Future Value Conflicts in the Anthropocene

PROGRAMME

'Future Value Conflicts in the Anthropocene' is a two-day workshop that will be held at **Hertford College, Catte St, University of Oxford OX1 3BW** (**16–17th February 2023**)**.** The event will comprise presentations, reading, and discussion of three research questions:

Research Questions

1. How can we understand the shifting temporal priorities and key value conflicts of the Anthropocene?
2. What can catastrophic events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, teach us about long-term environmental challenges?
3. Do emerging technologies (especially AR/VR) have the potential to sharpen our intuitions about intergenerational value conflicts?

This will be an interdisciplinary meeting for UK- and Netherlands-based researchers, including participants from two research projects: (1) *Visions of the Anthropocene* (funded by the British Academy & KNAW) and (2) *Tomorrow's Value Conflicts* (funded by the TU/e Strategic Alliance). Details below.

Schedule

Wednesday 15th February 2023

18:00 – 19:30   Informal drinks in Turf Tavern, Oxford (own expense)

Thursday 16th February 2023

10:30 – 11:00   Welcome coffee
11:00 – 11:30: Introduction: Blake Ewing & Matthew Dennis
11:30 – 12:30: Plenary Discussion 1 (reading listed below)
12:30 – 13:30: Lunch
13:30 – 14:00   Poster Session: *Tomorrow's Value Conflicts*. Hosted by Nesrin Güneş.
14:00 – 15:00: Plenary Discussion 2 (reading listed below)
15:00 – 15:30: Afternoon tea
15:30 – 16:10: Presentation: Minha Lee (Tomorrow's Value Conflicts, TU Eindhoven)
16:10 – 18:00: Break
18:00 – 19:00: Aperitif & book launches:

- *Values for a Post-Pandemic Future* (2023)
- *Moral Choices for Our Future Selves: An Empirical Theory of Prudential Perception & Moral Theory of Prudence* (2022)

19:00 – 20:00: Dinner at Hertford College

Friday 17th February 2023

9:30 – 10:00   Coffee
10:00 – 11:30   Closing discussion (plenary)

Sponsors

This event builds on previous research from two projects and is generously sponsored by them:

Reading for Plenary Discussion 1 (Thursday 11:30 – 12:30)

Velleman, J. D. (1991). 'Well-Being & Time.' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. 72: 48–78.

Railton, P. (2016), 'Introduction', in Seligman, M. E. P., Railton, P., Baumeister, R. F. (2016). *Homo Prospectus*. Oxford, England, UK: Oxford University Press.

Reading for Plenary Discussion 2 (Thursday 14:00 – 15:00)

Viganò, E. (2022). 'Introduction' in *Moral Choices for Our Future Selves: An Empirical Theory of Prudential Perception and a Moral Theory of Prudence*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1–8.

Viganò, E. (2022). 'Chapter 4: How does the Moral Theory of Prudence work in Practice? The application of the theory to advance healthcare directives in dementia' in *Moral Choices for Our Future Selves: An Empirical Theory of Prudential Perception and a Moral Theory of Prudence*. New York: Routledge, pp. 93–113.

Project Title (1): '**Tomorrow's Value Conflicts**'

How can ethicists understand future environmental challenges? How can they test their intuitions about **future value conflicts**? The 21st century will require applying ethical insights to slow-burning environmental challenges that it is hard to anticipate in advance. The decisions we make today about **CO2 emissions**, the use of **scarce natural resources**, the **depletion of biodiversity**, and use of **non-renewable energy**, etc. will define the key ethical dilemmas of the future. Recently ethicists have acknowledged that our moral understanding of future value conflicts is highly sensitive (and often swayed) by our initial assumptions and intuitions. This has two obvious problems. First (1), many key environmental challenges are only **emerging slowly**. This means that it is hard to envision these problems before they arise, when it is typically too late. Second (2), the majority of ethicists still come from a **homogenous demographic** (white, male, high-income, Western), which growing research shows has a strong influence on their intuitions regarding future environmental problems. This panel will discuss using **experimental philosophy (x-phil)** to understand emerging value conflicts. X-phi is a new method to improve ethical reasoning by **integrating empirical data** into **ethical assessment**, which has been proposed as having the potential to transform our understanding of future environmental challenges. X-phi advocates have suggested that **VR/AR** may be able to 'immerse people in moral dilemmas' in ways that change their intuitions (Alfano 2018, Meijers 2021). The panelists will explore whether VR/AR has the potential to transform how we collectively view environmental challenges.

Project Title (2): '**Visions of the Anthropocene**'

Since its early use as a geologic periodisation, over the past two decades or so the Anthropocene concept has gained in temporal complexity. The use of sub-concepts like Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Anglocene, Polemocene, etc. speak to this development, as scholars from different practices and disciplines in the sciences and humanities began to engage with the concept. But in this process, the concept began to not only represent an increasingly complicated confluence of times – where world time encounters geological or planetary time – but also an entanglement of different times and temporalties that are especially susceptible to re-evaluation and reorientation in response to shock events. For instance, the emergence of COVID-19 provides a useful lens to anticipate key future challenges of the Anthropocene. It potentially poses challenges to other time horizons and priorities; or it validates them. Indeed, it is looking increasingly likely that the Anthropocene will involve learning how to cope with a degraded environment (clean air, water), scarcity of fossil fuels, future pandemics, as well as an increasing reliance on risky untested emerging

technologies (AI, IoT, climate engineering). In short, the ways of life experienced first-hand under events like COVID-19 may bear striking similarities (and important differences) to the future ways of life that many will come to experience during the unfolding conditions of the Anthropocene.

Presentation: Minha Lee (Tomorrow's Value Conflicts, TU Eindhoven)
Title: **Two Types of Moral Conflicts: Empirical Studies on Conflicts with Conversational Agents and Conflicts Within Oneself**

Artificial agents that have moral status and minds can influence people in moral situations; moral conflicts between humans and AI will become a greater issue in the coming years. We tested whether people's reactions to a virtual agent that brought up confrontational work conflicts influenced their physiological reactions, e.g., heart rate. Our qualitative analysis revealed that virtual agents for conflict training were positively received, but not for conflict mediation with cross-cultural differences. Those with non-Western backgrounds felt that an agent could help "save face," whereas Westerners preferred to resolve conflicts in person. In line with this, participants with a Western background rated the virtual agent to be less competent compared to those with non-Western backgrounds.

      Another type of conflict is found within: Our moral conscience as the "inner light" that guides us shines brighter during moments of ethical conflicts when we notice a tension between our many oughts and/or wants. In this, people may display different speech patterns when discussing morally conflicting situations. Based on a set of interview data, our quantitative analysis showed quiet and even-toned voice features when people talked about moral conflicts, and speech was laced with emotively positive and negative words, though more negative words were used. Moreover, we find promising results in our automatic classification experiment using speech features. How and what moral conflicts people deliberate on in real-life may be pertinent to future research in affective computing, as well as applications for decision-making support, ethical competencies coaching, therapy, and healthy moral selfhood.