The Need for Virtue in an Age of Climate Change

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Philosophy

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August 2018

This thesis titled

The Need for Virtue in an Age of Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

ALLISON, ZACHARY R., M.A., August 2018, Philosophy

<u>The Need for Virtue in an Age of Climate Change</u>

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Dale Jamieson, Stephen Gardiner, Allen Thompson, and Byron Williston are four of the most prominent philosophers who have written on the role that virtue plays in an age of climate change. None of them, however, consider how valuable virtue can be in serving preventative ends. Climate change is, in part, a moral failure and part of the task of mitigating climate change should be acknowledging this failure and working to make sure we do not commit the same mistakes of the past. In this thesis, I argue for the cultivation of a virtue that I call "holism" that I believe can help humanity achieve this end.

In chapter one, I discuss the arguments of the aforementioned philosophers and identify how their views of virtue in the Anthropocene are not identical to my own. In chapter two, I spell out the virtue of holism and argue for how it can help humanity work towards not allowing another climate catastrophe to happen once the present crisis is mitigated. Finally, in chapter three, I consider possible objections to the claim that cultivating the virtues is necessary for adequately remedying climate change.

DEDICATION

To my selfless parents for teaching me the importance of doing what is right and to my

dear grandmother, Judith Gray, for instilling in me the passion for writing.

This is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is relatively young as a serious field of study, as it only really began to blossom in the 1960s and 1970s.[1] Climate ethics, the study of ethical theory and action in light of the reality of climate change and a sub-field within environmental ethics, is even younger. Within the realm of climate ethics, debates have traditionally been dominated by discourse regarding principles of fairness, justice, and responsibility. A portion of the writings of some of the most prominent philosophers in the field, however, have recently been concerned with virtues. This naturally brings into question what value a theory of virtues has in debates about climate ethics, for climate change is one of the most complex issues humanity has faced to date, with an overwhelming number of contributing factors and agents. It is primarily a problem of collective action that is fueled by a complex set of factors. Introducing discussion of individual character traits and dispositions, then, might seem like the wrong direction to take when the root of the problem lies in the aggregate of harmful actions and practices. A number of philosophers disagree, however, and argue that there is merit to discussing the virtues in light of climate change. This is the position I will be taking in this paper.

Dale Jamieson, Stephen Gardiner, and Allen Thompson are three of the most prominent philosophers who have utilized and acknowledged the value of the virtues as regards a climate ethic. More recently, Byron Williston released the first book-length work dedicated to virtue and climate ethics. Jamieson argues that the virtues can provide

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[1] James Garvey, *The Ethics of Climate Change: Right and Wrong in a Warming World* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 52.

guidance for how to live in our changing world, as well as help to restore in us a sense of agency in an otherwise seemingly hopeless situation. He believes the virtues provide a way for us to live meaningful lives in the Anthropocene, though it should be said that he does not believe they provide a concrete formula for solving the problems of the climate crisis.[2]

Gardiner appeals to virtue and vice in order to explain the "wickedness" of the climate catastrophe and the incompetence that humanity has exhibited in attempting (or failing to attempt) to remedy the situation. He describes climate change as "a perfect moral storm" brought about by the convergence of a global commons tragedy, an intergenerational commons tragedy, and theoretical ineptitude.[3] The synthesis of these great issues permeates agent susceptibility to the sort of vices that compromise responsibility. He eventually suggests that cultivating good character can counteract against the vice that this moral "storm" breeds.

Allen Thompson argues that the virtue of responsibility for the global climate is something that is shared by all of humanity and that we must all be good environmental stewards. For not only our survival, but our flourishing, depends on satisfying the basic conditions for life on Earth[4] – and that includes maintaining a healthy planet. Thompson

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[2] Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 200.
[3] Stephen Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption," *Environmental Values* 15 (2006), p. 399; see also Stephen Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 23.
[4] Allen Thompson, "The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate," *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), pp. 217-218.

believes that in recognizing this necessary virtue, humanity will be better fit to combat the problems climate change presents.

Finally, in his book, *The Anthropocene Project,* Byron Williston argues that in order to figure out morally defensible solutions to the climate crisis, we must become better people and that means cultivating particular virtues. He defends this claim by pointing to the moral failure of those he identifies as the "global prosperous" "in attending to the vital interests of the people of the future."[5] Williston takes a similar approach to Gardiner, in that he points to character flaws to explain humanity's failure in addressing climate change thus far. Ultimately, he argues for the importance of three virtues in light of the climate crisis: justice, truthfulness, and radical hope. In short, justice helps to connect people of the present with people of the future so as to motivate right action regarding climate change mitigation. Truthfulness is an epistemic virtue that helps guide the kind of action necessary to tackle such a grand and controversial phenomenon. And as for hope, Williston believes it is important to paint a positive, hopeful picture of the future to influence the activities of today, for hope works in concert with the former two virtues to help us "reclaim our agency." Here Williston echoes Jamieson. Radical hope helps guide right action, even when the circumstances look grim.

While I acknowledge the significance of these authors' arguments about the insights that a theory of the virtues brings to climate ethics, their perspectives are not identical to my own. The lack of discussion about how the virtues are important to preventing future catastrophes directs my attention to that very issue. In this paper, I will

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[5] Byron Williston, *The Anthropocene Project* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 7.

argue that certain virtues are necessary if climate change is to be *adequately* addressed. My primary position is that in order to adequately address the problem, part of the task of mitigating climate change is to work towards preventing another climate catastrophe once the current crisis is mitigated. Doing so requires cultivating the proper character traits that would guide individual lives so as not to engage in the kind of environmentally destructive behavior that brought us to our current state. As has been briefly mentioned, some philosophers have already done work to identify which virtues we need in the Anthropocene. I will argue for at least one additional virtue, the like of which I have yet to see championed, which I will call "holism."

The first portion of this paper will address the claims made by the authors mentioned above regarding how they view virtue as applied to climate ethics. I will discuss the merits of their claims, as well as identify other ways virtue aids us in an age of climate change. Most notably, I will put forth the position that part of the task of mitigating climate change is ensuring that humanity upholds the kind of morality that would not allow for another climate crisis to arise. Cultivating a virtue that I call "holism" can help accomplish this. Jamieson has expressed reservation about taking the environmentalist position that we are a part of nature and the ultimate reason that we face the environmental problems we face today is because we have somehow come to act as though we are distinct from something else called "nature." He eventually acknowledges the truth of this claim. Nevertheless, I aim to dispel his worries about taking such a view, for the virtue of holism is founded precisely on that perspective and I believe it to be crucial to a complete climate ethic. Thus, the second portion of the paper will deal with

the virtues needed to adequately address climate change. I appeal to the virtues and vices identified by prominent scholars in the field before adding my own contribution, even noting how adopting the virtue of holism can help individuals to see the importance of the other relevant virtues. In the third part of the paper, I consider possible objections to the claim that cultivating the virtues is necessary for adequately remedying climate change.

CHAPTER 1: VIRTUE IN CLIMATE ETHICS

This section will be a brief look into the views of the most notable philosophers who have written on climate virtue ethics or have championed virtue language when writing on climate ethics. Virtue ethics as applied to climate change is an incredibly new field of inquiry. Given its infancy, work on the subject is not as abundant as more established subjects. As it is, Dale Jamieson, Stephen Gardiner, Allen Thompson, and Byron Williston appear to be the foremost authors who have written on the topic. Each of these philosophers has a unique vision for how virtue fits into a climate ethic; however, as will be clear from the exposition of their views, none considers the role virtue might play in preventing a future recurrence of a climate crisis. I will begin this exposition with Jamieson's position and then follow with the rest of the aforementioned scholars sequentially.

1.1: Dale Jamieson

In *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed*, Dale Jamieson tries to explain why we as a species failed to prevent climate change. Just as climate change is a large and complex issue that has no easy fix, so too the explanation for human inadequacy when contemplating how we ended up in this situation is multi-faceted. He writes, "Our failure to prevent or even to respond significantly to climate change reflects the impoverishment of our systems of practical reason, the paralysis of our politics, and the limits of our cognitive and affective capacities."[6] Deep at the root of our political inertia is our overwhelmed moral cognitive abilities.

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[6] Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, p. 8.

It is no secret that responsibility is a major topic of debate when it comes to climate change. There is constant feuding over individual versus collective responsibility, but Jamieson appeals to evolutionary explanations for why climate change has failed to elicit a greater moral response: "Our biological endowment makes it difficult for us to solve or even recognize this kind of problem... Evolution built us to respond to rapid movements of middle-sized objects, not to the slow buildup of insensible gases in the atmosphere. Most of us respond dramatically to what we sense, not what we think."[7] It can seem overwhelmingly grim, then, when considering what the correct moral response is to climate change if it appears that most people *will not* have a response.

This is precisely where the virtues come in for Jamieson, though. He believes that morality can aid us in the Anthropocene by contributing towards making the world a better place and helping us to live meaningful lives and this is to be done by cultivating certain virtues. These "green" virtues would aim to reduce one's greenhouse gas emissions and ameliorate their effects *regardless of the actions of others*. Jamieson believes that when faced with a problem as grandiose as climate change, the strategy should be to reduce one's own contributions to the problem as much as possible, regardless of what others do, and that we will be more successful in doing this by cultivating the right virtues than by focusing on improving our calculative abilities.[8]

The virtues, then, have a kind of instrumental value for Jamieson in light of climate change. For him, they are tools to give meaning to our lives despite the crisis we

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[7] Ibid., pp. 61, 4.
[8] Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, p. 186.

face. He proceeds to offer examples of what kinds of character traits he deems worthwhile green virtues, such as humility, temperance, respect for nature, and mindfulness. I will go into more detail about specific virtues in section two, but what is worth noting here is that the virtues need not be strictly classical conceptions or wholly new ones either. The Anthropocene demands both.

1.2: Stephen Gardiner

Gardiner utilizes an indirect approach to climate virtue ethics. Instead of explicitly illuminating the value of virtue in climate ethics, he tackles the issue from the other end by identifying vices to explain humanity's failure to mitigate climate change. He does this by discussing three different "storms," as he calls them, that, when brought together, become so nasty that a problem of moral corruption arises that leaves agents susceptible to the kinds of vices that compromise the agent's responsibility for the issue; the convergence of these separate issues resulting in moral corruption creates what he calls "the perfect moral storm."

The first major problem or "storm" is the global problem. Climate change is a global problem in at least three ways. First, there is the dispersion of causes and effects. Everyone who emits greenhouse gases contributes to climate change – that includes individuals, corporations, and institutions of all types. These entities are spatially dispersed all over the globe; thus, neither the root causes nor effects can be isolated to any one region, location, or individual. Then, of course, there is the fragmentation of agency. Because no one individual is responsible, it is difficult to assign responsibility. Without an all-inclusive structure of agency, we are left incompetent to respond to the

problem. And finally, there is international institutional inadequacy. There is no singular governing body that can enforce international regulations to bring about the kind of cooperation that would be necessary to bring global emissions down to a manageable level. Gardiner has hope that such a body could arise, as it is in every country's best interest to mitigate climate change, but, of course, as he himself acknowledges, there are road blocks to enacting this dream.[9]

The second major "storm" is the intergenerational problem. The global problem was understood in spatial terms. The intergenerational problem faces the same issues, but in temporal terms. Consider the issue of the dispersion of causes and effects. Climate change is not something that happens overnight. Its effects take time. The effects of the climate change that we are causing now will not be realized until some time in the future. Indeed, the climate change that we are currently experiencing is the effect of past emissions. This presents an array of problems when considering how to solve the issue. For example, continued action for several decades will be necessary in order to remedy negative impacts. This means that any procrastination or political stalemates regarding action on climate change will have serious consequences and, as we have seen, the governments of the world have been hesitant to take more drastic measures to address climate change. This illuminates the inadequacy of our institutions when it comes to thinking of climate change as a temporal problem. And finally, there is the question of temporal responsibility. The emissions of the past affect us today and our emissions today

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[9] Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, p. 29.

affect those in the future. There is much fuss over who is responsible for fixing the problem when we are not currently feeling the effects of our transgressions.[10]

These first two issues are commons tragedies.[11] The third "storm" is our own theoretical ineptitude and it echoes the inadequacy of our cognitive abilities that Jamieson discussed. Gardiner acknowledges that even our best moral and political theories have significant difficulty with problems of international justice, future persons, scientific uncertainty, and our relationship to not only animals, but nature itself… and climate change encompasses all of these issues and more. Theoretically, then, it seems that we simply lack the basic competency to adequately address climate change.

Consider the economic approach that has dominated analyses of climate change: cost-benefit analysis (CBA). John Broome, one of the foremost philosophers writing on climate change and who also happens to be an established economist and was on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2014, is critical of cost-benefit analysis when applied to matters of climate change. As Gardiner points out, "It is common to all CBA to assume that environmental goods are infinitely substitutable for other goods" and CBAs of climate change do not grapple seriously with potential of environmental disaster.[12] Not only that, but because our understanding of our responsibility to future generations is so poor, it is not adequately accounted for in cost-

[10] Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, p. 34.
[11] "Commons tragedies" refers to a famous piece written by Garrett Hardin that is often referenced in environmental ethics in which he describes a group that shares a common resource, where it is individually rational for one individual to use as much of the resource as possible, but it is collectively rational for everyone to share. Under certain, popular incentives, the individuals choose the individually rational option, resulting in a tragedy of the commons. See Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons" *Science* 3859 (1968), pp. 1243-1248.
[12] Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, pp. 263-264.

benefit analysis, and since climate change is inherently concerned with future generations, engaging in cost-benefit analysis to solve the problems of climate change is simply self-deception.[13] Despite this, cost-benefit analysis dominates economic discussions and it is one reason that Gardiner believes humanity currently suffers theoretical inadequacy when it comes to finding solutions to problems of climate change.

Bring these three storms together and they create the perfect moral storm when considering ethical action for climate change. This perfect moral storm, in turn, gives rise to the problem of moral corruption. Gardiner illustrates this by asking us to consider the intergenerational problem. If one engages in intergenerational buck-passing (the act of intentionally procrastinating to act on climate change) and acknowledges that it is morally uncomfortable to do so, then presumably one would also welcome ways to shroud that action. One way to do this is to avoid engagement with the issue altogether. Gardiner highlights particular vices such as distraction, complacency, delusion, selective attention, pandering, hypocrisy, and unreasonable doubt as examples of the kinds of character traits and dispositions those who wish not to act on climate change might exhibit to avoid acknowledging the issue.[14]

What Gardiner has done is systematically pieced together how the complexities of climate change present such an overwhelming problem for us that, rather than acknowledging and remedying the issue, we instead would rather fall victim to moral failure in succumbing to vices that distract from moral responsibility to act. Not all hope

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[13] John Broome, *Counting the Cost of Global Warming* (Cambridge, UK: The White Horse Press, 1992), p. 19; see also Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, p. 42.
[14] Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, p. 45.

is lost, though. Developing and promoting good character, Gardiner says, is one way to combat this moral corruption and weed it out of our systems – in other words, cultivating the virtues. Allen Thompson, to whose work we will now turn, argues for the adoption of particular virtues in the Anthropocene.

1.3: Allen Thompson

Thompson argues that the conditions humanity has forced upon itself by bringing about climate change present new possibilities for what it means to live a good life. This is so because, in order to live any kind of life at all, the basic conditions for life must first be met. That is, there must be habitable living conditions and since we now live in an epoch where human activity significantly affects the biosphere and global climate, we find ourselves in a position where we must take on the role of ensuring that we provide for ourselves (and other species) habitable conditions in which to live. We must become stewards of the environment. Therefore, any action that works against the good of securing basic conditions for life on Earth is considered wrong or immoral. The kind of reasoning Thompson is using here echoes the popular contemporary conception of the foundation for what it means for something to be considered virtuous, the neo-Aristotelian position of "natural goodness." [15]

To cope with this new role, Thompson argues for the adoption of the virtue of radical hope – a particular conception of the virtue of courage that instills in us a kind of optimism and steadfastness that we can still achieve human goodness, despite possibly

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[15] Natural goodness is an approach to ethical naturalism that is founded on the thought that the concept of "goodness" is directly dependent on the relation of an individual to the 'life form' of its species. See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 26-27.

not knowing entirely what constitutes human goodness anymore in our changing world. Given that Thompson's conception of virtue is founded on the natural goodness thesis, this commitment to pursuing some unknown, but still worthy, conception of the good life commits the radically hopeful environmentalist to the idea of the emergence of some new form of goodness in nature. If the environmentalist is to see the realization of this new goodness, then he is also tied to the virtue of responsibility for the natural world. [16]

Virtues of stewardship have long been touted in environmental ethics, but in light of the conditions of the Anthropocene and in concert with the virtue of radical hope, the virtue of responsibility for the natural world becomes a responsibility for the global climate. In order to secure the basic conditions for life, we must protect the natural world. In light of climate change, in order to protect the natural world, we must police our greenhouse gas emissions and work to remedy the effects of the emissions that are not prevented, so that global Earth systems do not deteriorate to a point from which they cannot recover.

Because Thompson has his conception of virtue founded in neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, anthropogenic climate change presents the possibility for the emergence of new forms of natural goodness. We were not designed to manage the global climate.[17] It is a good that came to be because the course of human history made it so. For Thompson, virtue shows us how we are to live good, meaningful lives, and those conditions change in the Anthropocene. He advocates the adoption of new virtues,

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[16] Thompson, "The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate," pp. 214-216.
[17] Ibid., p. 214.

including radical hope, but most importantly, responsibility for the global climate. The fact that human activity alters the climate on a global level means that the flourishing of life on Earth demands that humanity exercises this great power responsibly.[18]

1.4: Byron Williston

In 2015, Byron Williston released the first book-length account of the role of virtue in the Anthropocene with *The Anthropocene Project*. Like Gardiner, he highlights important vices that explain humanity's failure regarding climate change, though he primarily targets the moral failure of a group he calls the "global prosperous" in his condemnations. The global prosperous are those individuals and institutions that "1) are on the upper end of the consumption spectrum relative to the rest of the world, 2) espouse broadly liberal-democratic moral and political ideals, and 3) value scientific rationality."[19] He focuses on the global prosperous in particular, because it is this group that can affect change or significantly contribute to the problem without experiencing much of the effects. Williston believes that the way to find morally defensible solutions to climate change is to develop the right dispositions that will guide moral action. He ultimately champions three virtues that can help us accomplish this: justice, truthfulness, and hope.

To illuminate how justice can help us in our crisis, he details how climate change injustice is largely a matter of the global prosperous being morally weak and that this weakness manifests itself in the form of greed. Think back to the intergenerational

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[18] Thompson, "The Virtue of Responsibility for the Global Climate," p. 218.
[19] Williston, *The Anthropocene Project*, p. 8.

problem that Gardiner discussed in his perfect moral storm example, with one generation (or population in Williston's case, i.e. the global prosperous) knowingly taking advantage of the back-loaded nature of the effects of climate change. The current generation or global prosperous can enjoy all of the benefits of over-emitting while not having to worry about or experiencing its repercussions. In this way, they are exhibiting vicious greed. Committing such acts and knowing the repercussions is what makes this a moral failure and this weakness is exacerbated by self-deception[20] – another vice that Gardiner also mentioned. By focusing on how these vices harm the global poor and future generations, we can then realize how important the virtue of justice is in the Anthropocene. Justice helps connect us with those from which we may be spatially or temporally separate.

Truthfulness is an epistemic virtue that helps guide the kind of action we need in order to tackle such a complex problem. It involves identifying the forms of climate change denial and eradicating such ignorance from our epistemic character. Arrogance, greed, pandering, lust for power, and other vices all drive climate change skeptics to assume their positions and institute political inertia to halt action on climate change.[21] By advocating the ideal of being committed to the truth, humanity will be in a better position to seek morally sound solutions to the crisis.

Like Thompson, Williston advocates radical hope in the Anthropocene. Unlike Thompson, though, Williston's radical hope is not founded in some deep metaphysical commitment to natural goodness that seeks a new, unknown form of a flourishing human

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[20] Williston, *The Anthropocene Project*, p. 104.
[21] Ibid., p. 114.

life. Rather, Williston argues that hope is an important virtue in the Anthropocene, because it is important to believe that there can still be a better tomorrow, even in the face of possible failure. As Jamieson said, "Until the world or humanity comes to an end, there will always be a chance to make a difference."[22] And like Jamieson, Williston believes that hope can help us to reclaim our agency in the face of this seemingly dark circumstance. Hope destroys fatalism and despair and keeps the dream alive that there is still a chance for a more sustainable future. Together with justice and truthfulness, hope helps humanity to see what matters when considering action on climate change.[23]

1.5: Conclusion

Virtue language as it has most prominently appeared in the literature thus far has served one of two primary purposes, it seems. The first is that virtue can aid us in living meaningful lives and making the world a better place in an age of climate change, as is the case in Jamieson, Thompson, and Williston. The second is that exposing character flaws in individuals helps to (at least partially) explain why humanity has driven itself to this point or why there has been little to no progress in mitigating climate change, as is evident in the work of Gardiner and Williston.

These are valuable contributions to the discussion of the role that virtue plays in the Anthropocene. However, I believe there is a missing piece to the puzzle. Part of our task of mitigating climate change should be working towards avoiding making the same mistakes of the past that brought us to our current state. If we adopt and cultivate the right

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[22] Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, p. 1.
[23] Williston, *The Anthropocene Project*, pp. 156-157.

character traits, we might be able to mold a morality that would prevent such happenings. I believe the character traits and dispositions discussed above are all important in serving this end. Justice, mindfulness, hope, truthfulness, temperance, and many more will all have important roles to play in solidifying the right character one ought to exhibit in the Anthropocene. A focus, however, that I believe is missing from the debate is how such virtues serve preventative ends.

Allen Thompson's advocacy for responsibility for the global climate and Jamieson's "respect for nature" and "mindfulness" virtues come closest to what I will be advocating, but where their positions differ from mine is in the fact that they do not argue for how adopting these virtues would bring about the kind of morality that would help to prevent another catastrophe like the current one from happening again in the future once the present crisis is mitigated. Thus, in section two I will argue for adoption of the virtue of holism, which is essentially recognition of the fact that all of humanity is a part of nature – that all of nature is intimately interconnected and that our survival and flourishing in this world rests on a cooperative and respectful relationship with the natural world and all of its inhabitants. Cultivating this virtue, I will argue, would not only help to prevent any future anthropogenic environmental catastrophe from occurring, but it also aids and bolsters the positions of the aforementioned authors.

CHAPTER 2: THE DISCONNECT

I shall begin this section by talking about how humanity's disconnect from nature contributed to the current state of affairs. I will do so by showing how realizing our dependency on, and interconnectedness with, the natural world and respecting that great fact is a virtue (what I call holism) and that if this had been a prevalent, prominent disposition throughout human history, anthropogenic climate change would have been highly unlikely. As Gardiner and Williston showed, part of the reason humanity was able to bring about climate change is due to a certain kind of moral failure. Specifically, we have failed to live our lives by the relevant virtues, including holism.

2.1: Holism and Being a Part of Nature

Let me begin by defining more concretely what I mean by holism and why specifically I chose that word as the virtue's name. Holism is essentially the environmentalist position that we (humans) are a part of nature and that our sustained existence in this world rests upon a respectful relationship with the natural world. It is the realization that humans can have profound, potentially negative, impacts on the environment. The environmentally virtuous individual who adopts such a position sees the world holistically in the sense that he views the Earth and its inhabitants as significant to himself. Everything, from the tiniest biological organism to the very land itself, is deeply interconnected to our existence and plays some role in determining the state of the world. In short, holism as a virtue has the following components: 1) doxastic – the belief that there is such interconnectedness, 2) attitudinal – a respect for this interconnectedness

as having great value, and 3) behavioral – a disposition to act in ways that reflect these doxastic and affective/attitudinal states.

Allow me to provide an example of what I mean by this intricate connectedness we share with the rest of nature. Consider the human impact on wolf populations in the western United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the end of the 1920s, nearly all of the United States' wolves had been killed off, primarily due to ranchers protecting their livestock. Without a natural predator around, deer populations reached such astronomical heights that even we humans were having a hard time controlling them. They were depleting all of the vegetation to the point of desolation. But in 1995, we introduced a small number of wolves back into Yellowstone. As a result, the deer started to avoid some areas of the park, recognizing that those territories were now patrolled by wolves and were thus unsafe. Remarkably, those areas deserted by the deer started to regenerate. What was once barren hillside soon became lush forest and once the trees returned, so did the birds. Not only did the birds return, but the beavers did too, as beavers like to eat the trees and build dams. And the dams the beavers built in the rivers provided habitats for otters, muskrats, ducks, fish, reptiles, and amphibians of all kinds. Not only that, but the wolves killed the coyotes too, which allowed for more rabbits and mice to thrive, which meant more hawks, weasels, foxes, and badgers. More ravens and bald eagles flocked in to feed on the carrion that the wolves would leave. The bears shared in this carrion consumption and their populations rose too – in part because berries were more bountiful due to the regenerating shrubbery. But the wolves did not only have an impact on the wildlife… they even had an effect on the *rivers*. The reduction in

foraging by deer contributed to the regrowth of trees and vegetation necessary for the stabilization of river banks; thus, the rivers collapsed less often and became more fixed in their courses. As there was less erosion, channels narrowed. More pools formed and river habitats improved.[24] All of this happened because we reintroduced wolves back into Yellowstone National Park – and that was only necessary because we had nearly hunted them to extinction.

I bring this up to highlight the fact that human activity can have a great impact on the environment and the delicate balances in nature. While this is only one small example, it shows how our collective actions have a significant effect on the world – whether we realize it or not – and it is in our best interest to try to understand these effects so that we may avoid engaging in behavior that would produce undesired consequences.

Part of what I am advocating here is the value of an environmental structure in which we are *not* accelerating climate change over the kind of environmental structure in which we are. The climate naturally changes over time. The problem we face today is that human activity is accelerating climate change to such a degree that Earth systems are being altered so quickly that adapting to this anthropogenic climate change is going to prove astronomically expensive. Not only that, but other life forms on the planet are not able to adapt quickly enough, threatening the existence of many of them. Slower, non-accelerated, less aggressive rates of climate change allow more time for species to adapt

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[24] George Monbiot. "For More Wonder, Rewild the World." Youtube video, 15:10. Ted. Posted September 9th, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rZzHkpyPkc

to their climate and become successful, without our influencing a push in one direction or another. We must see nature as an extension of ourselves. Just as plasticity and complexity aids in the health and success of the human genome, so too greater ecological depth seems like a good reason to objectively value that ecological complexity and diversity. If the environment is an extension of ourselves and a complex, diverse environment is a healthy one, then we ought to strive to preserve that state.

If we have the power to potentially negatively impact the livelihood of not only other humans, but other life forms as well, then morality compels us to reduce those negative impacts as best we can. Realizing that we have this influence ought to urge us to act knowledgeably. Interconnectedness, then, as I understand it, is the recognition of the impact – good or bad – that humans can have on earth systems.

Thus, the holistic individual seeks to understand causal networks like the one just described to the greatest degree possible for him. While everyone ought to seek to understand as much as they can about feedback loops and cycles, not everyone will be capable of understanding, say, the complexities of climate science, the carbon cycle, or the trophic cascade described above, for example. Nevertheless, one committed to the virtue of holism seeks to understand as much about human impact on the natural world as he can and welcomes the opportunity to do so. Like Thompson, I believe this is important because our flourishing depends on maintaining a healthy environment and we are now in positions of great power where we must be active stewards of the global climate. Acknowledging the fact that we can have such a profound influence on the environment ought to bring about great respect for and awareness of that power, for misuse of it could

result in quite expansive consequences. Recognizing this interconnectedness we share with the rest of nature and respecting that fact to such a degree that it urges one to act rightly towards the environment are the foundations of holism.

The roots of our environmental problems are grounded in the observation that an influential portion of the human population has been acting as if we are somehow distinct from an outside entity called "nature" and that this entity is some bottomless resource for us to exploit. If we wish to preserve a healthy existence for all life on Earth, ourselves included, then ensuring a harmonious relationship between our actions and the natural world is essential. I specify "our actions" here, because we now live in the Anthropocene – the new geological epoch in which human actions have a dominant influence on the global climate.

This view may seem trivial or romantic, and that can raise worry in the kinds of people who are committed to ideals of reason and rigorous argumentation. Dale Jamieson, for example, while eventually acknowledging the importance of the claim that we are part of nature, has expressed this apprehension.[25] As I explain below, however, such worries are not justified.

At the basis of holism lies the belief that we are a part of nature and there is no way to escape it. We need the natural world to remain in a healthy state in order for our species to both survive and thrive. In a certain sense, this can seem trivial. It is obvious (for a naturalist) that we are a part of nature, for what else is there to be a part of? Yet the majority of humans in the developed world seem to have developed this sense of

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[25] Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, p. 192.

"otherness" between ourselves and the rest of nature. It is as if we have distinguished what is "us" and "what is to be used by us." Viewing the world in this way can be problematic, as I hope to have shown through the example of how connected our actions can be with the wolf example. Of course, humans are different from other biological organisms and the land itself, but this distinction does not rule out the connection these things hold to us and that everything is a part of nature.

In order to better illustrate this, perhaps a definition of nature would serve to make what I am saying clearer. Nature is the all-encompassing collective of the physical features and products of the universe. Given that we inhabit Earth, nature as I am concerned with it here will primarily refer to these qualities as they pertain to us as Earthlings. This includes the landscape, oceans, sky, physical forces, and all of the plants, insects, animals (including us), and other biological organisms.

From the first eukaryotes all the way to modern day homo sapiens, we are evolved products of the earth, as is all life in our world. Life was able to evolve as a result of favorable environmental conditions. Now that humanity has the role of planetary steward, we are tasked with maintaining these favorable environmental conditions. With how expansive the hand of human activity reaches in the world today (as opposed to hundreds of years ago, for example), accomplishing these charges now requires a greater understanding of our dependency on healthy earth systems. Previously, it was possible to get by without such knowledge (though it might have helped to prevent our current problem). A flourishing life in the Anthropocene, however, demands it. As Thompson said, the course of human history has imposed this duty on us.

Humans are a part of nature, then, because we are products of evolution and products of evolution are products of the earth. In an age of climate change, acknowledging that we are a part of the collective of nature and that our actions affect the environment and its inhabitants becomes ever more critical. Acknowledging our interconnectedness with the rest of nature in conjunction with the fact that climate change threatens the survival of several species that delicately contribute to the balance of earth systems, compels the holistic individual to care for those species. He does so not only because he has this new role of planetary steward, but also because the informed holistic individual understands that, for example, climate change threatens bee populations due to a rise in carbon dioxide concentrations that undermines their nutritive and reproductive success. He understands that bees pollinate the majority of the crops that feed ninety percent of the world and that the extinction of the bees would be devastating. Worries about triviality or romanticism[26] can be checked with a look into evolutionary history and environmental biology. I cannot delve too deeply into these matters here, but I hope to have at least painted the basic picture.

2.2: Holism as a Virtue and Climate Change

Holism is a virtue because we value our existence. If it were otherwise, we would not take the measures we do to prolong and enhance our lives. Therefore, those actions and beliefs that contribute to our survival or flourishing can be considered virtuous, insofar as there are not negative repercussions that outweigh the benefit of these actions

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[26] This is not to say that holism cannot be seen from a romantic point of view. What I have tried to show here is that it is not *merely* a romantic notion.

or beliefs. Acknowledging the fact that we are a part of nature and that there are great causal networks at play connecting all of its constituents becomes particularly important in a time when human activity has the profound effect on the environment that it does. Much in the way Thompson established responsibility for the global climate as a virtue based on its merits as a virtue of stewardship, holism can find its way into environmental virtue-hood by similar standards. It is a character trait that helps the virtuous individual to see why it is important to care for the environment and its inhabitants.

Speaking of holism in this way can make it sound as if it is only valuable insofar as it helps to maintain a healthy environment in which we can live, but it need not be. Seeing the world through the lens of holism leaves one more open to appreciating nature for its benefits to personal flourishing as well, stemming from the holistic individual's respect for natural environments. Seeing the environment for its natural beauty and aesthetic charm has its own rewards. There is a certain peace and sense of well-being that comes from basking in the glory of a hilly valley atop the cliff of a snow-capped mountain or watching a hummingbird swiftly dart around in the early morning before the sun rises and the rest of the forest comes to life. There is a reason people seek the solitude and wonder of hiking miles into the wilderness… it makes one feel good to simply *be* in nature in its purest, unadulterated form. Acknowledging that we are a part of nature, rather than seeing it as some foreign, antiquated entity separate from humanity, can help us to see how to be more at peace in our lives. Holism, then, is valuable in that it can incline one to feel this sense of tranquility.

Getting back to how holism is useful in realizing Thompson's virtue of responsibility for the global climate, holism can help to make sense of Gardiner's, Jamieson's, and Williston's views on virtue in the Anthropocene too. Holism is a good foundational green virtue to adopt to become more environmentally virtuous generally. The individual who guides his life by the view that he is a part of nature would be more inclined to consider the whole of his actions through a green lens.

Consider the virtue of mindfulness that Jamieson advocates. He describes it as essentially being aware of the environmental consequences of one's actions.[27] This would be made easier if the mindful virtuous green was operating on a holistic worldview. Understanding that every time one drives a car one is emitting carbon that goes into the atmosphere that interacts with other greenhouse gases and negatively impacts distant peoples of the future is a much more accessible reality when the foundation of one's worldview is understanding these cause-and-effect networks. This same line of reasoning can be applied to the other green virtues Jamieson discusses.[28]

Consider also what Gardiner and Williston say about the role that vice has played in inciting anthropogenic climate change. The holistic, morally motivated individual would be hard-pressed to fall victim to vices like complacency, greed, delusion, pandering, and hypocrisy, for doing so would not be in line with the virtue by which he purports to live his life. Because holism leads one to the other environmental virtues, one would identify the moral inferiority and destructiveness of something like greed, for

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[27] Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time,* p. 187.
[28] See Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, pp. 186-193, for more of the green virtues that Jamieson champions.

example. Holism, then, is an invaluable foundational green virtue that can help guide an ethics of the Anthropocene.

This importance of how holism is useful in preventing personal susceptibility to character vices brings me to the point about how powerful the adoption of holism can be in preventing future climate crises. To see this, consider how the course of human history might have gone if holism was a dominant worldview already. We have known of the effect of human-induced CO_2 emissions for a significant amount of time – as early as the 1950s. In that time, embarrassingly little progress has been made to mitigate those effects. Leaders who were driven primarily by moral motivations and adopted a holistic worldview would have been more likely to act hastily, for they would have understood well the great influence of the different contributing factors and the dire consequences that come with them. A healthy environment would always be one of the top priorities of such a virtuous individual.

This reasoning brings up the point that people in power have a great moral obligation to be more virtuous in the ways I have been describing. While it is important for everyone to be virtuous and everyone has a moral obligation to be so, those who have a greater causal influence have an even greater obligation. This does not take away from the importance of those who are not in positions of power to adopting the virtue of holism, though. It is difficult to say whether anthropogenic climate change would have happened if the majority of people had held this worldview, as that implies a greater understanding of the causal influence between those with power and those without, which is a topic I cannot investigate fully here, but one thing that can be said with confidence is

that "voting with your wallet" is a common phrase for a reason. Holding certain beliefs and living one's life so committed to them to the point that it guides the bulk of one's actions has a powerful influence on the state of the world (like only purchasing from companies that you ethically agree with, i.e. voting with your wallet). The same can be said for the importance of everyone adopting holism as a virtue – one whose actions are guided by it contributes less and less to climate change and environmental destruction generally.

Just as having this virtue would have been a powerful tool to preventing the current problem we face, it can still hold that preventative value if we start cultivating it now. As I mentioned previously, part of the task of mitigating climate change should be ensuring that we are taking the necessary steps to make sure another environmental crisis does not arise once the present situation is remedied. This does not appear to be a very prominent focus of the literature, but it ought to be. When a vehicle experiences engine failure, the mechanic fixes the problem by finding out why the failure occurred in the first place. Furthermore, he takes measures to ensure that a similar problem does not occur in the future. Failure to approach climate change mitigation in a similar manner would be a failure to fully, adequately address the problem.

This brings into the discussion what is really necessary to solve the problem. Of course the relevant focus on science and technology that can help to fix the practical issues will be needed, but we very clearly need a change of focus in what we value as well. As I have tried to argue, the disconnect between humans and nature appears to be prevalent, for if it wasn't, we would likely not be facing the environmental problems we

face today. We must hold nature at the forefront of our value systems, for without it there would be nothing left *to* value. It is the vessel we are all aboard and we are now in a position where we must make sure it does not sink. Cultivating the virtue of holism is invaluable in taking an ethics of the Anthropocene to the level needed to adequately rectify the current crisis and prevent the future reoccurrence of such crises.

2.3: Conclusion

Holism is a virtue because it is beneficial towards the well-being of humans and living a flourishing life. If humanity were to adopt this virtue, it would serve an important role as a foundational green virtue to lead individuals to discovering other environmental virtues. The question of cultivating virtue in oneself and others is a common inquiry from doubters of the utility of virtue ethics. Identifying a virtue like holism that would be powerful towards developing further virtues, then, adds even more value to it. Finally, holism serves preventative utility in helping to ensure moral attitudes in humanity that would be unlikely to drive us to another climate crisis once this current crisis is averted, due to the reflective nature of the virtue.

CHAPTER 3: RESPONSES TO CRITICISMS

In this section, I will respond to some potential criticisms of the view I have been advocating. Specifically, I will defend the pursuit of moral solutions to climate change, address some possible reservations that doubters may have about holism as a virtue, as well as defend the value of virtue in the Anthropocene.

3.1: Broome: Do Not Forget Morality

I would like to begin by arguing against the idea of disregarding morality when conceiving of ways to mitigate climate change. At least some influential thinkers, such as John Broome, have argued that we should not seek to mitigate climate change through an appeal to morality, on the grounds that such efforts are impractical and fail, as we cannot possibly hope to make all the people of the world virtuous in time to mitigate climate change.[29] Particularly, he argues that it would be inefficient to *rely primarily* on appealing to individual moral motivation – and I would agree with him on this. Just as we do not rely on the rightness of not driving dangerously to keep roads safe, but on laws instead, we similarly should not rely on the rightness of not emitting unnecessary greenhouse gases to resolve our climate crisis, as "people are in practice not enough influenced by moral considerations."[30]

But as Alyssa Bernstein has shown, what Broome accomplished with his essay was showing that morality is not *sufficient* for mitigating climate change. His argument does not, however, show that there is no good reason *not* to pursue moral considerations

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[29] John Broome, "Do Not Ask for Morality," *Ethical Underpinnings of Climate Economics* (New York: Routledge Press, 2016), pp. 1-3.
[30] Broome, "Do Not Ask for Morality," p. 3.

alongside the other means needed to remedy the crisis. In fact, doing so might even be necessary. Arguments focused on policy or other practical matters may need to be coupled with moral arguments in order to convince the general public to accept them. It should also be mentioned that Broome does not show that it is morally permissible to neglect considerations of justice when considering solutions to climate change; and his own proposal incorporates conceptions of justice as he understands them.[31]

One might anticipate that Broome would retort that it is a waste of valuable time and resources for professional academics working on issues of climate change to focus their efforts on moral arguments, as we need all hands on deck working on more timely solutions that will be effective in the limited time we have left to control climate change. To this, I would point back to the arguments previously provided showing that anthropogenic climate change is partly a moral failure, and that part of fixing a problem is finding out how it occurred in the first place and working towards not allowing ourselves to commit the same mistakes again. But also, it is important to acknowledge that our beliefs are informed by our values. What we hold to be important in our lives is ultimately a reflection of what we value.

If a person believes public libraries are important institutions in society, then he or she believes this because of some value placed on reading, public access to knowledge, research resources, or whatever else the case may be – and the reasoning behind why one would value such things can be traced back to a foundational good. Let us assume that

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[31] Alyssa Bernstein, "No Justice in Climate Policy? Broome Versus Posner, Weisbach, and Gardiner," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XL (2016), p. 178.

someone believes libraries are important institutions to have in society because reading books is a good thing for people to do. The next question then would be, "why is reading books a good thing?", to which an advocate might reply that acquiring knowledge is an objectively good thing that humans ought to do.[32]

This same kind of thinking can be used to understand the inspirations behind all beliefs, and it is precisely for this reason that we ought to pay attention to what and why we value the things we do. Broome is well-intentioned in his call for more pragmatic solutions to climate change. He wants to ensure that we take care of this crisis in the limited time we have left, which is of course important if we want to avoid consequences too difficult from which to recover. It remains to be seen, however, to what point morality can even be removed from matters of climate change mitigation. Let us use the same reasoning we just utilized with regard to discovering the value of reading in order to understand the motivations behind Broome's call for a focus on more pragmatic solutions to climate change.

Broome does not want people to focus primarily on moral arguments to resolve the crisis, because people are generally not motivated enough by moral considerations to act rightly. He makes this argument because he cares about ameliorating the problem in a timely and effective manner. Solving this problem efficiently matters to him, because he sees that there are significant, negative consequences that arise as a result of climate change. One such consequence is the intergenerational injustice perpetrated by the

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[32] I am not making any meta-ethical commitments here about the foundations of goodness, but such a proposition could be supported by Ronald Sandler's expansion of Philippa Foot's theory of natural goodness. See Ronald Sandler, "A Theory of Environmental Virtue" *Environmental Ethics* (2006), p. 255.

current generation against future generations. Broome acknowledges this injustice and advocates for it to be rectified, arguing that it can be corrected by "providing gifts" to future generations – compensating them for the injustices they are experiencing by altering the kinds of goods in which we invest, such as divesting away from fossil fuels and emitting fewer greenhouse gases. This of course would not come without cost to the current generation, so to compensate ourselves, we could leave fewer resources to future generations than we otherwise would have had we not divested from the status quo. In this way, Broome believes that it is possible for both present and future generations to benefit from mitigating climate change without either one needing to suffer, make sacrifices, or experience injustice. Therefore, we "do not need to appeal to anyone's morality."[33]

Broome's argument here strikes me as peculiar, as justice is an inherently moral concept. To provide this approach as one possible solution is to invoke the value and relevance of a conception of justice. Even if morality is not Broome's primary reason for acting on climate change, it is clear that justice is an integral part of this proposed solution. He admits that controlling investments to the degree that he is talking about has serious complications in a world devoid of a world government and goes on to offer a more practical solution in his proposal for what he calls a World Climate Bank – a kind of financial institution that would issue bonds to governments in order to fund green investments in concert with putting a price on carbon emissions.[34] Broome may admit

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[33] Broome, "Do Not Ask for Morality," p. 7.
[34] Broome, John and Foley, Duncan. "A World Climate Bank." Ed. Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries. *Institutions for Future Generations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

that morality is the foundation of his own proposal.[35] Ultimately, what he is arguing is for us *not to rely* on cultivating right character in order to solve the problems of climate change – not to rely on moral motivations as our motivation to mitigate. He is skeptical of focusing on individual moral motivation. However, as I have been arguing, a failure to address character flaws (individual morality) would be a failure to *adequately* address the issue. Paying attention to our moral failures must be a part of our solution to the climate crisis.

What we must consider are the possible repercussions that could result from disregarding moral arguments and our character. Think of beliefs as a simple diagram of a house. If values are ultimately what inform our beliefs and interests, then they are their foundation. The beliefs themselves make up the walls and roofing – they are what we see and admire upon first glance. However, if we do not pay close enough attention to our foundation (the values that support our beliefs), then the foundation eventually crumbles and fades away from a lack of maintenance, as it were, and the walls and roofing come tumbling down with it.

As Gardiner and Williston argued, this is what happened with climate change - a lack of attention to our values (rightly conceived, e.g. the environmental virtues) is (partly) what brought us to our current state. It would be irresponsible to allow ourselves to continue to make that mistake by completely ignoring moral arguments in regards to climate change. And as I have hoped to show in this section, our values have significant influence on our beliefs and interests. Broome and his proposal for a World Climate Bank

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[35] Broome, "Do Not Ask for Morality," p. 7, 15.

being informed by a conception of justice is just one notable example. But even if we could separate our values from our beliefs and interests, excluding moral considerations from the arguments over mitigation and focusing solely on the pragmatic solutions might only remedy the problem in the short term. Climate change can surely be mitigated without paying any attention to virtue. However, to do so would not be fully, properly fixing the problem. As I have been arguing, part of the task of mitigating climate change is working towards not allowing ourselves to make the same mistakes that gave rise to the current crisis and if we ignore our moral failures then we are only dooming ourselves to repeat history. We must devote some attention to rectifying the flaws in human character that contributed to our present situation. Climate change urges us to reconceive of our interests, and this requires reflecting on our values.

3.2: Potential Issues with Virtues and Morality

A worry that the virtue ethicist must always confront is how to cultivate virtue in oneself and others. While I cannot delve too deeply into this issue in this particular paper, it would be poor form not to at least touch on it. Climate change is famously a problem of collective action and, as Gardiner helped illustrate, assigning responsibility is notoriously difficult. With no one person being responsible for remedying climate change, the virtuous individual takes it upon himself to do what is right. My suggestion is to cultivate environmental virtue in others through leading and teaching by example. This brings us back to the question of how much influence people in positions of leadership or power can have on others. If it turns out that these kinds of individuals significantly influence others' character, then there is an argument to be made that those with a greater causal

influence, such as individuals in positions of leadership or power, can be strong catalysts in the spreading of the desired character traits. Regardless of one's position in the social hierarchy, everyone ought to be virtuous. It just may be the case that those who *can* significantly influence a positive change in others' character, *should*. An excellence in moral education becomes of paramount importance.

Related to the question of how to cultivate virtue is the issue of the long-term vision of the position I have been advocating. I have been arguing that holism is a valuable character trait for us to cultivate. Namely, it is a good foundational green virtue that can lead one to the other environmental virtues and it serves the utility of molding a morality that would be less likely to instigate another climate crisis. It is a virtue that people would do well to cultivate as we navigate the problems of climate change and I do not think it is unreasonable to suggest that the value holism offers us now, in the short-term, may also be valuable in the long-term.

Moral education is going to be important if we want to inculcate the proper virtues in future generations so that they may continue to maintain a healthy planet (and otherwise be good people generally, of course). Plato and Aristotle both believed that music could help people to acquire virtue. In his *Laws*, Plato speaks of the importance of the lyre-master being able to discern good rhythms from bad and that, insofar as these rhythms emotionally affect the soul, the lyre-master ought to perform these melodies in public so as to challenge others, and particularly children, to acquire virtue through their influence.[36]

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[36] Plato, *Laws*, Trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 81-3, 812B.

As Aristotle famously noted, virtue is habitual. It takes time to learn how to act rightly and the hope is that one would not have to question what the right action to take might be – the virtuous person just does it, for it has become habit over time. Emphasizing the moral education of children, then, would be a particularly important endeavor, seeing as how children are sponges for retaining knowledge and they have ample time to learn.[37] It is at least easier to teach children correctly than to try to change the minds of stubborn adults.

So we have at least one sense in which the Ancients believed virtue could be cultivated. I cannot speak to how music might bring people to the virtue of holism or the other environmental virtues, but I can note other activities that I believe could be conducive towards this end. Regularly riding a bicycle is a potential candidate. If cycling becomes one's primary mode of transportation, one may begin to notice some small intimacies about his surroundings that he may not have been able to see when he was driving to work each day, for example. An appreciation for the local flora and fauna that simply was not possible when driving a car may start to set in. One begins to observe the coming and going of spring flowers in parts of town that were otherwise untraveled by him before he was cycling. He discovers a flock of local red-spotted blackbirds along his route and hears their unique mating call, perhaps sparking in him a curiosity about the animal, which could then potentially lead to an appreciation for it. These are not claims that can be made for certain, but they are the kinds of testimonies you can reasonably expect to hear from a commuter-cyclist because the experience of cycling is more

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[37] Aristotle, *Politics*, Trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 661, 1340b.

intimately connected with the surrounding environment than the experience of riding in a car.

Taking the time to hike and appreciate the beauty of one's natural surroundings, even if it is a casual, local hike, is another activity that could inspire an individual to consider how to do good towards the land and its inhabitants. Gardening is another. One cannot grow successful crops without an understanding of how to maintain healthy soil and pest populations. If we consider how important it is to teach children to be virtuous from an early age, then showing them the value of hiking and green practices like recycling, composting, and gardening could be an integral part of moral education that is missing from common practice today. Perhaps school trips to wildlife refuges and sustainability centers ought to be emphasized. The earlier people are exposed to the goods that these activities and practices offer, the better off they will be to becoming more environmentally virtuous individuals.

Actively acknowledging that one is a part of nature, recognizing the impact human activity can have on the planet and its inhabitants, and respecting that great power to the point that it urges one to act environmentally conscientiously are all properties that would not only help guide us in acting rightly towards remedying climate change, but they would also serve well in making us a more sustainable species. This is what holism offers. These might not be the only properties that can make us more sustainable, but they are relatively accessible ones and by virtue of that accessibility, cultivating holism as a virtue by which to lead one's life may be one of the most efficient means to becoming *effective* caretakers of our planet. If we manage to ameliorate the effects of climate

change, then we will want to do our best not to commit the same moral failures that caused it in the first place. The holistic individual would be less likely to succumb to such vices.

Of course, a warranted worry that comes from moral approaches to solutions to climate change is whether or not mitigation would actually happen even if everyone cared about finding a solution. This is a justified worry because if not everyone knew that everybody cared, would people continue to do what is necessary?

The answer to this is a rather simple one: the environmentally virtuous individual would act rightly to do his part to mitigate climate change regardless of the action of others. That is what it means to be virtuous – to do what is right and good. The non-actions of others do not determine what the individual concerned with climate change is supposed to do. The problem still persists and requires actions of certain kinds. Those concerned with doing the right thing will do so if they wish to remain virtuous and are committed to their ideals. That virtue compels one to act rightly regardless of the actions of others is one of the benefits of virtue in an age of climate change. It provides us with hope that there will be people who will do what is right, regardless of whether or not others do too. The world needs steadfast champions of the righteous in a time when people can be so easily discouraged from doing what is right and necessary just because there are not enough other people doing it. Ultimately, we can only ever count on ourselves. Even if no one else were to do what is right, the virtuous individual can at least rest peacefully at night knowing that he or she did.

A critic might respond that there are many people who act virtuously towards the environment in precisely the way I have been advocating, and yet climate change remains a problem. Perhaps then what is needed is not really virtue in itself, but rather a certain number of virtuous individuals. And if that is the case, the critic might question why it is virtue that is necessary. People could advocate for the same green principles for selfish or vicious reasons instead.

The critic would be right that what is really needed is a certain number of virtuous individuals. There are undoubtedly many environmentally virtuous people doing good work today – but there are not enough. We need more people to see the benefit of caring for the environment. How many people it will take before circumstances become brighter is hard to gauge. Perhaps it will only take a certain number of the right people (such as policy makers and corporate leaders) or perhaps it will require so many people that being green becomes the new "norm" and that to not be green would be looked at as foreign. I cannot make an empirical claim about the requisite numbers here. What I can say, however, is that I agree with Gardiner and Williston that a lack of environmental virtue is part of the reason anthropogenic climate change is a reality, and that if more people were to be virtuous in the way I have been advocating, then the world would be in a better position to tackle the problem.

But why virtue? Surely these environmental goals could be pursued for selfish or possibly even vicious reasons. It is easier to give in to vice than it is to pursue virtue, after all. If we really cared about mitigating climate change, then the path of least resistance sounds like the most logical option to take. This kind of approach runs the risk of

becoming self-defeating, though. The kinds of vices that would inspire one to mitigate climate change are the same kinds of vices that Gardiner and Williston argued that brought about the problem in the first place. A greedy businessman who wants nothing more than to make as much money as he can might design a witty institution that successfully implements a carbon tax in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And he may succeed in curbing the effects of climate change, but because he had purely selfish, profit-motivated reasons for doing so, he failed to do what I have been discussing in this paper: he failed to *adequately* address the problem by seeking to understand the causes of climate change and how to avoid making those same mistakes again. If we accept Gardiner and Williston's arguments that certain character vices, such as greed, helped incite climate change, then we cannot accept vicious foundations for acting environmentally conscientiously.

3.3: Holism and its Accessibility

The most obvious worry about holism as a virtue, I believe, is whether or not anyone can learn to live by it. In other words, is holism accessible? I lightly touched on this above (see §2.1 above), but holism does not require some deep scientific understanding of the earth's systems or a spiritual connection to the natural world in order for one to have a grasp of what holism means. One can simply understand that human actions have an impact on the environment and be concerned about the potential negative consequences of those impacts. But, as I mentioned before, as an adopter of the virtue of holism, one ought to educate oneself to the best of one's ability on the feedback loops and cycles between humans and the environment. This includes learning about the

local ecology of your area and understanding the basics of climate science. Obviously everybody will have varying degrees to which they can understand these things and not everybody will be expected to know everything. What is important is that holism becomes a prominent value in our lives and that people become not only aware, but concerned about, potential negative impacts humans can have on the environment. Understanding our connectedness with the world is crucial if we want to become a more sustainable species. As I said in section two, there has been a disconnect between humans and nature and it is time to close that gap.

A worry may arise that people who are not inclined to think on a deeper level about these sorts of things will be shut off, as it were, from the virtue of holism due to its reflective nature. Not everyone is a deep thinker, after all. There is a great variance of personalities in the world and that is quite all right. The cultivation of virtue is not a sprint; it is most certainly a marathon. It takes time. Anyone who thinks this transformation will happen overnight is only fooling themselves. What holism asks of us is to reconceive our interests in terms of our relationship with the natural world. That is going to take some patience. The philosopher's task is not one of abrupt revolution – it is one of thoughtful reconstruction. The hope in cultivating holism as a virtue is that, in time, more people will come to realize that a deeper understanding of how we are connected with the world is necessary to a sustainable existence on this planet.

CONCLUSION

The discussions of virtue in climate ethics have been informative and I believe the case I have made is a valuable addition to that discussion. My aim here has been to show that the use of virtue theory in climate ethics has predominantly been 1) as an explanation of our moral failures, as was the case in Gardiner and Williston, and 2) a means to cope with our new living conditions and live meaningful lives in the Anthropocene, as was the case with Jamieson and Thompson. I believe virtue can serve other ends in the Anthropocene, however. Particularly, holism can be a powerful preventative tool in helping guide us to not repeat the moral failures of the past. This can be accomplished by bringing our values, including holism, to the forefront of our considerations. To that end, it would be unwise to ignore virtue in an age of climate change, as virtue can also empower the individual to make a positive difference towards mitigation. Lastly, it is important that we lead by example and educate others on the virtues if we wish to see these traits passed on to future generations. If we wish to maintain habitable, flourishing living conditions for us and all other life on Earth, we must recognize that humanity has disconnected itself from the natural world and we must do our part to close that gap. Cultivating holism would be invaluable in taking humanity to that next step.

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