

INTRODUCTION

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“The future is not yet.” When it comes to climate change this seemingly obvious saying slides into the view that we cannot yet or fully grasp the future—so we can or should leave thought of our future responsibilities to another day. In contrast, continental philosophers have long taken temporality as key to philosophy—and found that the future is central to our being *now*. The three articles in this special section¹ argue that questions of how we now know, imagine or calculate the future must be rooted in present dynamics, and that displacing the open future from the now can damage or distort our approach to climate change, with catastrophic consequences.

Climate change is a topic that brings philosophical and scientific perspectives into overlap, and a brief foray in the world of science can return us to this open future in a new way. In *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, the philosophically minded theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli concludes that “Time is our ignorance,” it is “information we don’t have.” His argument in some ways echoes insights of continental philosophy. “We are,” he writes, “beings who live in time... dwell in time and are nourished by it.” Yet this is only “because the world is immense, and we are small systems within the world, interacting only with macroscopic variables that average among innumerable small, microscopic variables.” For a godlike being who “had a *complete* description of a system,” all of the system’s variables would be “on the same footing,” so none “would be correlated to irreversible phenomena such as time.”² Perfect

¹ The papers grew out of a panel on “Future Earth, Future Life, Future People: Environment and Values” at the 2015 conference of the Canadian Society for Continental Philosophy. The conference and panel were supported by the following sources at Concordia University: Office of the Vice-President Research and Graduate Studies; Department of Philosophy; President’s Office; David O’Brien Centre for Sustainable Enterprise (DOCSE); Department of Religion; Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture (CISSC); Loyola College for Diversity and Sustainability; Department of Sociology and Anthropology;

² Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 252. The critical question whether anything properly called a “description” could ever be complete, or whether such a description and thereby timelessness, is mythical, or better, whether the time-

knowledge obliterates time. We, however, are born into inherently finite perspectives, we access being only from within, we are being-toward-death. This is to be of time.

Science too is born of time, and is thus a science of inborne ignorance. As Rovelli puts it, a “scientist is someone who lives immersed in the awareness of our deep ignorance.... But if we are certain of nothing, how can we possibly rely on what science tells us? The answer is simple. Science is not reliable because it provides certainty. It is reliable because it provides us with the best answers we have at present.”³

Rovelli’s view of science as born of ignorance, lacking certainty, and open to the future, broaches a challenge, from within science, to what Lorraine Code calls “The Tyranny of Certainty.” Code’s contribution moves beyond science itself, taking up the broader social and epistemological frameworks within which science operates and is deployed in discussions of climate change. She draws on feminist, continental and other philosophical currents that attend to questions of who is speaking, and the where and when of the situations from which one speaks. In effect she shows how the knowing of the situated “who” turns on a linkage between the present and an open future, a link that riddles knowledge with uncertainty. Our tendency is to mask this by seeking or demanding a certainty that could in fact only be achieved by tyrannical erasure of the diverse finitude of who we are. This misguided epistemological stance vis-à-vis the future harms our handling of climate change. Ted Toadvine, in his contribution, “Our Monstrous Futures: Global Sustainability and Eco-Eschatology” focuses on doomsday narratives as displacing the open future into a forecast apocalypse that is over and done with. The imagined apocalypse, like absolute certainty, masks the open future: as a projection of our own imagination, the apocalypse is far more navigable than the future we now have to deal with. In his critique of prevalent concepts of responsibility to future generations, Matthias Fritsch argues that we must understand the generational linkages between now and the future, not as over and done with, or as governable, calculable or discountable in advance, but as themselves springing from ongoingly open temporal and natal dynamics. Conceiving our debt to future generations as already calculable masks what is in fact an incalculable opening to what is still now being born.

less view in fact involves a different inflection of time-like change, must be left to another occasion. Suffice it to say that a phenomenological approach would further radicalize Rovelli’s insights about science.

³ *Ibid.*, 260.

The calculation of generational debts, the imagined apocalypse, and the tyranny of certainty are stratagems by which we hook ourselves to a future that we now claim to govern, imagine or know, so as to get ourselves off the hook for what we are now doing. We mask the open future by pretending to reach it from a now over and done with. The reality is that we are hooked to time and the future only because the *now* is not yet. And this is because we are ignorant of who we now are. Our approach to climate change must begin from this present future, of those who do not yet know themselves—the future from which alone finite knowing can begin. We may mask or forget this, but time tells us otherwise, bringing us back to the future now.

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