Is Paternalism Morally Justified in the Wake of the Climate Crisis?

Dean-Talha, Jamus

Paternalism in Crisis: Is paternalism morally justified in the wake of the climate crisis?

Jamus Ray El Madani Talha-Dean

Student Number – 34011591

Specialization – Political Science: Legitimacy and Justice

Supervisor – Dr Jelena Belic

Second Reader – Dr Tom Theuns

Date of Submission – 16/01/2023

Word Count – 8,832

Universiteit Leiden

Abstract

In this paper I will be analysing the duties and obligations of an individual to reduce their own carbon footprint, and how these duties should be reformed to suit modern conceptions – specifically, forming them as collective duties. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, I will argue that paternalistic polices are justified, as they would bring betterment to individuals by allowing them to achieve their long-term goals, as well as the steer them away from harm.

Table of Contents

Paternalism in Crisis: Is paternalism morally justified in the wake of the climate crisis?

Introduction

Human activities have been catalysing the observed trend in global warming since the 19th century. The widespread adoption of industrial practices has drastically accelerated natural processes and caused an alarmingly high concentration of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) in the atmosphere (IPCC AR6 WG2 Technical Summary, 2022). This has resulted in increasing global temperatures, air pollution and worldwide oceanic acidification (Guinotte and Fabry, 2008). As a result, extreme weather phenomena that can no longer be attributed to normal climate variability have irreparably damaged the livelihoods of countless people: through droughts that degrade and eliminate food supplies; abnormal precipitation causing volatile flooding and the near extinction of plants and animals integral to food producing ecosystems (IPCC AR6 WG2 Summary For Policymakers, 2022).

Although many are aware of the dangers and irreversible damage that our lifestyles are causing, very little is being done to truly combat climate change. Regardless of long-term promises vocalised in The Paris Agreement, states have consistently failed to meet targets that reduce their carbon footprint. As of October 2022, none of the thirty-nine biggest emitters of GHGs are on target to achieve the globally agreed aim of maintaining global

warming to a 2^{o}C increase, while proactively limiting this increase to 1.5^{o}C (Home, 2022). Despite sound scientific reports produced by the IPCC since 1990, detailing the profound and numerous risks directly linked to such inaction, in the current global situation these targets are simply impossible, as short-term actions do not fit long-term plans (Home, 2022). As one of the most defining problems facing humanity, it is alarming to see that so many employ an attitude of complacency and avoidance. Drastic action must be taken if we are to curb the already present climate crisis.

I believe that paternalism is justified in the wake of the climate crisis as it would allow individuals to comply with their moral duty and help towards protecting them from the significant harm that would be caused by climate change. Although states are rightly believed to be the key duty-bearers where climate action is concerned, I will argue that individuals and the global population, framed as a collective, also bare a responsibility. Political theorists have extrapolated upon this notion to great extent (Caney 2010, Schwenkenbecher 2012). Such arguments place moral and practical responsibilities on an individual's contribution to climate change mitigation and reject entrenched opinions against individual action. The argument supporting individual duty is substantiated by acceptable reasons to act, namely, when such action is taken as an aggregate of the collective (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). This argument will be used as a foundation for the ensuing discourse. Individuals often avoid engaging in positive environmental practices for a multitude of reasons. One may believe that an individual cannot bring about impactful change on their own, however, if all adopt this mentality then no change will be made. Vice-versa, if the individual actively changes their lifestyle for the betterment of the climate and the environment then these changes will have a positive effect when undertaken by the collective, as they may influence others to act accordingly and change their behaviours too. However, the society we live in and the mentality of the individual isolates one from the effect of their actions. Institutional

incentives and the nature of the environmental problem feed negative environmental behaviour. Acting positively towards the environment is often far more costly than not doing so, resulting in individuals being disincentivised. Furthermore, incentives against positive climate behaviours are actively created, as political polices and institutional nudges lower the cost of such behaviour (DeSombre, 2018).

I will argue that paternalism and paternalistic policies are morally justified given the urgent nature of the climate crisis and individual environmental behaviour. My argument will be structured as such: (1) Individuals bare a moral responsibility to reduce their personal carbon footprint, because not doing so will cause a significant amount of damage to themselves and others. Furthermore, given that the climate crisis is a problem facing the entire population, duty and responsibility should be framed around the collective with individual environmental actions taken as an aggregate of such. (2) Individuals often know that acting positively towards the environment is the right thing to do, yet lack the will to commit to long-term goals and the organisation to function effectively as a large collective. (3) Paternalism is, therefore, morally justified in the case of the climate crisis as a means of mitigating climate. State intervention would protect individuals from the harms of climate change and bring betterment to peoples lives as it allows them to bypass their weak-willed nature and achieve their long-term goals.

The need to justify paternalism can be attributed to three cogent criticisms: It limits individual freedom and autonomy by assuming latent irrationality; it disregards the concept of liberal neutrality as the state coerces individuals into a predetermined conception of good; it establishes a system of state-led intervention into people's lives, engendering a political climate fit for authoritarian and totalitarian rule (Husak, 1981). These moral and practical objections to paternalism form a reasonable argument against the implementation of paternalistic policies. However, I will argue that given the nature of the climate crisis,

paternalism is morally justified in the context of mitigating environmental damages. Theoretically, paternalism is aimed at individual betterment and state-led abstinence from detrimental actions, behaviours, and decisions.

Acting in a way that necessitates climate change and catalysis environmental damages is injurious to the individual: rising sea-levels that will devastate habitable and arable land; rising temperatures that will necessitate a drastic increase in droughts and in turn cause malnutrition and starvation (Caney, 2010). Environmentally damaging behaviours not only affect the individual, but also others and the collective. Vulnerable peoples: such as the infirm, economically marginalised and the young suffer most from changes in the climate and the environment (IPCC AR6 WG2 Summary For Policymakers, 2022). Therefore, the negative environmental actions of the individual have an adverse effect on themselves and others. According to Mill, interference with an individual's life is therefore justified, as their actions affect the lives of others (Mill, 1869). Furthermore, such interference would be for the betterment of the individual, as acting towards climate change mitigation would work towards substantially reducing the projected damages caused by climate change as well as bringing betterment by helping individuals comply with their moral duties (IPCC AR6 WG2 Summary For Policymakers, 2022). I will argue that given an individual's propensity to disregard long-term will in favour of short-term want, it is justifiable for the state to intervene and create the conditions that will allow the individual to act in-line with their will – that of acting in a way that is environmentally positive.

The ensuing discourse will be structured as follows: Chapter 1 will be comprised of a succinct review of literature pertaining to individual duty, responsibility and obligation in the context of climate change. This will be followed by an analysis of the nature of individual

and collective duty, addressing the question of whether individuals bear a duties concerning climate change and the issues concerning the compliance with such duties.

Chapter 2 will be concerned with paternalism in the context of climate change: the general issues with paternalism and the need for justification. This will be followed by the justification of paternalistic climate policies as well as examples of such policies.

Chapter 3 will be focus on key objections to the aforementioned arguments. Namely, why nudging is not enough, given the context of the climate crisis and the fear that paternalistic policies of any form could lead towards authoritarianism. This will then lead to the final conclusion.

Chapter 1

An analysis of Individual duty and the moral reasons for reducing one's personal emissions

The question of individual duty and climate change raises many arguments. Schwenkenbecher (2012) outlines three prominent views against individual duty: the "No harm view", the "No effect view" and the "Overly Demanding" view (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). This forms the key structured rebuttal to the claim that individuals have a moral duty to reduce their negative impact on the environment. The "No harm view" (Schwenkenbecher, 2012) holds that an individual's carbon footprint has a negligible effect on climate change when compared to the eclipsing aggregate of the entire world. Engaging in behaviours that perpetuate the climate crisis are hence not harmful and are therefore absent of any moral or political obligation to employ abstinence. This is paired with the "No effect view", in which an individual's duty to reduce their carbon footprint is rejected, as said reduction would have

no impact on the overall desired outcome (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). These claims are aptly rejected by Schwenkenbecher, as she argues that morally significant harm is indeed caused by individual pollutants, when taken as an aggregate of the collective, and such claims ignore aggregate harm (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). However, this opinion is rejected by Sinnott-Armstrong (2005), who argues that small-scale individual actions have no moral or practical relevance due to them being a mere iota of global emissions (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2005).

Sinnot-Armstrong's argument follows the example of taking a Sunday Drive for the purpose of fun. In which, undertaking such an activity would have a negligible (and hence, non-existent) effect on overall of emissions, and the driver does not intend to harm anyone. Therefore, the action is absolved of any moral implication (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2005). However, I believe that this argument is fundamentally flawed, as a small affect is nevertheless an affect. Choosing to avoid an activity that emits GHGs would take away from the global aggregate of emissions, no matter how small. This small contribution, when undertaken as a collective will influence the global calculation to a greater degree, leading to the need to reassess conceptions of individual harm when faced with global problems. The author also omits the notion that it is perceived to be morally wrong to engage in an activity that has a preordained and expected amount of harm, when an accessible alternative would cause less or no harm in comparison (Hiller, 2011).

The "No harm view" and the "No effect view" are also opposed by Hiller (2011). Justified by the rejection of "individual causal inefficiency" (Hiller, 2011), the author claims that if individual activities do not cause climate change, then what does? – a "metaphysically odd emergent entity"? (Hiller, 2011, p.349). Although this claim suits the view that individuals do indeed bare a moral duty to mitigate climate change, it fails to address the significant responsibility borne by institutions and collectives. This leads to the key argument against individual duty - that of institutional duty. As stated by Schwenkenbecher, institutions

inexplicably bare the majority of responsibility to enact positive environmental behaviours. However, the argument for individual moral duty does not reject institutional duty, it merely allows for both forms of duty to coexist – they are not mutually exclusive.

As professed by Sinnott-Armstrong (2005), individuals do not have a duty to reduce their own emissions, because in the grand calculus of worldwide emissions the addition or subtraction of their contribution will make no difference. I will argue against this point, drawing attention to the fallacy of the claim when an individual's emissions are taken as an aggregate of the collective. As a collective, the effect of individual emissions grows exponentially; harmless drives and frequent flyer miles become a substantial constituent of overall emissions. Therefore, I believe that an individual has a moral duty to reduce their own emissions because they will indefinitely add to the overall emissions. Furthermore, given that the worldwide emission of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) and the subsequent warming of the global climate is recognised as inherently bad, it is within reason to assume that necessitating such an outcome is also bad. Regardless of how small the addition of the CO_2 emitted by a seemingly inconsequential leisurely drive. If the current level of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) in the atmosphere is at a dangerously harmful level, then adding more is bad – be it an iota or a myriad. Regardless, when individual emissions are isolated away from the collective it is evident that their contribution is a minute fraction of the global sum – but I believe that it is still inherently harmful. This is dependent on the source. The Greenhouse Gas (GHG) effect is a natural phenomenon that regulates the Earth's temperature, equally, the carbon cycle has been releasing CO_2 for as long as living things have been living, dying and decaying. This is not the problem. The problem is that burning fossil fuels and releasing CO_2 that has been locked in Earth, and therefore removed from the carbon cycle, adds more carbon than can be recycled by the natural process. So, although CO_2 is essential for plant life and a natural part of the Earth's atmosphere, burning fossil fuels and emitting excess CO_2 that does not fit into

the cycle is what is causing the climate crisis (He, M., Sun, Y. and Han, B. 2013). Going for a leisurely Sunday drive for fun burns fossil fuels and adds excess carbon to the carbon cycle which cannot be recycled, accelerating climate change and causes, I believe, morally significant harm.

An individual's ability to cause harm to another can be divided into two categories: direct harm and indirect harm (Royzman, 2002). Direct harm can be defined as an action taken by an individual that causes visible and categorical harm to another, for example: Abdel punches Hakim. Through this example, Abdel has caused direct harm to Hakim. From a moral standpoint, it is easy for an outside agent to come to the conclusion that direct harm has been caused. The causal link is clear. However, in the context of indirect harm it can be considerably more difficult to ascertain whether harm has been indirectly caused by an individual perpetrator, and whether the victim was harmed at all. I believe that this can be attributed to two distinct factors: (1) Indirect harm may not be caused by a singular individual, but rather a group or collective. This makes the determination of the perpetrator far more difficult and engenders a gap between the perpetrator and their action. If an agent acts against a negative duty, indirectly harming another, but never directly sees the victim or the ramifications of their actions, it devalues the strength of that negative moral duty – insofar as the obligation that the perpetrator feels towards not causing harm. (2) Indirect harm may be caused over a long period of time, with the final result not coming to fruition in the immediately foreseeable future. An individual's actions may cause no significant or visible harm to another, however, in aggregate terms the eventuality will be considerable harmful. This means that an individual may deem that their actions are not harmful and no moral duty has been violated, simply because their perception does not account for the long-term consequences of their actions. However, this does not mean that one is absolved of their

moral duty, as moral agents bear duties irrespective of how they themselves perceive what they do.

I believe that this is the case for individuals who believe that their personal emissions cause no morally significant harm. Sinnott-Armstrong (2005) professes that one person's luxury emissions, such as frequently flying or driving a particularly environmentally damaging vehicle cause no tangible harm to others, and therefore are not accompanied by a moral duty to abstain from these actions. However, I believe that these actions constitute a form of indirect harm that encompasses both of the aforementioned categories (aggregate harm and long-term harm). For example: If an individual were to drive to work for an extended period of time every day, their decision to drive would increase the overall level of global emissions, regardless of how visible that change would be. Consequently, the level of global GHG emissions would in-turn have far-reaching ramifications in terms of the climate. The greenhouse effect, a natural phenomenon that has been drastically accelerated due to considerable GHG emissions would lead to global warming; causing ocean acidification that toxifies marine food supplies, rising sea-levels that will eventually envelope vulnerable communities and droughts and famine that will lead to malnutrition, starvation and death. As one can see, the emission of GHG is an obvious manifestation of indirect harm. However, whether an individual is the perpetrator of this harm remains to be seen.

One could argue, as Sinnott-Armstrong does, that personal emissions cause no significant harm because the addition of these emissions to the global calculus is inconsequential; and, therefore, should not necessarily be avoided. This argument, however, ignores the aggregate harm that is caused by a collective – one that is comprised of individuals engaging in the same action. In this sense, significant indirect harm is being caused because of the actions of the individual and others (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). This leads to considerable difficulty when ascribing one with an individual duty to not cause harm, as individual duty is often seen

as separate from collective duty. However, in an increasingly globalised world where the problems that we face have unforeseen consequences, I believe it is important to reassess the nature of individual duty and frame it in a sense that fits with modern societal conditions. If one was to reject a negative duty to not exacerbate the climate crisis simply because they believe that their actions will have no effect or cause no harm, then the issue at hand will never be solved. It will not be solved without action and the actions of an individual have an effect, no matter how small. Therefore, I believe that each individual has a duty to both themselves and others to act in a way that does not worsen the crisis, because omitting from this duty will add to a phenomenon that causes considerable and far-reaching harm.

In terms of long-term indirect harm, one can see that the act of emitting resides on an indeterminate time scale. An individual driving to work for an extended period of time and emitting GHG in the process will add to the global calculus, but the effects of this harm will not be seen for a period of time. Climate change is a slow process, with incremental consequences that have been occurring since the early 19th century. Hence, it is difficult for an individual to see the ramifications of their actions, or even accept that a form of indirect harm is being caused – simply because of the slow nature of climate change. However, this does not mean that the harm that is caused is less significant than short-term harm. On the contrary, climate change is one of the most catastrophic phenomena faced by the human race and it is exactly that long-term scale that has greatly exacerbated the issue – the harm we cause today will affect the entire population, but we may never see the consequences of our actions. As seen with Sinnott-Armstrong (2005), this results in the rejection of an individual moral duty to act in way that will stymie the issue. Because the harm that is caused is too difficult to ascertain or seen as too insignificant to take into account.

As expressed by Schwenkenbecher (2012), the argument against the duty of an individual to mitigate climate change can be framed around three key principles: (1) the *no-*

effect view; (2) the *no-harm view*; (3) the *overly-demanding view* (Schwenkenbecher, 2012, p.182). The *no-effect* view is inherently consequentialist and absolves individuals of moral duty because a single person's actions could not solve the climate crisis – if the desired outcome is to stop climate change, one person deciding to reduce their carbon footprint will not have a significant effect. Accordingly, this view rejects the presence of an individual's negative duty towards GHG emissions by implying that the act of emitting is inconsequential and is, therefore, not wrong. I believe that this argument fails to convince when one accounts for the collective. If everyone deems the *no-effect view* to be true and convincing and does nothing to reduce their own carbon footprint, then the aggregate of each person's emissions will account for a significant percentage of global GHG emissions, essentially engendering a self-fulfilling prophecy– as is the case now. Conversely, if the reverse were to occur and each individual decided to actively reduce their personal emissions, such collective action could bring about the desired outcome – the reduction of global GHG emissions. Given that climate change is a global issue facing the entirety of the population, I believe it is imperative to frame the discussion around the collective. In this sense, one can argue that individuals have a moral duty to act in a way that creates good for themselves and others, because these actions are undertaken as a collective.

When actions are undertaken as a collective it places a new moral duty on that action, separate to the duties related to the actions of an isolated individual (Parfit, 1986). The argument follows that if an individual is faced with the choice of two actions; one that will bring an amount of betterment and good to themselves and others, and one that will not (equally, one that will bring harm), then that individual has a moral duty to perform the action that creates some semblance of good – given that that action is also undertaken by the collective (Parfit, 1986). In the context of GHG emissions and the subsequent acceleration of climate change, an individual's decision to do nothing to reduce their carbon footprint will

bring no semblance of good and rather, will bring significant harm to themselves and others, given that this decision is shared by the collective. Harm, in this sense, would be the destruction of arable and habitable land due to rising sea-levels and extreme weather phenomenon; subsequent drought and famine that would lead to drastic increases in malnutrition and starvation, and the devastation of vulnerable communities leading to mass immigration and death. However, if enough individuals act as a collective and abstain from environmentally damaging practices, choosing rather to reduce their carbon footprint, then such harm could be avoided.

Schwenkenbecher (2012) raises an issue with the moral duty of collective actions - the fact that unstructured collectives comprised of individual agents lack the certainty that others are acting in an equally collaborative fashion. The moral code presented by Parfit (1986) establishes the presence of a moral duty to act beneficially to others when another action would be neutral, but only when others undertake the same action. This caveat places considerable strain on the performance of this moral duty, as collectives aiming to achieve a desired outcome through collaboration would struggle to adhere to a moral duty when that duty requires others to act in the same way. In this sense, such collaborative action would necessitate a strong-willed and evangelical collective of individuals, assiduously undertaking their moral duty – in complete adherence with their sense of individual moral duty. However, much is the case in schemes that require such fervent collaborative action, predetermined goals are not met because of this uncertainty and lack of due diligence (Schwenkenbecher, 2012). I believe that this could be successfully avoided if it weren't for the lack of a beneficent supervisory force; one that would be able to organise collective action and maintain the irrefragable nature of the moral duty ascribed to each individual. In other words, an individual would no longer be uncertain as to whether others are undertaking the same collaborative action as themselves, because each individual is under supervision, and would

rather comply the moral duty that they themselves have deemed right and necessary, and work towards achieving the foreordained goal.

I believe that a significant amount of individuals know that acting in a way that necessitates climate change is wrong. The information that denotes the harmful effects is widely available and most of it is scientifically proven to be accurate (DeSombre, 2018). The use of plastic bags, driving cars that run on fossil fuels, incorrect disposal of waste pollutants; all these actions are undertaken by a vast majority of people, despite the knowledge that they are categorically harmful to the environment. This outlines the fact that moral reasons are not enough to motivate environmentally good actions. Schwenkenbecher's explanation may shine a light upon the reasoning behind these activities (the no-harm view, the no-effect view, the overly-demanding view) and why they are chosen over a more environmentally friendly alternative. In short, the author argues that an individual's propensity to act positively towards the environment is often overshadowed by the fact that the act itself is either too demanding, considered too infinitesimal to have any real effect on the outcome of the greater problem or too harmless to count (Schwenkenbecher, 2012).

I believe that in addition to the aforementioned paradigm, an individual's will plays an important role in their actions. Namely, the will to commit to long-term goals that are seemingly demanding, without an immediately tangible reward for their actions. For example: Fatima knows that driving to work every day in her heavily emitting car is bad for the environment, so she purchases a bike. Consequently, she rides her bike to work every morning, content with her decision to contribute towards worldwide environmentally friendly practices. However, after a certain amount of time she loses that motivation and chooses the easy route instead. She may wake up late and drive instead of cycle, or perhaps she decides that she'll cycle to work for two days of the week and drive for the rest. As a rough exemplification, this outlines the way in which long-term plans to act beneficially to the

environment fall to the way side over time. There is no clear finality; to work against climate change is not an action that will bring a tangible reward, but rather it is a duty to not cause excess harm – it is a practice in avoiding and deflecting the worst possible outcome. Fatima is not a bad person, nor is she an ardent proponent of climate change and the wholesale emission of negative GHG. But given the long-term nature of the climate crisis and the effect individuals believe they have on the outcome, the commitment to one's will to act in an environmentally positive manner is hampered (DeSombre, 2018).

As previously mentioned, I will argue that individuals do indeed have a moral duty to act beneficially towards the environment. Furthermore, this individual duty should be seen as an extension of a collective duty – wherein, the actions undertaken by an individual and the repercussions of those actions should not be seen as isolated from the collective. But rather, as an aggregate. However, in the actualisation of this duty, individuals often falter. The reasons for this can be condensed into these three principles: the nature of indirect harm, the difficulty in organising a collective and the subsequent lack of certainty, and the weak-willed nature of individuals when committing to long-term goals. I believe that at least some individuals often know that acting in a way that stymies climate change is right and will bring betterment to their lives. Whether an individual sees this betterment as the maintenance of a habitable environment remains to be seen, but it is widely accepted that climate change is bad. However, the aforementioned principles (the nature of indirect harm, the nature of collective action, and the weak-willed nature of individuals) stop individuals from acting positively towards the environment and achieving the betterment that accompanies it. I will argue that given an individual's propensity to disregard long-term will in favour of short-term want, it is justifiable for the state to intervene and create the conditions that will allow the individual to act in-line with their will – that of acting in a way that is environmentally positive.

Chapter 2

Paternalism and Climate Change: Paternalism as a means of bolstering one's will to achieve one's long-term goals

Before addressing the nature of environmental and climate based paternalistic policies, I find it important to address the need to justify paternalism. Paternalism and the practices that accompany it are often surrounded by a moral debate, fundamentally concerning the way in which paternalistic policies interfere with an individuals' life (Rizzo, 2008). The three main arguments against paternalism are: (1) Paternalism erodes an individual's autonomy and freedom, coercing people into a practice of which they have not explicitly expressed consent to. (2) Paternalism essentially assumes latent irrationality, cheapening the value of human reasoning and an individual's ability to logically assess their decision-making paradigms, and ultimately decide what is best suited to themselves. (3) Paternalism violates the liberal concept of state neutrality, as enforcing policies that force an individual to act in a way that is for their betterment seemingly imposes a conception of 'the good life'. Throughout the ensuing discourse, I will argue that paternalistic policies specifically aimed at curbing the climate crisis do not overly infringe upon these objections to paternalism. Specifically framing the argument around an individual's will to act towards a long-term goal, and the need for individual and collective diligence when faced with the dire and drastic consequences of inaction in the wake of the climate crisis.

When speaking of the term paternalism, I am using Dworkin's working definition, that of: "Paternalism is the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm" (Dworkin, 2020). In this sense, I believe that paternalism is justifiable as a means of combatting climate change. My defense of paternalism in the context of climate change is twofold. (1) Given that irreversible and damaging change to the Earth's climate is inherently negative, restricting an individual's autonomy in an attempt to avoid this outcome will protect them from harm. (2) If it holds that an individual knows that acting beneficially towards the environment is good, but they lack the will to exact their long-term goals, then paternalistic policies that aid people in achieving such goals will bring them individual betterment (Conly, 2014). However, I find it important to state that I am not endorsing paternalism in any other field or political deliberation. I aim to argue that given the nature of the climate crisis, I think that paternalistic climate policies are justifiable. The factors that make the climate crisis unique and distinguishable is that it will categorically affect the entire world and combatting widespread devastation is an act of mitigation. The actions of an individual, when seen as part of a collective, will bring harm to themselves and countless others. However, the long-term and disconnected nature of this harm wanes an individual's will to act in favour of their own betterment – paternalism, I will argue, could act as a way of maintaining an individual's compliance with a long-term goal by imposing policies that will allow individuals to act in accordance with their will.

Paternalism is the interference of a state in the life of an individual, regardless of their will, and substantiated by the claim that said interference will bring betterment to the individual or protect them from harm (Dworkin, 2020). Rizzo (2009) is a critique of paternalism, who claims that the state does not have a better understanding of what is good when compared to the individual and will always bring detriment when intervening with an

individual's decision-making paradigms. Rizzo (2009) stands as a proponent for paternalism's ability to reliably engender good, however, he states that this can only be achieved if an individual's specific circumstances are considered – which is not statistically feasible (Rizzo, 2009). Rizzo (2009) holds that any interference is not based on sound research and therefore, cannot generate meaningful good for the individual.

Given various views concerning paternalism, the reasons against such policies can be categorised into these three arguments: (1) Paternalism erodes an individual's autonomy and freedom, coercing people into a practice of which they have not explicitly expressed consent to. (2) Paternalism essentially assumes latent irrationality, cheapening the value of human reasoning and an individual's ability to logically assess their decisions, and ultimately decide what is best suited to themselves. (3) Paternalism violates the liberal concept of state neutrality, as enforcing policies that force an individual to act in a way that is for their betterment seemingly imposes a conception of 'the good life'. The view that paternalism is in conflict with liberal neutrality is supported by Arneson (1980), who rejects paternalism on the basis of the erosion of individual autonomy and of the liberal legitimacy of the state. He argues that Mill's ardent disagreement with paternalism is tenuous, but no other view gives a plausible reason to reject it. The argument follows that a person, although not acting in their best interest is still accountable for those decisions and the state should not assume that this necessitates interference – in this sense, Arneson believes that individual autonomy should be safeguarded against state interference, regardless of whether such interference would bring betterment to the individual.

However, in the context of climate change, liberal neutrality is often partially avoided. Given that "green" behaviours are scientifically proven to mitigate the effects of climate change, paternalistic policies aimed at promoting such behaviours do not constitute the promotion of a particular conception of "the good life". This argument is presented by

Scoccia (2008), who states that paternalism need not violate liberal neutrality if the actions that paternalistic policies are aimed at blocking are universally regarded as detrimental – in this case, actions that will eventually lead to climate change (Scoccia, 2008). However, Scoccia (2008) does not address the method in which paternalistic policies are implemented and does not address the problem of authority when deciding how to coerce individuals into acting for their betterment. Scoccia (2008) takes a consequentialist view in his defence of paternalism, stating that the means are not important when considering the good that the ends will provide. This opinion is shared by Conly (2014) who focuses on individual betterment and paternalism's power as a tool for achieving long-term goals - by inhibiting our ability to make unsound and ill-advised choices. Conly's arguments defend paternalism against the objections raised by Arneson and Rizzo. She argues that an individual's decision to act against their interest should not be sanctified, merely because they decided to act in such a way. In short, Conly believes that an individual's decision to act irrationally necessities state interference in that person's decision-making paradigms. In response to this rather controversial stance, the author justifies her position by revealing the weaknesses of key objections to paternalism. Conly goes to argue against the claim that paternalism is unnecessary; if one chooses something, that must be what they want. This forms one of the authors key arguments – an individual's choice should not be the be all and end all; one's decisions do not always reflect what that individual really wants or wills. Conly (2014) also claims that we care too much about liberty to allow the state to interfere – even if interference will increase our happiness (Conly, 2014). The argument follows that given an individual's innate disposition towards acting irrationally, the state should intervene and enable the actualisation of one's long-term goals (Conly, 2014). Conly holds that the grandeur given to an individual's autonomous decision-making capability is misplaced and rather, holds people back when attempting to achieve their long-term goals.

Additionally, Conly (2014) states that paternalistic policies aimed at coercing individuals away from obvious detrimental behaviour can only bring betterment, as it absolves the individual of irrationality (Conly, 2014). I believe that Conly (2014) fails to address the conception of will when an individual engages in decision-making. The state need not assume latent irrationality, but rather the weak-willed nature of the individual when committing to long-term goals. This has particular relevance in the context of climate change, as stated by DeSombre (2018). DeSombre (2018) draws attention to the strong institutional and cost related incentives that catalyse negative environmental behaviours. Highlighting how costs and the nature of climate change as an external factor subsidises such behaviour, disincentivising individuals (DeSombre, 2018). The author argues that when engaging in an action that necessitates climate change, the agent is attempting to achieve a very basic goal: drive to work, take a flight to see a relative or buy cheap imported goods. The effect of this action on the climate is external, insofar as the far-reaching impacts of the action are not immediately apparent and may be felt hundreds of miles away and years in the future. This makes the omission of such an action particularly difficult, as the link between cause and consequence is greatly extended. In that moment, an individual driving to work is not intentionally harming the environment, they are merely carrying out a basic task. Although they may know that acting in a way that exacerbates climate change, long-term incentives and will are secondary to achieving a relatively minor goal in the short-term. The argument for paternalistic policies aimed at the mitigation of climate change can be formed around the concept of incentives and will.

Another objection to paternalism is its violation of the principle of state neutrality. It is argued that paternalism presupposes a conception of "the good life", coercing individuals into adhering to a doctrine that they may reject (Scoccia, 2008). In the context of climate change, it is a well-established scientific fact that mitigating the emission of GHGs would

reduce the detrimental effects of climate change (IPCC AR6 WG2 Technical Summary, 2022). Therefore, acting positively towards the environment is not a doctrine crafted by the state, but one based on a reasoned hypothesis. However, the issue lies with which paternalistic polices will be enforced, as there is no absolute conception of the best possible "green lifestyle". This raises questions, such as who has the authority to dictate which policy is best, as given liberal state neutrality, the government would have no authority to judge which conception of good is the best to impose on all citizens? Following from this, I will formulate several possible policy avenues, aimed at the mitigation of climate change and the acceptance of more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Regarding paternalism's nature as a foundation for authoritarian and totalitarian rule, I will argue that paternalism is justified in the context of climate change yet remain agnostic on its relevance in other policies. Climate change should make us reconsider paternalism as a means to an end and separate it from authoritarian and totalitarian rule. Climate focused paternalism would be aimed at the betterment of the individual, and by proxy, the collective – not the wholesale intrusion into an individual's autonomy as an attempt to regulate and control private life for the sake of perpetuating the state's rule. I will also argue that nudging, as expressed by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), is not a feasible counterweight to environmentally negative behaviours, as its definition states that "to count as a nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid" (Thaler, Sunstein & Pratt, 2008). This goes against the desired outcome of paternalistic climate policies, as they would have to be unavoidable and bound by law if they are to engender change.

In terms of policies, they could take the form of plausible avenues in which the state could regulate the environmentally unfriendly behaviours of an individual, in an effort to promote and enforce a 'green lifestyle'. This could be the restriction of highly emitting actions; such as banning domestic flights and banning vehicles in certain parts of cities. It

could also go as far as banning fossil fuel vehicles, which is an integral part of the worldwide plan of phasing-out fossil fuels (Muttitt, 2020). Additionally, paternalistic policies aimed at the reduction of waste could be realistically implemented. Such as the mandatory fitting of water-efficient fixtures, which would save hundreds of millions of kilowatt-hours of electricity in pumping, heating and treating water (Denchak, 2022). There are many avenues in which the state could devise and implement far-reaching paternalistic climate policies that ameliorate the lives of individuals and allow them to achieve their predetermined will to act in an environmentally friendly way.

I believe that the climate crisis is a unique problem facing the entirety of the human race. Given this, it must be addressed with a unique solution. As expressed by the IPCC, up to the current date, action towards mitigating the climate crisis have been surrounded by debate, avoidance and blame-shifting; which has led to astonishing levels of inaction. It is this inaction that has led to the severity of the situation now faced by the world as a whole. The right paternalistic climate policies could bring betterment to individuals by allowing them to achieve their long-term goals, bypassing their weak-willed nature. Additionally, such policies would, in future, engender a shift in the global mentality towards climate change. By implementing paternalistic climate policies, the state would be projected the severity of the climate crisis, which could potentially change the global stance of inaction to action. Individuals could no longer avoid the issue of the climate crisis and would be forced, for their own betterment, to act in a way that necessitates positive change and mitigates the vastly devasting effects of climate change on the planet, its ecosystems and the human population as a whole.

Chapter 3

Objections

As expressed in the aforementioned discourse, paternalistic policies are generally seen as divisive and extreme methods of state action. The fears and understandable disdain towards such policies can be attributed to their inherently intrusive and authoritative form. As argued by Rizzo (2008), such policies may lead to an authoritarian state, where the inherently controlling aspects of paternalistic policies would permeate into other aspects of stately life – relinquishing some freedom is tantamount to relinquishing it all. However, I believe that paternalistic policies in the context of the climate crisis, when implemented correctly, should not lead to authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is a form of government in which the state has complete control over the stately lives of its citizens, and individual freedoms are severely restricted. Paternalistic policies, on the other hand, are designed to protect individuals and society as a whole, and would be implemented through regulations, aimed at bolstering incentives and strengthening individual will. To avoid authoritarianism, it is crucial that climate related paternalistic policies are based on sound scientific evidence and are implemented through democratic processes, with input and participation from the public. Additionally, it is important that these policies are transparent, and that there are clear mechanisms in place for citizens to express their concerns and provide feedback.

Moreover, it is important to consider the proportionality of the measures taken and to maintain a balance between protecting the population and preserving individual freedom. A good example of this is the implementation of carbon pricing, which is a way of internalizing the external costs of carbon emissions, it is a market-based approach that allows the market to adjust to the new reality, rather than being dictated by the government (He, M., Sun, Y. and Han, B. 2013). In summary, while paternalistic climate policies may involve some restriction of individual freedom, it should not lead to authoritarianism as long as it is based on sound scientific evidence, implemented through democratic processes, and is transparent, proportionate, and balanced.

Nudging is a concept in behavioural economics that refers to using subtle cues and prompts to influence the behaviour of individuals (Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. and Pratt, S 2008). The idea behind nudging is to make it easier for people to make the choices that are in their best interest, without restricting their freedom of choice. The concept of nudging is based on the idea that individuals are not always rational decision-makers, and that small changes in the environment or in the way choices are presented can have a significant impact on the individual, their behaviours and their decision-making. Nudging can take many forms, such as default options, which are pre-selected choices that individuals must actively opt out of, or social norms, which are messages that convey what is considered normal or typical behaviour in a given situation. Examples of nudging could include the likes of making healthy food options more visible or accessible, or providing information or feedback that helps people understand the consequences of their choices.

One of the key characteristics of nudging is that it is non-coercive, meaning that people are free to make their own choices. Nudging aims to influence people's behaviour without restricting their freedom of choice, by providing them with information, making it easier for them to do what is in their best interest, or by making the desired choice the most obvious

and immediately rewarding. It is exactly the nature of nudging that makes it incompatible with the climate crisis at this juncture. Nudging, at its core, is designed to be easily avoidable. Given the current state of the climate crisis, 'easily avoidable' is not enough to engender true change and steer individuals towards acting positively towards the environment. While nudging may be a useful tool in addressing climate change, it alone is not enough to effectively mitigate the crisis, and the time for nudging as the sole means of influencing positive environmental behaviour has long past. Climate change is a multifaceted and complex issue that requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that goes beyond nudging. Nudging can be useful in promoting small changes in behaviour, such as encouraging people to recycle or to turn off lights when they leave a room. However, the scale and urgency of the climate crisis demands more significant and immediate action. The problem of climate change is not only an issue of personal behaviour, but also a systemic issue that is deeply ingrained in the world's economic and political systems. Paternalistic policies, on the other hand, can address the underlying structural and systemic issues that contribute to climate change. For example, by implementing regulations on carbon emissions, governments can significantly reduce the amount of Greenhouse Gases that are released into the atmosphere. Additionally, by encouraging the use of renewable energy sources and providing education and information to the public, individuals can comply with their long-term goals, avoid their weak-willed nature when committing to such goals and be empowered to make more informed decisions that can lead to a reduction in overall environmental impact.

Conclusion

To conclude, I believe that paternalism and paternalistic policies are morally justified given the urgency of the climate crisis. I strongly believe that individuals do indeed have a moral responsibility to reduce their personal carbon footprint, however, the climate crisis is a problem facing the entire population, so duty and responsibility should be framed around the collective. Additionally, I maintain that while individuals may know that acting positively towards the environment is the right thing to do, they often lack the will and organization to do so effectively as an individual or a large collective. As such, I argue that paternalism is morally justified as a means of mitigating the climate crisis and protecting individuals from its harms. However, I acknowledge that there are several criticisms of paternalistic policies, such as limiting individual freedom and autonomy, disregarding the concept of liberal neutrality, and creating a political climate that is conducive to authoritarian and totalitarian rule. Despite these criticisms, I argue that given the urgency of the climate crisis, paternalistic policies are morally justified in the context of mitigating environmental damages, given that such policies are aimed at individual betterment and state-led abstinence from detrimental actions, behaviours, and decisions. Paternalistic policies, can be an effective way to regulate environmentally unfriendly behaviours in individuals and promote a "green lifestyle." Some examples of these policies include restrictions on high-emitting actions, such as banning

domestic flights and certain types of vehicles, as well as mandatory fittings of water-efficient fixtures. I believe that the unique nature of the climate crisis requires a unique solution and that current levels of inaction on the issue have led to its severity.

Paternalistic policies, I argue, can not only help individuals achieve their predetermined will to act in an environmentally friendly way, but also shift the global mentality towards understanding and combating climate change. Overall, I hold that such policies can bring about positive change in the betterment of individuals, as well as mitigate the devastating effects of climate change on the planet and its inhabitants.

Bibliography

Arneson, R., 1980. Mill versus Paternalism. *Ethics*, 90(4), pp.470-489.

Caney, S., 2010. Climate change and the duties of the advantaged. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 13(1), pp.203-228.

Climateactiontracker.org. 2022. *Home*. [online] Available at: <https://climateactiontracker.org/> [Accessed 16 October 2022].

Conly, S., 2014. *Against autonomy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Denchak, M. (2022) *How you can stop global warming*, *NRDC*. Available at: https://www.nrdc.org/stories/how-you-can-stop-global-warming (Accessed: December 11, 2022).

DeSombre, E., 2018. *Why Good People Do Bad Environmental Things*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press.

Greg Muttitt & Sivan Kartha (2020) Equity, climate justice and fossil fuel extraction: principles for a managed phase out, Climate Policy, 20:8, 1024-1042

Guinotte, J. and Fabry, V., 2008. Ocean Acidification and Its Potential Effects on Marine Ecosystems. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1134(1), pp.321-322.

He, M., Sun, Y. and Han, B. 2013. Green Carbon Science: Scientific basis for integrating Carbon Resource Processing, Utilization, and recycling, *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 52(37), pp. 9620–9633. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/anie.201209384.

Hiller, A., 2011. Climate Change and Individual Responsibility. *The Monist*, 94(3), pp.349

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty.* 2nd ed London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1869;

Parfit, D. (1986) "Five mistakes in moral mathematics," *Reasons and Persons*, 1, pp. 67–86.

Pörtner, H.-O., D.C. Roberts, H. Adams, I. Adelekan, C. Adler, R. Adrian, P. Aldunce, E. Ali, R. Ara Begum, B. BednarFriedl, R. Bezner Kerr, R. Biesbroek, J. Birkmann, K. Bowen, M.A. Caretta, J. Carnicer, E. Castellanos, T.S. Cheong, W. Chow, G. Cissé, S. Clayton, A. Constable, S.R. Cooley, M.J. Costello, M. Craig, W. Cramer, R. Dawson, D. Dodman, J. Efitre, M. Garschagen, E.A. Gilmore, B.C. Glavovic, D. Gutzler, M. Haasnoot, S. Harper, T. Hasegawa, B. Hayward, J.A. Hicke, Y. Hirabayashi, C. Huang, K. Kalaba, W. Kiessling, A. Kitoh, R. Lasco, J. Lawrence, M.F. Lemos, R. Lempert, C. Lennard, D. Ley, T. Lissner, Q. Liu, E. Liwenga, S. Lluch-Cota, S. Löschke, S. Lucatello, Y. Luo, B. Mackey, K. Mintenbeck, A. Mirzabaev, V. Möller, M. Moncassim Vale, M.D. Morecroft, L. Mortsch, A. Mukherji, T. Mustonen, M. Mycoo, J. Nalau, M. New, A. Okem, J.P. Ometto, B. O'Neill, R. Pandey, C. Parmesan, M. Pelling, P.F. Pinho, J. Pinnegar, E.S. Poloczanska, A. Prakash, B. Preston, M.-F. Racault, D. Reckien, A. Revi, S.K. Rose, E.L.F. Schipper, D.N. Schmidt, D. Schoeman, R. Shaw, N.P. Simpson, C. Singh, W. Solecki, L. Stringer, E. Totin, C.H. Trisos, Y. Trisurat, M. van Aalst, D. Viner, M.Wairiu, R.Warren, P.Wester, D.Wrathall, and Z. Zaiton Ibrahim, 2022: Technical Summary. [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 37–118, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.002.

Royzman, E.B. and Baron, J., 2002. The preference for indirect harm. *Social justice research*, *15*(2), pp.165-184.

Rizzo, M. and Whitman, D., 2008. The Knowledge Problem of New Paternalism. *SSRN Electronic Journal*,

Schwenkenbecher, A., 2012. Is there an obligation to reduce one's individual carbon footprint? *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 17(2), pp.168-188.

Scoccia, D., 2008. In Defense of Hard Paternalism. *Law and Philosophy*, 27(4), pp.351-381.

Sinnot-Armstrong, Walter 2005 "It's Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations," *in Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics and Ethics, Advances in the Economics of Environmental Resources, vol 5*, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Richard B. Howarth, eds., Amsterdam: Elsevier, 285-307

Thaler, R., Sunstein, C. and Pratt, S., 2008. *Nudge*. 1st ed. [United States]: Penguin Books, p.3.

IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001.