Justifying Futile Climate Resistance

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ABSTRACT

Many have attempted to justify certain acts of disruptive climate activism by appealing to, at least in part, their effectiveness. Accordingly, they help raise awareness, assure others that many will participate in the collective action, pressure politicians, call for change in governmental policies, and/or directly frustrate environmentally damaging industries. But what if the climate disaster is inevitable? What if climate protests and resistance are futile? Should this be the case, we cannot appeal to the instrumental value realized to justify the costs (or even harm) imposed by activists, as those would be gratuitous costs (or harm). Nevertheless, we believe that futile climate activism can be justified as fitting protest, that is, as a form of fitting expression against serious disregard for the lives of others. Violent climate resistance can satisfy the conditions of correct directedness, type appropriateness, proportionality, and adequacy, and is thus called for in situations of futility. The conditions of fitting protest may have further implications for protests that aim to bring about political or social change.

Keywords— climate change, protests, futile resistance, ecotage, property damage

1 Introduction

In the face of climate change, much of the future can seem bleak. The worst effects of the climate crisis, if they come to pass, will lead to catastrophic loss of lives and property, the destruction of ecosystems and heritage, the total submersion of several states, and the annihilation of their people's connection to their land.[1] While few will be untouched by climate change, its effects will fall unevenly, and those who stand to be worst affected are those who are already among the worst off. To mitigate or avoid these outcomes, coordination on an international scale is required. Yet, the prospects for serious climate change mitigation and avoidance are bleak. There seems to be every incentive for individual states to free-ride on the efforts of others, and little hope for even well-meaning states to make meaningful progress alone (Gardiner, 2011). Even if those who are

[1] For broad overviews of the effects of climate change, see e.g. NASA (n.d.); NOAA (n.d.).

disproportionately affected want climate action, states and politicians are (too) slow to respond. Many reasonably believe that the yearly Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—the most promising vehicle for coordinated state action—are meaningless and empty (Kalmus, 2023; McGrath, 2024; Wright, 2023). Fossil fuel companies have a disproportionate influence over our climate policies and themselves carry out many of the most harmful activities. Despite being experts in the consequences of climate change, they only use their rich knowledge to plan for their investments and projects (McKibben, 2019, Chapter 7).

In light of this lack of progress, some have opted for climate activism, whether peaceful or radical. Extinction Rebellion, for instance, has occupied places of public importance across the world, including traffic hubs, highways, and airports. The youth have gone on strike. Environmental activists have occupied coal mines and seaports to temporarily frustrate the extraction and export of coal. Some have gone so far as to damage oil pipelines.

Yet, just like greener policy proposals, climate activism is often met only with indifference, lip service, mockery, or even hostility by political leaders, and by misinformation and even threats from fossil fuel companies (Farrell et al., 2019; Si et al., 2023; Gunster et al., 2018; Mattheis, 2022). Activists are fighting an uphill, if not a losing, battle.

In short, it is reasonable to expect that many of the worst predicted outcomes of the climate crisis will come to pass, and that climate activism is powerless to prevent them. (We very much hope that this isn't the case, but hope and expectation are quite different things.) And this expectation leads us to consider the possibility that climate activism may be futile. If this is so, then the many costs climate activism imposes may not be justifiable: we cannot appeal to their effectiveness vis-à-vis the severe consequences they help to prevent, as they do not achieve or prevent anything.

This paper considers an alternative framework for the justification of futile climate resistance, even when that resistance is costly or imposes harm on others. Drawing on recent work on the expressive justification of harmful protest (Flanigan, 2023; Flanigan, 2025), we propose that futile climate resistance, including when it imposes harms, can be justified by the normative dynamics of *protest itself*, which is to say (we argue) as a form of *fitting expression*. The very futility of climate activism, together with the severe injustice the climate crisis represents, makes acts of protest a fitting response. Moreover, we contend, the severity of this injustice calls for *forceful* acts of protest. Marches, letters to the editor, and other traditional tools in the protester's toolkit are inadequate to meet the seriousness of this crisis. In this way, the pursuit of illegal and ordinarily impermissible means of protesting the climate crisis—coercion, threats, and property damage—may be morally justified.

By providing a potential justification for futile climate activism, we believe that our account broadens our understanding of climate resistance in particular but also resistance to injustice in general. Current discussions about what we may do in the face of injustice are dominated by a focus on instrumental concerns; that is, a focus on what resistance can achieve (e.g. Brownlee, 2012; Rawls, 1999; Smith, 2011; etc). But there is also a tradition that focuses on what's *worth* resisting, without necessarily taking into consideration whether resistance achieves any concrete outcome—because of its importance to oneself (Boxill, 1976; Hill, 1973); because it honors the value of something valuable (Southwood & Wiens 2022); or because it is the interpersonally fitting response to another's actions

(Flanigan, 2023; Flanigan, 2025). This alternative tradition recognizes that resistance often takes place in contexts where the prospects for instrumental achievements are too uncertain, or worse, clearly out of reach, yet nevertheless seem importantly called for.

Our discussion contributes to the *fitting protest* strand of this literature. In addition to demonstrating that view's fruitfulness for thinking about climate resistance, our discussion develops that view in ways it has not so far been developed, and so deepens our understanding of noninstrumental resistance in general. Moreover, our account also sheds further light on some aspects of instrumental protests.

Here's the plan. Section 2 presents the empirical case for climate despair, on which the rest of the argument is conditioned. Section 3 introduces a recent account of the justifiability of futile resistance as expressive protest. Section 4 develops and enriches this account by considering its implications for climate resistance. Section 5 considers an important worry for any theory of the justification of climate resistance: whether it permits harming persons. Section 6 returns to the argument's empirical premises and considers how its conclusions change if we are uncertain whether the climate crisis is inevitable. Section 7 concludes.

2 Climate despair

As we write this paper, Australia, the world's second-largest coal exporter, continues to export coal, despite the abundant renewable energy source potential the country has. At COP28, Australia's Climate Change Minister supported phasing out fossil fuel in the energy system by 2050, yet at the same time, "Australian companies are moving to expand fossil fuel production: more than 100 major coal, oil and gas projects are in planning, at a cost of around A$200 billion" (Green, 2023). Indonesia, the world's largest coal exporter, increased its exports by 11.5% in 2023 (Maguire, 2023). Neither China nor India committed themselves to tripling their renewables by 2030 (Hussain, 2023). The United States, the world's highest per-capita emitter (Climate Watch, 2021), also fails to do its fair share (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). Trump is now again in power; during his campaign, he had a clear slogan: *drill, baby, drill* (Martínez, 2024). His current actions on the climate are consistent with his electoral promises.

These trends, which are reflective of a larger global failure to limit warming to agreed-upon levels (McGrath, 2023; Poynting, 2024), will have dramatic consequences for many present and future people.[2] At least 3.3 billion people—40% of the world's population—live in "contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change" (IPCC, 2022, p. 12). Conservative projections estimate that by 2100, more than 400 million people will have seen their homes fully submerged by sea level rise (Hooijer & Vernimmen 2021). Those living in coastal areas that will remain above water will nevertheless see their "settlements and infrastructure, health and well-being, water and food security, and economies and culture" severely disrupted (Mycoo et al. 2022, p. 2045) in "compounded and cascading" ways (IPCC 2022, p. 66). Migration away from these areas will involve not only mass displacement and its attendant harms but also potentially the loss of entire nation-states and thus "ancestral homelands, unique and lasting ties to land, and vital cultural identities" (Cerdeiro et al., 2023; Ramsay et al., 2023).

[2] Concerns about the non-identity of future people have been argued, from a variety of perspectives, to be practically immaterial, affecting the precise magnitude, but not the fact, of climate disaster. See *inter alia* Mazor (2009) and Tank (2022).

Pessimism about policymakers' willingness to avoid many of the worst climate change outcomes seems warranted. Many have thus decided to take matters into their own hands. For example, in 2007, six British activists scaled the tower of the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station, causing power production (and thus coal burning) there to cease for a time (Bedell, 2009). Similarly, in 2014 and again 2023, members of the Pacific islander "Climate Warriors" organisation together with hundreds of Australians paddled into the Port of Newcastle, the world's largest coal port, on traditional canoes, kayaks, and surfboards, and formed a blockade to temporarily stop coal from being exported (Beazley, 2023; Davidson, 2014). These concrete acts of resistance and others like them take place against a background of both widespread peaceful participation in the global climate movement—for instance, more than 7 million people are reported to have participated in Fridays for the Future events in 2019 (Deutschman et al., 2024)—and growing calls for more radical action (e.g. Malm, 2021).

Yet despite the idea that activists are taking matters into their own hands, it remains unclear what such acts, including by their own lights, are meant to accomplish. Alone, they are drops in the ocean; and even in combination, these acts could not substantially affect emissions. They are thus most plausibly seen as symbolic resistance aimed at driving public opinion to pressure governments to adopt policies fundamentally different from current ones. Yet, even when radical climate protests don't alienate potential allies (Kountouris & Williams, 2023), climate activism has very limited success in leading to concrete policy changes, at least and notably in the United States (McAdam, 2017). Climate activism, as a matter of fact, has very limited success in shifting public support for climate action (Fisher et al., 2023). Worryingly, activism has "no direct correlation with significant policy changes *able to mitigate global warming*" (Coca-Vila 2024, p. 8, our emphasis). In both direct and indirect practical dimensions, then, the concern is that climate activism accomplishes approximately nothing—or worse, that it is counterproductive.

There are other ways climate activism may be futile (though we think the following two considerations are less central than our main worry). Even if we manage to avert the climate crisis, individual acts of climate activism may not play any meaningful role in facilitating this goal. For one, the radical changes necessary for the transition away from fossil fuels may be caused by technological breakthroughs or structural changes in economic incentives. Alternatively, even if certain instances of climate activism join into the causal chain that leads us to meeting our climate goals, others may not, especially those performed in countries that free-ride upon the efforts of other countries. In the latter scenario, the work of certain climate activists are simply too isolated from others to make any difference.

Such possibilities pose an important challenge to accounts of climate disobedience and resistance that take effectiveness as a justificatory condition. The influential Bedau-Rawls's account of civil disobedience holds that civil disobedience must have reasonable prospects of bringing about political change (Bedau, 1961; Rawls, 1999, Section 55); Jennifer Welchman's account of environmental civil disobedience turns centrally on the effectiveness of environmental civil disobedience (Welchman 2001); and accounts of uncivil disobedience often propose that the key to its justification lies in its greater effectiveness compared to civil disobedience (Delmas, 2018; Lai, 2019). Recent accounts also optimistically hold the effectiveness of climate activism central to their justification, either as successful defensive actions (Arridge, 2023; Malm, 2021; Manson, 2024) or as effective means to distribute the costs of mitigating the climate crisis fairly (Lai & Lim, 2023).

The general worry is that, insofar as futility is concerned, instrumental justifications of climate activism are untenable. While the costs of climate activism can be imposed upon liable parties, they are not instrumental to averting the climate threat. And if they are not instrumental in averting the climate threat, they cannot be justified by appealing to the vital instrumental roles they play in averting the climate threat. What's more, given the futility of their acts of resistance, one may even wonder whether climate activists might then become legitimate targets of defensive action themselves.

3 The expressive account

The situation facing climate victims is thus, plausibly, that they face a grave and potentially catastrophic injustice, but they are powerless to do anything about it. When facing wrongs that one cannot overcome, what is the appropriate course of action? There are several possibilities to consider.

First, one might do nothing, either out of despair or out of conviction that when lacking ameliorative options, it is best not to act—at least when acting imposes costs on oneself or others. Second, one might do a little, not with the hope of improving one's condition, but in order to keep the spirit of resistance alive, or perhaps to help prefigure a more just state of affairs. Third, one might resist anyway, indeed perhaps *because* the path to ameliorating injustice is blocked.

It seems plausible that the first two courses of action are permissible. In contrast, the third—active but futile resistance—is the least obviously so. It is, however, the option we will defend here. Moreover, we will argue that resistance in such circumstances is not only permissible but *appropriate*. In this section, we will spell out these claims in more detail.

To begin, it is worth motivating the intuitive plausibility of the view that forceful resistance can be permissible under conditions of futility. Forceful resistance involves substantial costs, typically both to those who resist and to those resisted, including the imposition of harms. Since these costs are by hypothesis futile, it may seem puzzling or doubtful whether they could be justified. But consider, for example,

> *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.* During the Nazi occupation, Eastern Europe's Jewish population was forcibly concentrated into urban ghettos. Several hundred thousand Jews were concentrated in the largest of these, the Warsaw Ghetto. When it became clear to residents that the Nazis' "relocation" programmes were in fact mass extermination programmes, armed resistance was organised. In April 1943, resistance fighters together with ordinary civilians, fought against Nazi occupation forces attempting to "relocate" the last of the ghetto's residents. Ultimately, about 14,000-20,000 Jews were killed in the uprising, and about 50,000 more were sent, as planned, to the Treblinka death camp (following the more than 200,000 who had already been sent there).[3]

[3] The Nazi commander Jürgen Stroop reported these numbers in his report after murdering the Jews in the Warsaw Ghettos. The document, often referred to as the Stroop Report, was used as indicting evidence that led to Stroop's conviction and execution after the war. Here's an English translation of the report: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/1061-ps.asp

Surely Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were permitted to fight for their lives, even if they knew that they could not save themselves. Indeed, on a common view of the history of the uprising, it was the very realisation of the hopelessness of their condition that spurred them to act. In other words, it was *because* they knew they had no path forward that they decided to stand and fight. Consideration of this and similar cases makes clear, intuitively, that acts of forceful resistance are sometimes morally permissible even when they achieve no instrumental benefits. But this intuition, as strong as it is, does not explain why resistance in such cases is permitted, nor can it tell us whether a similar permission extends to other cases of futile resistance, such as futile climate resistance.

One possibility, suggested by the language of "standing up for oneself" and "fighting for one's life" is that those who resist in such cases are engaged in permissible self- (and other-) defense. This view is *prima facie* appealing but faces the immediate difficulty that in such cases, by hypothesis, successful defense is unachievable. If defense is unachievable, in what sense could the ethics of self-defense license the relevant harms? It does not help to point out that in some cases, a slim chance of successful defense might be improbably realised, for very often, to assign even a slim chance of success seems to overestimate the odds. Did Jewish resistance fighters in Warsaw in 1943 have even a slim chance of saving the lives of Ghetto residents against the Nazi regime? For every David and Goliath story, there are many more cases in which the oppressed are simply crushed. Moreover, this view also seems to get the direction of variation wrong: in at least some cases, as the odds get slimmer, the call for resistance only grows. But if it is the slim chance of defensive success that licenses these harms, then as the odds get slimmer, these resistant harms can only become less permissible.

In light of this, others have taken the view that what is permissibly defended in such cases is not the lives or bodies of those who resist but rather their *moral standing* or *honour* (Frowe, 2014, Chapter 4; Statman, 2008). The idea is that even when one cannot defend one's life or body, one can, by standing up for oneself, successfully defend one's standing or honour. This idea, however, is subject to a variety of serious objections that have not so far been answered, including that (i) the view must license "deferred harms": harms which "restore" one's standing or honour long after the initial assault, and which therefore look very much like acts of revenge; and that (ii) the view engages in unwarranted extension of the principles of defensive ethics to objects—standing, honour—that are very unlike, and have very different properties from, those on the basis of which the principles have been developed (see Bowen, 2016; Ferzan, 2018; Flanigan, 2023). In view of these difficulties, this is also not (in our view) a promising path to take.[4]

A third possibility, which we prefer, also takes seriously the language of "standing up for oneself" but casts this as a matter of expression rather than defense. On this view (developed in other contexts by Flanigan, 2023; Flanigan, 2025), by fighting for life or limb even when they cannot be secured, one expresses to one's attacker that their conduct is both wrong and intolerable. Fighting back, on this view, is a way of *saying something*—"no!" and "no more!"—and a way of *demanding interpersonally* that one's attacker recognize the wrongfulness of their action and cease it, even when, and perhaps because, one is powerless to enforce this demand.

[4] That being said, if any of these accounts turn out to be correct, they will align with our overall claim: climate resistance that does not ameliorate climate injustice is morally permissible—though in this case because it defends standing or honour, rather than because (as we argue) it is expressively fitting.

Importantly, this view claims not only that standing up for oneself in the face of oppression is *a way* of protesting one's wrongs, but that it is *morally permissible to do so*. This thought may seem vulnerable to the same sort of objection posed against the alternatives already discussed. For, by hypothesis, in the cases in question, protesting one's wrongs will not make them cease; and even on a communicative level, such protest may seem futile, for very often, one's expression of protest in such cases will be ignored. But if protest accomplishes nothing, how could it license the imposition of costs on the wrongdoer *or* on the protester?

We propose that protest is permitted, when it is permitted, not because of its instrumental achievements, but because it is a way of saying the appropriate thing to say—that is, because it is *fitting expression in the context*. Before explaining why we believe this is so, it is worth explaining more fully what we mean by this.

3.1 Fittingness

When we say that a person, say, Sandra, should be trusted because she is trustworthy, or that some proposition should be believed because it is credible, we are making fittingness claims. That is to say, trust is the fitting—or equivalently, the "merited," "apt," "appropriate," "correct," or "called for"—response to the trustworthy, and belief (or credence) the fitting response to what is credible. As we use the terms, when we say that "Sandra is trustworthy" we are making a *fittingness claim*, and when we say, on this basis, that "You should trust Sandra," we are expressing a *fittingness demand*. Put generally, fittingness claims are propositions about what is fitting, and fittingness demands are expressions of the normative demands yielded by true fittingness claims.

For practical purposes, we take the fitting to be a basic normative category alongside the traditional categories of the deontic and the evaluative (see Berker, 2022). We say "for practical purposes," because although there is ongoing meta-ethical debate about whether any one of the basic normative categories is ultimately *more* basic than the others, it is clear that at the practical level, the categories are distinct: the trustworthy merit trust not because of any duty or other requirement to trust, nor because of the goodness or value that trust could bring about, but simply in virtue of the normative standards of trust itself. At the practical level, at least, the fitting is a *sui generis* normative category that interacts with, but does not reduce to, other normative categories.

The category of the fitting has a long history in philosophy, but it is only in recent decades that it has attracted significant interest and attention. Much of that attention has come from meta-ethicists (e.g. Howard, 2018) and philosophers of emotion (e.g. d'Arms & Jacobson, 2000). Political philosophers have recently begun to attend to the category as well (e.g. Srinivasin, 2018, Cherry, 2021), but have confined their claims largely to the domain of political emotions. First-order practical fittingness claims, such as the ones we make in this paper—i.e., claims about what it is fitting to *do*—are highly contested and remain the object of a certain skepticism, as does, to a certain extent, the category of the fitting itself (Howard, 2018. p. 2; Plunkett, 2021; Paytas, 2024). To address this, it is worth being explicit about how, in our view, we can arrive at first-order practical fittingness claims, as well as what, precisely, they entail.

First, it is important to note that "fitting" is a technical term, and not all natural linguistic uses of the term (of which there are many) correspond to valid fittingness claims. Most obviously, to claim that some piece of clothing fits the wearer is to say nothing about whether it should be worn. Similarly, claims such as that the stormy weather befits one's dark mood are of course not claims about how the weather should behave, nor about the mood one should be in. By contrast, when we claim that protest is the fitting response to certain wrongs, we use the term in its technical sense to mean that it is the *normatively correct response* in those circumstances.

Second, a claim that some response (e.g. grief or belief) befits some phenomenon (e.g. loss or good evidence) is made true by some further substantive theory of why a particular type of response befits that particular type of phenomenon. This is not a matter, in the first instance, of the fit relation itself, but rather of the particular domain of application that the response and phenomenon in question involve. (Here, e.g. grief befits the loss of a loved one or good evidence demands the formation of some belief.) This is like the way that what makes something good to do often depends more on features of the relevant context or domain of action than on general facts about goodness, and what makes something rationally required often depends more on the nature of rationality than on general facts about requiredness. In this way, first-order fittingness claims appeal, at least implicitly, to background theories of fit-making that can ground such claims in the relevant domains. Thus, the explanation of why one should believe *this* given *that*, why blame is the correct response to wrongdoing, and why grief is the appropriate response to loss, will all look quite different: despite all (arguably) involving the fittingness relation, they each also involve very different normative domains—belief, interpersonal ethics, and emotion.

Third, and relatedly, not all fittingness demands have the same normative force, and what force they do have depends on their domain of application. Just as moral requirements are typically thought to have greater normative force than rational requirements, so too do demands of fit in interpersonal morality (seemingly) have greater force than demands of emotional fit. That is, it matters much more, e.g., to give fitting thanks, or to express fitting remorse, than it does to respond fearfully to something fearsome or to respond angrily when anger is apt. Again, this follows not from facts about the category of the fitting itself but from the relative normative importance of morality, rationality, and emotion. Because interpersonal morality is a domain of particular importance, it should not be surprising if first-order fittingness demands in that domain turn out to be weightier than first-order fittingness demands in other normative domains.[5]

3.2 Protest as fitting response

Our claim is that climate resistance is a fitting response to the climate crisis. This is a specific instance of the more general claim that political protest is sometimes a fitting response to political wrongs, which is itself, on our view, an instance of the still more general claim that protest is sometimes a fitting response to interpersonal wrongs.

In the background of our first-order claim, then, is a substantive theory of protest that explains when and why it is an appropriate response to interpersonal wrongdoing. While developing that theory in full is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to describe

[5] Fittingness is sometimes equated with desert, but this is a mistake. Some conceptions of desert make substantive fittingness claims (e.g. that for one to deserve punishment is for it to be fitting that one suffer), but fittingness claims needn't make any appeal to desert. For example, one could hold that loss befits grief, and that grief essentially involves suffering, without holding that grievers deserve to suffer (Nelkin, 2019). This is important for our purposes, since we hold that fitting protest can sometimes license harms, but we do not hold that wrongdoers deserve harm.

it in outline in order to substantiate the first-order fittingness claim we make.

The basic idea, following Strawson (1962), is that common membership in a community of moral agents licenses what he called "reactive attitudes": attitudes of moral accountability and assessment, like praise and blame, that we hold only toward those we take to be moral agents in the relevant sense—people toward whom we take the "participant stance." Thus, the way we react to the threat of being knocked down is very different depending on whether the threat comes from another person or from (say) a rock. Although we might work to prevent both from coming to pass, only the person can be held accountable by being blamed, excused, etc. Moreover, not only is it *possible* to take attitudes of accountability towards other agents, doing so is positively *called for*. To fail to respond to the way others treat us is to move ourselves, or them, outside of the practices of accountability inherent in interpersonal morality, and instead to regard them from the "objective stance," i.e. just as we would a rock. Strawson called the demand to relate to each other in this way "the strains of involvement."

Further developing this view, Angela Smith (2012) argues that blame—the archetype of a Strawsonian reactive attitude—is fundamentally a kind of protest. Describing her conception of protest, she writes:

> I think we should understand protest as a challenge to, and a repudiation of, a certain moral claim implicit in the wrongdoer's behavior. ... If we understand blame as itself a form of moral protest, then, we might see it as having two distinct but related aims: first, to *register* the fact that the person wronged did not deserve such treatment by *challenging* the moral claim implicit in the wrongdoer's action; second, to prompt moral recognition and acknowledgment of this fact on the part of the wrongdoer and/or others in the moral community (Smith, 2012, pp. 42-43).

Protest, on this view, is a basic component of interpersonal ethics—at least as basic, and perhaps more so, than blame. It correctly responds to wrongdoing by challenging it, thereby insisting on the proper respect owed to the wronged, as well as on the appropriate recognition and acknowledgement of this by others.

Put simply, protest is a way of fittingly rejecting wrongful treatment by others. It is fitting because challenging transgressions against one's moral status by others is a core part of how we engage with each other as co-members of the moral community, and a core part of how we hold one another to account. It is how we stand up for ourselves in the face of wrongdoing. *Not* to respond to others' wrongful treatment would be to regard them, or oneself, from the "objective" rather than "participant" stance.

We believe a parallel thought holds true in politics. On this view, political society is one among several spheres of interpersonal interaction, distinguished by its special structure and aims rather than by the basic kind of relations instantiated among its participants. Political wrongs are thus a species of interpersonal wrong, and call for protest. Not to protest political wrongs committed against one is, holding other concerns equal, in a parallel way, to see oneself or one's wrongdoer as outside the political community, as not the kind of agent whose conduct merits practices of accountability.

We take protest to be fundamentally expressive. That is, the activity of challenging others' wrongdoing and demanding acknowledgement of it is an interpersonal activity, which one undertakes by expressing these things to others. Fitting protest, then, is understood as fitting expression. We take this to be true in interpersonal and political contexts. Importantly, since interpersonal and political wrongs can be very serious, the demands of fitting protest in response to them can be correspondingly very weighty.

3.3 Conditions of fitting resistance

Our proposal is that climate resistance can be understood as a form of political protest in this sense. It is a way of expressing what is fitting to express in light of the gravity of the injustice. *Futile* climate resistance is a response specifically to the apathy and wrongful inaction of those who could do something about the climate crisis but do nothing.

Even if this is accepted, however, it might seem that the fittingness of protest could not go so far as to license *harms* against others, since protest (like other forms of expression) can very often be accomplished simply with words. That is, even if saying "no" and "no more" is fitting, what could license saying so through harmful acts?

It is common, however, to think that when one should say something because it is fitting, one should not simply say it but say it *adequately*. (On this point, see especially Anderson, 1995; Anderson & Pildes, 2000.) For example, a mumbled "sorry" or "thanks" may be inadequate when only a heartfelt expression of remorse or gratitude will do. Similarly, even heartfelt gratitude or remorse may be inadequate if it is kept to oneself, i.e. not expressed. In more extreme circumstances, to adequately apologize or thank someone can require acts. An apologetic gift, or "going out of one's way" to give thanks with some kindness in turn, may be the only way to adequately respond to major moral failure or great kindness. A parallel thought applies to fitting protest. When one has demanded that one's wrongdoer cease, but when the wrongs continue anyway, it may be that one should *insist* that they stop by saying so more loudly. And if one's loud protests are ignored, it may be that one should turn next to expressive acts. One can, by slamming one's fist or stomping one's feet, or ultimately by fighting back, forcefully make one's righteous claim that their conduct is wrong and intolerable. Anything less than this may be inadequate to the circumstances.

In addition to this *adequacy condition*, there are several further conditions on fitting expression, and thus on fitting protest (identified in Flanigan, 2023). For one thing, fitting protest must be *proportionate*, meaning that it must not be excessive with respect to the thing protested. For example, it would most often be disproportionate to protest a social slight with loud, passionate recrimination. For another, fitting protest must be *correctly directed*. This is similar to the liability condition in defensive ethics, insofar as it typically requires that protest be directed towards those who are responsible for what is protested. It would often not make sense, and would not be fitting, for example, to protest the injustice of one city's policies by addressing the mayor of a neighbouring city. Finally, fitting protest must also be *type appropriate*. This is just to say that the *form* of a protest must be of the appropriate type, i.e. intelligible as protest of the thing protested. To protest a ban on certain books by destroying them would not, for example, be a fitting form of protest against such a policy, even if one insisted while doing so, "this is my protest against book bans."

So, our proposal is that futile climate resistance is justified when and because it is a fitting response to the injustice of climate change and the futility of protest against it; and specifically, that an instance of futile climate resistance is fitting only if it adequately and proportionately responds to those responsible for climate injustice, in a form of an appropriate type. Could radical climate activism, including violence or property destruction, meet these conditions? In the following section, we'll consider and further develop the conditions of the expressive account in greater detail as they apply to climate activism and resistance.

4 Climate resistance as fitting protest

To reiterate, we are taking seriously the possibility that climate activism is futile. After decades of summit meetings, talks, making demands, and activism both peaceful and radical, the climate disaster is now upon us, with only more and worse to come. What may activists now do? We believe that activists who are the victims of the climate disaster, and their allies, may justifiably protest the inaction and indifference leading to this injustice. This may involve, we contend, some measure of violence and property damage. For example, we contend that the ecosabotage performed by Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya against the Dakota Access Pipeline (see Shipley, 2021) and the Frontline Action on Coal's vandalism of mining equipment in Australia (see FLAC, 2021) are justifiable. In the following, we will spell out the conditions that both license and limit such protests as expressive acts: type appropriateness, correct directedness, adequacy, and proportionality.

4.1 Type appropriateness

There are many ways to protest, just as there are many ways to say "thank you" or "I'm sorry." But some forms of expression are ill-suited to playing these roles. Gratitude and contrition cannot ordinarily be expressed with a slap, and protest cannot ordinarily be expressed with a grin. The problem is that these acts, in their expressive dimension, are not of the appropriate type. This is not simply about expressive possibility, it is about appropriateness: writing "thank you" or "I'm sorry" on my hand would not render the slap a type-appropriate expression of gratitude or contrition, nor would saying "stop!" through a grin make the grin a type-appropriate form of protest. For expression, including protest, to be type appropriate is just for its form to be well-suited to its content.

One way to judge whether a particular case of climate protest is type appropriate is to evaluate whether, and to what extent, it *responds intelligibly* to what is protested against. Several recent accounts of protest and resistance have proposed views in this vein. For example, Chong-Ming Lim (2023) proposes that the targets of protest must stand in the correct causal relation to the injustice protested against. Accordingly, as the workplace of a fossil fuel executive is causally connected to the extraction policies, the workplace can be a legitimate target of protest. Nicholas Southwood and David Wiens (2021) propose that an action must honor the value in question when promoting a value whose achievement is not feasible, and must not, at least, contribute to the violation of the values one protests on behalf of. Thus, for example, climate protests that target public transportation—as the cleaner forms of traveling—are inappropriate. Megha Devraj (2024) argues that *spectacular* protests, while not necessarily targeting persons or artefacts that directly contribute to injustice, can, through showing, help us imagine a world where pernicious norms are absent. When protesters target pieces of art in museums, they highlight the way in which we value classical Western art but continue to ignore how the climate crisis threatens other natural or artificial heritage. In doing so, protestors help us imagine a better world that is both feasible and desirable. The above accounts can be understood as articulating different modes of *intelligible response* to injustice. Saying that protest must intelligibly respond to injustice is another way of saying that protest must *make sense* in light of what it protests against.

With respect to the climate crisis, protests that interfere with the operations of corporations that are in the business of producing emissions, or put pressure on the systems that enable fossil fuel and mining industries, are most clearly type appropriate—they protest against the entities and systems morally responsible for climate disaster now and in the future. (These entities and systems, it is worth noting, are not only responsible for bringing about climate change, they often also actively work to derail efforts to ameliorate the climate crisis by, for example, using political donations to block greener policies and spreading misinformation to discredit climate scientists and vilify greener energy sources.) In contrast, protests that do little more than (say) disrupt public transport—one of the more environmentally friendly means of travel—display a stark mismatch between the content of the protest and how it is expressed.

This isn't to say that such protests are *eo ipso* unjustifiable. Mass protests may use the disruption caused to gain publicity, raise public awareness, and ultimately create an audience for a type-appropriate message regarding the climate crisis. But the justification of such tactics in this way is instrumental: it depends on whether the good promoted can outweigh the inconvenience imposed on the affected travelers. When they are justified, it is because of the value of their consequences rather than because they are a fitting response to wrongs. By contrast, type-appropriate fitting protests respond directly to what they protest.

The same might be argued, though more tenuously, of protests that deface priceless pieces of human cultural heritage, which are *prima facie* unrelated to the climate crisis. This issue is raised by some climate resistance tactics, such as covering Stonehenge with orange cornflower (Kerr, 2024), throwing soup on the Mona Lisa (Cohen, 2024), or gluing oneself to a road (Deutsche Welle, 2023). Some who pursue these tactics may argue that they are expressively type appropriate, not merely instruments for raising awareness: by (reversibly) defacing priceless objects we collectively value, our failure to correctly collectively value the environment (that is subject to irreversible damage) is highlighted, and may help us imagine a world without such disparities (Devraj, 2024). This is not the place to discuss the merits of such claims in detail. The point is rather that our view correctly locates the source of moral disagreement in these cases: it is about whether they are type-appropriate responses to the climate crisis. Substantively, it also seems clear that if these tactics are type appropriate, they seem to be less so than other forms of protest whose form more clearly directly matches their expressive content.

4.2 Correct directedness

For expression to be fitting, it must also be directed at the proper target. For example, when thanks are called for, it is thanks *to* the object of one's gratitude that is called for. Similarly, when protest is called for, it is protest *of* a wrong and (typically) *toward* a wrongdoer that is called for.[6] More precisely, protest is correctly directed insofar as it is

[6] We are open to the possibility that some systemic injustices may not have particularly responsible perpetra-

directed at (and imposes attendant burdens, harms, or costs on) those who are responsible for the climate crisis.

But who are the responsible parties when it comes to the climate crisis? Again, plausible candidates include polluting corporations, reckless states or governments, as well as perhaps individuals in positions of responsibility within these group agents. Insofar as corporations and states or governments are those most clearly responsible for the climate crisis, protest is most clearly fitting when it targets these entities.

An important question is whether, in democratic societies, ordinary citizens can also be responsible for, and thus appropriate targets of protest for, actions taken by the state in their name. This question in its general form is contentious, as is the more specific question of whether ordinary citizens in developed countries bear sufficient responsibility for their states' climate policies. While each has indeed benefited from the consumption of fossil fuels, ordinary citizens typically do not have much of a say over energy (extraction) policies. Thus, while the state and its officials may undertake harmful climate policies on behalf of, to the benefit of, and with the authorization of, democratic citizens, how we may distribute such responsibilities to these citizens is unclear. This consideration alone speaks against indiscriminate climate protest that aims at disrupting public life (such as transportation and public gatherings) on expressive grounds. While indiscriminate climate action may manage by sheer numbers to affect responsible persons, mass protests more often than not burden innocent parties (Lai & Lim, 2023). In contrast, there are clear bodies that have knowingly and intentionally conducted business to profit from activities that led to and exacerbate the climate crisis we currently face, and the political and economic system that enables those corporations. Environmental protests that directly bring their case against responsible parties are most clearly correctly directed.[7]

Can violence or property damage be justifiable as a form of fitting protest? Why shouldn't peaceful protests in front of the headquarters of mining corporations or those that occupy governmental buildings where the extraction projects were approved suffice? Certainly, such nonviolent acts of protest are both type appropriate and correctly directed. Here, we need to take into consideration *adequacy* and *proportionality*.

4.3 Adequacy

As we argued above, adequate expression of what is fitting to express may, in very serious circumstances, license (and indeed demand) forceful expressive acts, when and because only forceful expression would adequately respond to the seriousness of the wrong in question. The climate crisis, together with the unwillingness of emitters to act to mitigate it, represents an especially serious injustice. Simply consider the scale of the harms that persons, not to mention animals and ecosystems, suffer. People die in bushfires and floods. Smoke from bushfires imposes significant health risks on local populations (Borchers Arriagada et al., 2020; Vardoulakis et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020). 21 million people are affected by river floods alone annually (Yari et al., 2020), a figure that will, due to extreme rain, grow to 54 million by 2030 (Lehmann, 2015). Sea-level rise has also

tors, and so no fitting agentive targets. In such cases, correct directedness would most plausibly demand that the system itself be the target. The case of climate disaster, however, has clear agentive targets.

[7] While *correct directedness* and *type appropriateness* often go hand in hand, they are conceptually distinct. Destroying drilling equipment may be type appropriate but incorrectly directed if the equipment were to be shipped to paleontologists; sending flowers to mining companies as a form of protest may be correctly directed but type inappropriate.

led to the submersion of the territories of several small island states, and loss of freshwater supply (Thomas et al., 2020), and threatens total submersion in the future. The impact of the climate crisis also falls disproportionately on poorer countries (Taconet et al., 2020) and the least advantaged individuals (Smith et al., 2022).

Against injustice and intransigence of this magnitude, mere words are clearly grossly inadequate. Indeed, when spoken politely and calmly, they may in fact be an insult to those who do and will suffer from the climate crisis, as if the ongoing and upcoming disasters were among the everyday subjects of polite political disagreement. Instead, forceful expressive acts of protest are called for. Adequacy, thus, places a *lower* bound on what must be engaged in to fit the wrong protested against.[8]

4.4 Proportionality

Proportionality, in contrast to adequacy, places an *upper* limit on the expressive magnitude of protest: just as gratitude should not be excessive to the kindness it responds to, protest should not be excessive with respect to the wrong it responds to. In its expressive dimension, then, violence or property damage involved in climate protests should not be excessive. But given the magnitude of death and destruction imposed on climate victims, what counts as proportionate should be fairly generous. Even highly disruptive acts of protest pale in comparison to the existential threats imposed upon certain communities (understood in terms of the threat to their survival and ability to meet their basic needs (Huggel et al., 2022)). It is easy for those of us who are distant from facing existential threats to overlook how devastating the effects of (for instance) total submersion would be to small island states. Our ignorance or apathy may lead us to believe that the disruption of business as usual is excessive when it comes to climate protests. But such a belief would be mistaken: what is protested against far outweighs what mere property damage can inflict upon businesses. This may, of course, lead us to the opposite worry that nearly unlimited disruption to others may be licensed, as hardly anything would be disproportionate in light of the climate crisis, considering the lives lost, the countries displaced, the heritage lost, and the ecosystems disrupted. In one sense, this is simply the uncomfortable consequence of serious recognition of the injustice that the climate crisis represents. However, it is practically limited in several important ways.

First, even if the magnitude of the injustice of climate change would make very disruptive or forceful protests non-excessive in response to it, such protests must still be correctly directed. Few if any individual targets of climate protest bear sufficient responsibility for the climate crisis that they could appropriately bear the full extent of proportionate protest of it. Insofar as protest is directed at some individual or collective taken to bear some responsibility for the climate crisis, it should be proportionate to that person or collective's degree of responsibility.

Second, it is true that our account is fairly permissive when taking proportionality into consideration. This is because what is protested against is the *perpetration* of climate harms. Whether this is more permissive than the framework of defensive ethics with respect to climate defense, however, depends on what may reasonably be thought to be

[8] If adequacy places a lower bound on fitting protest, could violence be *required?* Surely not: it seems to clearly be always optional. The explanation is that for something to be *called for* because it is fitting is not for it to be deontically required. Compare: when blame is called for, it remains intuitively optional. In addition, those on whom demands of fitting protest fall will typically have a personal prerogative to do less than what is demanded, as when (for example) the prudential costs would be high.

prevented by climate activism. If climate activism can prevent nothing meaningful, then even the slightest instrumental resistance would be disproportionate. Yet, those who engage in climate resistance often believe that their acts are instrumental to preventing the worst of the climate crisis. Under the scenario where it is reasonable to believe that climate resistance can prevent the worst of the climate crisis, then, our account is no more permissive than the instrumental accounts these activists appeal to. This is because under this comparison, what fitting protest responds to and what defensive action aims to prevent in this case are the same—the very serious harms of climate change.

Taken together, these conditions imply that fitting climate protest is that which (i) intelligibly expresses a message of protest against climate injustice suffered by protesters or on behalf of those suffering climate injustice (ii) targeted towards those who bear responsibility for the injustice, in such a way that is both (iii) adequate to the seriousness of the injustice and also (iv) in proportion to the contribution to the injustice of the protest's target. When considering the worst harms of climate change, such as those that will befall residents of small island nations or low-lying coastal developing countries, together with the indifferent or cynically dismissive responses of those contributing most to further emissions, such as those of fossil fuel companies and many rich states, it seems clear that adequate protest may demand more than any traditionally civil forms of protest—marches, signs, chants, letters, and so on—could achieve. Forceful acts of protest seem demanded instead. Trespassing on power stations, engaging in ecotage against pipelines, mining sites, and oil tankers, and other similar forms of property damage all seem like good candidates for actions that meet the conditions described above. Again, this is not because such acts are instrumentally effective in mitigating climate injustice but because they are adequate means of protesting it. While having no good prospects of preventing the climate crisis or even mitigating the disasters that will eventuate in any meaningful sense, these acts of resistance express a forceful rejection of the serious injustice of the climate crisis, by imposing and focusing damage on perpetrators, in ways that properly reflect the severity of the threat we all face.

5 What about targeting persons?

The entities most responsible for the climate crisis today are, plausibly, certain high-emitting states and fossil fuel companies. This is one reason why property damage is likely the best candidate for fitting climate protest: targeting property owned or controlled by these corporate agents is the most direct way of forcefully addressing an adequate message of protest to them. But these entities are composed of people, and their acts are directed by individuals (politicians and executives), taken on behalf of other individuals (citizens and shareholders), and spoken for by individual spokespeople. Could climate protests fittingly target any of these individuals?

This is a version of a more general, and highly contested, question that touches on collective versus personal responsibility (Smiley, 2022) and democratic complicity (Beerbohm, 2012; Pasternak, 2021). Without pretending to be able to settle such debates here, this section will make some tentative remarks about how this question is answered by the expressive view.

Consider

Bad CEO: The chief executive of a major fossil fuel company has known for several decades, thanks to his staff scientists' work, about the catastrophic consequences of climate change and the company's substantial contribution to them, and has done everything he can to conceal and downplay this information, sow public distrust of climate science, and generally ensure the continued legality and profitability of fossil fuel extraction and carbon emission.

Could protesters permissibly target Bad CEO as an individual, including with harm, as a means of forcefully expressing protest?[9]

Insofar as harm to individuals is typically graver than harm to property, directing harmful protest at individuals for their roles in the actions of corporate agents would amount to an escalation of the magnitude of the protest. Moreover, while individual leaders are important symbols of corporate agents and thus ripe targets for protest, there are limits to the extent that an individual may be permissibly used for their symbolic significance—limits which do not apply, for example, to similarly significant symbols such as corporate headquarters, state buildings, statues, and so on. For these reasons, the extension of these principles to expressive harm against persons must be taken carefully. However, when an injustice is severe enough, adequacy might demand just such an escalation; and when a corporate officer is sufficiently individually responsible, correct-directedness might permit it. If so, then as long as such a harm is also type appropriate and proportionate, it would be fitting.

Consider again the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. If Jewish resistance fighters had been able to target Nazi commanders directly, it seems clear that they would have been permitted to do so. On our view, this is not due to the commanders' liability to defensive harm, but rather because they would have been the targets of correctly directed, adequate, and proportionate protest, and because harming them would have been an appropriate type of protest against the grave wrongs they committed. This suggests, we believe, that in at least the most extreme cases, fitting protest may license harms against individuals for their roles in collective acts.

Whether this is also true of fossil fuel executives in relation to their role in the climate crisis is, as we have already emphasized, a more complex question. But if we hypothesize that a few executives are individually morally culpable for a significant enough share of the harms of the climate crisis—that is, for the many lives lost, countries submerged, ecosystems destroyed, and so on—then our view is that they would be (subject to the constraints imposed by the other conditions) appropriate targets of harmful protest. And as we have also emphasized, this hypothesis is not far-fetched nor implausible. This is a conclusion we do not wish to shy away from. However, it is also important to qualify the practical reach of this conclusion in the following ways.

First, our account requires that fitting protest be correctly directed. In practice, this condition largely tracks matters of moral responsibility and culpability. But insofar as many of the decisions of fossil fuel companies are taken "behind closed doors" via complex

[9] Note that this case closely resembles reality: for example, former Exxon CEO Lee Raymond said in 1997 that "...the scientific evidence is inconclusive as to whether human activities are having a significant effect on the global climate" despite clear internal statements to the contrary, made across two prior decades, by senior Exxon scientists. (See House Committee on Oversight and Accountability Democrats and Senate Committee on the Budget, 2024; Inside Climate News, 2015; Jerving et al., 2015.)

coordinated decision-making procedures, formidable epistemic barriers may arise to determining which if any individual executives are appropriate targets of protest. Moreover, executives are typically not easily accessible, and due to the rise of (climate and other forms of) activism, corporate spending on the security of their senior executives is on the rise (Porter, 2024). The costs of targeting executives, as well as the risks of harming innocents as a result, are thereby increased. On the other hand, corporations themselves, as temporally persistent entities that make these decisions, or in whose name such decisions are made, are clearly appropriate targets. And since corporations are constituted not only by the people who run them but also by various physical and virtual facilities, they are also more readily accessible targets. When protest against a corporation *and* its executives would be appropriate, it may make more sense to target the corporation.

Second, it is important to recognize that many of the most devastating decisions made by fossil fuel executives were made in the 1980s and 1990s by individuals who are no longer in those roles (Supran et al., 2023).[10] Current executives are not responsible for the decisions of predecessors to their roles any more than current political leaders are responsible for the decisions of predecessor politicians. We do not wish to downplay the responsibility of current senior executives for continuing or expanding existing business strategies, but the wrongs they are currently committing should be carefully delineated from the damage their predecessors have already caused. But we cannot infer reliably from general knowledge about the decisions made by fossil fuel executives in the past to specific beliefs about the decisions made by current executives, and then to beliefs about their appropriateness as targets of harmful protest.

By contrast, again, the corporations these executives lead are often temporally persistent entities. Very recently, scientific advancement has enabled us to attribute end-to-end responsibility to corporations corresponding to their estimated contributions to specific damages caused by human-induced natural disasters (Callahan & Mankin, 2025). Chevron Corporation, for instance, "very likely caused between US$791 billion and $3.6 trillion in heat-related losses over the period 1991–2020" (Callahan & Mankin, 2025, p. 893). Estimates for ExxonMobil and BP are $1.91 trillion and $1.45 trillion respectively, for damages caused by extreme heat (Callahan & Mankin, 2025, p. 896). As continuous entities, their responsibility accumulates, and protests against these corporations easily satisfy the criteria for fitting protest. And as these corporations are profit-driven and hold onto many assets, the most obvious way to protest against them is to target their property and balance sheets. Corporations may, in this way too, be better (or at least morally less risky) targets of protest.

Third, it is worth noting again that our view is no more permissive than views that permit resistance as a form of defense, *should it be the case*—as some climate protesters believe—*that climate protests can prevent the worst of the climate crisis*. Setting aside our objections to the ability of such views to meet the effectiveness constraint on permissible defensive action, notice that what is proportionate as a means of defense against the wrongs of the climate crisis is often roughly equal to what is proportionate as fitting protest against the ongoing and foreseen wrongs of the climate crisis. This is because the wrongs of the climate crisis to be prevented are the same as the ongoing and foreseen wrongs worth protesting, and proportionality responds to the same underlying value (or disvalue) of those wrongs. In this way, our view is no more radical than any view

[10] Three individuals served as Exxon CEO between 1975-2005. Two are dead at the time of the writing of this paper. The third is 86 as we write this in 2025.

supporting defensive action against climate injustice in terms of proportionality. Indeed, it may be difficult for defensive accounts of ecotage to avoid such "radical" conclusions (McLaughlin, 2023).

Similar remarks, and similar limitations, apply to fitting protest that targets politicians. Like fossil fuel executives, many politicians have similarly culpably failed to act to avert the climate crisis, and worse, have done so cynically for personal gain. But also similarly, we must take care when considering protest against individual politicians not to infer from the actions of former politicians, or the general class of politicians, to any one person. And again like fossil fuel executives, individual politicians are difficult to access in ways that other parts of governments (like buildings and other state property) are not. In light of these practical and epistemic barriers, then, activists should in most cases prefer state property to individual politicians as targets of protest.

Despite these limitations, our account does clearly imply that some individuals may be harmed in fitting futile climate protests. Even taking account of the above limitations, this may strike some as an unappealing consequence of our view (e.g. Malm, 2021; McLaughlin, 2023). Here, we can only try to make the consequence more palatable. The common claim that climate change is an existential threat, while true, may obscure the concrete realities of what that entails. If we were to properly list and imagine the details of what such an existential threat entails, we would have to try to individually imagine the many individuals who are harmed, displaced, and killed in climate disasters. Small island states are facing total submersion, and in coastal countries throughout the global South, an imminent refugee crisis is on its way to becoming reality. Babies will die of dehydration, malnutrition, and otherwise easily preventable diseases. Heritage, both natural and artificial, will be irreparably damaged. Wars may well be fought over resources that are rapidly becoming scarcer. We haven't even begun to enumerate the harms that non-human animals and ecosystems would suffer. Because many victims appear as abstract numbers, and are faceless to us, this may pose a barrier to our moral imagination. We must take care to balance the harms to so much and so many, which are difficult to fully imagine, against the harms to a few corporate officers or politicians, which may be easier to fully imagine.

6 Futility and uncertainty: the case for hedging

We have asked, if climate resistance is futile, then what is the point of engaging in it—even when it is harmful, destructive, or otherwise costly to others? Our answer has been that *especially* in circumstances of futility, expressions of protest are called for; and that given the gross magnitude of climate injustice, expressive acts of protest, including violent protest, may be demanded. While the truth of the conditional—that climate resistance is futile—is a view taken by many who study climate change and its politics (see again Coca-Vila, 2024; Fisher et al., 2023; McAdam, 2017), others take the view that climate disaster is not inevitable, and that the worst harms of climate change can still feasibly be averted. Maybe, if only we work together hard enough, we can still forestall the climate crisis in some meaningful way. Others may simply be uncertain which of these two descriptions of reality is correct. In light of this, it is worth asking what activists who face uncertainty about the futility (or not) of climate resistance should do.

Traditional approaches to moral decision-making under empirical uncertainty tell us to weigh options while taking into account the likelihood of various factual scenarios coming about. This approach is not well suited to the case at hand, however, because it is unclear how and indeed whether one can weigh the demand to fittingly respond to a wrong against the prospect of achieving some valuable outcome. It is doubtful that there is value—in terms of achieved outcomes—to fitting responses. Even if there is, it would not be what makes fitting responses choiceworthy: they are to be chosen *because they are fitting*. The fitting and the valuable appear largely incommensurable, at least at the practical level.[11] (Occasionally, one or the other seems to practically dominate: it can be "not worth" responding fittingly to a wrong when the prudential costs are too high, for example. But many cases are not like this.)

Rather than *weighing*, then, we suggest that those uncertain about the effectiveness or futility of climate resistance should instead *hedge*. That is, they should aim to act in ways that are compatible with either empirical possibility, by engaging in acts of climate resistance that are plausibly effective *and* expressively fitting. To be clear, this is not a general proposal for the resolution of the apparent incommensurability between valuable and fitting choices; sometimes, options will be either fitting or plausibly effective, such that aiming to satisfy both standards is either impossible or unappealing. But with respect to the climate crisis, many strategies for resistance *can* meet both standards. (We offer some examples below.)

This may seem to give short shrift to the instrumental arm of this hedging strategy. For surely, the thought goes—and as we have argued—a problem as big as climate change could not plausibly be instrumentally affected by resistance strategies like forceful protest against energy companies, or slashing the tires of large SUVs and other gas-guzzling vehicles. Worthwhile instrumental action might need to be of a different kind entirely, such as (for instance) coordinated political advocacy. Worse, some of these other strategies might then seem *counterproductive*, insofar as they might alienate those whose political support is instrumentally needed. If so, there could not be (many) strategies that are at the same time plausibly effective *and* expressively fitting.

But we have good reason to believe that many expressively fitting acts of climate resistance would not be counterproductive. The most plausibly effective climate resistance strategies do aim at advocacy. Since advocacy centrally involves *communication*, it should be unsurprising that it often aligns with fitting *expression*. Charges of counterproductivity in climate resistance have most commonly been directed at tactics such as traffic disruption and the defacing or destruction of artwork, which (as we have noted) are the tactics most plausibly *not* correctly directed and/or type appropriate often *because* they burden the innocent in an unintelligible manner.

Moreover, we should consider the possibility that discrete acts of fitting protest, carried out by individuals but in combination with many others, might nevertheless make some difference. This thought is made more plausible if we again imagine these many acts of fitting protest as aligning with political advocacy goals. Indeed, there is nothing surprising about individually futile expressive acts that can make a difference in aggregation. Individual voting is extremely unlikely to make a difference; yet, "expressive votes will,

[11] Even views that connect the fitting and the evaluative at a more fundamental level, such as fitting attitude accounts of value, do not clearly make valuable options commensurable with other kinds of fitting response: if (as these views propose) what is valuable is what it is fitting to value, it remains opaque how the valuable is to be weighed against interpersonally fitting, yet not necessarily valuable, responses (see Maguire, 2018). Selim Berker (2022) argues that the fitting and the evaluative (and the deontic) are fundamentally distinct normative categories.

in aggregate, determine the outcome of the contest" (Brennan and Hamlin 1998, 157). Here, if the climate crisis can be averted, its aversion will be the outcome of massive joint actions, among which will include putting financial pressure on fossil fuel industries through direct action.

To reiterate, we ourselves are sceptical of the promise of advocacy strategies such as these to meaningfully affect the course of the climate crisis. But for those who take a different view, this hedging strategy may be appealing.

Lastly, it is worth noting that we believe the notion of hedging we propose here has implications (separately) for instrumental protest in general (and not limited to climate resistance). First, we believe that instrumental protests may sometimes benefit instrumentally from the considerations of fittingness. This follows from the observation, made just above, that the communication necessarily involved in advocacy is often aligned with the goals of fitting expression. When costs are imposed on liable parties, for instance, protests are less likely to alienate innocent parties that would otherwise be affected, and thus less likely to generate backlash (Lai and Lim, 2023). When instrumental protests are type appropriate, they are also more likely to garner wider support by being intelligible to a wider audience. Second, the hedging considerations described above apply as much to instrumental protest as they do to purely expressive protest under conditions of uncertainty. When uncertainty looms, insofar as one's protest adheres to the norms of fitting expressive protests, one's acts are morally safer.

7 Conclusion

The climate crisis is happening, and we must take seriously the possibility that climate catastrophe is, for many, now inevitable. What implications does this have for climate resistance? We have argued that should the grim picture be accurate, climate resistance would no longer be instrumentally justified. However, climate resistance, at least in the form of ecotage, would nevertheless be justifiable as fitting protest. It would be a forceful rejection of the wrongs fossil fuel companies and political systems impose on us. The justification we have defended here is based on the appropriate ways to respond to significant values—the lives of persons, the self-determination of nations, heritage, the existence of species, animal suffering, and ecosystems.

But will our account license harming persons? Perhaps; it depends on the correct answers to questions in other theoretical domains, and in rare cases when epistemic and practical hurdles are overcomable, yes. This is not a theoretical consequence we shy away from. Yet, if the values defensive climate actions respond to are so significant that such harms would be proportionate and correctly directed, then we should also not be too quick to condemn expressive interpersonal violence.

The philosophical landscape of the ethics of resistance is dominated by considerations of effectiveness. This isn't without some merit: values are to be responded to, and when feasible, the best way to respond to them may be to safeguard them. Yet, values may call to us in other ways. Here, we focus on what values may demand of us when it is infeasible to safeguard them. We contend that, against those who disregard and trample upon those values, protest is—and may be the only—fitting response.

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Conflict of Interest

Both of the authors have kids. We believe that all kids, including our own, may financially benefit if we don't destroy the planet they come to inherit.

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