HOW CAN WE BROADEN MYOPIC MORAL HORIZONS? THE ROLE OF ETHICAL GRADUALISM FOR 'MORAL' REMAPPING

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Abstract. One of the main objectives of this article is to clarify why 'mapping' otherness in the era of the Anthropocene is not an axiologically neutral process. This hypothesis is elaborated by demonstrating how the proponents of both radical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism rely upon the center-periphery dichotomy when 'mapping' what they understand by other in both spatial and moral terms. In this context, I argue that overcoming the negative effects of so-called myopic moral horizons is possible by adopting the principle of ethical gradualism in an interspecies context.

Keywords: radical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism; ethical gradualism; myopic moral horizons; broader ethos of progress

1. Introduction

The etymological analysis of the word Anthropocene shows that it has a suffix with a meaning 'new' or 'recent' ('cene' from Ancient Greek 'καινός') which triggers the question what is considered as 'newer' in the era of the Anthropocene. Recognizing the idea of 'new' as pure novelty tacitly contributes to supporting an 'old' ideology, namely, that every single world can be defined as a new one compared to the previous 'old' world. However, taking responsibility in one vaguely defined new world makes the idea of responsibility for the present world useless because one is limited to the assumption that no matter what one does, there always will be another world coming.

In this context, one of the main objectives of my paper is to analyze how mapping space of (un)common worlds is not a controversial objective if we clearly outline differentiated responsibility which given moral agents should take, especially when they should morally respond on behalf of other beings which cannot become moral agents.

Adopting such an approach would mean to look for an explanation how one can decouple the ideas of absolutized common world and disconnected uncommon worlds from the different forms of radical anthropocentrism or radical eco-centrism.

Against the background of the aforementioned investigations, I raise a hypothesis that we can achieve peaceful co-existence in (un)common worlds if we apply the principle of ethical gradualism as a precautionary principle against both radical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism.

2. The Role of Ethical Gradualism
2.1. Conceptual Clarifications

Taking into account that in most fields of applied ethics, specifically in these of business ethics and medical ethics, the concept of ethical gradualism is broadly used for the purposes of showing a different degree of differentiation of development or perfection (as is demonstrated in the case with ethical culture in the field of business ethics) (Francis & Murfey, 2015) or a differentiation of a moral status (as is shown in the case with embryos, while examining when and how they have a moral status) (Francis, Gius & Coin, 2004), in this article, I adopt another, more detailed, definition of ethical gradualism.

By ethical gradualism I understand what G. Skirbekk describes as a principle of "advocatory" representation which concerns the way in which one takes moral responsibility in some borderline cases when given members of human species should represent other humans or non-humans on their behalf in a fairly moral manner (Skirbekk, 1994: 81 – 82)[1]. This particular definition demonstrates how an enrichment of moral interactions between humans and other species can be carried out by going beyond the thinking mode of choosing *either* radical anthropocentrism *or* radical eco-centrism.

2.2. Some Methodological Advantages of Applying Ethical Gradualism

As one of the main methodological benefits of applying the principle of "advocatory" representation, I would point out the one that ethical gradualism gives some hints how acting morally *on others' behalf*, one can feel obliged to act for *the sake of those others*. The necessity of rethinking the role of ethics in fulfilling some scenarios of co-existence is encouraged by the presumption that living in the same space is a matter of living with or without others, which is not an axiologically neutral process either. A similar conclusion applies to living in different spaces because we can live *with* others even when they do not live in one and the same space with us. The situation is complicated by the additional requirements of how to live in one and the same or different spaces when we and others live in different worlds. In turn, one should keep in mind that assuming the plurality of the worlds in question does not lead to supporting the idea of bad moral infinity unless the principle of ethical gradualism is neglected in the process of mapping those worlds.

Paradoxically enough, both radical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism support the idea of one common world, although they derive from mutually exclusive assumptions regarding the subjects who map its space. In the case of

radical anthropocentrism, the space of common world is exhausted with humans. It is mapped by humans for humans, while with that of radical eco-centrism, it is considered as being mapped by nature as a homogenous subject for nature alone. In both cases, the relation between one common world and uncommon worlds is set on the principle of exclusion. The world which is recognized as a common world gains the privilege of calling itself *center*, while the rest constituting uncommon worlds if any is coined as *periphery*.

That is why I argue that the necessity of introducing the principle of ethical gradualism into the process of mapping space concerns the respective necessity of recognizing that center-periphery is not an axiologically neutral dichotomy. Thus, by adopting the principle of ethical gradualism, one can reveal how neither center is 'good' as such nor is periphery 'bad' by default. One should also keep in mind that 'bad' has some different connotations when evaluated from the perspectives of radical anthropocentrism or radical eco-centrism.

Stating that we cannot rely upon *center-periphery* dichotomy is only a necessary condition for realizing that we need some other principles if we want to maintain the diversity of space untouched. The scenario of co-existing in one space full of different worlds shows that, similar to the way we cannot rely upon the center-periphery dichotomy, we can no longer rely upon the *common-uncommon* one either. This is due to the fact that the latter dichotomy is no longer recognizable as being based upon the assumption that spatial (physical) proximity leads to social and moral proximity by default.

Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I argue that adopting the principle of ethical gradualism requires an enrichment of both the scope and the criteria for mapping by adding the elaborated criterion of sharing, in respect to the process of co-existence. Regarding the process of co-existence, the question is whether or not we have had internalized the engagement of being concerned with others, especially when these others are not like us. The dilemma is getting even more complicated when the requirement for sharing space affects how to remap this space by making moral engagements on behalf of others when the latter can never become moral agents. In other words, the question is how – since morality is a human 'invention' – humans can provide moral treatment to representatives of organic and non-organic nature who could never exert moral agency by themselves.

3. 'Mapping' Otherness in the Era of the Anthropocene
How can the aforementioned dilemmas affect the process of 'mapping' otherness in the era of the Anthropocene since, as we already emphasized, mapping is not an axiologically neutral process? According to Latour, the "point of living in the epoch of the Anthropocene is that all agents share the same shape-changing destiny. A destiny that cannot be followed, documented, told, and represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity or objectivity" (Latour, 2014: 17). He

describes the present challenges of living as being concerned with rejecting every impulse that insists on being "from a place and having duration". "To the point that the Modernist dream may be defined as a constant fight to replace the "subjective" space and time by a really rational view of a space belonging to no space and a time made of timeless instants" (Latour, 2015: 154).

In turn, the lack of modernizing frontiers requires identifying different friends and foes due to the fact that new lines of conflicts bring to light "a totally different Gaia-politics", which redraws all the maps (Stengers in Latour, 2015: 154). That is why "by remixing all the ingredients of what used to be distinct domains of subjectivity and objectivity, the very notion of the Anthropocene" becomes "an enormous source of confusion – but a welcome source" (Ibid.).

However, extending the target group of moral subjects by adopting the principle of ethical gradualism can contribute to remapping otherness without using dichotomies such as *center-periphery* and *humans-other species*. Otherwise, relying upon the absolutization of these dichotomies would lead to stigmatizing the diversity of otherness, when humans and other species are recognized as 'the rest', depending on who is recognized as constituting the 'we' group.

In this context, I raise a hypothesis that extending the dichotomous type of mapping, as imposed in the era of the Anthropocene, can be recognized as glorifying a new ideal of performativity regarding moral agency. It demonstrates how to do things with others considered as tools. Such a process of transformation has much to do with filling the world with human-made objects as sovereign objects; an oxymoron that has been developed into a cult at the time of the Anthropocene. Therefore, the blurred frontiers between subjectivity and objectivity in Latour's sense can be examined as supplemented with the blurred ones between means and ends which rely upon a deliberately caused amnesia regarding the value of human condition.

Going back to the origin of the transformations in question, I argue that the necessity of a new *Gaia-graphy* (Latour, 2015: 152) is a logical consequence (in the sense of being both epistemologically and morally determined) of the changes concerning present human condition. Within the latter condition, the category 'the rest' becomes recognizable as a broad interspecies category consisting of all living beings (including some groups of humans), which are not "like us".

3.1. The Role of Myopic Moral Horizons in Mapping (Un)common Space

Analyzing the aforementioned specifications, I raise a hypothesis that axiological aspects regarding spatial dimensions of conflict sensitivity can be described by what Schmidt et al. call myopic moral horizons. Myopic moral horizons are defined as affected in the era of the Anthropocene by "the multiple temporal and spatial scales at which impacts of human activities are understood", as well as by "the multiple temporal and spatial horizons by which obligations" are interpreted (Schmidt et al., 2016: 4).

Regarding the spatial embodiments of myopic moral horizons, I argue that the normative validity of the process of acceleration, which is triggered by the overrated trust in progress in the era of the Anthropocene, is grounded in the objective to appropriate as much space as possible in minimum time. This in turn gives a green light to the different aspects of the appropriation of otherness for the purposes of demonstrating a broader ethos which can meet the requirements for overcoming some new moral challenges. From the perspective of the Anthropocene, the broader ethos is assumed to be broader in the sense of allowing the optimal cartography of space of 'the rest' by underrating the diversity of the subjects who inhabit this space. Thus, 'the rest' is recognized as a homogeneous subject with a small letter.

On a macro-methodological level, the gist of the problems regarding the ethos in question can be summarized as follows: by determining ethos of progress as 'broader', one inevitably makes it 'narrower' in a moral sense[2]. The assumption of being broad is an important premise for supporting the thesis of so-called by Schmidt et al. advocates of the good Anthropocene (Ibid.: 6). According to these advocates, "through innovation and technology", the ecological and social challenges we face "can be reframed as a moment to co-design the Earth System in a way that moves beyond the failed society/nature binaries" (Ibid.). However, as Schmidt et al. also argue, there are significant difficulties deriving from that view such as the double-bind consequences of technological solutions that raise the levels of consumption (Ibid.).

In this context, the principle of ethical gradualism gains new strength if we have to explain the particular negative effects of the broader ethos of progress in moral terms. Evaluating harm in its cumulative effects (Ibid.: 5)[3] clearly illustrates why ethical gradualism cannot be successfully applied within the framework of consequentialist ethics. The latter 'measures' the cumulative effects of actions on the basis of the quantitative but not necessarily qualitative implications of the individual and collective responsibility. The difficulty derives from the accumulation of the effects upon the people since we should specify whether or not these consequences are *produced* by one or many individuals, as well as whether or not they *affect* one or many individuals. Providing such a clarification is of crucial importance because it does not necessarily follow that by arguing that we need a broader ethos of progress we are excused of taking the responsibility to explore the diversity of different intersecting and confronting vital needs of the living beings on both individual and collective levels.

Returning to the process of mapping, I argue that overestimating the role of consequentialist ethics regarding broader ethos of progress also results from the overrated belief in the opportunities given by no man's land as a free space[4], where everyone can get as much as he or she wants without being restricted by the choices of other subjects. The lack of asking how it can happen (since we are not the only species in the universe) is underlined by the misbelief that it is we who own no man's land. This paradox, which is not only ontological and epistemological, but also

political and moral, can be described by referring to the concept of human *hubris*. Developing the latter, one starts to think that what is no one's is not commonly shared, but rather possessed by 'us' at the expense of 'the rest'.

By contrast, Latour claims that it is not hubris that makes modernizers move "but the escape from the past, a past to which they are totally fixated because they remain constantly terrified by being archaic, attached, and dependent." (Latour, 2011: 76)[5]. Being paralyzed by the past, these people are unable "to simultaneously look behind the back for what is coming next" (Ibid.) in order to prepare for it. He continues that "the moderns' state of confusion in facing the ecological crisis, the lack of any full-blown politics of nature, proves that they have been the *least* future-centered of all people. Had they looked ahead, they would have seen what was coming much earlier" (Ibid.). The modernizers are described as bad indicators "when the time has come to distinguish who is reactionary from who is progressive, who is archaic from who is modern…" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Latour emphasizes that it is the syndrome of people who are not reliable to be asked for directions ("Don't ask directions from people twice terrified!") (Ibid.). However, I would point out that having no sense of orientation in this case may also be considered as a result of the trauma of the past, in addition to the growing hubris. The latter has such a crucial impact since it is understood as a desperate strive for finding trustworthy fixation mechanisms due to which one to erase the trauma in question.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the different axiological aspects of the mapping process of the (un)common space, I aim to clarify why arguing for the non-contradictory recognition of (un)common worlds is not impossible. I reach the conclusion that the challenge is also strengthened by the fact that (un)common space requires not only the non-contradictory mapping of many (un)common worlds, but also providing some prescriptions how to live with (in the sense of co-exist in) the plurality of these (un)common worlds so as they to lose neither their unique features nor to lead to bad moral infinity. Otherwise, from the perspective of mapping space, it would mean that what is considered as a common world will always be recognized as a *center* in contrast to the uncommon worlds which would be stigmatized as a *periphery*.

Against the background of the aforementioned investigations, I have drawn the conclusion that spatial mapping of (un)common space is closely tied with the possibilities of 'moral' mapping since plurality of (un)common worlds requires revealing the possibilities of non-contradictory co-existence of different beings which are not necessarily able to exert moral agency. In turn, clarifying the role of the agency in question for the different scenarios of co-existence assumes the cultivation of conflict sensitivity. It reminds us that living *with* others is always a matter of becoming selves rather than functioning as just another living being.

Certainly, arguing for *either* common worlds *or* uncommon ones alone would not contribute to recognizing the plurality of (un)common space. That is why I claim that adopting the principle of ethical gradualism could open up some new perspectives of interacting with others by avoiding the difficulties choosing *either* radical ethical anthropocentrism *or* radical eco-centrism. Otherwise, paradoxically enough, radical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism would favor building one similar, in its absolutist embodiments, space where the idea of being commonly shared will be grounded in the principle of exclusion. Thus, common worlds will be justified as worlds excluding *either* humans *or* other beings depending on what subjects are recognized as deciding on others' behalf. In this context, I have drawn the conclusion that it is cultivation of sensitivity to the mode of living *with* different others that can contribute humans to be morally engaged with moral treatment of beings which could never develop moral agency.

However, one should also keep in mind that treating morally these beings on their behalf is only a necessary condition for justifying the role of moral agency unless the mode of 'for their own sake' is introduced. Otherwise, exerting moral agency on behalf of others brings us back once again to the trap of radical ethical anthropocentrism. Elaborating upon the latter statement, I also pay special attention to the fact that adopting the principle of ethical gradualism cannot be entirely abstracted from the field of ethical anthropocentrism since humans are the only one species which can exert moral agency and provide moral treatment in general. That is why the point is to develop some normatively relevant alternatives of coupling the principle of ethical gradualism with a reliable type of moderate ethical anthropocentrism.

Analyzing the strategies of remapping space from the perspective of moderate ethical anthropocentrism, I draw the conclusion that adopting the principle of ethical gradualism can contribute to successfully 'mapping' both ourselves and others without using spatial dichotomies and thus make possible the simultaneous existence of (un) common worlds in one non-contradictory manner. Otherwise, choosing *either center or periphery*, namely, a space full of *either* common *or* of uncommon worlds, would increase the tension brought with so-called myopic moral horizons which accompany the unsuccessful attempts at building a new *Gaia-graphy* in Latour's sense.

In turn, one of the main issues concerning this new *Gaia-graphy* is that it is triggered by a loss of gravity in the era of the Anthropocene, which, as I would argue, is a moral loss of gravity because the conflicts in the Anthropocene always have some strong moral dimensions. In the epoch of the Anthropocene, one no longer appeals for finding home since - due to the acceleration of time and compression of space - people no longer strive for having home for good. This makes the process of building (un)common space more urgent and complicated than ever.

All the complications result in two intrinsically related outcomes, at least. It becomes more and more difficult to spend enough time in one place which to call home. It is even more complicated to examine this issue from an existential

perspective since it concerns one's willingness to live long enough with others in the same place so as to *wish* to call this place home. That is why the need of imposing a new *Gaia-graphy* can be interpreted as an attempt at saving the human condition for the purposes of having a living condition for all of us, when we assume not only ourselves, but also the others who matter firstly for themselves and then, if possible, for us.

I also conclude that one of the main reasons why good advocates of the Anthropocene praise the role of a broader ethos of progress when mapping space is grounded in the overestimated belief in the panaceas this ethos can provide for our co-existence. Furthermore, the misbelief in the panaceas in question can be described as being triggered by one's way of overrating the opportunities the idea of no man's land brings to light. The misrecognition concerns the interpretation of free space as a space where everyone can appropriate as much space as possible in minimum amount of time. In turn, the paradox of uncontrollable appropriation, which simultaneously refers to everyone and no one, can be defined as arising from human hubris. The latter is strengthened by the assumption that what belongs to no one is not considered as commonly shared, but rather as being possessed by selected representatives ('we') at the expense of the rest ('they').

Extrapolating the debate on a macro-methodological level would mean that both forms of radicalism, namely, radical ethical anthropocentrism and radical eco-centrism, could be examined as demonstrations of hubris in mapping space of unity with uniformity, where peaceful co-existence excludes conflict sensitivity by default.

NOTES

1. For some arguments in favor of applying ethical gradualism in an interspecies context, see Skirbekk, 1994: 87-93.
2. As Latour relevantly points out, progress does not necessarily mean to look "ahead with eyes wide opened and careful precaution" (Latour, 2011: 76). It could also "be blind, thus moving with eyes wide shut" (Ibid.).
3. Schmidt et al. refer to Jamieson's theory that on the one hand, there are volcanic eruptions that are "potentially devastating but are not moral events", while, on the other one, it is difficult "to establish responsibility for small, cumulative and seemingly inconsequential actions by both individuals and communities that, when taken together, cause massive irreversible harm" (Ibid.).
4. Latour discusses the dream of living in no man's land (Latour, 2011: 76) as a result of frustration of dependence, namely, of living without attachment to land.
5. He suggests that it would explain why they keep living in utopia, "viz. thinking of growth and development without attachment and entanglement, a dream of living in no man's land" (Ibid.).

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