

Ole Andreas Kvamme

School Strikes, Environmental Ethical Values, and Democracy

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of the school strikes for the climate, initiated in August 2018 by the Swedish student Greta Thunberg, soon to become a global social movement involving hundreds of thousands of students. I examine 10 speeches of Thunberg as recontextualizations of environmental ethical values that have been formulated within the context of United Nations. With this approach, guided by an ethical and educational interest grounded in moral education, and informed by conceptions of Seyla Benhabib, this paper demonstrates how students become democratic citizens appropriating the concern for future generations as a cosmopolitan claim in a resistance to exclusions from current politics.

Key words

School strikes, cosmopolitanism, democratic iterations, jurisgenerativity, moral education, environmental and sustainability education

1 Introduction

There is a salient contradiction established by the global sustainable development initiatives.¹ On the one hand, since the 1980s, the agenda has been grounded in a diagnosis of a current crisis and the need for transformative action, designated sustainable development. On the other hand, throughout the course of the history of this agenda, unsustainable practices have persisted, and the situation has deteriorated in vital areas. The most illustrating case is obviously anthropogenic climate change, as documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.² A similar case can be made by the rapid loss of biodiversity and the mass extinction of species, as documented by the Intergovernmental

1 United Nations, *Resolution 70/1. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=111&nr=8496&menu=35>; World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our common future* (1987), <http://www.undocuments.net/our-common-future.pdf>.

2 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Global warming of 1.5° C: Special report* (2018), <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

Ole Andreas Kvamme, University of Oslo, Norway
email: o.a.kvamme@ils.uio.no

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Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.³ Furthermore, although millions of people have experienced improvements in living standards, the unequal distribution of wealth is increasing,⁴ in contrast with the explicit aim expressed in the sustainability agenda.⁵

The contradiction between an acknowledged crisis and lack of transformative action is made even more explicit when the normative tenet of sustainable development—to protect and improve life on earth now and in the future—is accentuated.⁶ The world community⁷ acknowledges that life on earth is under threat, but does not act adequately upon this understanding. The values here addressed, most significantly the concerns for present and future generations and the more-than-human world⁸, have been expressed in pivotal United Nations conventions⁹ and also reflected in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO)¹⁰ global education policy for sustainable development.

In an ongoing research project, I explore how the environmental ethical values¹¹ addressed by United Nations and UNESCO are recontextualized in Norwegian education policy¹²

3 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. *Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services*, May 6, 2019, https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/spm_unedited_advance_for_posting_htn.pdf.

4 Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman, *World inequality report. Executive summary* (World Inequality Lab, 2018), <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018summary-english.pdf>.

5 United Nations, "Resolution 70/1."

6 Peter Kemp, *Citizen of the world: The cosmopolitan ideal for the twenty-first century* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2011).

7 In this singular form the plural, diverse world population in which power and wealth is unequally distributed, should be considered.

8 The formulation "more-than-human world" is increasingly in use in scholarly literature (see e.g. Bob Jickling, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Rob O'Donoghue, and Akpezi Ogbuigwe, *Environmental Education, Ethics & Action: A Workbook to Get Started* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2006)), evading the designation of the non-human as a negative opposite to what is human.

9 United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, A/RES/217 (III)[A] (1948), <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>; United Nations, *The Convention on Biological Diversity*, 31 I.L.M. 818 (1992). (Rio de Janeiro: United Nations, 1992), <https://www.cbd.int/convention/text/default.shtml>; United Nations, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, FCCC/INFORMAL/84 (1992), <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>.

10 UNESCO, *Framework for the UN DESD international implementation scheme*, ED/DESD/2006/PI/1 (Paris: UNESCO workshops, 2006), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000148650>; UNESCO, *UNESCO Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development*, ED-2014/WS/31 (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1674unescoroadmap.pdf>

11 I here adopt the term "environmental ethical values" from David Kronlid and Johan Öhman, "An environmental ethical conceptual framework for research on sustainability and environmental education," *Environmental Education Research*, 19, no. 1 (2013): 20–44. They distinguish between a value-oriented and a relation-oriented approach within environmental ethics. Environmental ethical values are not seen as abstract concepts, but are qualified with regard to people and nature. Kronlid and Öhman develop a sophisticated conceptual framework which is not applied in this study.

12 Ole Andreas Kvamme, "Blurring the image of the other? The recontextualization of environmental ethical values in Norwegian education policy documents," in *Challenging life. Existential questions as a resource for education*, eds., Jari Ristiniemi, Geir Skeie, and Karin Sporre (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2018), 359–381.

and educational practices addressing sustainability. A Norwegian classroom study observing moral education¹³ instantiates how this contradiction is individualized, depoliticized, and regulated by a carbon footprint measurement. Within the field of environmental and sustainability education, this individualizing tendency is well-documented¹⁴ and is seen as an expression of the hegemony of neoliberalism.¹⁵

Considering this background, it is conspicuous that a hallmark of the school strikes for the climate, which emerged in Sweden in August 2018¹⁶ and rapidly spread to other countries, is the political accentuation of the contradiction delineated above. These strikes mobilized thousands of students in the spring of 2019, when reportedly more than 1.4 million students around the world took part in the demonstrations.¹⁷

The disobedient act of breaking with compulsory school attendance, establishes an uncertain and ambiguous relation between the school strikes and formal education. A closer look at the normative dimension expressed by environmental ethical values may contribute to an understanding of the school strikes and moral education, even beyond the field of formal education. I here acknowledge that “education is something larger in scope and often more persistent in impact than schooling.”¹⁸

1.1 Aims, proceedings and methodological considerations

In the present article, I study recontextualizations of environmental ethical values, as expressed by the United Nations and UNESCO, in the school strikes for the climate. The values here addressed are the concerns for present and future generations of human beings and the more-than-human world.¹⁹ More specifically, this study is carried out by analyzing some key speeches by Greta Thunberg, the central initiator and public figure of the

13 A preliminary analysis is presented in Ole Andreas Kvamme, “The significance of context: Moral education and religious education facing the challenge of sustainability,” *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education* 8, no. 2 (2017): 24–37.

14 Therese Hume and John Barry, “Environmental education and education for sustainable development”, in *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences*, eds., Neil J. Smelser & Paul B. Baltes (Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Elsevier, 2015), 733–739.

15 John Huckle and Arjen E.J. Wals, “The UN decade of education for sustainable development: Business as usual in the end”, *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 3 (2015): 491–505. Malin Ideland and Claes Malmberg, “Governing eco-certified children through pastoral power: Critical perspectives on education for sustainable development,” *Environmental Education Research* 23, no. 2 (2015): 173–182.

16 Other initiatives have anticipated the school strike for climate, like the Climate Strike emerging from the Plant-for-the-Planet network calling for school strikes on 30 November 2015, the first day of COP 21, the United Nations conference in Paris that followed up the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. See “Climate Change Call for a global Climate Strike on November 30, 2015”, accessed November 1, 2019, <https://www.climate-strike.net/call2015/>.

17 Damian Carrington, “School climate strikes: 1.4 million people took part, say campaigners,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/19/school-climate-strikes-more-than-1-million-took-part-say-campaigners-greta-thunberg>.

18 David T. Hansen, *The teacher and the world: A study of cosmopolitanism as education* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2011).

19 UNESCO, *Framework for the UN DESD*, 15–16.

school strikes for climate.²⁰ In part 2 of the article, ten speeches are analysed, held in the period from September 8, 2018 to April 23, 2019.²¹ In part 3 I further explore these recon-textualizations from the perspective of critical cosmopolitanism, and in part 4 I proceed by considering the ambiguous relationship between the school strikes and formal education, introducing the analogy of civil disobedience, and suggesting that the students in the school strikes are transformed to democratic citizens.

Methodologically, this study is an instance of reflexive qualitative research²² with the critical hermeneutics of Ricoeur²³ as a central reference. Two interrelated aspects are significant. First is the function of distanciation as a step in the hermeneutical process, allowing for the analysis of structure, patterns, and tensions in the studied material. Second, a distance to the material under interpretation opens for the practice of ideology critique.²⁴ In the following, this perspective is further qualified by accentuating the utopian element of environmental ethical values,²⁵ exploring their potential for immanent critique, parallel with Hegel's identification of critical standards given in the historical process.²⁶ Ricoeur is not promoting any particular hermeneutic strategy. In this case I have initially mapped the environmental ethical values in Thunberg's speeches,²⁷ disclosing patterns and tendencies.

20 The choice is warranted by Thunberg's key role in the school strikes for the climate, with the aim of identifying some central tenets and tendencies to be further considered. The choice also demonstrates certain limitations of this study. If I had focused on the school strikes for the climate in particular political contexts, the manifold social movement of the school strikes would have become visible, including the contentious discourses and controversies that have arisen in numerous countries.

21 Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered at People's Climate March, Stockholm, September 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igt_D-6sGHU; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered to COP 24, plenary session, December 12, 2018, https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/greta-speeches#greta_speech_dec3_2018; Greta Thunberg, (2018c). Speech delivered to UN General Secretary António Guterres, COP 24, December 3, 2018, <https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/greta-speeches>; Greta Thunberg, Ted Talk: The disarming case to act right now on climate change. Stockholm, November 2018, https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered at Extinction Rebellion protest in London, April 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKMX8WRw3fc>; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered at World Economic Forum, Davos, January 22, 2019, <https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/greta-speeches>; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered during the EESC event "Civil Society for rEUnaissance," February, 21, 2019, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/videos/speech-greta-thunberg-climate-activist>; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered outside conference building, World Economic Forum, Davos, January 22, 2019, <https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/greta-speeches>; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered to British members of Parliament, April 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/23/greta-thunberg-full-speech-to-mps-you-did-not-act-in-time>; Greta Thunberg, Speech delivered to EU Parliament, April 16, 2019, <https://speakola.com/ideas/greta-thunberg-speech-to-eu-parliament-2019>.

22 Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldböck, *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research* (London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications Ltd, 2009).

23 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

24 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*.

25 Paul Ricoeur, "Ideology and utopia," in *From text to action: Essays in hermeneutics II* (London, United Kingdom: Continuum, 2008), 300–316.

26 Robert J. Antonio, "Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Developments in Hegel, Marx and Contemporary Thought," *The British Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 3 (1981): 330–345.

27 The analysis has involved the categorization of the three addressed values, with synonyms and corresponding words, carried out in repeated readings – in which even more words were added, ascertained by the employment of the search function of Microsoft Word. I have identified the presence of first-person singular / plural to identify

The central aim has here not been to elucidate the differences between the speeches in question, but rather to accentuate common characteristics, treating the ten speeches as one text corpus. Nuances in the material are nevertheless addressed, and the variety of contexts is considered.

These texts are speeches which have been held in public. The speech genre necessitates to bring in the rhetorical situation in the analyses, in the following examined with reference to Bitzer,²⁸ and a sensitivity for the particularity of context. In Thunberg's speeches the rhetorical situation is enriched and complicated by the use of social media in a globalized world.

Accommodating for the mediations between the general claims made by United Nations and the specific contexts of the school strikes for the climate, political theorists are considered, mainly the critical cosmopolitanism of Seyla Benhabib, conceiving of recontextualizations of universal claims as democratic iterations. Key concepts in Benhabib's account (presented below) is brought into the analyses and discussion. Bernstein's²⁹ perspective on ideology and pedagogy is employed in the discussion of recontextualizations emerging at the boundary between the school institution and the public space. Education is in the following understood as critical formation or *Bildung*, as expressed in the late Klafki's³⁰ renewal of the German didaktik tradition. Although formal moral education is not particularly explored, the interest in environmental ethical values is conditioned by my background in this particular research field. Moral education is conceived of as an approach to education engaged in the fundamental questions of what is right and good, mediating between an individual and a societal perspective.³¹ Moral education may be addressed in particular school subjects and be a cross-curricular concern involved in all school subjects. Embedded in this conception, this study is a contribution to moral education.

expressions of *my* and *our* needs, concerns, and expressions of *rich / poor / (un-)righteous / (un-)righteousness / (in-)just / (in-)justice / (in-)equality / (in-)equity* to discern aspects of intragenerational concerns. To identify references to the more-than-human world, I have employed the words *nature, environment, biosphere, ecology, ecosystems, animals, plants, species*. Correspondingly, future generations have been identified through *future, future generations, and coming generations*. Other expressions have been considered and employed, most significantly sustainability and sustainable development.

28 Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The rhetorical situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1–14.

29 Basil Bernstein, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: theory, research, critique* (Lanham, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000).

30 Wolfgang Klafki, "Characteristics of Critical-Constructive Didaktik," in *Didaktik and/or Curriculum. An International Dialogue*, eds., Bjørg Gudem and Stefan Hopmann (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 307–328.

31 Such a mediation is of particular importance addressing the complex issues of sustainability in education. Olof Franck's remark on ethics within sustainability education is a pertinent reminder: "[T]he main ethical question to be focused on within sustainability didactics is not, 'Is this or that specific action to be judged right or wrong?' but, 'Does this or that action contribute to the development of a good common life, a good society and a good world?' (Quoted in Olof Franck and Christina Osbeck, "Challenging the concept of ethical literacy within Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) storytelling as a method within sustainability didactics," *Education* 3–13 46, no. 2 (2018), DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2016.1201690).

1.2 Globalization and critical cosmopolitanism

The school strikes for the climate³² have emerged in a time period distinguished by processes of globalization. Globalization involves the extension of relations across the world space.³³ It is envisaged as a manifold phenomenon, including economic globalization promoted by global capitalism, but also involving technical, scientific, cultural, and political globalization with a profound impact on life everywhere on the planet.³⁴ Papastephanou³⁵ even includes environmental globalization with reference to the ecological crisis and global warming. Political globalization refers to the establishment of transnational political institutions and practices, including the United Nations, and education policy expressed through organizations like the OECD and UNESCO.³⁶ In this respect, globalization is closely connected with the concept of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism in the modern view is often conceived of as an ethical or political response to the negative effects of globalization,³⁷ accentuating both the equal moral worth of every human being and obligations that belong to everyone,³⁸ as expressed in the United Nations' human rights agenda. Cosmopolitanism has been criticized for being lofty, idealistic, and all too consensus oriented and for ignoring particular contexts, tensions, conflicts, and plurality.³⁹ One of few contributions within environmental and sustainability education addressing cosmopolitanism has come from Sund and Öhman,⁴⁰ focusing on the problem of depoliticizing education by referring to universal, common values, a concern I return to in the conclusion. From such critique numerous contributions have

32 The emerging social movement is distinguished by various names, like Fridays for Future, <https://www.fridays-forfuture.org/>; School Strike 4 Climate, <https://www.schoolstrike4climate.com/>; and Climate Strike, <https://www.climatestrike.net/> (with numerous additional versions in other languages). In the following "the school strikes for the climate" is employed, when referring to the broad school strike phenomenon.

33 Peter Christoff and Robyn Eckersley, *Globalization and the environment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2013).

34 David Held and Anthony G. McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002).

35 Marianna Papastephanou, *Thinking differently about cosmopolitanism: Theory, eccentricity, and the globalized world* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

36 Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard, *Globalizing education policy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

37 Kemp, *Verdensborgeren*; Claudia Schumann, "Cosmopolitanism and globalization in education," in *International handbook of philosophy of education*, ed. Paul Smeyers (Springer International Handbooks of Education, 2018), 821–831.

38 Gillian Brock, "Cosmopolitanism," in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 316–322, DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412958660.n103](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412958660.n103).

39 Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan vision* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2006); Sharon Todd, *Toward An imperfect education: Facing humanity, rethinking cosmopolitanism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009); Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in adversity: Human rights in troubled times* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2011).

40 Louise Sund and Johan Öhman, "Cosmopolitan perspectives on education and sustainable development: Between universal ideals and particular values," *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 20, no. 1 (2011): 13–34; Louise Sund and Johan Öhman, "On the need to repoliticise environmental and sustainability education: Rethinking the postpolitical consensus," *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 5 (2014): 639–659. DOI: [10.1080/13504622.2013.833585](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.833585).

emerged that take context into account, for instance, rooted cosmopolitanism,⁴¹ eccentric cosmopolitanism,⁴² and critical cosmopolitanism.⁴³

The central problem addressed by Benhabib in her critical cosmopolitanism is the relationship between universal norms and specific contexts. Her approach is distinguished by addressing the space for interpretation. The dynamic and often conflicting processes of contextualizing cosmopolitan norms is expressed in her concept of *jurisgenerativity*, which Benhabib draws from Robert Cover,⁴⁴ referring to how laws acquire meaning in specific contexts that the laws themselves cannot control. Thus, “there can be no rules *without* interpretation,”⁴⁵ and subsequently—because of the multitude of hermeneutical contexts—a variety of interpretations emerge for which the rules cannot control.

Jurisgenerativity is not only a condition indicating a descriptive dimension. According to Benhabib, a normative dimension is also involved; the jurisgenerative capacity of the rules may be opened up or narrowed down. From jurisgenerativity follows Benhabib’s key concept of *democratic iterations* of the universal claims in their new contexts, involving processes of public argument and deliberation. When “appropriated by people as their own, they lose their parochialism as well as the suspicion of Western paternalism often associated with them.”⁴⁶

Benhabib’s critical cosmopolitanism is a continuation of her moral philosophy developed in the 1980s and published in *Situating the Self* in 1992. This is a rethinking of Habermas’ discourse ethics, acknowledging the significance of the situated self in moral deliberation. From Hannah Arendt, Benhabib brings in the concept of *narrativity*, emphasizing the web of relations as an inevitable trace of the human condition. Benhabib claims that actions are identified narratively: “To identify an action is to tell the story of its initiation, of its unfolding, and of its immersion in a web of relations constituted through the actions and narratives of others.”⁴⁷ *Enlarged thought*⁴⁸ is the crucial methodological aspect of this interactive universalism, signifying the exercise of moral judgment by a situated self. Situated in its own position, the self acknowledges the perspective of others who are differently positioned. This practice implies the ability to know how to listen to what others are saying. Benhabib

41 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers* (New York, NY: Norton, 2007).

42 Papastephanou, *Thinking differently about cosmopolitanism*.

43 Here the central reference in the following is Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*. While a positive cosmopolitanism, according to Benhabib, affirms global oneness and unity, a critical cosmopolitanism explores the tensions at the heart of the cosmopolitan project, focusing on “the unity and diversity of human rights; on the conflicts between democracy and cosmopolitanism; on the vision of a world with porous borders and the closure required by democratic sovereignty.” (Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 2)

44 Robert M. Cover, “The Supreme Court, 1982 Term -- Foreword: Nomos and Narrative”, *Faculty Scholarship Series. Paper 2705* (1983), http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/2705

45 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 125.

46 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 129.

47 Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 127.

48 The concept was originally coined by Hannah Arendt on the basis of Kant’s reflective judgment of aesthetical objects, which Arendt applied to the judgment exercised within the political sphere.

however, widens the perspective by adding, “or when the voices of others are absent, to imagine to oneself a conversation with the other as my dialogue partner.”⁴⁹

Decisive in Benhabib’s critical cosmopolitanism is the distinction between norms of international law, which govern the relationships between states, and cosmopolitan norms, which “accrue to individuals considered as moral and legal persons in a worldwide civil society.”⁵⁰ Both originate as treaty-like obligations on a state level, but the peculiarity of cosmopolitan norms as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and its subsequent covenants, is the way they protect individuals even within the borders of the particular states and thus limit the sovereignty of the state. Much of Benhabib’s interest has been concerned with the mediation between these two levels, decisive in this study as well.

Benhabib’s perspective opens up for the possible mediation between the moral and the political. With this in mind, the school strikes as reflected in Thunberg’s speeches may be studied as democratic iterations of the environmental ethical values universally claimed by the United Nations and UNESCO. Thus, the focus should not just be on identifying the environmental ethical values within the context of Thunberg’s speeches, as I do in part 2. This is a backdrop for an exploration of the function of the environmental ethical values within the political context of the school strikes, an exploration which begins in part 2 and is further developed in part 3. Here the recontextualizations of the environmental ethical values are conceived of as democratic iterations.⁵¹

2 The rhetorical situation and context of Thunberg’s speeches

The current analysis has involved an initial mapping of the environmental ethical values in Thunberg’s speeches, which I here sum up before considering the rhetorical situation. In her appeals, there is a clear emphasis on intergenerational concerns (the future is explicitly mentioned in nearly all the speeches),⁵² to the members of the British Parliament clearly stated as “I speak on behalf of future generations.” In a majority of the speeches concerns for the more-than-human world are expressed,⁵³ sometimes with particular reference to

49 Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 137.

50 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 124.

51 In Scandinavia, the Swedish scholar Karin Sporre has discussed the significance of Benhabib’s critical cosmopolitanism for education. According to Sporre, “A crucial question is how educational institutions and actors within them can open up to democratic iterations that are expressions of emerging cosmopolitan norms.” (Karin Sporre, *In search of human dignity: Essays in theology, ethics and education* (Münster, Germany: Waxmann, 2015): 237).

52 Thunberg, “COP 24, Plenary Session”; —, “COP 24, UN General Secretary”; —, “TED Talk”; —, “Extinction Rebellion”; —, “World Economic Forum”; —, “EESC Event”; —, “Members of British Parliament”; —, “EU Parliament.”

53 Thunberg, “COP 24, UN General Secretary”; —, “TED Talk”; —, “Extinction Rebellion”; —, “Inside World Economic Forum”; —, “Members of British Parliament.”

the mass extinction of species,⁵⁴ as well as intragenerational concerns with reference to equity.⁵⁵

In his classic article “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer addresses the significance of the particular situation in rhetorical discourses. This perspective may be productive to now consider how Thunberg is responding to the context of climate change.

According to Bitzer, the rhetorical situation presents “an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.”⁵⁶ Bitzer suggests that the rhetorical situation involves three elements: the exigence; an audience; and constraints established by persons, events, objects, and relations that are part of the situation, including the rhetor.⁵⁷

2.1 The exigence and the audience

The exigence that Thunberg’s speeches respond to, has already been addressed in the introduction to this article. Unsustainable human practices currently harm life on earth and are threats to the conditions of future life on earth. Here all the three environmental ethical values are mobilized, demonstrating what is at stake, and establishing a global context.

The audience of a speech involves, according to Bitzer, all who have the power to improve the situation which is addressed. Within the sustainability agenda, this is a complex issue, which transcends the framing of local speeches. From the perspective of global politics,⁵⁸ coercive power, represented primarily by strong national states; productive power, represented by global corporate capitalism; and social power, including social movements, are of significance. Between these forms of power, a complex interplay is executed, shaped by cumulative inequalities of power and exclusion, designated by McGrew⁵⁹ as distorted global politics. Considering social movements, the audience may even include everyone who is engaged in bottom-up processes of changing unsustainable structures and practices. The last point is particularly pertinent to the mobilizing function of Thunberg’s speeches for the school strikes for the climate.

54 Thunberg, “COP 24, UN General Secretary”; —, “TED Talk”; —, “Extinction Rebellion.”

55 Thunberg, “COP 24, UN General Secretary”; —, “TED Talk”; —, “Inside World Economic Forum”; —, “EESC Event”; —, “Members of British Parliament”; —, “EU Parliament.”

56 Bitzer, “The rhetorical situation”, 6.

57 Bitzer’s article from 1968 is a classic within modern rhetorical research. Richard E. Vatz initiated in 1973 an important debate on the significance of the contribution of the rhetor in the establishment of the rhetorical situation. In short, according to Bitzer the rhetor is responding to a given situation. Vatz draws attention to how the situation is created by the rhetor. I cannot enter this discussion here, but will in the following accommodate for both positions: On the one hand Thunberg is responding to anthropogenic climate change threatening life on earth, on the other hand she is herself creatively forming the rhetorical situation e.g. in addressing the situation as a climate crisis. Richard E. Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation”, *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 6, no. 3, (Summer, 1973):154-161.

58 Anthony G. McGrew, “Politics as distorted global politics,” in *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study*, ed. Adrian Leftwich (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 166–181.

59 McGrew, “Politics as distorted global politics,” 176.

United Nations may be said to instantiate the distorted global politics McGrew claims distinguish the current world order. While the United Nations is constituted by the nations of the world, there are also inbuilt asymmetries of power, like privileging the permanent members of the Security Council as well as the weak measures of accountability.

2.2 How to address a global context

The rhetorical situation delineated above is complex and contentious, with global reach. How does a rhetor approach a global context? In the 10 public appeals by Thunberg which I consider here, two patterns are conspicuous. To begin with, all the speeches, even the first one held in Stockholm on September 8, 2018, have been performed in English, recorded on site, and posted on social media.⁶⁰ As a consequence, the receivers of Thunberg's message in the specific, physical, and local contexts are continuously supplemented by followers of social media, serving a mobilizing, border-crossing function. The second pattern concerns the selection of the particular speech contexts. During the period considered here (September 8, 2018–April 23, 2019), all three forms of global power mentioned by McGrew (see above) are addressed by Thunberg: *coercive power* at the United Nations' Conference of the Parties (COP) 24 in Katowice, the EU Parliament in Strasbourg, and the British Parliament; *productive power* at the World Economic Forum in Davos; and *social power* at the People's Climate March in Stockholm on September 8, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) forum in Brussels, and a demonstration organized by Extinction Rebellion in London with the participation of Children's School Strike for Climate.

This is how Thunberg has contributed to what Randall Curren and Charles Dorn have designated as a *global constitutional activity*, which is an "activity through which people function and experience themselves as a global public that shapes and preserves the norms and constitutional principles that regulate the global order."⁶¹ More specifically, Thunberg is speaking to one audience (i.e., adults, who are persistently addressed as "you"), presupposing that this group has the power to perform necessary action. Concurrently, she is speaking on behalf of a "us," representing the school striking students. A conflict between generations is here exposed, and the mobilizing function of the speeches becomes visible. The fellow students are supposedly also implicit receivers of the speeches (cf. how the speeches have been posted by #FridaysForFuture).

60 A majority of the speeches studied here have been posted by #FridaysForFuture, an initiative started in August 2018 with a coordinating function. In one case, Thunberg (in the speech outside World Economic Forum) spoke directly to the camera, presumably not addressing a local audience.

61 Randall Curren and Charles Dorn, *Patriotic education in a global age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 123.

2.3 The significance of kairos

Considering the challenges of the rhetorical situation addressed above, it is not astounding that Thunberg's message has often been delivered in a general way.⁶² Still, the context of the rhetorical situation is made specific with reference to the dimension of time, a decisive element in her speeches. According to Bitzer, a rhetorical speech is a response to an exigence; the speaker does not herself establish the rhetorical situation. With regard to Thunberg, the exigence is obviously not her invention, but still she has effectively elucidated and condensed what is at stake, that is, the *kairos*,⁶³ which in classical rhetoric and philosophy refers to a loaded situation calling for instant action.⁶⁴

A distinct example of the presence of kairos in Thunberg's appeals is her speech at the COP 24 plenary session. There previous references to the sustainability crisis or climate crisis (e.g., the TED talk in November⁶⁵) were summed in the claim: "We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis",⁶⁶ a phrase also included in subsequent speeches. At Davos in January 2019, kairos was metaphorically addressed when Thunberg confronted the audience with the claim "Our house is on fire",⁶⁷ later replaced with "Our house is falling apart"⁶⁸ in her April 16 speech to the EU Parliament the day after the Notre Dame fire. The message delivered throughout her speeches has consistently been that the emergency situation is not being treated as an emergency, calling for necessary action. There is still time to act, but time is running out, and we have to act now.

The kairos element in Thunberg's speeches relates to all the three classical rhetorical forms of persuasion.⁶⁹ With reference to the serious message of IPCC, she is appealing to reason (logos). Speaking as a youth on behalf of future generations she is appealing to character (etos). And emphatically and persistently, the appropriation of cosmopolitan claims

62 This is the case even when referring to her home country, like in her speech at the Extinction Rebellion protest in April 2019, where she stated: "I come from Sweden, and back there is almost the same problems as here as everywhere that nothing is being done to combat the ecological and climate crisis, despite all the beautiful words and good promises."

63 Bitzer actually does not employ the concept of kairos when designating the rhetorical situation. Kairos also has a withdrawn position in Aristotle's rhetoric. According to Vestrheim, this is due to Aristotle's emphasis on theory, while kairos refers to the particular situation, which cannot be designated by general theoretical principles. Still, because kairos refers to the particular opportunity to speak, it stands out as "the starting point for all rhetoric. Theory cannot address kairos in itself, but everything theory addresses, must be assessed in relation to Kairos." [My translation from Norwegian.] Gjert Vestrheim, *Klassisk retorikk [Classical rhetoric]* (Oslo, Norway: Dreyers Forlag, 2018), 54. Bakken designates kairos as *the right moment*, and parallels the concept with Bitzer's rhetorical situation. (Jonas Bakken, *Retorikk i skolen [Rhetoric in school]* (Oslo, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 2009), 55.

64 Kristin Sampson, "The temporality of philosophy in the *Apology*," in *Readings of Plato's Apology: Defending the philosophical life*, eds., Vivil Valvik Haraldsen, Olof Pettersson, and Oda E. Wiese Tvedt (London, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2018): 57–71.

65 Thunberg, "TED Talk."

66 Thunberg, "COP 24, Plenary Session."

67 Thunberg, "Inside World Economic Forum."

68 Thunberg, "EU Parliament."

69 Christof Rapp, "Aristotle's Rhetoric," ed., Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2010 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>.

also is an appeal to emotions (pathos), allowing existential feelings of fear and despair to enter the climate change discourse.

3 A cosmopolitan approach to the Paris Agreement

The consideration of *kairos* above demonstrates how time is a salient constraint employed by Thunberg in her speeches. The time dimension makes the current context distinct and acute, even within the general, global scope. This issue of constraint is the third aspect of the rhetorical situation, as delineated by Bitzer. He refers to Aristotle's distinction between artistic proofs and inartistic proofs, the prior signifying constraints invented by the rhetor herself, and the latter signifying other constraints in the situation (e.g., established laws). What distinguishes Thunberg's speeches in this respect is her references to inartistic proofs, primarily the United Nations sustainability agenda. As I will now suggest, this is where she offers a cosmopolitan approach to this political struggle.

A recurring reference in Thunberg's speeches is the Paris Agreement of 2015, as in the speech delivered at the EESC event "Civil Society for reUNaissance" in February 2019. When addressing politicians, she states, "We want you to follow the Paris Agreement and the IPCC reports. We don't have any other manifests or demands."⁷⁰ The Paris Agreement is the current follow-up of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change from 1992. Environmental ethical values are clearly acknowledged in the preamble's recognitions, affirmations, acknowledgments, and notices, including both the respect for human beings now and in the future and the concern for ecosystems and biodiversity, summed in the concept of equity, with heaviest burden given to developed countries.⁷¹

The Paris Agreement from 2015 was the first climate agreement addressing specific measures to be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, backed by all member states of the United Nations. The common ambition presented in Article 2.1.a is the long term goal to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius."⁷² Additionally, in Articles 2.1b and 2.1c, adaptational measures are addressed together with finance flows, developing a pathway towards reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

The Paris Agreement is considered weak, as it allows the parties (i.e., the member states themselves) to voluntarily report planned emissions, so-called nationally determined con-

70 Thunberg, "EESC Event."

71 While such preambles may appear as a mandatory institutional exercise characterizing the genre, their content may nevertheless cause controversy. Doelle reports that "some Parties insisted on having these provisions included in the Paris Agreement while other Parties resisted including them." (Meinhard Doelle, "The Paris Climate Agreement – Assessment of strengths and weaknesses," in *The Paris Agreement on climate change: Analysis and commentary*, eds., Daniel Klein, Maria Pia Carazo, Meinhard Doelle, Jane Bulmer, and Andrew Higham (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017): (Section B, 1), <http://works.bepress.com/meinhard-doelle/1/>)

72 United Nations, *The Paris Agreement* (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2015): <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

tributions that are established in the subsequent articles of the agreement and followed up by soft accountability measures.⁷³ Thus far, the reported emission cuts have not been sufficient to reach the common ambition. Additionally, aviation and shipping are omitted from the agreement, weakening the possibility to monitor total global emissions.

When Thunberg refers to the Paris Agreement in her speeches, she accentuates the long-term goal articulated in Article 2.1a together with the principle of equity. From this perspective, she criticizes reported emission cuts as insufficient, for example, in her addresses in April 2019 to the EU Parliament and the members of British Parliament. Moreover, as the mapping of the environmental ethical values in Thunberg's speeches has shown (see the introduction to part 2 of this article), she repeatedly appeals to the environmental ethical values expressed in the preamble of the Paris Agreement—to protect the lives of present and future human beings and of other species—as well as the principle of equity. In this way, the cosmopolitan aspect of the Paris Agreement rather than the intergovernmental aspect is prioritized.

Such an interpretation of the Paris Agreement enables Thunberg, in her speech at the plenary session of COP 24, to insist: "Until you start focusing on what needs to be done rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope". While what needs to be done is a perspective referring to the cosmopolitan claims of the protection of life, what is politically possible may refer to intergovernmental negotiations. Obviously, the cosmopolitan claim is also a political claim, but in Thunberg's speeches, it is the cosmopolitan message of the Paris Agreement, which is accentuated in a political message, not the built-in political weakness distinguishing the agreement as a treaty between sovereign nation states.

That approach has allowed Thunberg, in her iterations of cosmopolitan claims, to stress their legitimization with reference to the United Nations consensus statements, while at the same time employing them as a criterion for critique of the lack of political follow-up. This is also how her speeches may be said to instantiate the method of immanent critique, going back to the early Hegel, expressing the possibility "to criticize a particular philosophical, political or cultural paradigm...in the name of a criterion that such a paradigm contains within itself".⁷⁴ It is this critique which I here conceive of as the utopian element of environmental ethical values because it instantiates an ideology critique (i.e., a critique of the current social order).

73 Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al. refer to accountability mechanisms, that function within democratic societies, while "in the realm of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, however, – and the PA [Paris Agreement] is no exception – 'non-compliance mechanisms', where they exist, are 'non-judicial, non-confrontational and consultative.'" They add, "Most states in the PA negotiations carefully avoided the 'a-word' [a – accountability] in discussion of implementation follow-up and monitoring." (Sylvia I. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Maja Groff, Peter A. Tamás, Arthur L. Dahl, Marie Harder, and Graham Hassall, "Entry into force and then? The Paris Agreement and state accountability," *Climate Policy* 18, no. 5 (2018): 593–594. DOI: 10.1080/14693062.2017.1331904).

74 Karin de Boer, "Hegel's Conception of Immanent Critique: Its Sources, Extent and Limit," in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, eds., Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83.

3.1 The appropriation of cosmopolitan claims

Interpreted as cosmopolitan claims accrued to everyone, environmental ethical values may be appealed to by anyone. This possibility is a vital aspect of the school strikes for the climate, and also characterizes Thunberg's speeches as democratic iterations. Benhabib holds that these processes are "encouraging new forms of subjectivity" and "can empower citizens in democracies by creating new vocabularies for claim-making."⁷⁵

As democratic iterations, the school strikes are expressions of a new group—children and youth—entering the public space, appropriating the cosmopolitan claims as their own, and stating that the future is no abstraction, but is populated with the diverse life on earth, including themselves.

Using the authority from this position—belonging to the future generations protected by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—Thunberg and the other school strikers are holding politicians and business leaders of the world accountable for the lack of action. Exactly at the point where the Paris Agreement is at its weakest, the school strikes for the climate have assumed ownership of cosmopolitan claims to be found in the very same agreement signed by the world nations. The moral authority of the school striking youths is further strengthened by the fact that the history of climate negotiations among the adults is one of broken promises, with continuous growth in the emissions of greenhouse gases since the Climate Change Convention was adopted in 1992.

3.2 Context and narrative: The practice of enlarged thought

The emphasis on the rhetorical situation has illuminated certain aspects of the context of Thunberg's speeches. The exigence that the speeches are responding to is of global reach, determining the global audience. At the same time, the speeches constrain the context, appealing to reports of urgency presented by institutions like the IPCC and to cosmopolitan values endorsed by the United Nations.

The productive establishment of context is, however, also expressed in another way, which may be made visible through Benhabib's concept of enlarged thought and narrativity. As previously presented, according to Benhabib (1992), enlarged thought is designating the practice of moral judgment involving anyone affected by the action in question, which is also strongly connected to Benhabib's political theory of deliberative democracy.⁷⁶

We have seen how the scope has been enlarged by the entrance of the school striking students into the public discourse, insisting on their right to be heard. However, although the identification with the future is significant in her speeches, Thunberg has been careful with not restricting the ethical scope to her own generation of human beings, as her speech at "Civil Society for rEUanissance" clearly states: "Some people say that we are fighting for our future, but that is not true. We are not fighting for our future, we are fighting

⁷⁵ Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 125–126.

⁷⁶ See Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed., Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 70.

for everyone's future."⁷⁷ This *everyone* even includes other species and the whole biosphere. Beginning with her TED talk in November 2018, Thunberg, has continuously referred to the sixth mass extinction of species and demonstrated an awareness of inequity, clearly stating that the moral burden is not equally distributed. Not everybody is responsible for the crisis; instead, the rich bear responsibility.⁷⁸ In this way, the recontextualizing practice demonstrates how all the environmental ethical values have significance, although the cosmopolitical appropriation primarily regards the protection of future generations.

Narratives are distinguished by a trajectory, potentially including the past, the present, and the future. Thunberg has projected the context into the future, challenging adults to expand the practicing of enlarged thought. In her TED Talk in November 2018, Thunberg provides an example that she has subsequently reiterated:⁷⁹

The year 2078, I will celebrate my 75th birthday. If I have children or grandchildren, maybe they will spend that day with me. Maybe they will ask me about you, the people who were around, back in 2018. Maybe they will ask why you didn't do anything while there still was time to act. What we do or don't do right now will affect my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren. What we do or don't do right now, me and my generation can't undo in the future.⁸⁰

This is a call to adults to include her generation in their ethical and political thinking, with an emphasis on a possible future. Demonstrating how her own life is related to the lives of others is the mode of narrative Thunberg has deployed here. But even more significant, considering the conception of narrative that Benhabib borrows from Arendt, is how Thunberg poses a possible judgment from the future generations on the achievements or lack thereof of the present adult generation; the story of our lives is also the narrative told by others. In this way, the position of accountability, commented on earlier, becomes specific and concrete. The web of relationships in this speech is woven both between and within generations.

3.3 A reservation: The responsibility placed on adults

A peculiar aspect of Thunberg's speeches is how she has placed responsibility on the adult world. In the early speech in September at the People's Climate March in Stockholm, she states, "The changes required are enormous and we must all contribute in every part of our daily lives, especially us in the rich countries, where no nation is doing nearly enough.

77 Thunberg, "EESC Event."

78 In this respect, Thunberg's message is confronting the richest nations of the world, including Sweden and the European Union. Regarding the issue of global equity, it should be mentioned that although school strikes for the climate have turned into a worldwide phenomenon, the response has been most considerable in affluent countries.

79 Thunberg, "COP 24, Plenary Session."

80 Thunberg, "TED Talk."

The grownups have failed us.”⁸¹ This appeal to transformation of everyone’s daily lives is clearly reflected in Thunberg’s own choices, most famously her rejection to travel by airplanes. However, in her subsequent speeches the appeal to change individual life styles, has given way to the message that politicians and business leaders must act as if they are in a crisis. They are the ones who are responsible for the current misery, and they must solve it. Thunberg has acknowledged that solutions may be difficult, but still insists that “the main solution however is so simple that a small child can understand it. We have to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases”,⁸² as stated in her message to business leaders in Davos.

By holding the political world accountable, she has turned the relationship between adults and children upside down. However, she has still insisted on her status as a child, placing the responsibility on adults, not presenting specific solutions. She is not quite consistent in this reservation, sometimes suggesting that systemic change might be necessary, that green economic growth is insufficient, or that a culture of competition must yield to cooperation. She has also become more precise in her critique, most specifically in her speech to the members of the British Parliament, which was delivered as an accurate critique of the moderate ambitions for emission cuts.⁸³

However, the general picture is that Thunberg, at least thus far, has shown reluctance with indicating how the demands and requirements may be operationalized in practical politics. This applies to the utopian element pointed at previously as a dimension of the environmental ethical values. This utopian element is expressed in the critique of the current state of affairs, which is consistently applied in Thunberg’s speeches. But it may be expressed in the suggestion of possible alternative worlds, as well. Such a constructive dimension has not been developed by Thunberg. This reluctance may be warranted in the position of accountability related to the Paris Agreement: The young people are not in charge of the current states of affairs, they are an obvious interest group which now has become visible, but their task is to hold the adult world accountable, pointing at the urgent need for action. But the lack of specifications and a political program may nevertheless in the long run be a weakness in the ongoing struggle involving a hegemonic world economy.⁸⁴

81 Thunberg, “People’s Climate March.”

82 Thunberg, “Inside World Economic Forum.”

83 Thunberg, “Members of British Parliament.”

84 The general demand of the school strikes for the climate still is distinct, requiring politicians to take necessary action for reaching the overall aim of emission cuts in the Paris Agreement. It should also be added that there have indeed been made specifications in various national expressions of the schools strikes for climate. In Norway, the school strikers have demanded full stop of further oil prospecting (Åsa Bache, “Thousands participating in school strike for climate May 24”, *Nature and Youth*, May 23, 2019, <https://nu.no/saker/skolestreik/2019/05/tusenvis-vilstreike-skolen-for-klima-24-mai/>), in Australia a similar demand has been no new coal, oil and gas projects (“About us”, *School Strike 4 Climate*, accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.schoolstrike4climate.com/about>).

4 The school strikes' ambiguous relation to education

In part 2 and 3 of this article, I have analyzed the recontextualizations of environmental ethical values in 10 speeches by Greta Thunberg from September 2018 to April 2019. The study has demonstrated how these values are conceived of as cosmopolitan claims, appropriated in democratic iterations, determining the emergence of democratic citizens. In the rhetorical situation established by the current crisis, the constraints of context have been expressed by Thunberg in her call to immediate action.

4.1 Environmental and sustainability education as a backdrop for the school strikes

What is the significance of this analysis for education? In one respect, a hypothesis could be that the school strikes for the climate are the outcome of well-functioning school systems, following the guidelines of environmental and sustainability education. In these schools, students critically examine unsustainability practices, climate change, and explore how to live well.⁸⁵ They develop a capacity for action competence, possibly expressed in political engagement beyond the school institution.⁸⁶ Additionally, the education provided, accommodating for the integrity of the students, is transformative and participatory with an openness to unprecedented action,⁸⁷ here expressed in the school strikes phenomenon itself. With particular consideration to moral education, the school strikes may reflect diligent studies of environmental ethical values, even regarding their institutional embeddedness in the United Nations sustainability agenda.

As a matter of fact, Thunberg and other school strikers have referred to education in the school as an important source of knowledge about global warming and anthropogenic climate change.⁸⁸ Such student reports may be considered to reflect international priorities granted to sustainability education in the globalizing education policy of UNESCO and followed up nationally on a worldwide basis.⁸⁹ In a key UNESCO document framing the

85 Randall Curren and Ellen Metzger, *Living well now and in the future: Why sustainability matters* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

86 Finn Mogensen and Karsten Schnack, "The action competence approach and the 'new' discourses of education for sustainable development, competence and quality criteria," *Environmental Education Research* 16, no. 1 (2010): 59–74. DOI: 10.1080/13504620903504032.

87 Bob Jickling and Arjen E. J. Wals, "Globalization and environmental education: looking beyond sustainable Development," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 40, no. 1 (2008): 1–21. DOI: 10.1080/00220270701684667

88 Hilde Schramm, Greta Thunberg, and Deborah Lipstadt, (Originally Broadcast February 1, 2019) (C. Amanpour and W. Isaacson, Interviewers) [Interview transcript], May 29, 2019, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/amanpour-and-company/video/february-1-2019-ceo4lu/>; Anuna de Wever and Kyra Gantois, *Vi er klimaet: Et brev til verden [We are the climate: A letter to the world]*. (Oslo, Norway: Spartacus, 2019).

89 The significance of education for the transformation to a sustainable world was accentuated in Agenda 21, a global action plan which was another outcome of the Rio Summit, followed up by subsequent initiatives: United Nations, *Resolution 57/254. United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*, 2002, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/57/254&Lang=E; United Nations *Resolution 70/1. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf; United Nations, *Resolution 72/222. Education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2017), <https://www.un.org/en/ga/72/resolutions.shtml>.

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), the values dimension is particularly addressed, calling for an education policy that is “fundamentally about values, with respect at the centre; respect for others, including those of present and future generations, for difference and diversity, for the environment, for the resources of the planet we inhabit.”⁹⁰

4.2 From students to democratic citizens

However, the hypothesis considered above is weakened by reports on how environmental and sustainability education may individualize and depoliticize the issues at stake.⁹¹ While not dismissing the positive significance of environmental and sustainability education, there are good reasons, when considering the school strikes phenomenon, to reflect on possible obstacles involved, pertinent to the phenomenon of education itself. In Basil Bernstein’s conception of the recontextualization of societal discourses in education settings⁹², he points out how a space for ideology emerges, when discourses are pedagogized. This perspective is even reflected in my own research, as touched upon in the introduction to this article.

Fundamentally, this issue pertains to the function of the student role itself. A student is an institutional role referring to a position in a learning process taking place within the school institution. The preparatory function is obvious, although the immanent value of the learning process should be accentuated, as well.⁹³ However, as the school strikes for the climate demonstrate, children and young people have substantial interests in the political struggle of transforming society’s current unsustainable structures and practices. In this perspective, the school strikes represent a break with the hegemonic practice of institutionalizing children and youths and not including their interests in current political priorities.

Following this perspective, the school strikes may be conceived of as recontextualizations occurring in the opposite direction as the one designated by Bernstein whose emphasis has been on how societal concepts are pedagogized in educational institutions.⁹⁴ The school strikes stand out as expressions of an empowerment in which the students, by virtue of an ethical and political engagement, leave the formal educational setting and are transformed into democratic citizens. The recontextualizations of the environmental ethical values studied in this article are decisive in this transformation. Embedded in the consensus conventions and declarations of the United Nations, they are appealed to as cosmopolitan values, which provide authority to the voices of children and youths expressed in the public space. In this transformation of the students to democratic citizens, the

90 UNESCO, *Framework for the UN DESD*, 4.

91 Huckle and Wals, “The UN decade of education for sustainable development: Business as usual in the end”; Hume and Barry, “Environmental education and education for sustainable development”; Ideland and Malmberg, “Governing eco-certified children through pastoral power.”

92 Bernstein, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*, 32.

93 Joseph Dunne, *Back to the rough ground: practical judgment and the lure of technique*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

94 Bernstein, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*.

individual youth becomes part of a social movement, experiencing the power of political mobilization and adding to the possible impact of the school strikes for the climate. What such a conflictual perspective exposes, is how the school strikes, as acts of resistance, may particularly involve the school as a societal institution with a hegemonic function.

Another conspicuous aspect from the perspective of formal education, is the potential for learning within the school strike movement. Conceived of as the transformative practice of *Bildung*, education may take place everywhere. Elaborating on Wolfgang Klafki's critical-constructive didaktik, Stefan Ting Graf points at how authentic *Bildung* does not rely on schools.⁹⁵ The individual may be empowered independently of or in spite of what is going on in the educational institution, due to the hegemonic practices taking place here. While this comment may not take due notice to friction as an integrated aspect of formal educational processes, it certainly addresses the significance of break from the educational institution in the school strikes for the climate.

Below, I continue these reflections on the contentious character of the school strikes, considering how the school strikes may be conceived of as political measures within a social movement. I suggest viewing them as forms of civil resistance paralleled with civil disobedience.

4.3 The school strikes and civil disobedience

The school strikes for the climate are not adequately understood as simple truancy; they stand out as acts of civil resistance⁹⁶ made in public, significant in the establishment of a social movement. The closest analogy might be civil disobedience. This political instrument—employed by Gandhi in India during the struggle for national independence—was central in the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1960s and into the 1970s, which prompted a vibrant debate within political theory. Lately it has been employed by the environmental movement in various countries. The term itself refers to the refusal by a group to obey a specific law, thereby drawing attention to an injustice in society.⁹⁷ In the 1970s civil disobedience gained support from prominent political theorists, like Hannah Arendt and John Rawls. Stears⁹⁸ identifies four characteristics that have been accentuated in the philosophical defense of civil disobedience. First, civil disobedience involves claims of justice rather than narrow self-interest. Second, it refers to the way justice is already understood by the majority of citizens. Third, the justificatory message must be clear and apparent to all. Fourth, civil disobedients must have explored any other democratic instru-

95 Stefan Ting Graf, "Wolfgang Klafkis dannelsesteori. En indføring" [The *Bildung* Theory of Wolfgang Klafki. An Introduction], in *Fylde og form. Wolfgang Klafki i teori og praksis* [Richness and Form. Wolfgang Klafki in Theory and Practice], eds., Stefan Ting Graf and Keld Skovmand (Århus: Forlaget Klim, 2004), 25–58.

96 Daniel P. Ritter, "Civil Resistance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, eds., Donatella Della Port and Mario Diani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014–2015), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678402.013.49.

97 Marc Stears, "Civil disobedience," in *Encyclopedia of political theory*, ed., Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 201–203. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412958660.n68>.

98 Stears, "Civil disobedience."

ment before the factual disobedience takes place and must accept any legal punishment that may follow from their disobedience. Both transparency and justice are characteristics recognizable in the school strikes. However, as we have seen above, justice is here expressed as cosmopolitan in scope, and the students have not been subject to legal punishment by the state. Sanctions, if any, belong to the educational system itself.

In her elaborations on civil disobedience, Hannah Arendt⁹⁹ accentuates the significance of a *tacit consent* within society following from the social contract that binds each member to his or her fellow citizens. That consent must be distinguished from the support given to specific laws, but it does involve some kind of fundamental *consensus universalis*. This distinction allows civil disobedience to be seen as a democratic act and not as a violation of democracy. According to Arendt, once a child or youth has grown into an adult, dissent stands out as a possibility. However—and this reveals the challenge raised by the school strikes—what if the youth's interests are not protected by current politics, and it is not time to wait to dissent or resist until the child has become an adult?

Here, then, is the crucial issue expressed by the school strikes for the climate: When the adult world does not take responsibility, children and youths leave the school as a preparatory institution behind in an act of resistance and dissent and simultaneously make a claim on justice. The employment of cosmopolitan values is expressed as measures of critique, crucial for the warranting of this political act. The school strikes demonstrate how the juris-generativity of these values has been restricted by not including the age group that will be most affected by current unsustainable politics in the democratic processes, i.e. the young generation without the right to vote.

On a deeper level, the tacit consent in society may be said to be challenged by the lack of protection of future life on earth. If so, some of the complexities of the current crisis become visible. Ecologically, life on Earth is already harmed and under threat of future harm. Politically, this situation produces uncertainty and weakens the preconditions of democracy that bind each member to fellow citizens. The school strikes may herein be positively conceived of as attempts to restore this tacit consent that is fundamental to democracy. However, this function obviously requires that the students' appeals are heard by adults and followed up on through political action.

5 Final considerations and conclusion

In this article, I have studied how environmental ethical values expressed in United Nations Conventions are recontextualized in the school strikes for the climate. The analyses of the 10 speeches of Greta Thunberg demonstrated that the values persistently are addressed, with continuous reference to the Paris Agreement. The environmental ethical values are pivotal in the establishment of the exigence that the speeches address. They are employed

99 Hannah Arendt, "Civil disobedience," in *Crisis of the republic* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), 49–102.

to designate what is under threat by current unsustainable practices—present and future life on earth, involving human beings and the more-than-human world, and including equity as a precious concern. Decisive is how *kairos* in the speeches is continuously established by reference to a current crisis. While the context of the speeches is global in scope, reflecting both a global exigence, cosmopolitan claims and an emerging global social movement, the time dimension makes the message distinct and acute. The concern for future generations is brought into the present in the urgent call for action.

The perspectives from Benhabib's critical cosmopolitanism have made visible how mediations are taking place between the environmental ethical values and acts of political resistance, in which the students transcend the school institution and become democratic citizens. Crucial in Thunberg's speeches is how the moral message of the Paris Agreement is accentuated as a political message, not referring to the built-in political weakness distinguishing the agreement as a treaty between sovereign nation states. This approach has allowed Thunberg, in her iterations of the environmental ethical values as cosmopolitan claims, to stress their legitimization with reference to the United Nations consensus statements, while concurrently employing them as a criterion for critique of the lack of political follow-up.

In the speeches of Thunberg the school striking youths embody the environmental ethical values, and particularly the concern for future generations. It is in this strong sense that the values are recontextualized, conceived of as cosmopolitan claims. The central message is that the youths' own existence, protected by the United Nations conventions, is under threat, due to the lack of necessary political action. At the same time, the speeches of Thunberg transcend a limited self-interest, accommodating a concern for equity in the present and the protection of all future life.

The school strikes themselves establish an ambiguous relation to education. On the one hand, they may be seen as the outcome of a well-functioning environmental and sustainability education awaking the students' political awareness of the current crisis and enabling them to take action. On the other hand, the transformative element is not positioned within the context of formal education, but is expressed as a break with the school setting. I have here, with reference to Arendt, paralleled the school strikes for the climate with civil disobedience. The environmental ethical values are appealed to as common values, but the lack of necessary political action threatens the tacit consent that binds the citizens together, putting particularly the life prospects of the young generation under risk. In that respect the climate crisis is also a threat to democracy. Here the school strikes for the climate may be seen as expressions of a disregarded societal group without suffrage who is claiming the right to be heard in matters that are vital to life and existence. In this perspective, the strikes are ways to restore democracy, if followed by political action that protects the interests of the young generation.

Addressing moral education as practiced in school, some suggestions may be formulated on the background of this study. First of all, the school strikes for the climate prompt reflections on the status of the youths in the class room. It is decisive to realize that young

people is a group in society with particular interests in the current political tug of war concerning the transitions to sustainable societies. To acknowledge this status has consequences for how sustainability issues are addressed in educational practices, including the reminder that young people are not a homogenous group—most of them have not been school striking—demanding approaches that open up for plurality, disagreements, and difference. At the same time, the school strikes for the climate, as we have seen, may be said to also problematize the student role in itself, as positioned outside of the political space, calling for further reflection on tensions involved between formal education and democratic empowerment.

Regarding the environmental ethical values studied here, their cosmopolitan character should be accentuated in ways that invite the students to discuss them and appropriate them. In the establishment of such an educational space, the United Nations conventions are of vital importance, as well as the persistent contradiction between proclaimed values and insufficient action. With such a framing the explorations of ethical issues in school concerning the current ecological crisis, climate crisis, and increasing social inequity, necessarily also involves a political dimension.

The school strikes for the climate also prompt reflections on the practicing of moral judgment in moral education. A conspicuous element in Thunberg's speeches is how the youth's own existence is included in what is to be taken care of. The concern is not about promoting narrow self-interests, e.g. maintaining unsustainable consumption patterns, but seems to be a matter of including oneself in the vulnerability that distinguishes all living beings. From this follows the openness for emotional responses, like feelings of fear and despair. The existential dimension should be acknowledged in moral education and included in the corresponding *Bildung* ideal.

There are risks involved in appealing to cosmopolitanism and universal claimed values in education. Sund and Öhman points at how environmental and sustainable issues may be turned "into moral issues of good and evil and thus *moralise the political.*"¹⁰⁰ This is a concern that even applies to the practices of the school striking students. My suggestion here, however, is that the risk is not primarily to consider the environmental and sustainable issues as moral issues, but the reduction of adequate response to sole questions of individual behavior. This is what necessitates mediations between the ethical and political. Decisive in the analysis carried out here, has been how the environmental ethical values in Thunberg's speeches are recontextualized as cosmopolitan claims, appropriated and applied as critical instruments in a political struggle. Furthermore, these instances of democratic iterations are constitutive for a new social movement and seem to be significant in processes of transformative learning, in which the students emerge as democratic citizens.

100 Sund and Öhman, "On the need to repoliticise environmental and sustainability education.", 650, original italics.