needs through affected publics and their vulnerabilities.⁶⁰ He claims that climate change undermines

⁵⁵ David Schlosberg, “Climate Justice and Capabilities: A Framework for Adaptation Policy,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 26, no. 4 (2012): 446.

⁵⁶ Schlosberg, “Reconceiving Environmental Justice,” p. 519.

⁵⁷ Amartya Sen, “Why We Should Preserve the Spotted Owl,” *London Review of Books* 26, no. 3 (2004).

⁵⁸ Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 290–91.

⁵⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 34.

⁶⁰ Schlosberg, “Justice, Ecological Integrity, and Climate Change,” p. 174. See also Schlosberg, “Climate Justice and Capabilities,” p. 446.

“people and place” and “threatens a number of basic needs and rights” but does not push further into the examination of what “the lack of recognition of that relationship that causes the status injury faced by vulnerable communities”⁶¹ actually means regarding cultural, social, and economic ways of life implicated in climate change, or how this lack of recognition of the unique needs/identities of individuals and communities is institutionalized at local, regional, and global levels. In these ways, it obscures the wider implications of climate change as a crises of human intersubjectivity. When expressed in terms of protecting vulnerable communities, capabilities approaches quickly become trapped in communitarian justifications for localized based-capabilities alone, when in fact the ethics of capabilities gestures to a commitment of universal reach. The linkage between “freedom and justice” that was present in earlier expressions of “functioning and flourishing” drops off entirely in more recent accounts of capabilities approaches to climate justice.

In this context, Honneth’s recognition framework can serve to broaden the understanding of the social conditions that underlie the capabilities approach, that is, the basic environmental and climatic conditions necessary for human “functioning and flourishing” across time (intergenerational rights), place (spatial equity), and political institutionalization of participation (deliberative democracy). Indeed, as self-respect (or non-humiliation) is central to a “functioning and flourishing” life, and yet is a social achievement that can arise only intersubjectively (that is, through the mutual recognition of subjects in ethical life), without placing recognition at the forefront of its analysis, the capabilities approach pays only lip service to the normative conditions that could make their ethical commitments to the capabilities of individuals and communities actual.

RECOGNITION THEORY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As I have shown in the first half of this paper, for Rawls, ethics was pre-socially defined and as the environment was largely neglected in the construction of his model—and trumped by commitments to an underlying methodological nationalism—it was difficult to situate climate justice as a practical aim. The capabilities approach was suggested as a step forward by emphasizing the basic needs of human beings in which climatic conditions could be seen as necessary conditions for “functioning and flourishing.” Yet, like procedural justice, it was shown to be largely formalistic, concerned with an individualistic and minimalist account of capabilities rather than the social and relational conditions that would make these possible. As I demonstrate in this section, the radical implications of recognition theory provide a way to get to the root normative questions at the core of climate change injustice: disrespect and denigration. This approach foregrounds intersubjectivity as the key to understanding social relations in which social justice is defined in terms of mutual recognition, and looks historically to institutionalized relations of recognition that

⁶¹ Schlosberg, “Climate Justice and Capabilities,” p. 451.

either promote or hinder mutuality. Climate justice and international social struggles toward this end are seen as necessitating what Honneth defines as “the reciprocal limitation of one’s own, egocentric desires for the benefit of the other.”⁶² On this ethical grounding derived from Hegelian principles, the right of all peoples for climatic stability, and, the improvement of international negotiation mechanisms to respect the unique climatic needs of different peoples, require institutionalized practices of self-restriction through which we experience freedom in, and through, all others. This challenges our existing international institutions to contribute to the subjective capacities required by all peoples for their freedom; to provide roles and responsibilities that serve subjects as goals for self-actualisation; and provides sufficient preservation of material conditions for the reproduction of modern society.⁶³ It is particularly in this last category that climatic stability is viewed as a basic material condition for the reproduction, not only of all local communities, but international society taken as a whole.

In contrast to the increasing individualism of capabilities approaches, a regulative social ethic premised on recognition theory broadens the climate justice debate to include the cultural, social, and economic ways of life necessary to sustain a form of ethical life that the capabilities approach presupposes but cannot secure. That is, while placing “functioning and flourishing” as central to climate justice is a considerable advance, without a social theory to ground its normative presuppositions, the capabilities approach can be charged as a purely extraneous ethic, an external notion of value too far removed from society to be applicable within it. This would also explain the tendency in capabilities approaches toward individualism as they attempt to secure standards of value within a concrete particularity and, thus, ensure the determinacy of such an approach. Honneth’s recognition theory, in contrast, while broadly complementary to capabilities approaches, offers important correctives as it grounds ethical concerns in the objective needs of individuals and the experience of social injustice rather than assumed capabilities. While few are yet to engage with Honneth systematically in climate justice literature,⁶⁴ its unique contribution leads directly to the social criticism of climate justice because Honneth claims that moral (external) forms of argumentation do not exhaust the critique of society. Rather, when a society’s desires or interests have “taken a wrong turn,” that is, where a “given set of social relations [have] violated the conditions which constitute a necessary presupposition for the good life” constitutes a form of social

⁶² Honneth, “From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Grounding of Self-Consciousness,” *The I in We*, p. 17; Honneth, “Introduction,” *The I in We*, p. viii.

⁶³ Honneth, “The Realm of Actualised Freedom: Hegel’s Notion of a ‘Philosophy of Right,’” in *The I in We*, p. 30.

⁶⁴ Along with Schlosberg exceptions, include Amy Lauren Lovecraft, “Climate Change and Arctic Cases: A Normative Exploration of Social-Ecological System Analysis,” in Stephen Vanderheiden, ed., *Political Theory and Global Climate Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 91–120; and Mathias Friman and Björn-Ola Linnér, “Technology Obscuring Equity: Historical Responsibility in UNFCCC Negotiations,” *Climate Policy* 8, no. 4 (2008): 339–54.

“pathology” that can be readily understood and struggled against by subjects.⁶⁵ This provides the foundation to question and struggle against the social norms, values, and practices, that have contributed to climate change as a violation of the “necessary” conditions of leading a “good life.” Expressed alternatively, the ethical system of mutual recognition places the global climate as properly basic to the social conditions worthy of humankind—and in the nomenclature of capabilities approaches, as a vital social condition that communities and individuals require to “function and flourish.”

Not only does recognition theory help advance capabilities approaches, it also encapsulates and surpasses the Rawlsian approach to climate justice.⁶⁶ Honneth sees his work as an “elaboration” on Rawls, positing that the elements of Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* that emphasize equality of opportunity, just distribution of goods, and fair possibilities to participate in the democratic political processes are all equally fundamental conditions in his ideal concept of ethical life through mutual recognition.⁶⁷ Honneth admits that Rawls’ notion of “justice as fairness” offers one of the most influential accounts of proceduralism (the idea that normative judgments about cooperation must be located in deliberative contexts under conditions of impartiality i.e., the “veil of ignorance”). Yet as subjects in Rawls’ model are assumed utilitarian-instrumental actors, it cannot explain why human beings would be motivated to abide by principles agreed to in the “original position” because subjects must have some understanding of their intersubjective vulnerabilities to make any shared notion of justice sensical to them. Rawls attempts to offset this problem by asserting that vulnerabilities can be sufficiently addressed at the legislative level. The problem, however, is that capacities of subjects are vulnerable to injustice *before* such acts of legislative deliberation. For example, while Rawls views self-respect as a basic condition for the good life, he does not see that a commitment to protecting individuals from threats to their autonomy entails a commitment to securing the rights necessary to actualize such freedom.⁶⁸ Consequently, vulnerability—including vulnerabilities associated with climate

⁶⁵ Axel Honneth, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society,” in *Disrespect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), chap. 2, p. 56.

⁶⁶ See Nikolas Kompridis, “From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the ‘Ethical Turn’ in Critical Theory,” *Critical Horizons* 5, no. 1 (2004): 323–60.

⁶⁷ Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” in J. Christman and J. Anderson, eds., *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 139–45. See also Axel Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 179–80. See Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, pp. 221–28.

⁶⁸ Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” pp. 132–33. Axel Honneth (interview with Gwynn Markle), “From Struggles for Recognition to a Plural Concept of Justice: An Interview with Axel Honneth,” *Acta Sociologica, Recognition, Redistribution, and Justice* 47, no. 4 (2004): 387, citing Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 131–80.

change—must be accommodated in the notion of justice as a precondition. This is because the basic structures needed to protect a person’s capability to form what Honneth refers to as “worthwhile life-plan” (or their “functioning and flourishing” to refer to Schlosberg once again) necessitates the securing of “primary goods” that Rawls places so much emphasis. The difference being that, for Honneth, these “primary goods” must include both the moral personality of the individual (self-respect, legal personhood, formal equality, moral subjectivity and so on) but also other capacities (material and social conditions) that enable the person to lead a “complete life.” Climate justice becomes an essential part of the primary goods of society, not merely in a limited distributional sense, but in the sense of the conditions necessary for *all* to self-actualize.⁶⁹ The ontological hole exposed earlier in the Rawlsian system is overcome from the outset. It is the recognition of such needs in oneself *and* in one’s other that forms the basis of Honneth’s ideal: mutual recognition.

The fundamental difference, then, between Rawls and Honneth pivots on the equal distributions of rights and duties, *or* the socially binding value orientations as the standard of justice.⁷⁰ Elaborating on Honneth’s view of Michael Sandel that we have observed previously, Honneth argues that Rawls’ atomistic and utilitarian conception of the subject assumes that the “good life” is something defined pre-socially and something based primarily around the rational pursuit of egoistic interests. Questions of human intersubjectivity disappear completely from Rawls’ typology. To the degree that this abstracts human subjects from their “real” social context(s) and inherent intersubjectivity, prevents any meaningful engagement with climate change. Indeed, as we have seen from the models that have attempted to do so, each specific Rawlsian model struggles to make any meaningful connection between Rawls’ ethical principles and climate action, instead stumbling to place climate justice within a suitable Rawlsian framework. They merely assert ideological support for Rawls above the area of concern. In distinction, Honneth’s ontological position holds that human subjects are radically situated within specific notions of social value and intersubjective relations through which the representation of the individuals as an independent, solipsistic, and isolated subject becomes untenable.⁷¹ Rawls’ model inevitably runs into difficulties when it begins to take into account the conditions that are necessary for the full realization of individual self-determination.⁷² This is because in the absence of any supra-contextual criterion

⁶⁹ See Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” pp. 139–45.

⁷⁰ Axel Honneth, “The Limits of Liberalism: On the Political-Ethical Discussion Concerning Communitarianism,” in *The Fragmented World of the Social*, ed. C.W. Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 232.

⁷¹ It should be noted that Rawls seemingly concedes this point by showing that the individual “search for the good” requires “that the social collective protect certain basic rights and a basic standard of living.” See Honneth, “The Limits of Liberalism,” pp. 235, 238, citing John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1985): 223.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 241.

from which to distinguish morally acceptable and morally objectionable concepts of the collective good, Rawls is forced to retreat to contextualist principles of morality anchored in Western, liberal, and democratic principles. But doing so raises a contradiction: a denial of universalism by relying on particularistic forms of (Western) ethical life (inclusive of rational choice, utilitarianism, and social atomization) that are then extolled as ideal. For Honneth, the only way out of this “theoretical cul-de-sac” is to adopt a formal model of ethical life that includes “all those collective notions of the good life” and is “sufficiently reflexive and pluralistic as not to violate the principle of the individual autonomy of each and every subject.”⁷³ Justice is no longer merely about an abstract notion of fairness or of the just distribution of social goods/bads but turns toward the conditions of human freedom itself, that is, in giving convincing justifications “of our ethical judgments concerning the necessary requirements of a good and well-lived human life.”⁷⁴ It is at this point that environmental protections, including but not limited to the global atmosphere, become a crucial part of ethical life as a necessary condition for the realization of the self-autonomy (the “functioning and flourishing”) of all subjects.

On this basis, Honneth offers a clear alternative to those theories of justice that take as their starting point a generally valid procedure to derive a justification of norms—an approach that Rawls’ Kantianism exemplifies.⁷⁵ What Honneth offers is the Hegelian critique of such approaches by reinstating the importance of the “ethical” against purely (formal) “moral” criteria.⁷⁶ For Honneth, social justice is “measured” by its “ability to guarantee for all [its] members equally the conditions of such a communicative experience and thus enable every individual to participate in condition of undistorted interaction.”⁷⁷ Subjects are considered to have an interest in their interaction partners whom they expect social recognition because they are aware that their own autonomy is conditional and dependent on the autonomy of their partners. This forms the crucial aspect of Honneth’s approach to mutual recognition: a subject’s self-understanding develops through the recognition of other subjects as equals (that is, through mutual recognition), and concomitant ethical relations of respect, rights, and esteem, between self and other. This is not just basic or simple recognition of an “other” when we encounter them, something that is typically automatic (or unthinking). The key is *re*-cognition: a quantitatively different and more demanding act of cognition that looks to *mutuality* rather than

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 245–46.

⁷⁴ Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and present of Social Philosophy,” in *Disrespect*, p. 41.

⁷⁵ Axel Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of ‘Critique’ in the Frankfurt School,” in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. James Ingram et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 46–47.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey C. Alexander and Maria Pia Lara, “Honneth’s New Critical Theory of Recognition,” *New Left Review* 1/220 (1996): 2.

⁷⁷ Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel’s Social Theory*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 26–27.

just *identity* in the other.⁷⁸ It is the recognition (and respect) of the differences of the other and their unique needs as equal to one's own, and indeed, as fundamental to one's own autonomy, that leads to a higher conception of ethical life and one which can ground climate justice within the reciprocal, objective needs of all subjects.

It follows that societies—including international society and transnational civil society—are only legitimate to the extent that they guarantee “reliable” relations and processes of mutual recognition on the three levels necessary for positive relations to self.⁷⁹ The emphasis on intersubjectivity in Honneth's recognitional approach means a reconceptualization of justice toward the capacities and conditions necessary for “autonomy-sustaining relations-to-self” and “a normative theory of the recognitional basic structure of a society” that could secure the social conditions for mutual recognition.⁸⁰ That is, Honneth ties social justice to an ethical theory that defines the social “preconditions” that must be available for individual subjects to realize autonomy. In the words of Honneth:

The justice or well-being of a society is proportionate to its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition under which personal identity-formation, can proceed adequately.⁸¹

The difference, then, between Rawls and Honneth is explainable not by reference only to differences in formal ethical perspectives but the respective foundational concept of self-realization that underlies the later's approaches. The imperative is to move from an emphasis on fairness and distribution to the normative conditions in which a social freedom can actualize the individual autonomy of all through social relations of recognition and respect of the unique needs and differences of others. As posited by Honneth and Titus Stahl, we can normatively evaluate the changes in the social order of recognition because relations of recognition are constitutive of the meaning of rights and distributive principles within society.⁸² Indeed, outside of the relations of recognition questions of justice, fairness, ethicality, and distribution would simply make no sense to their participants.

The task, then, is to move from a conception of climate justice based on principles of distribution to one of creating symmetrical relations of recognition.⁸³ This is because “goods” are not self-contained but always rely on and require cooperation of other subjects—that is, autonomy is fashioned from “living relations of reciprocal

⁷⁸ See n. 9.

⁷⁹ These include self-trust (as an “object of concern”), self-respect (as a “responsible agent”), and self-esteem (as a “valued contributor” to society). These intersubjectively achieved relations-to-self are shown to arise through the ideal social conditions of “love, rights and solidarity,” respectively. Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” p. 173.

⁸⁰ Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” pp. 139–45.

⁸¹ Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy,” p. 37.

⁸² Axel Honneth and Titus Stahl. “Wandel der Anerkennung. Überlegungen aus gerechtigkeits-theoretischer Perspektive,” in A. Honneth, O. Lindemann, and S. Voswinkel, eds., *Strukturwandel der Anerkennung* (Frankfurt A. M.: Campus, 2013).

⁸³ Axel Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism,” in *The I in We*, pp. 37–39.

recognition,” the recognition of others as “as beings whose needs, beliefs and abilities are worth being realized,” and *not* the “goods” themselves.⁸⁴ In his debate with Fraser, Honneth demonstrated recognition to be properly basic and foundational to any material redistribution and argued for a synthesis of “material” and “cultural” considerations of justice in a unified framework. For him, without any notion of the conception of the “good life” that underlies them, it is impossible to adequately criticize, or understand, any of the contemporary injustices of distribution.⁸⁵ Society can only ascribe distribution based on the normative worth recognized in others. This is for the simple reason that the moral horizon of a society and its processes and relations of recognition “represent historically contingent forces that influence us behind our backs.”⁸⁶ Consequently, inequity in distribution presupposes disrespect, a pathologized form of misrecognition. Climate change (in)justice with its inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens is then an expression of “the violation of well-founded claims to recognition”⁸⁷ across international society. The connection between the vulnerabilities of climate change—and broader environmental crises—is that recognition theory seeks to reconstruct “the entire spectrum of reciprocal social relationships” as the only way to “truly disclose all the conditions under which subjects achieve autonomy.”⁸⁸ As we recognize our own reliance in climate, so too does this necessitate reciprocal recognition of this need in others, in which climatic stability becomes a “rational” determinant of our own shared freedom. Here, “rational” refers to the Hegelian notion of “Right,” i.e., those elements in social life that embody and constitute freedom.⁸⁹ The assumption in recognition theory is that subjects through our shared vulnerabilities to climate change, but also shared benefits of climate stability, should seek the establishment of just social relations because they are “aware that their autonomy depends on the autonomy of their partners in interaction.”⁹⁰

Recognition refers not just to psychological processes or ethical predispositions but social and material conditions, inclusive of supportive social infrastructure of love, rights, solidarity, but also material and institutional forms of social freedom in personal, private, and public life.⁹¹ Here, climate stability and general environmental conditions are part of the “indispensable” conditions for giving persons

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” p. 114.

⁸⁶ Axel Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism,” in *The I in We*, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” p. 134.

⁸⁸ Axel Honneth, “The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism,” in *The I in We*, p. 49.

⁸⁹ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), sec. 1.

⁹⁰ Axel Honneth, “The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder,” in *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 259.

⁹¹ The basis of social freedom is the concern of *Freedom’s Right*. See Axel Honneth, *Freedom’s Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

the “equal chance” for autonomy—and thus relate directly to Rawls’ concept of “basic goods.”⁹² Expressed otherwise, the environment, inclusive of climatic stability, is an ontological precondition of successful identity formation, through which climate change justice forms a foundational part of a “just social order.” For Honneth, all individuals have an interest in establishing such a society and indeed struggle for such an order, because it is only by establishing “a just social order” that “subjects can attain the most undamaged possible self-relation, and thus individual autonomy.”⁹³

Recognition of the climatic needs of others as equal to one’s own and as fundamental to one’s own autonomy has significant overlaps with Holland’s notion of the environment as a “meta-capability” in which a stable climate is viewed as a component of the environmental capabilities that enables all central human capabilities to *do* or to *be* (i.e., life and bodily health).⁹⁴ Using human capabilities in the way Nussbaum treats material things like shelter, nourishment and property, Holland posits the environmental instrumental value of the climate as a “condition of justice.”⁹⁵ Climate stability provides the ecological context for personal, social, material, and political relations in which the state is responsible for sustaining the ecological conditions for a “decent and dignified life.”⁹⁶ Along similar lines to the previous discussion, for Holland, without accounting for ecological systems, the capabilities approach cannot identify what is actually necessary for achieving justice in society. Moreover, for Holland, there are corresponding international duties to offset one’s carbon usage in direct relation to the level of sustainable ecological capacities of vulnerable states.⁹⁷

Despite significant overlaps with elements of a recognition framework for climate justice, the limitation of Holland’s approach is not just the replication of Nussbaum’s minimalist content, but the neglect of the social relations that would make the “environment as meta-capability” immanent to society. Instead of such an analysis, the approach relies on the promotion of rights and civil liberties to reach this end.⁹⁸ The problem common to such approaches is the interpretation of autonomy as being able to be acquired through rights and moral obligations rather than concept of the social “good.”⁹⁹ That is, following Hegel’s critique of the limits of rights, self-autonomy cannot be guaranteed only negatively but consists in “the ‘objective’

⁹² Honneth, “Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” p. 177. See also Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed., chap. 2, sec. 15.

⁹³ Honneth, “The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder,” p. 259.

⁹⁴ Breena Holland, “Environment as Meta-capability: Why a Dignified Human Life Requires a Stable Climate System,” in A. Thompson and J. Bendik-Keymer, *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change* (Boston: MIT Press, 2012), p. 156.

⁹⁵ Breena Holland, “Justice and the Environment in Nussbaum’s ‘Capabilities Approach’: Why Sustainable Ecology Capacity is a Meta-capability,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): 320.

⁹⁶ Holland, “Environment as Meta-Capability,” pp. 147, 159.

⁹⁷ Holland, “Justice and the Environment in Nussbaum’s ‘Capabilities Approach,’” pp. 324, 329.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 325–26.

⁹⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*, p. 96.

circumstances of an external, social world in which individuals can grasp its features as an expression of their own personality.”¹⁰⁰ Rights seek a protective zone for the freedom of the individual and are indispensable to this end, but on their own are insufficient to achieve the conditions of self-autonomy.¹⁰¹ The point for recognition theory is to move beyond equal environmental rights in order to commonly explore problems in a cooperative international community. The challenge is how to build such forces of solidarity that would make persons across states feel responsible for each other and to make sacrifices related to climate change.¹⁰²

CLIMATE JUSTICE AS A “STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION”?

Having established climate justice as a direct claim for the recognition of the needs of individuals and peoples, the question becomes how can the moral framework of international society, that is so obviously limited in communication and shared cultural norms of recognition, possibly include climate justice as a necessary condition for self-autonomy for all? The key problem in answering this question is whether moral progress can be observed and evaluated through struggles for recognition within global social relations. Unfortunately, few have looked at this question. Here, Honneth is of little assistance as he only refers to normative claims within an institutionalized recognition order, something significantly underdeveloped in world politics.¹⁰³ While he has discussed some aspects of recognition in the context of international relations, he seems circumspect of the possibilities of recognition at the highly aggregated level of states.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, this does not preclude the possibility of locating recognition in world politics, even though such patterns remain weak in institutional form.¹⁰⁵ Specifically, there are at least three ways in which expanding recognition to be inclusive of environmental rights and climate justice can be made in world politics.

First, struggles by groups and individuals for recognition are (potential) sites for the progressive extension and expansion of social practices of recognition. Honneth indicates how principles of recognition, such as self-respect or self-esteem,

¹⁰⁰ Honneth, “From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Grounding of Self-Consciousness,” in *The I in We*, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*, p. 260.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 274, 292.

¹⁰³ One could challenge Honneth’s methodological nationalism as I did in Rawls’ own work above. On world politics and recognition, see Volker Heins, “Realising Honneth: Redistribution, Recognition, and Global Justice,” *Journal of Global Ethics* 4, no. 2 (2005): 144–46, citing Honneth, “Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” pp. 137, 145.

¹⁰⁴ See Axel Honneth, “Recognition between States: On the Moral Substrate of International Relations,” in Thomas Lindemann and Eric Ringmar, eds., *The International Politics of Recognition* (London: Paradigm, 2013), p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ I have made a case for such nascent forms of cosmopolitan recognition elsewhere. See Shannon Brincat, “Cosmopolitanism: The Fourth Dimension of Recognition?” presented at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention, San Francisco, 2–6 April 2013.

can be extended in terms of the actual content of what is to be recognized, and, by expanding the circle of those who are recognized as social members. That is, struggles for recognition can result in a process of individualization (the increase of opportunities to legitimately articulate parts of one's personality, i.e., through the extension of legal rights) and also a process of social inclusion (i.e., by expanding the circle of inclusion in society and the qualities/attributes that are to be esteemed). Climate justice would imply progress across both axes, involving extension of what is considered environmentally necessary for human freedom as a vital human need and in expanding those included as requiring environmental protection and stability as a vital human need.¹⁰⁶ Within this dialectic, there is an open-ended, non-deterministic possibility for moral progress through social struggle whereby individuals/groups can raise neglected needs for moral consideration and struggle for enlarging the evaluative horizon of society *and/or* struggle for expanding the content of individual and collective ways of life to be respected and esteemed.¹⁰⁷ Legitimate claims in struggles over climate justice are those likely to result in a "gain" for individuality and/or social inclusion.¹⁰⁸ Climate justice that promotes participation/deliberation, respect for diverse community needs, securing the environmental conditions for human flourishing, along with rights-based and distributive claims of responsibility, would be aspects of climate justice consistent with struggles for recognition. For example, in the worsening variability of climatic conditions for Arctic peoples that threatens traditional ways of life—from reindeer pastoralism to continued life on traditional lands—we can observe social struggles for climate justice that emphasize recognitive dimensions including claims for rights, respect, and esteem of unique and vulnerable ways of life that include, but surpass, any distributive or rights-based framework.¹⁰⁹

Second, and related to the extension and expansion of spheres of recognition, climate justice involves threats to individual and collective autonomy in the form of disrespect. Honneth states that any social environment that is hostile to what an individual considers meaningful is demoralizing and therefore that social justice committed to protecting the autonomy of individuals must protect against such threats of denigration from wherever they emerge.¹¹⁰ This opens up the possibility for conceptions of environmental rights and climate stability to be included as necessary conditions for individual autonomy because overcoming the denigration of forms of life along cultural, ethnic, and gendered lines has been documented as crucial to successful processes of identity-formation in the work of Piaget, Mead,

¹⁰⁶ Axel Honneth, "Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," pp. 184–85, 187.

¹⁰⁷ Honneth, "Recognition as Ideology," in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. B. van den Brink and D. Owens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 340–41.

¹⁰⁸ Honneth, "Redistribution or Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," pp. 186–87.

¹⁰⁹ For an account of such struggles, see E. A. K. Warner and R. S. Abate, eds., *Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: The Search for Legal Remedies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2013).

¹¹⁰ Anderson and Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," pp. 136–37.

and Honneth. Moral injustices arise whenever human subjects are denied the recognition they “feel they deserve” and which forms the catalyst for struggles for recognition.¹¹¹ Disrespect thus constitutes what Honneth calls the “systematic key” to comprehending patterns of social recognition that generates justified demands on the way “subjects treat each other.”¹¹²

The question here becomes one of determining within the discourses of climate justice whether the existing moral vocabulary confirms these features of Honneth’s recognition theoretic—something *prima facie* evidenced in the language of international debates that are replete with concerns of fairness and respect, intergenerational justice, and the fundamental equality of peoples.¹¹³ In this context, we can also observe institutionalized patterns of disrespect at the level of international negotiations in how states treat each other. A key example is offered in the Copenhagen Accord that manifested disrespect both in its enactment procedure and its active clauses. On procedural terms, the agreement worked against multilateralism, being drafted by only a select group of nations to the exclusion of other member states. Not only were these negotiations non-transparent, most other national delegations had not even seen the document before it was announced. Its active clauses were non-binding with no enforceable undertakings adopted nor binding emissions targets secured. Moreover, it had a coercive component in that developing states that did not sign the accord were then not eligible to access funds for mitigation programs.¹¹⁴ In the wake of Wikileaks that exposed U.S. involvement in spying, threats, and promises of aid in order to shore up support for the Copenhagen Accord, Pablo Solon, Bolivian ambassador to the UN in New York, described this problem as a pathology of disrespect:

What is of concern to us all is that this type of diplomacy is exercised in a multi-state process. One country, because of its economic power, is resorting to blackmail. This is not a negotiating process between countries who respect each other. It’s an imposition.¹¹⁵

What this example makes clear is that global material inequalities may reflect forms of distorted recognition (or *misrecognition*) in which the fundamental equality of peoples are disrespected and obstructed, both in their ability to participate and in

¹¹¹ Axel Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today,” in *Disrespect*, p. 71.

¹¹² Honneth, “Preface,” in *Disrespect*, pp. xii–xiii.

¹¹³ In particular, one could look to Article 3.1, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992) that employs this language openly.

¹¹⁴ This was of concern in the vague language of the Copenhagen Accord of COP 15, 2009, regarding the setting up of the Green Climate Fund and the pledges by developing states of \$30 billion by 2012, and \$100 billion by 2020 for assisting developing states mitigation projects. For most recent updates, see COP 19: UNFCCC, FCCC/CP/2013/10/Add.1 (<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/10a01.pdf#page=14>).

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Goldenberg and John Vidal, “U.S. Envoy Rejects Suggestion that America Bribe Countries to Sign Up to the Copenhagen Accord,” *The Guardian*, 7 December 2010.

the manner in which their uniqueness is recognized. Disrespect and inequality are two sides of the same process that engenders non-cooperation. Timmons Roberts and Bradley Parks have shown that it is the fact that core, industrially advanced, states have the highest per capita levels of greenhouse gas emissions (and a history of the highest use of fossil fuels) and the periphery the lowest emissions but the highest incidences of climate change related catastrophes, that is primarily responsible for the mistrust between nations.¹¹⁶ As the core is seen to “owe” the periphery an ecological debt for environmental damage that continues to go unrecognized by the former, constitutes a clear example of fundamentally distorted processes of recognition, one that is responsible for the major fault line in climate change debates at the international level.

In the place of such institutionalized forms of misrecognition, Honneth argues for an “internal” conception that would displace this hierarchical imposition toward a genuine form of plurality where each member—and their unique desire for “self-esteem”—are taken as the suitable normative basis for society and relations in community.¹¹⁷ While the Copenhagen Accord represents the failures of international climate negotiations, there are some positive examples now linking stable processes of recognition and workable international policy outcomes. For example, Markandya has argued that what is critical to the success of any climate action are the issues of trust and fairness in sharing the burdens of costs that places relations of trust (recognition) as essential to policy success.¹¹⁸ In the same vein, the “Greenhouse Development Rights” framework of Paul Baer et al. is one based on notions of recognition and respect that are subsequently directed to distribution issues. Here, the link has been made between an acknowledgement of the rights owed to all peoples and equitable burden-sharing based on the grounds of responsibility, capacity, and recognition.¹¹⁹

As we have seen, relations of recognition in the spheres of love, law, and solidarity are preconditions of the pursuit of the good life for, and with, all others in just institutions, and hence, this intersubjective structure of freedom leads to the necessity of mediating institutions that “inform subjects in advance about the interdependency of their aims.”¹²⁰ Recognition here pushes for institutional reform at the international level, for if climate justice is to be secured, it “must entail granting all members of society the opportunity to participate in institutions of recognition.”¹²¹ Only through the equal participation of vulnerable communities

¹¹⁶ See Timmons J. Roberts and Bradley C. Parks, *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), p. 229.

¹¹⁷ Honneth, “Post-traditional Communities: A Conceptual Proposal,” in *Disrespect*, p. 261.

¹¹⁸ Anil Markandya, “Can Climate Change be Reversed under Capitalism?” *Development and Change* 40, no. 6 (2009): 1139–52.

¹¹⁹ Paul Baer, Tom Athanasiou, Sivan Kartha, and Eric Kepm-Benedict, “The Greenhouse Development Rights Framework: Drawing Attention to Inequality within Nations in the Global Climate Policy Debate,” *Development and Change* 40, no. 6 (2009): 1121–38.

¹²⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*, p. 65.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

can the potential harmful impacts of climate change hope to be avoided through discursive negotiations that embody the recognition of the unique needs for self-autonomy of such peoples. The institutional limitations of the international public sphere are not only the relative weakness of existing structures for deliberation, and their capture by powerful interests and dominant states, but how they embody fracturing and exclusionary mechanisms, legally or informally, that isolate certain peoples, exclude specific needs, and hinder participation. So the failure of existing climate change negotiations is not only found in their inability to deal effectively with the crisis, but also by the rejection of the legitimacy of such forums for many of those communities threatened by climate change. For recognition theory, these shortcoming can only be overcome through democratic negotiations with the participation of all.¹²² Despite the lack and underdevelopment of discursive mechanisms and spaces for negotiation at the international level, the fact that we are far from an ideal international public sphere that embodies the “democratically negotiated will of the people in an intelligent and pragmatic manner,”¹²³ there are nevertheless hopeful signs. For Honneth, the “formation of largely de-hierarchical publics on a global scale” are helping to overcome the stratification of the international public sphere and here we have any number of nongovernmental organizations promoting climate justice that are “trailblazers” in the “transnational communicative communities.”¹²⁴

The third and perhaps most fundamental linkage between recognition and climate justice is the emphasis on climatic stability as a vital human need. That is, as recognition is concerned with the conditions of individual freedom, climatic stability is cast as something properly basic in the social conditions necessary for self-actualization. Here, struggles for a stable climatic environment as a principle of freedom could fall under the sphere of both “rights” and “solidarity,” that is, as a form of right owed equally to all *and/or* as a necessary precondition for the effective articulation of one’s capacities/abilities in international society. As Honneth has argued, rather than a single, elementary form of recognition amenable to all, individual autonomy can only be guaranteed through a “multiplicity of forms of recognition, whose particularities vary according to the respective layer of personality to be affirmed.”¹²⁵ This shows that Honneth’s approach does not serve as a restriction to the desideratum of normative openness, transformability, and contestation in climate justice debates. Rather, it raises the possibility of elaborating the normative content of the features that are “desirable” or that may be “legitimately expected” in intersubjective relations that can, and will, vary across time and place.¹²⁶ Here, a broad interpretation of what Honneth refers to as the importance of the “social

¹²² Ibid., p. 187.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 304–05.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 300.

¹²⁵ Honneth, “Rejoinder,” in *Recognition and Power*, p. 351.

¹²⁶ Honneth, “Between Aristotle and Kant: Recognition and Moral Obligation,” in *Disrespect*, p.

environment” becomes evident as to include a vast array of conditions for autonomously leading one’s own life, dependent as they are on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition inclusive of legally institutionalized relations of equality and respect, networks of solidarity with members of community and, arguably, environmental and climate stability as a precondition.¹²⁷

In this context, recognition offers a unique means to engage with climate change as a specific form of harm, raising specific duties to vulnerable communities and intergenerational obligations. For Honneth, harm revolves around those social injustices that depreciate “the social value of forms of self-realization.”¹²⁸ Accordingly, some writers in environmental ethics have linked climate change to cosmopolitan harm conventions as a practical extension of the negative duties to not cause distress, suffering, and damage as owed *equally* to both insiders and outsiders.¹²⁹ Such cosmopolitan forms of recognition are integral to the functioning and legitimacy of international society despite the fact that recognition theory (as it is currently formulated) is unduly bounded by the state and domestic considerations. Such an argument could then resonate with the landmark declaration in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that anthropogenic climate change was a “common concern of mankind,” effectively linking cosmopolitan justice with climate change. Whereas the Rawlsian framework, as I have shown, restricted obligations owed to burdened societies and made binding obligations only to future generations within the national community, from the standpoint of recognition we need not know the identities or preferences of those in different spatial locales or the future to justify the need to protect the conditions basic to human “functioning and flourishing” or self-actualization. At this point, we come full circle to the concerns of capabilities approaches that view equality as actively fostering basic capabilities and therefore seek the preservation of the environment for future generations in order to retain the “substantive freedom to be healthy, well fed, and well clothed.”¹³⁰ The link between the necessary material and ethical conditions of freedom bridge the Honnethian understanding of justice with capabilities literature. In so doing, climate justice debates shift from formal principles of fairness, distribution, and rights to those engaged with the global conditions necessary for human “functioning and flourishing,” or what Honneth would call “justice as freedom.”

¹²⁷ Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” pp. 131–32; Honneth, “Justice as Institutionalised Freedom,” p. 196.

¹²⁸ Axel Honneth, “Recognition or Redistribution? Changing Perspectives on the Moral Order of Society,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 18, nos. 2–3 (2001): 49.

¹²⁹ The limitation with Elliott’s account is that it also tends to focus on distributional concerns, i.e., a focus on disproportionate consumption of resources, impact (i.e., displacements), and exclusion from structures of environmental governance. See Lorraine Elliott, “Cosmopolitan environmental harm conventions,” *Global Society* 20, no. 3 (2006): 345–63, esp. pp. 348–49.

¹³⁰ Page, *Climate Change, Justice and Future Generations*, p. 70.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have advanced two arguments. The first was to expose the limitations inherent to Rawlsian approaches to climate justice. Here, as the moral agents in Rawls' world were rational egoists, charged only with securing the just institutions for their future generations, with no discernible duty to the global commons, and only a minimally construed obligation of assistance to fellow decent peoples, the Rawlsian framework was considered an ill-advised starting point for global climate justice. In the second argument, I advanced a form of climate justice based on recognition theory. Here I have shown how climatic stability can be considered a precondition for successful identity formation and self-actualization and that a recognition framework for climate justice can help extend justice to include the climatic conditions necessary for human freedom, for extending those seen as requiring or deserving such rights, and thus, overcome key forms of disrespect and harms associated with climate change.

More broadly, looking to recognition theory offers a way re-engage both with social theory and political activism in climate justice, rather than a retreat from its complexities by reducing everything to matters of distribution. Indeed, the expansion of moral responsibility that Honneth suggests is taking place, would also mean that responsibility cannot be apportioned to geographical proximity for persons suffering from life-threatening situations such as global climate change. Through struggles over climate justice we may, in fact, be witnessing the slow but inexorable struggle of the "moralising international relations."¹³¹ Climate justice may, in the end, provide the rational impulse necessary for an emancipatory politics because it is an issue of such urgency—of such rational force—that it may yet "convince subjects to create a social practice of cooperation."¹³²

¹³¹ Honneth, "Is Universalism a Moral Trap? The Presuppositions and Limits of a Politics of Human Rights," in *Disrespect*, pp. 210–12.

¹³² Honneth, "A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory," pp. 41–42, 29.