Geoengineering the Climate: Democratic Authority or the Nature of Respect

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Geoengineering, like climate change, may radically transform the planet with complete disregard for what came before. This, it seems to me, is one of the main reasons environmentalists worry about it. The main arguments about geoengineering in the environmental ethics literature, however, are purely pragmatic – they suggest that many of the proposals on the table pose too high a risk to humans. There is, as far as I know, only one serious argument against geoengineering in the environmental ethics literature that does not just come down to concern about its safety (though there are certainly reasons to worry about safety when people are proposing putting great quantities of dangerous chemicals into the atmosphere). The argument is this: Geoengineering may impact everyone, so everyone must consent to its use. For, geoengineering may radically transform the planet. This seems to me to get things precisely backwards. People everywhere object to geoengineering because it may radically transform the planet. This paper will try to explicate the idea that at least some kinds of geoengineering are problematic because, like anthropocentric climate change, such geoengineering will radically reshape the earth without respect for what came before. This is not a matter of respecting other people but of respecting nature. Though, respect for nature may be necessary to respect people, consent aside.