

Francisco Garcia-Gibson

Assistant Professor, National Research Council, Argentina

garciaqibson@gmail.com

Short bio: I have published on global poverty and non-ideal theory at *Ratio*, *Metaphilosophy*, *Journal of Global Ethics*, and *Global Justice: Theory, Practice, Rhetoric*. I have been awarded a Marie Curie Fellowship and will be conducting a two-year research project on climate political action at the LSE Department of Government.

A defense of indirect-impact solutions to the inefficacy problem in climate political action

Abstract

The inefficacy problem is especially salient in climate politics. We need enough social movements, political parties, and states to act soon in order to prevent catastrophic climate change; yet many of these agents can't by themselves make a difference to climate change. How could these agents then have *any* reason to perform these inefficacious acts?

The dominant 'moralistic views' claim that even agents who can't make a difference can still have moral reasons to act (such as reasons based on fairness, complicity or ability to help). I argue that the moral reasons that existing moralistic views offer are at best very weak, and quite likely to be outweighed in most political action scenarios. Pursuing climate aims often comes at a *real* cost to other serious moral aims (such as risking people's right to work), and moralistic reasons for performing inefficacious acts typically can't outweigh these costs.

The main alternative to moralistic views are 'indirect-impact views', according to which in inefficacy cases agents have reason to act because they could make a difference indirectly, by influencing other agents. Indirect-impact views are promising. However, existing views try to show that in inefficacy cases agents *always* have indirect-impact reasons to act. I contend that this is implausible, because many political agents simply aren't sufficiently likely to inspire others to act, or at least likely enough as to offset the costs of performing inefficacious acts. I argue that indirect-impact views are only defensible if they are *casuistic*, i.e. they claim that only in some inefficacy cases agents have sufficiently weighty reasons to act.

I then respond to a serious objection by Julia Nefsky against casuistic indirect-impact views. These views counterintuitively imply that the main reason political agents have to perform inefficacious acts is that by doing so they could fool other agents into doing something they have no (moral or other) reason to do. I argue that inspiring agents to do what they have no reason to do does not count as fooling them: that's just how many social norms arise and persist. I also argue that even if this inspiration acts counted as fooling people, the acts could may be all-things-considered justified given the climate emergency.

I end by outlining what these conclusions imply for the philosophical research agenda on climate political action and the inefficacy problem. Instead of focusing on whether in cases of inefficacy climate political agents have moral reasons to act, philosophers would contribute more by focusing on identifying who (and when) can make a difference indirectly, and on defining when the likelihood of indirectly making a difference can be worth the moral, and other, costs.

Keywords: inefficacy problem; climate politics; indirect impact; competing political reasons.