Even a cursory glance through the many excellent chapters contained in this volume reveals one thing for sure: the study of ethics and international relations (IR) has no future; it has several. From its contested history, superbly summarised by Kimberly Hutchings, to its disputed present, the chapters demonstrate the plethora of approaches, foci, methodologies and ontologies that now comprise this burgeoning field. And this is without considering those approaches and issues that were not included in this volume (such as a focus on disability1 or a contribution from Queer theory2). Editing is unavoidably violent and exclusionary, after all; summarising a field is necessarily a ‘falsification in process’.3 What is particularly encouraging is that throughout this volume, there is little trace of the cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism framing device that became so influential in the 1990s.4 Whilst the motivating tension between universalism and particularism remains, it no longer stifles a field which, as Beate Jahn’s chapter points out, is characterised by fragmentation rather than unity. This diversification and absence of overarching and limiting frames is a sure sign that the health of, and widespread interest in, the field of ethics and international relations is here to stay. The ethical ‘turn’ is one that has certainly been taken, but in a variety of directions.

Eric A. Heinze and Brent J. Steele note in their editor’s Introduction that ‘the same diversity that enriches the field of Ethics and IR also makes it a difficult one to characterize’. Equally, this diversity makes the field’s futures impossible to forecast. And as theoretical physicist Niels Bohr is said to have observed, prediction is always very difficult, especially when it’s about the future.5 Not only are predictions susceptible to unexpected events in international politics, disciplinary changes can emerge through unforeseen cross-pollinations from other fields of study. Most importantly, predictions are always personal and political, reflecting what the forecaster fears or wants to occur. With this in mind, I point in this chapter to three foci and challenges that I believe will grow, or become more urgent, over the coming years. They are also areas I would like to see become more influential. These issues – the environment and non-human, the decolonial challenge and unexceptional slow violence – will be examined in turn, but they are also linked in key ways, and each takes its lead from certain contributions to this volume. I begin with the environment, as this is often presented as the most urgent and catastrophic challenge to life itself.
Environment, climate change and the non-human

It is normal practice to commence any writing on the environment and climate change with a set of scary statistics. These are not difficult to find. Every day brings a fresh news story about the deadly and potentially catastrophic effects of the damage humans have been doing to the environment for the last two centuries. According to the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, an international research collaboration that tracks 40 key indicators and publishes its findings each year in *The Lancet*, the threats to human life posed by this damage are now potentially irreversible. It has already led to 125 million more people made vulnerable to heatwave events between 2000 and 2016, a 46% increase in weather-related disasters between 2000 and 2013, and 24 million more undernourished people than in 1990. Both confirming and contesting Carol Farbotko’s chapter in this volume (which noted that ‘climate migrants are empirically elusive’ and almost impossible to locate in actuality, if often the subject of many dire predictions), the Lancet Countdown confidently reports that ‘climate change alone has directly forced at least 4,400 to migrate and over 1 billion people may be at risk of migration by the end of the century’. In spite of this, people remain largely unmoved by the ethical or political urgency of the situation, a problem reflected in the headline of the *New Scientist*’s article on the 2017 Lancet report – ‘Climate change will kill millions but you knew that already’.

Environmental degradation and climate change are challenges to which international ethics must respond, and yet beyond Green theory it is unsurprising that it has yet to do so in a convincing or sustained way. Other than Benney, Farbotko and Brasset, Richardson and Smith’s chapters, there is little in this volume to suggest an imminent change in this regard. And yet there is plenty of potential in each theme of the present volume. The philosophical foundations of international ethics in Joy Gordon’s theme could be turned to the issues of collective and differential responsibilities for environmental damage, as well as the anti-egalitarian, unjust nature of its outcomes. IR theory could take more account of Green theory, which is inherently critical, normative and cosmopolitan in its approaches and recommendations. Critical security studies in its various hues has been engaging with environmental security since the 1990s, and with its recent turn to the Anthropocene is well ahead of international ethics in this regard. The role, and current failure, of international institutions in any response to climate change appears inevitable, while the impasse posed by state sovereignty on the potential for intervention is a perennial issue. Whether or not Responsibility to Protect (R2P), a prominent topic in James Pattison’s theme in intervention and sovereignty, could be part of any reaction must be doubtful: this emerging norm has proven incapable of reformulating to cope with refugees fleeing the atrocities it was designed to deal with; there can be little hope of it providing for the protection of climate refugees who have no status in international law (see Chapter 28). The imbrication of the environment with issues of vulnerability and political economy are well recognised already in this volume, but the role of religions and their various relationships to the non-human could be a source of further work.

Perhaps this general myopia is a sign that ethics and IR still remains too wedded to the staples of the international system: state sovereignty and the mitigation of anarchy. Climate change could be taken as an opening to begin debates in ethics and IR that are more fundamental and ontological, such as what duties of care we owe to the non-human that co-constitute our world, making it liveable and breathable. It also generates questions involving different conceptualisations of time and space: do we need to look to alternative spaces, often ignored by IR, such as islands made vulnerable by ecological change? What about global cities as the command and control nodes from which these changing ecologies are directed? After all, cities
such as London and New York direct the flows of finance that can strip rural populations of their land in the Global South, turning it over to agribusiness interests that pollute and destroy local environments.\(^{14}\) Such cities are largely dependent for their very material existence on the populations they helped expel and to whom they outsourced their most polluting industry, with up to 80% of London’s food imported from outside the UK\(^{15}\) – does this incur particular obligations of responsibility, care or justice? What responsibilities do current individuals, communities and populations owe to future generations who will live with the choices made, or avoided, now? How do we deal with the contingency of this future, and how is such uncertainty helping to construct our present? Can those in the Global North who were not directly responsible for the damage of past industrialisation, but continue to experience the benefits of it, be held accountable to vulnerable populations in the present day? Should we be discussing issues of reparation, as noted by some of the literature discussed in Puneet Dhaliwal’s chapter in the context of colonialism, or do we need something more structural and far-reaching, as he implies? Are the philosophical foundations outlined in this volume by Matthew Lindauer, Kok-Chor Tan and David Atenasio able to address these questions? Are conventional IR theories even able to think them?

In confronting the challenge of man-made ecological transformation, however, the turn to ethics and IR needs to avoid positing itself as the source of solutions or motivations for changed behaviour. Madeleine Fagan has pointed to the way that such a simple narrative tends to reproduce a particular vision of the ethical subject (the individualised, non-relational liberal subject of later modernity who is capable of collective action) and its civilisation (made up of businesses, airports, infrastructure and power stations) which is to be saved.\(^{16}\) This is not only depoliticising, it also limits our ethical imagination whilst re-entrenching the ‘very modernist project that has arguably brought us to this point in the first place’.\(^{17}\) What is perhaps needed is a more intricate vision of the ethical subject as co-constituted in relation with the non-human – as inter-species as well as international. Outlined by Donna Haraway, this vision involves thinking of ourselves as a co-shaped species, emerging in a ‘knot’ with microbes and genus of all varieties, ‘in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down’. The point for Haraway is ‘not to celebrate this complexity but to become worldly and to respond’, building a wider vision of the cosmopolitical that includes the non-human in a web of contingent obligation and care.\(^{18}\) Such a conception would offer no solutions to climate change, but opens the possibility of thinking responsibilities outside the frame of human exceptionalism that currently limits ethics and IR.

Regardless of how the problem is faced and from which angles, the challenge of climate change and relations to the non-human is an area with which ethics and IR will need to wrestle, both now and in the future.

### The decolonial and postcolonial challenge

One way of approaching this problem is hinted at in Ajay Parasram’s brilliantly provocative contribution to this volume. Illustrating the coexistence of alternative ontologies made visible from a postcolonial framing, Parasram finds inspiration in the indigenous North American Dene ontology of land relayed by Glen Sean Coulthard in *Red Skins, White Masks*. For the Dene, human and non-human are not considered separable entities, society is not opposed to nature and land is not an external background but a *relationship* based in obligations towards the human and non-human alike. Such a ‘grounded normativity’ is posed by Parasram as an alternative to the abstract reasoning of Eurocentric ‘state of nature’ theorising. But it also illustrates the fact that different ethico-ecological ontologies and accounts of co-existential subjectivity have
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existed for centuries outside what Robbie Shilliam calls the ‘European–modern’. This external status has ensured its practitioners have been excluded as unworthy interlocutors in ethical inquiry policed by the Western academy.19

The post– or decolonial challenge is therefore the second issue that ethics and IR will increasingly need to confront. This language of ‘challenges’ and ‘confrontation’ between international ethics and post–/decolonialism is obviously profoundly problematic, as it implies these are two separate and internally homogenous fields of inquiry, encountering each other only now on level terrain. On the one hand, this is clearly false: the diversity of ethics and IR has already been stressed and the critical chapters of Parasram, Puneet Dhaliwal, William Ackah and Mustapha Pasha in this volume demonstrates how the field encompasses this challenge; meanwhile postcolonialism and decolonialism are marked by different spatial, temporal and intellectual origins and concerns, as well as internal differences.20 And yet, on the other hand, the post– and decolonial critiques remain marginalised contestations because of the way they point to the Eurocentric foundations (Parasram), abstract methods of reasoning (Dhaliwal) and constitutive exclusion of colonial violence and peoples (Ackah) that grounds and legitimises the majority of international ethical thought. Dhaliwal and Ackah, in different ways, call attention to the colonality of power relations that remain infused within our understandings of global justice, cosmopolitanism, human rights, empowerment and emancipation.

It is partly for this reason that Louiza Odysseos cautions against a rush to translate the decolonial into the ‘familiar ethical languages and approaches’ of the Western academy. Her stress on retaining decolonial ethics precisely as a challenging question is ‘not a prohibitive move but one that encourages a fundamental questioning of the language, praxis and figures of ethics’,21 upon which many contributions to this volume rely. In this way, then, decolonising international ethics remains a challenge we all must confront, rather than being simply an alternative approach, an exotic form of cosmopolitanism we choose whether or not to engage alongside more accustomed forms. For example, could the just war tradition and critical security studies, the focus of Cian O’Driscoll’s section in this volume, explore their problematic entanglements with Western modernity and colonial violence by adopting the ‘perspective of subjects who inhabit its [modernity’s] underside’, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres does in Against War?22 Can the ethics of international institutions stand up to historical inquiries which reveal their consciously erased origins in the perpetuation of colonial domination, as provided by Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson’s investigation of the EU in Eurafrica?23 Would the norms of intervention, sovereignty and humanitarianism look different if interrogated not just from the perspective of contemporary Latin American states (as in Raúl Salgado’s chapter), but also according to the vision of the neo-liberal, depersonalised, non-relational ‘human’ they seek to ‘protect’ within an historically particular understanding of the Western state?

As the decolonial challenge has swept through the arts, humanities and social sciences, it becomes harder for ethics and IR not to engage it more fully. Yet there is an important caveat to stress with regard to the mode of that present and future engagement. Just as scholars would do well to follow Oddyseos in not seeking to ‘translate’ decoloniality into accepted forms of ethics, they should also avoid attempts to mine colonial experience for alternative ontologies which could in some sense ‘save’ Western civilisation, whether ecologically, morally or politically. Seeking to instrumentally draw out and export the Dene ontology of land, for example, would be to reprise the extractive power relationships of coloniality once again. Rather, the decolonial critique and its gradual decolonisation of ethics and IR could be seen as a multiplicity of challenges and questions which strive for new, hybrid and potentially revolutionary forms of knowledge and practices of being human-in-relation.24
Ackah’s passionate defence of an ‘ethics from the underside’ in this volume points to a crucial aspect of the decolonial critique of the international system, noting that the precarious conditions, poverty and disenfranchisement of African peoples goes hand-in-hand with the fetishisation and commodification of Africa’s culture and its natural resources that produce mobile technologies. In doing so, decolonialism signals precisely the unexceptional, everyday ways in which injustice, exploitation and irresponsibility are practised in a depersonalised, market-driven global economy. While this ‘everydayness’ of injustice is a major emphasis of the themes on ‘International Political Economy’ and ‘Vulnerability’ in this volume, strongly flagged up in their thematic overviews by James Brassett and Debra L. DeLaet, many other contributions also highlight, in one way or another, the chronically uneven spread of suffering and how it is perpetuated by quixotic ways of being a modern, international subject.

There will always be a need for ethics and IR to maintain a focus on preventing and mitigating exceptional events, such as war, humanitarian disasters, genocide and ethnic cleansing. But the critical insights of feminists and post-Marxists have ensured that the greater complexity of unexceptional, structural violence within the global economy and international system has gained increasing traction in recent times, striated as it is by divisions including race, class and gender. The trend towards the unexceptional will, I would suggest, continue in the coming years; there is still some way to go in this regard, however, as a tendency remains in much of ethics and IR to focus on exceptional events, on abstract theorising and grand solutions, leaving everyday injustice to feminists, decolonialists and political economists. This is highlighted by a quick review of the journal *Ethics and International Affairs* and its recent issues. Here, an overwhelming preference becomes clear to favour international norms, human rights law, theorisations of global justice and attempts to plug holes in just war theory, more often than not written from the perspective of white, Western men.

An example of the sidelining of unexceptional violence is demonstrated by exploring the similarities and differences of two major events which took place in global cities – London and New York – creating terrible suffering and injustice. The first event, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on the 11 September 2001, is deeply familiar to everyone. This exceptional occurrence prompted the prouncement of a global war on terror which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths across the world, as well as countless books and articles. Many of these publications emerged in the field of ethics and IR, perhaps the most prominent early example being Jean Bethke Elshtain’s extraordinary defence of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. In contrast, the second event is perhaps less familiar to many. When the Grenfell Tower burned down in London on 14 June 2017, killing at least 71 people in one of the worst preventable disasters in UK history, there was almost no comment at all from scholars of ethics and IR (or IR in general), either on conventional or social media platforms. As Jenny Edkins will point out in a forthcoming book, the events bore key similarities, such as the horror of the intense fire in a high-rise building, with people seen in the windows seeking rescue; people forced to jump to their deaths; survivors and onlookers helplessly speaking by phone to their loved ones trapped inside; as well as a confused emergency response and the pulling together of a local community in solidarity. Yet the reaction to the two events has been markedly different: the victims of 9/11 were held up as national heroes, appropriated by the state despite their diverse international origins to support wars of retribution; the victims of Grenfell were treated with pity and charity in most quarters, or as the undeserving poor with uncertain immigration status in others.
There are several elements that account for the silence of ethics and IR on Grenfell, but I will draw out two that illustrate the need to engage the unexceptionality of complex international violence. First, whilst both events happened at the heart of global cities, 9/11 was undeniably ‘international’, with a global terrorist network accepting responsibility and placing the blame on US foreign policy. Grenfell appeared a more local, at best a national tragedy, with no ‘evil’ hand directing it. It was more easily left to other disciplines, such as sociology, law, urban geography and city planning. The fact that it seemed the result merely of poor everyday local planning and governance meant it was effortlessly marginalised from IR. And yet the Grenfell tower victims, and many survivors, came from all over the world, from Italy to the Philippines, including Syrian refugees and Lebanese nursery officers. The reasons for the deadliness of the blaze are not yet fully known, but they appear equally international. The recent renovation of the tower had involved a complex array of subcontractors and imported goods, including a French-owned project management firm, a German ventilation system, low-grade American-made cladding which many have blamed for the speed with which the fire spread, and a Qatari-owned gas network. Meanwhile, the cost-cutting that led to this sub-standard renovation was blamed by the local council and the independent management organisation it employed – Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) – on the austerity measures imposed by the global financial crisis.

A second reason for IR’s silence on issues like Grenfell is perhaps that the violence which led to it was so mundane, the responsibility complex, diffused and difficult to determine. In contrast to the sudden, unexpected and spectacular violence of the 9/11 attacks, Grenfell was the result of what Edkins calls a slower, more silent violence, the outcome of years of neglect, inequality and discrimination. The links between Kensington and Chelsea as one of the UK’s most internationally diverse and socio-economically unequal boroughs and the rise of London as a centre of global finance are obvious, but difficult to trace precisely. Meanwhile, the ideologically inspired hollowing-out and privatisation of local government provision, the neo-liberal deregulation of social housing from the 1980s, the resultant outsourcing and cost-cutting of renovation, all generated an unresponsive, undemocratic Tenant Management Organisation (the KCTMO) which could shift responsibility for the fire to the material choices and design decisions of architects and subcontractors. The problem here is that the ethics and politics of such local organisation and bureaucracy is dull, unexceptional and appears divorced from the more abstract, spectacular concerns of global justice and genocide. The perpetrators of such slow violence are not evil terrorists or genocidal warlords; they are an assemblage of private companies, planning and building regulations, economic and political decisions taken at all levels over many years. But these are precisely the same neo-liberal management techniques that have spread to more traditional areas of international ethics in recent decades, including the organisation of humanitarian aid and provision for refugees, victims of war and famine. It is within these mundane governmental assemblages that people’s everyday lives (and deaths) are decided globally. If ethics and IR is to deal with issues of international responsibility, care, accountability and justice in the future, it will need to turn its focus much more to dealing with the slow violence that led to Grenfell as well as the quick, unexpected violence of 9/11. And it will need the conceptual and methodological tools to track and trace the unexceptionality of these more everyday, gradual forms of injustice.

**Conclusion**

This volume has done an incredible job of showcasing the plurality and vibrancy of ethics and IR as a field that has a range of futures. What I have tried to do in this concluding chapter is
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offer suggestions for certain directions that I see those futures taking. Other scholars will, of course, see very different future trajectories, and these may turn out to be much more accurate predictions. But I have focused on the areas – the environment, the decolonial and the unexceptional – that are already signposted in this volume, and which I see as the most pressing concerns, those that most urgently need to be addressed. What links all these future directions most prominently perhaps is the need for ethics and IR in the future to deal more explicitly with the issue of power: the exercise of power in the discipline regarding what counts as ethics and IR, or IR more broadly; and the exercise of material, socio-economic and normative power internationally which decides who counts as worthy of recognition as subjects of ethical regard, as well as when and where the lines will be drawn. Whatever the future holds for the field, there must be an acknowledgement that practices of ethics and IR, as well as their theorisation, necessarily involve the use of power – without exercising power, nothing can be done, no one can be saved, nor anything achieved. But equally, the traditional language of humanitarianism, human rights and justice, as well as security and resilience, have been adopted by states, international organisations and NGOs as means for shaping and governing people’s behaviour globally. These concepts are now just as much tools of government and control as they are inspirations and means of emancipation and empowerment. So how do we deal with the ambivalence of ethics and IR that is always both oriented to incorporation/freedom and marginalisation/govern-ment, in ever more complex ways? This is a broad and intricate problem for the present and the future of international ethics.

Notes

7 Ibid., indicator 1.8.
8 Andy Coghlan, ‘Climate change will kill millions but you knew that already’, *New Scientist*, 30 October 2017.


For a brief summary of the differences between postcolonial and decolonial theory, see Gurminder K. Bhambra, ‘Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 17(2), 2014, pp. 115–121.


A ‘full’ list of the victims (the number is still doubted by many) is available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/13/grenfell-tower-fire-victims-dead-missing-identified-named-so-far (accessed 1 December 2017).


