

CAN AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS HELP IN WEATHERING GARDINER'S STORM?

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Jessica VAN JAARSVELD

Department of Philosophy

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Email: 201037522@student.uj.ac.za

ORCID No: 0000-0001-9176-429X.

Abstract

African environmental ethics (AEE) encompasses specific features that make it well-equipped to tackle many of the ethical issues posed by climate change. In particular, the African prescription to foster harmonious relations between oneself and other humans, non-human animals and nature as a whole, and the African notion of land ownership enable AEE to offer the moral and theoretical resources needed to deal with the climate change problem. I use Stephen Gardiner's analysis - which likens climate change to a perfect moral storm - to show that traditional AEE can handle climate change's most challenging aspects. Since, as Gardiner proposes, we lack an ethical theory capable of responding to the challenges posed by this perfect moral storm, it is significant to show the benefits that the African ethical approach offers in this regard. Such a systematic analysis, that uses Gardiner's storm as a basis, has not been undertaken before.

Keywords: GARDINER, Perfect moral storm, African environmental ethics, Indigenous ethics, Climate change.

Introduction

In his highly influential book, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, Stephen Gardiner (2011) describes why it has been, so spectacularly difficult to adequately respond to climate change. Gardiner (2011, 7) argues that climate change poses "a perfect moral storm", involving "the unusual intersection of a number of serious, and mutually reinforcing, problems". Though climate change poses a global dilemma, ethical

responses within African ethics have not historically received significant attention in the wider climate change literature. Sirkku Hellsten, Frederick Ochieng-Odhiambo and Martin Schönfeld (2013, Section 5, para. 1) state that “until now, the African approach has received little attention in the context of climate ethics”. That said, there has been positive development in this regard in the form of an – albeit limited – increase in work on the topic. Aïda Terblanché-Greeff (2019), for instance, argues that the African ethic of Ubuntu could be used to promote a strategy of degrowth that would fare better at responding to climate change than Western sustainable development strategies. Hellsten, Ochieng-Odhiambo and Schönfeld (2013) also propose that Western models of growth are problematic, leading to the climate crisis we are facing and that the African values of communalism and reliance on sage wisdom (sagacity) may offer a better way forward. Workineh Kelbessa (2005) explores the climate policies of certain African states to see if they encompass ethical considerations, finding that few do, and suggests that African Environmental ethics has much to offer when addressing the moral aspects of climate change.

This paper aims to further develop these suggestions by spotlighting the strengths of African environmental ethics (AEE) as a guiding ethical framework with regard to climate change. It does so by asking in particular whether African environmental ethics offers a moral framework capable of weathering, so to speak, Gardiner’s perfect moral storm. I answer positively, claiming that AEE, as expounded in prominent AEE literature, provides a promising way to deal with many of the major elements of the problem of climate change, as outlined by Gardiner’s moral storm analysis. I support my claim by drawing on the work of authors within the AEE literature to describe the African prescription to foster harmonious relations between oneself and other humans, non-human animals and nature as a whole (as conceptualised by the African notions of Ukama and Ubuntu) and the African notion of land ownership. I then go through each of Gardiner’s storms that he suggests converge to form the perfect moral storm of climate change (the global, intergenerational, ecological and theoretical storms) and show that AEE has particular features that make it able to deal with each. In so doing, I believe I offer a unique systematic consideration of how AEE fares in the face of the challenges posed by climate change.

This should be a helpful addition since - as Gardiner (2011 & 2016) notes - one of the largest issues is our current theoretical inadequacy, making it an urgent and crucial task to find theoretical resources in light of the looming and large-scale environmental threats. Consequently, this paper helps promote the adoption of a moral framework rooted in AEE to tackle climate change, within Africa and globally. This is also useful since Africa still needs to make strides towards climate change mitigation and adaptation and “an ethic for environmental sustenance that will appeal to the conscience of Africans must develop from within the indigenous culture of the people” (OWOLABI 1996, 11).

To support my aim, the paper unfolds as follows: I discuss AEE in more detail in the following section. I then introduce Gardiner’s storm analysis, giving a brief outline of its core features. Afterwards, I demonstrate how AEE can respond to the characteristics of the perfect storm by going through Gardiner’s storms in more detail. I then conclude in the final section.

African Environmental Ethics

Before expounding the central notions of AEE, it must first be noted that I do not suggest that one can speak of “Africa” or an “African ethic” as if there is one homogenous set of values across the continent. As in van Jaarsveld (2020), when speaking here of an “African environmental ethic” I am referring to those concepts that are found within many, if not all, (sub-Saharan) African ethical systems. This does not detract from or deny the diversity of values within Africa, but it is plausible to look at those features commonly held within African worldviews. As Godfrey Tangwa (1996, 186) notes, it is “no secret” that Africans share a common worldview and outlook on life, underpinned by similar philosophies. Even so, it would be overly simplistic for me to assert that I am providing an exhaustive account of African environmental ethics and all its philosophical foundations within the African context. Nonetheless, by incorporating the contributions of numerous prominent authors in the field of AEE (and African ethics in a broader sense), I can, at the very least, demonstrate that the concepts explored by many of these authors, who engage with an African perspective on the environment, offer a valuable approach to addressing the challenges of climate change as outlined in

Gardiner's analysis. This is similar to the method I employ in van Jaarsveld (2020).

As also suggested in van Jaarsveld (2020), the primary claim of AEE is that our fundamental relatedness with the world around us implies an ethical responsibility to cultivate harmonious interactions between ourselves and our natural surroundings. AEE posits that we are inherently part of a community comprising both human and non-human entities, and it emphasises the importance of respecting the relationships that define this interconnected community. This claim finds its roots in the African notions of what it means to exhibit human excellence, which properly encompass the ideals of Ukama and Ubuntu.

To begin unpacking the above, let us start by looking at Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a concept encompassing the idea that individual flourishing necessarily involves living in relation to the community, suggesting that our humanity is derived from our interconnectedness with others, and the term can be found in the African languages of Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana (MUROVE 2009a). From the African perspective, human well-being is only possible through communal relationships, “in an ongoing process of mutual enrichment” (PROZESKY 2009, 10). As can be seen, Ubuntu embodies the belief that individual well-being is intricately linked to communal living, asserting that our humanity is fundamentally shaped by our connections with others. This African communal ethos signifies that true human flourishing is only achievable through ongoing interactions within a community.

Ubuntu consequently implies that an ethical African person is one characterised by a commitment to interrelationships, recognising the interconnectedness of all entities in the shared tapestry of existence. Ubuntu is founded on a worldview of relationality and centers its primary perspective on the notion that achieving ultimate well-being as human beings relies on our interdependence with others (MUROVE, 2014). The concept of Ubuntu is often summarised in the maxim; “A person is a person through other persons”, referring to how the enactment of oneself as fully human should be strived for through interacting with others (which is said to include humans, non-humans, and nature) (TERBLANCHÉ-GREEFF 2019, 97).

Further using relationality as its starting point is the correlated concept of Ukama, which captures how relatedness is a foundational

feature of the cosmos. In explaining how fundamental the concept of relationality is within African cosmology, Mark Ikeke (2015) notes that it maintains that no life or entity exists in isolation; everything is inherently connected and subsists in relation to other beings and realities. In other words, the concept of relationality and the importance of communal relationships is not reservedly applied between humans, but it holds between humans and the universe. Kinship extends beyond fellow humans for Africans as they perceive a sense of connection not only with one another but also “with the earth and the entire cosmos” (IKEKE 2015, 184).

In unison, the concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu form a comprehensive understanding of the deep-rooted and holistic relationship that traditional African ethics maintains with nature. Consequently, African ethics, and African environmental ethics as a result, are founded on the idea that there is a crucial interrelatedness between people, as well as between people and the natural environment. This entails that we respect and take responsibility for all of these members.

Kevin Behrens (2010) looks at the work of authors on African ethics to show that:

African communitarianism can embrace all life, and thus provides a promising African environmentalism, based on respect for nature, individual objects in nature, and the nurturing of harmonious relationships and solidarity with other living things. (BEHRENS 2010, 478)

A useful term to summarise the traditional African relationship with nature is “eco-bio-communitarian”, and this term is offered by Tangwa (1996 & 2004). He explains that the term “eco-bio-communitarian” captures the traditional African belief that humans, plants, animals and the earth as a whole exist in inextricable interdependence. Chinedu Ifeakor (2017) delivers another term to capture the African attitude to the environment: “obligatory anthropoholism”. This term, Ifeakor suggests, encompasses the way that humans are obliged to care for and preserve the holistic ecosystem of which they are a part.

The intertwined concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu can be seen to convey a profound philosophy that defines human existence as

meaningful only within the intricate web of connections with all elements of existence. This perspective forms the bedrock of AEE, emphasising the critical interrelatedness among individuals and the inseparable bond between humans and the natural environment. Rooted in a traditional ethos of balanced ecosystems, African communitarianism presents a promising environmentalism that respects nature, fosters harmonious relationships, and acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life forms. Terms like "eco-bio-communitarian" (TANGWA 1996; 2004) and "obligatory anthropoholism" (IFEAKOR 2017) as discussed above encapsulate these intricate relationships, offering a lens through which to understand the holistic and responsible African approach to nature.

It is also of relevance to note that the belief in the existence of ancestral spirits plays a role in fostering practices that take the well-being of the environment into account. It is believed that ancestral spirits punish behaviour that does not uphold the ecological balance between humans and nature, resulting in taboos being placed on unsustainable practices. Ancestral spirits "are said to be the custodians of nature" (CHEMHURU and MASAKA 2010, 126), and, as a result, the Shona people of Zimbabwe, for example, have a taboo that prohibits abusing water sources for fear of ancestral punishment. However, Behrens (2012) notes that it is not necessary for one to believe in the existence of ancestors in the metaphysical sense in order to abide by the environmentally friendly attitude that the belief encourages.

The African ethic of Ubuntu also promotes a principle of sufficiency. Munyaradzi Murove (2014) explains that according to Ubuntu, one should regard the needs of others in equal measure to one's own needs, implying that one should not aim to possess more than what is sufficient. This point is also made by Terblanché-Greeff (2019, 104) who explains that by advocating notions like respect, collaboration and solidarity, Ubuntu is able to ground a principle of sufficiency, since "the commodification and misuse of non-humans and natural resources will be counterproductive in the attainment of Ubuntu".

By promoting the pursuit of sufficiency, rather than the excessive accumulation of wealth, the ethics of Ubuntu and AEE generally is able to reign in destructive human habits in place of more sustainable uses of the environment for the sake of both people and

non-human nature. Individuals are encouraged to consider the needs of others alongside their own and coupled with Ubuntu's promotion of advancing communal flourishing, AEE offers a valuable ethical framework for fostering sustainable practices and addressing the pressing challenges of environmental exploitation. AEE moves us away from the pursuit of growth without restraint, and so African ethics and its corresponding notion of personhood "should be given more credence in our struggle to contain the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change" (HELLSTEN n.d.n 2013, section 5, para. 17).

I leave my exposition of AEE here for now - though many of its key features will become clearer in what follows - and turn to discuss Gardiner's four storms.

Gardiner's Perfect Moral Storm

How is that that we are hurtling towards environmental catastrophe, where not only our own survival is at stake but that of many of earth's species, and yet we fail, time and time again, to take effective action? This is the question Gardiner (2011) asks in his highly influential book *A Perfect Moral Storm*. Patrick Curry (2012, 233) suggests that "Gardiner's sober, thorough and clear analysis should be included in any serious discussion of climate change". I use Gardiner's analysis of the climate change problem because it is a well-regarded and thorough outline of the ethical challenges of climate change and is thus well-suited to showcasing the strengths of AEE. Gardiner "provides a rich analysis of the ethical challenges that we must tackle in the face of climate change" (MOSS 2011, 1383). I do not, however, claim that Gardiner's is the best or only ethical outline of the climate change problem but since the ultimate purpose of the paper is to spotlight the strengths of AEE as an ethical framework, I find it sufficient to note that Gardiner outlines the climate change problem adequately for the present purposes.

Gardiner (2017, 436) bases the phrase "perfect moral storm" on Sebastian Junger's story of a shipping vessel that faced what Junger called a "perfect storm", that being a "convergence of several independently powerful storms". Gardiner uses the phrase to indicate that climate change presents an analogous situation in which there is a convergence of challenges that are individually difficult to overcome and *incredibly* challenging when compounded. "With climate change,

the converging factors are that the problem is genuinely global, appears strongly intergenerational, crosses species boundaries, and occurs in a setting where our theories and institutions are weak” (GARDINER 2017, 436). As such, in Gardiner’s perfect moral storm, there are four storms, labelled the (1) global, (2) intergenerational, (3) ecological and (4) theoretical storms. I go through the four storms in turn next.

The Global Storm

The first of Gardiner’s storms, the global storm, is made manifest by certain characteristics of climate change, including (a) the way the causes and effects of climate change are geographically dispersed, (b) the fact that climate change is not caused by any single agent and (c) the actors that have collectively contributed to climate change are not unified by any single structure of agency (as there is no global government) (GARDINER 2011). The problem of the global storm is exacerbated, Gardiner continues, by the fact that those predominantly responsible for climate change are the richer nations while the poorer nations are the ones most vulnerable to its effects. Responding to the poor nations’ vulnerability in this matter may encourage a response to other vulnerabilities of the global system, which the richer nations are reluctant to do (GARDINER 2011).

When viewed from the position of AEE, many problematic aspects of climate change that combine to form the global storm seem manageable. Recall that in AEE, humans, the environment and all its constituents are seen to be members of the fabric of life and, in this view, it is our duty to maintain harmonious relations within this cosmic community. As such, human-imposed boundaries such as state borders should not limit our responsibilities. When seen as a cosmic whole, we have an obligation to the environment in its entirety, regardless of where the damage is/was being done and who is/was doing it. This is not to say that African ethics does not include ways to mete out punishment to moral offenders, as it certainly does. For instance, the Borana Oromo of Ethiopia has a law which states that a person be fined thirty head of cattle if found to have intentionally or accidentally beaten a horse to death (KELBESSA 2014). How AEE would perhaps punish excessive past emitters would make for an interesting investigation elsewhere. My current claim, though, is only that when confronted with an ecological crisis, AEE seems to hold

that it is each and every person's responsibility to try reinstating a harmonious balance, regardless of what brought the disharmony about in the first place.

From the perspective of AEE then, the problems of dispersion of cause and effect and fragmentation of agency are not morally relevant to our obligation to preserve and respect the harmonious balance between ourselves and the rest of nature. As Bénézet Bujo (2009, 296) points out, "conservation needs no other argument than the unity of the whole". Kelbessa (2015, 63) too notes that the "ethical message [of Ubuntu] is not restricted to one's own ethnic group, regional community or nation, but can cover all of humanity and the more-than human world". As such, the global – and inter-species – dimension(s) of climate change are not insurmountable for AEE but are rather accommodated by its universal moral stance.

Furthermore, the problem of skewed vulnerabilities (where the poorer nations are more vulnerable to the effects of global warming) finds a strong answer in African ethics. The concept of Ubuntu maintains that our very humanness is dependent on our relations with others and that a person's flourishing and the flourishing of their community are interdependent. It would, therefore, be unacceptable from an African ethical point of view to pay no heed to the harm that changes in the climate cause to the most vulnerable among us. African ethics holds that "mutual care for one another as human beings precedes concern for the accumulation and safeguarding of wealth" (RAMOSE 2009, 312). As noted previously, the principle of sufficiency fostered by AEE also plays a significant role in this regard by encouraging us to meet our needs in a way that is not excessive but is considerate of the needs of others.

African ethics involves an all-encompassing perspective, in which concepts like hospitality, daily friendship, and engaging in dialogue with those in other ethnic groups are laws from which no one is exempt, "thus one is ultimately related to all human beings" (BUJO 2011, 5-6). An African ethical standpoint would force us to consider the effects of our emissions and the harm they may cause to those unable to adapt to the effects of climate change. It is an important principle in African ethics to "Do No Harm", so "it would be unethical to promote one's interest at the expense of others" (KELBESSA 2015, 68). According to such a moral standpoint, we would unavoidably

have to acknowledge the harms of climate change and step up to the task of addressing it.

The Intergenerational Storm

The second of Gardiner's contributing storms is the intergenerational storm, which develops because of the asymmetry in power between successive generations. Gardiner (2011, 32) suggests that because climate change is a "severely lagged phenomenon", meaning that its causes and effects are dispersed temporally, each generation faces a strong temptation to "pass-the-buck" on to successive generations. According to Gardiner, this is so because each generation faces all or most of the costs of reducing their emissions while experiencing little to none of the benefits of doing so. That there is a moral problem with intergenerational buck-passing is intuitively clear. By continuing to emit unabated, each generation passes on severe physical costs to future generations in exchange for typically luxurious and/or trivial benefits (GARDINER 2011). This violates the negative moral duties to not harm others, so the intergenerational storm poses an ethical problem.

According to AEE, it is clear that a person should protect the environment from damage and limit their consumption accordingly to benefit future generations. An important feature of AEE that has not yet been discussed is that it claims human beings have duties to the dead and to the yet-to-be-born, illustrated by the Kenyan proverb; "[T]he world was not given to you by your parents- [it] was lent to you by our children" (IFEAKOR 2017, 78). Land is viewed as a heritage passed down from one generation to another. Relatedly, and in line with the communal ethos underpinning African ethics, land should not be considered owned by individuals because the community collectively holds and preserves the land for the benefit of current and future generations. As Kolawole Owolabi (1996, 13) notes, "it is common knowledge that land in traditional African society does not belong to an individual but to the community". The concept of communal land ownership thus emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals with their community, ancestors and future generations.

Land is accordingly considered a resource that is received on loan, not owned, and should consequently be looked after properly and for the sake of future (as well as current) generations. This belief,

that land belongs to all, which is to say here that it belongs to the community of the living, dead and yet-to-be-born, “cuts across all ethnic groups in Africa” (OMARI 1990, 174). In the same place Omari further points out the need to responsibly manage the land for the collective good, stating that careful stewardship is essential to ensure everyone is able to gain from its wealth. Similarly, Owolabi (1996) notes how the communal ownership of land necessitate that it be treated with care, asserting that the obligation to preserve and protect the land's fertility arises from its shared status. This view of land thus entails that neither the land nor its resources belong to any individual, compelling every user to fulfil their duty to the community by maintaining the land appropriately.

Behrens (2012) also discusses how our obligation to future generations is rooted in obligations to our predecessors. Behrens states that the current generation must show gratitude to its ancestors because their ancestors passed on an environment capable of sustaining them (the current generation). This in turn requires the current generation to do as their ancestors did and pass on a similarly functioning environment. Murove (2009b, 27) similarly notes that from an African perspective, “an ethical act worthy of approval is, thus, one that preserves and incorporates the past into the present with the aim of providing the same memory for future generations.” While it may seem questionable to say that gratitude to one entity (the ancestors) can ground an obligation to another entity (successive generations), Behrens (2012) notes there is a strong moral intuition that when we are the recipients of kindness, goodwill or generosity (or other such things), we have a responsibility to pay-it-forward. By grounding respect to nature, in part, on gratitude to the ancestors, there is a strong motivation towards responsible stewardship of nature.

Terblanché-Greeff (2019, 99) makes this point, noting that “gratitude towards the past generation motivates the continuous guardianship of nature, and by treating nature with respect and dignity, the current generation can ensure that future generations inherit a natural environment that will satisfy their basic needs”. As seen, there are clearly promising foundations within AEE that can assist with grounding an obligation to tend to and care for the land and its resources for the sake of future generations. Kelbessa (2015) also briefly discusses how AEE is well suited to dealing with the

intergenerational aspects of the climate change challenge. In his words:

African worldviews include intergenerational ethics that teaches that natural resources ought not to be exploited beyond limit, and that the land ought to be taken care of for the benefit of present and future human generations, as well as for the good of non-human species. (KELBESSA 2015, 59)

AEE consequently has much to offer when facing off against Gardiner's intergenerational storm.

The Ecological Storm

Gardiner's third, ecological storm results from the fact that there is a dispersion of climate change's causes and effects across species. Human-induced environmental changes have significant implications for the rest of non-human nature. Gardiner (2016, 32) claims that "this encourages a distinct form of ecological buck-passing". The costs of human emissions are not only borne by the most vulnerable humans but also by animals, plants and whole ecosystems and biomes. Human use of fossil fuels benefits humans while harming massive proportions of the rest of the environmental community. Gardiner (2016) explains that this is an unsatisfactory consequence for both (a) anthropocentric views (that only consider human interests) and (b) non-anthropocentric views (that extend moral consideration to non-human entities). For the former, environmental destruction threatens human survival via the ecosystem resources and services on which human life and human flourishing depend. For the latter, non-human nature is seen to hold intrinsic value, so harming it is morally wrong. According to all positions then, human-induced environmental destruction is wrong. Gardiner shows that the ecological buck-passing that characterises the ecological storm poses a moral challenge. The impacts felt by non-human nature should not be ignored by satisfactory responses to the climate change problem.

It is consequently significant that the idea of the web of life and cosmic community underpinning AEE brings the concerns of non-human nature directly into its moral considerations. Kelbessa (2015, 61) notes that AEE "recognises the proper place of non-human animals in the world" and our relatedness with them and the

environment as a whole, citing an example from the Borana Oromo of Ethiopia in which water is left behind at wells for wild animals to drink based on the belief that non-human animals, like humans, have a right to exist. Lesley Le Grange (2012, 334) also points out with reference to the African outlook that “the realisation of one’s true self cannot be achieved if other human beings and nature are exploited or harmed”.

From an African perspective, humans should not “subdue, dominate, and exploit the rest of creation” (TANGWA 2004, 390). Hellsten, Ochieng-Odhiambo and Schönfeld (2013, section 1, para. 6) explain that the Western growth-based model of development is unsustainable, and we should adopt new conceptions of development, saying that we need “to shift our understanding of humans from masters of nature to members of nature”. They suggest that adopting an African communitarian outlook would offer an effective alternative that would aid in responding to climate change. Referring to the kind of paradigm shift required, they say that:

One path would be to look more deeply into the original communal view of existence that comes out of Africa and its wisdom, which connects individuals, communities, tribes, and nature into one overarching functional entity that all are obliged to care for. (HELLSTEN n.d.n 2013, section 7, para. 2)

We can see that adopting an African ethical framework would allow us to shift away from exploitative and damaging models of development towards sustainable ones that ensure the well-being of not only humans but of non-human nature as well. Behrens (2010, 476) also notes that the African “concept of promoting harmonious relationships and caring for the welfare of others extends beyond the family and even the human community, to embrace other natural beings, too”.

In line with the principle of sufficiency that AEE motivates and as opposed to exploitatively wasting the earth’s resources, “traditional Africans harvested and hunted with prudence and temperance. For instance, in traditional practices, you were not to catch a mother bird or animal with the infant” (IKEKE 2015, 185). This is in keeping with the African principle of “Live-and-Let-Live”

which recognises and promotes the rights of all entities in the world to exist and obliges us to contribute to their well-being (EKWEALO 2017, 53). The non-human world is not left out of African moral consideration, thereby allowing AEE to take into account the impact that climate change will have on non-human species and elements of nature, which is brought to the fore in Gardiner's ecological storm.

The Theoretical Storm

The theoretical storm results from “our current theoretical ineptitude” (GARDINER, 2010, 94), referring to the way in which even our best theories are unable to deal properly with the multiple compounded challenges arising from climate change. In the presence of the other storms, Gardiner (2011) explains that it would thus be of great help to have adequately robust theories to guide us towards effective climate action. Gardiner (2011) explains that moral and political philosophy develops in three stages, what he calls initial diagnosis, deep analysis and redemptive measures. Theories left at the first stage do little more than state “there is a moral problem here”, and that is surely inadequate if our true goal is to *overcome* the moral problem. We need to instead demand that our theories tell us “what exactly has gone wrong and what it would take to get it right” (GARDINER 2011, 244). The second and third stages are therefore crucial since satisfactory moral and political theories must offer a deeper understanding of the nature and cause of the moral problem (deep analysis) and provide guidance as to how to overcome the challenges (redemptive measures). It is worrying then that, according to Gardiner, our current dominant moral and political theories are closer to the stage of offering initial diagnosis than deep analysis and redemptive measures when it comes to the challenge of climate change.

Gardiner (2016, 38) notes that this applies to the major theories in moral and political philosophy, “such as utilitarianism, Rawlsian liberalism, human rights theory, libertarianism, virtue ethics, and so on”. Such criticism is also applied particularly seriously to the historically dominant approach in public policy, standard economic cost-benefit analysis. A cost-benefit analysis only accounts for a narrowly conceived set of concerns, considering the costs and benefits of a particular situation in terms of “willingness to pay”, and that such an analysis therefore “skews the overall evaluation toward short-term consumption and individualistic values, rather than wider concerns,

such as those bound up with communal, aesthetic, spiritual, environmental and non-human values” (GARDINER 2016, 78).

I argue that AEE can provide an analysis beyond initial diagnosis and that it can offer ways of scrutinising the problem and guidelines for a path forward. AEE can offer deep analysis because it can assess aspects of the climate change problem that other theories, such as economic cost-benefit analyses, cannot. For one, AEE grounds considerations for non-human nature, and it does so in a way that goes beyond instrumentality alone. For another, our current theories are inadequate because they cannot deal with long-term time frames. AEE, conversely, is far less time-bound, as it claims that our moral obligations start in the past and continue into the future. It can also morally ground our obligations to future generations, where issues of intergenerational justice continue to be inadequately dealt with by other prominent theories.

In addition to its other benefits, as discussed above, AEE can be successfully prescriptive. There is empirical evidence that societies governed by social practices with AEE as a foundation are sustainable in their use of the environment and harmonious with the rest of non-human nature (see ANGASSA, OBA & STENSETH, 2012). Their methods of communal land ownership, communal governance of resources like rivers and forests, and fostering a deep respect for the interconnected web of life have provided a way for humans and the rest of nature to coexist in a balanced way. Thus, it seems possible for our institutions and societies to use this as an example and develop policies accordingly. While doing so may not be easy, and many challenges will likely arise along the way, AEE nonetheless offers a concrete goal that can be worked towards.

One objection a critic may raise upon hearing about the theoretical strengths of AEE would be to ask; why, then, are there environmental problems in Africa? Hellsten, Ochieng-Odhiambo and Schönfeld (2013, section 5, para. 18) point out that although concepts like communalism may be identified as the defining aspect of African ethics, this should not be taken as a characterisation of every African culture. They further elaborate that, while individualistic tendencies, for instance, may have diluted the practice of communitarian values within Africa, especially within urban centres, “such modern changes should not distract us from the traditional African heritage, and from

its potential... of guiding the global adaptation to climate change” (HELLSTEN n.d.n 2013, section 5, para. 18).

Many authors also blame the influence of western capitalism and colonial rule for disrupting traditional African community dynamics that would have otherwise been more environmentally sustainable. William Beinart (2000) discusses the ways in which colonialism contributed to environmental degradation in Africa. Amongst the contributing factors, he explains that the appropriation of land and other resources by settlers disrupted the land use patterns of indigenous Africans. Many studies of the partial displacement and compression of African societies due to colonialism discuss the environmental decay that followed, continues Beinart.

It should not seem all that contentious to thus suggest that aspects of AEE may be promoted globally through moral education or other means, along with elements from other worldviews, in order to develop a new universal paradigm of environmental protection. Since the challenges facing the earth affect all humans, after all, it would be “a great mistake to think that the solution to these problems should be left to the Western world” (Tangwa 2004, 393). As Terblanché-Greeff (2019, 106) also states, “when formulating climate change adaptation strategies, all relevant stakeholders should be included in the conversation around the ‘global roundtable’”. To provide an ethics that can be acceptably used to tackle global problems that affect people in all places and across time periods:

...something universal, effective in practice and [demonstrably] real is needed. The principle of Ubuntu... meets this requirement... African ethics can indeed be seen as a salvatory power in today’s heartlessly globalising world, a potential moral saviour in a time of deep trouble. (PROZESKY 2009, 12)

What AEE can give us is a theoretical, moral framework that is capable of taking us further than initial diagnoses, and this is not something to be taken for granted, even if it will take a great deal of further work to unpack the question of what redemptive measures are ideal, feasible, and so on. Considering this may be the largest moral problem to face humanity, however, the solution cannot be expected

to be reached simply. However, it would be valuable to further explore how AEE can respond to the challenges of climate change.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that AEE has much to offer in dealing with the ethical challenges of climate change. I used Gardiner's conceptualisation of climate change as a perfect moral storm to showcase the benefits that AEE offers when facing these ethical difficulties, showing how AEE has certain salient features that make it able to weather many aspects of Gardiner's perfect moral storm. I did so by discussing the core notions of AEE, explaining that it is based on the belief that humans are fundamentally situated within a community of all things, human and non-human, to show that AEE has the features needed to deal with each of Gardiner's four storms that combine to form the perfect moral storm of climate change. I hope that this will bolster the proposal that those working in AEE are starting to make more loudly, that being that traditional African ethics "should be given more credence in our struggle to contain the adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change" (HELLSTEN n.d.n. 2013, Section 5, para.17).

Relevant Literature

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