

Reconsidering Virtue in the Anthropocene

Reconsidering Virtue in the Anthropocene:

A return to individual virtue in order to overcome the corruption of
climate change.

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Jonathon A. Kahler

#6760120

Supervisor: Dr. Naomi van Steenbergen

Secondary Reader: Dr. Matthias Kramm

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Summary

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In this paper I explore the role of individual virtue within the Anthropocene. Authors like Stephen Gardiner and Dale Jamieson appeal to a return to individual character in order to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. In response, virtue ethicists have proposed new virtues that promote the flourishing of humanity at a global scale. However, these “species virtues” have diminished individual flourishing and agency in the process. By incorporating these species virtues into what it means to flourish as an individual, we may return to individual character as a way to flourish in the Anthropocene.

I aim to illustrate how a return to individual flourishing, and the corresponding virtues is not only suitable for coping with climate change, but also motivates us to overcome the challenges of the Anthropocene. Returning to individual character grants us access to public virtues and the ethical tools of role models. In doing so, these role models may motivate us to act more virtuously. When paired with public virtues, we may be able to build the necessary institutions to overcome the moral corruption of climate change.

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1.0 Introduction

Environmental ethics is a rather young field within the tradition of philosophy, only coming about within the latter half of the 20th century. Alongside this is the emergence of climate ethics, the study of ethical theory within anthropogenic climate change. Such topics are ripe with conversations of justice, duties, and the consequences of certain environmental outcomes. However, attention has also been paid towards the necessary character and virtue to deal with such a crisis. Environmental virtue ethics is the study of character, excellence, and human flourishing within an environmental context. Climate change poses many challenges to such an approach that environmental virtue ethics has to solve in order to offer an actionable way through this crisis. As such, many authors have pointed out that climate change may call into question the efficacy of such an approach when dealing with the cultural and ecological changes that climate change will cause. This has led to a small but rich conversation on how climate change will alter our conception of human flourishing, and the necessary virtues to live within the Anthropocene.

One of the most prominent figures within the conversation of climate change more widely comes from Stephen Gardiner. In his book *A Perfect Moral Storm* Gardiner identifies the ways in which climate change leads to moral corruption within our world. Such corruption causes us to become complacent in the face of great injustices as we neglect the decline of the natural world and suffering of future generations. Other authors like Dale Jamieson recognise this corruption and highlight how difficult it is to place responsibility on any one agent, when the issues of climate change are temporally and geographically removed from us. In response to these issues, both authors appeal to a return to individual character in order to overcome the challenges of climate change.

With this proposal, many virtue ethicists have highlighted that amidst the Anthropocene our conception of human flourishing will radically change. With that comes a need to reassess what it means to be a virtuous person and what character traits we ought to emphasise in order to flourish, despite the seemingly impossible challenges ahead of us. Allen Thompson is one such author. Realising our collective impact on the global climate, he proposes a new virtue in the form of *responsibility for the global biosphere*. He sees such a virtue as not only necessary for the continuation of a habitable planet, but also in enabling a new form of human flourishing that is not yet knowable to us. Similar sentiments have been raised by Sarah Krakoff, who similarly proposes a *planetary stewardship* as a possible new virtue.

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Highlighting our role as planetary stewards, Krakoff emphasizes how such a virtue may enable us to grow as a species, so long as we are willing to meet the demands that come with such a role. Authors like Willis Jenkins have noted that both these virtues mark a depart from other virtue ethicists, in that they prioritize species flourishing over conceptions of individual flourishing. Jenkins classifies these new virtues as *species* virtues. While Jenkins attempts to bridge the gap between species virtue and individual flourishing, he nonetheless emphasizes the need to consider species flourishing within the conversation of climate virtue ethics.

While many of these authors have progressed the conversation of virtue within the Anthropocene, I am wary of the overemphasis of these species virtues in dictating individual conceptions of virtue. While authors like Thompson and Krakoff suggest a role for these species virtues, they do not emphasize personal character in a way that is meaningful for individuals. The return to individual character that was emphasized by Jamieson and Gardiner is lost in the process. While species virtues promote species flourishing, how this motivates us to overcome the moral corruption of climate change is less clear. My main position within this paper is that these species virtues do not properly promote individual character in a way that can meaningfully motivate us to overcome the moral corruption that climate change causes. Beyond merely coping with climate change, a return to individual character can motivate us to create change at a community level. Such change aims towards the flourishing of the individual, while also laying the motivational foundation to create systematic change as well. In this way, a return to individual character provides a more effective way of overcoming the moral corruption of climate change than species virtues.

In section two of this paper, I will address how climate change is a wicked problem in the ways that Gardiner and Jamieson articulated. Specifically, I will illustrate how it leads to a conceptual emergency that virtue ethics is well suited to address. From here I will address the claims of Thompson and Krakoff and illustrate how species virtues deemphasize individual agency and flourishing. Moreover, I will highlight how this deemphasis of individual flourishing leads to a demotivation to act. This lack of motivation means that we are less likely to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. To solve this, Willis Jenkins tries to bridge the gap between species virtue and individual flourishing. However, I will illustrate how this falls short through a lack of embodyable virtues. In turn I will propose that such species virtues can be incorporated into a pluralistic teleology that returns focus to individual character in the ways that Gardiner and Jamieson emphasized.

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In section three, I will go on to highlight how a return to these individual virtues allows us to emphasize public virtues – those virtues aiming toward community flourishing. When pairing public virtues with personal virtues that allow us to rightly orient ourselves with nature, we can achieve the necessary preconditions to overcoming our apathy towards climate change. I will then address the possible objection that species virtues may act as a form of public virtue through the political responsibility we hold as individuals. However, I aim to show that such responsibility cannot properly be classified as a virtue as such responsibility cannot be properly fulfilled by individuals when it is framed this way. With a return to individual character, we gain access to the ethical tool of role models to provide action guidance. Specifically, I will illustrate how these role models can motivate us to act and offer a conception of human flourishing amidst the Anthropocene. From here I will illustrate how role models that motivate us to uphold both public and personal virtues, may allow us to form the communities necessary to overcome the corruption that Stephen Gardiner first identified. With this, a return to individual character is not only important for giving us ways to cope with the corruption of climate change, but also motivate us to combat it.

2.0 Species Virtue in the Anthropocene

In this section I will aim to identify the ways in which we have deemphasised the role of the individual surrounding the conversation of virtue ethics within the Anthropocene. I will begin by first identifying how the moral corruption of climate change has led to a conceptual emergency within ethics. Specifically, I will look at how both Stephen Gardiner and Dale Jamieson saw individual character as a solution to the moral corruption that climate change causes, and as a way to overcome this conceptual emergency. I will then highlight how many authors have promoted species virtues that focus on species flourishing, rather than character traits that lead to individual flourishing. Both Allen Thompson and Sarah Krakoff proposed virtues that are not fully embodyable by individuals and leave us wondering how best to habituate their respective virtues of responsibility for the biosphere and planetary stewardship, respectively. Due to the inability for individuals to adopt such virtues, there is little motivation to overcome the moral corruption that Jamieson and Gardiner first identified. While Willis Jenkins has tried to bridge the gaps between species virtues and individual flourishing, what I propose is that they are incorporated into a pluralistic teleology that accounts for species survival within a conception of individual flourishing. In doing so I will aim to articulate how this makes these virtues more relevant to the individual. I will also address the criticism that Thompson raised, in that the cultural upheaval that climate change

will cause requires us to reevaluate our conceptions of what the virtues look like moving forward, before concluding.

2.1 Wickedness of Climate Change

One of the most prominent figures in the conversation surrounding climate ethics comes from Stephen Gardiner. In his book on *Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption*, Gardiner identifies climate change as a moral storm. He labels it as such because “peculiar features of the climate change problem pose substantial obstacles to our ability to make the hard choices necessary to address it” (Gardiner 2011, 398). Gardiner notes that even if we had the ethical tools to solve the problem of climate change, we may still find it difficult to act due to the moral corruption that the problem breeds. Such corruption stems from a number of issues.

The first is the dispersion of cause and effect between those acts that contribute to climate change, and those who will be affected by such acts. Likewise, we see a fragmentation of agency in which identifying a single agent responsible for the issue is extremely difficult to do. This applies not only to individuals, but also institutions. Both the dispersal of cause and effect, as well as the fragmentation of agency occurs both geographically and temporally. Geographically, because greenhouse gas emissions from any one location go on to affect the entire global climate, and the agents who are responsible may be found worldwide. (Gardiner 2013, 399) Temporally, as the effects of greenhouse gases take a very long time to be realised (Gardiner 2013, 403). The agents who contribute to these effects are often not alive to realise their consequences which causes an institutional inadequacy to arise. Institutions have a short time horizon in which they deal with problems and therefore are not concerned with their impact on future peoples. Climate change “provides each generation with the cover under which it can seem to be taking the issue seriously... when really it is simply exploiting its temporal position” (Gardiner 2011, 408). Given the temporal and geographic dispersal of climate change, Gardiner is “doubtful that these institutions can properly address these issues that have such deferred impacts. He claims that due to these issues we see that the motivation for current agents to act does not exist (Gardiner 2011, 405). Whether it be complacency, distractions or delusions, a moral corruption has emerged according to Gardiner that makes climate change the perfect moral storm.

As one of Gardiner's contemporaries, Dale Jamieson also sees the complexity that climate change poses. Rather than clear issues of blame and responsibility, Jamieson also recognises

the ways in which climate change complicates our traditional notions of morality. He offers an example of a boy named Jack who steals a girl's bike. Here we have a blameworthy agent who is responsible for the act, Jack. However, when considering the temporal and geographic dispersal that Gardiner identified, Jamieson gives a more apt example of the dispersal of responsibility. He states, "Jack and a large number of unacquainted people who set in motion a chain of events that causes a large number of future people who will live in another part of the world from ever having bikes" (Jamieson 2010,436). In this example, Jamieson wants to highlight the struggles in placing responsibility on a single individual agent for causing harm to another in a different time and space.

It is from this issue that he highlights that the problems of climate change strays from the paradigms of global justice, in which contemporary ideas of responsibility are not adequate to solving the issue (Jamieson 2010,440). Gardiner identifies a similar "theoretical ineptitude" within climate change. He states "even our best theories face basic and often severe difficulties addressing basic issues such as scientific uncertainty, intergenerational equity, contingent persons, nonhuman animals and nature. But climate change involves all of these matters and more"(Gardiner 2013, 407). What both Gardiner and Jamieson have identified, is what Mary Midgley described as a "conceptual emergency". A problem in which many of us are faced with the horrors of environmental problems that climate change has caused, but "we struggle to fit such concern into our traditional concepts of morality that only fit human centred concerns (Midgley 2000, 40).

To overcome this Jamieson believes that we must revise our everyday understanding of moral responsibility in the face of this conceptual emergency. In previous works he has suggested that we ought to focus more on character and "nurture and give new content to some old virtues" (Jamieson 1992,151). Jamieson suggests a *respect for nature* can "motivate people to acknowledge a responsibility to respond to climate change" (Jamieson 2010,440). He suggests this respect for nature due to the understanding that many of our environmental problems to date stem from devaluing the natural world. Holding a respect for natural is not only the prudent thing to do in that it ensures our own survival, it also "provides a background condition for our lives having meaning" according to Jamieson (Jamieson 2010, 442). In this way, he offers respect for nature as a way to motivate us to act, and to cope with the moral complexity of climate change that both he and Gardiner identified. For Jamieson the return to individual character provides the motivation for us to act, regardless of the behaviour of others. And while Gardiner identified a moral ineptitude within the storm of

climate change, he even suggests that we may have the concepts to tackle this issue, we simply do not want to act on them (Gardiner 2011b, 57). In the final sections of his book, Gardiner suggests that in order to quell the moral storm that is climate change, we may need to return to individual agency. He thinks that must come from capturing it in good moral theories that can develop both the character and lives of people (Gardiner 2011, 442). While he does not go into detail, it is the hope that refocusing on individual character will disperse the problem of climate change and cultivate the necessary institutions to overcome it.

Both Gardiner and Jamieson recognise a need to promote individual agency and character in order to deal with the conceptual emergency we face due to climate change. They do not propose this simply as a coping mechanism, but rather as a way in which to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. With responsibility for climate change being dispersed through time and space, and the motivation to act being non-existent, cultivating individual character may offer us the hope we need in order to move forward. For both Jamieson and Gardiner focusing individual character allows us to find meaning within the Anthropocene, even when our species cannot.

2.2 *Species Virtue*

Both Gardiner and Jamieson aim to emphasise a need to develop individual character in order to overcome the problems of corruption within the Anthropocene. Since proposing this, many authors have developed this idea further by appealing to the virtues. Virtues are well suited to this task as they focus on individual character. As such these authors have proposed new virtues in order to cope with the unique challenges of climate change. Among them are Sarah Krakoff and Allen Thompson who propose a *planetary stewardship* and *responsibility for the biosphere*, respectively. However, what many of these authors have done is appeal to wider, species-level virtues. In doing so, they have reduced the importance of individual character that Jamieson and Gardiner first appealed to. While many have tried to bridge the gap between these species virtue and individual flourishing, they fall short of developing the character necessary to combat climate change's corruption.

One author who proposes a species virtue is Sarah Krakoff. In recognising the challenges that climate change poses, she proposes the virtue of *planetary stewardship*. This virtue recognises certain planetary obligations that we have as a species due to the impact climate change has had (Krakoff 2011, 152). Much like Gardiner and Jamieson, she recognises that climate change requires us to reconsider contemporary ideas of morality. She states that

“different circumstances have different essential conflicts, and therefore call for the cultivation of different virtues and different behaviours” (Krakoff 2011, 148). In order to overcome the conceptual crisis that Midgley described, she conceptualises the transition toward these new virtues in the form of a stewardship (Krakoff 2011, 148). The transition to this planetary stewardship stage will allow us to hold the correction dispositions that will lead to a habitable planet for us as a species. Only by realising our obligations as a species will we be able to transition to this new stage, as the suitable dispositions of individuals are only realisable once we have become planetary stewards. What Krakoff is describing is the transition of the entire human species, rather than that of an individual agents. We are left wondering what can lead us towards as planetary stewardship if such a virtue can only be held by humanity as a whole. Rather than promoting a virtue for individual agents, Krakoff is promoting planetary stewardship as a virtue for the human species to adopt.

This is something that also occurs in the work of Allen Thompson. Thompson thinks that a recognition of the responsibility we have for climate change is why we have such a horror towards the problems it is causing. He states that “we don’t fear the *end* of the natural world; we fear *responsibility for the natural world*” (Thompson 2009, 96). Given the moral horror that we hold, he proposes a *responsibility for the biosphere* as a new virtue in order to overcome it. Such a virtue requires that we meet the normative demands that comes with being managers of earths global climate and basic ecological conditions (Thompson 2012, 216). He makes an appeal to human goodness to “meet the plurality of normative demands derived from humanity’s role responsibility qua mangers of the Earth’s global climate and basic ecological conditions” (Thompson 2012, 216). In recognising the good of humanity to include the global climate, the virtue of responsibility for the global biosphere emerges as a shared political responsibility. In placing this virtue as a shared responsibility, the demands of such a duty are dispersed among all those who hold it. While it may seem that such a responsibility will motivate us to act, it is a virtue that is rooted in the responsibility of a collective and distilled down to the individual. How such a virtue is achieved and motivating enough to overcome the apathy towards climate change is not clear.

This is something that occurs with many virtues that are proposed when dealing with climate change. Climate change is a global issue, and so many authors resort to virtues that are global in scope. We see this with Krakoff and Thompson, however, we also see it from other authors. Zachary Allison suggests the virtue of *holism* in which we recognise 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” (Allison 2018, 24). This virtue lies in the recognition that our species is a part of nature, and that “we need the natural world to remain in a healthy state in order for our species to both survive and thrive” (Allison 2018, 28). Much like Krakoff and Jamieson, the species virtue of holism asks us to adopt a virtue that is necessary for humanities continuance, rather than our individual flourishing.

This emphasis on species virtue that Thompson and Krakoff formed is something that Willis Jenkins recognised. In looking at the virtues of planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere, Jenkins recognised a distinction between species virtue and individual flourishing. He correctly acknowledges, “no individual causes climate change, just as no individual can meaningfully exercise planetary stewardship” (Jenkins 2016, 90). What Jenkins notes is that while these species virtues may influence concepts of individual flourishing and character, they are not able to be properly embodied by individuals. As Jenkins states “no one experiences being a geological force, even though our species has become one” (Jenkins 2016, 88). As individuals, we are not able to be stewards of an entire planet, much like we are not able to hold responsibility for the entire biosphere. As such, these species virtues fall short of offering dispositions that are conducive to individual flourishing. They move away from the emphasis of individual character that Gardiner and Jamieson saw as necessary in order to overcome the moral corruption of climate change.

Since species virtues are not realizable within individual agents, it is important that we pause to consider what the virtues are. It is widely held within virtue ethics that what makes a character trait a virtue, is that it is required in order for a person to flourish and live well (Sandler 2007, 14). The extent to which the virtues contribute to individual flourishing, and how they are defined will differ depending on the author. What remains the same is that they focus on individual character dispositions that can lead to that flourishing. One of the prominent authors on contemporary virtue ethics is Rosalind Hursthouse. In her book *On Virtue*, she goes to great lengths to describe an Aristotelian virtue ethic as a contender to other contemporary moral frameworks. Hursthouse defines virtue as “a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well”(Hursthouse 1999, 167). In adopting these virtues, individual agents are able to act in ways that are conducive to a life of flourishing. However, what is important is that virtues are *character traits* that the *individual* needs in order to flourish. As such the virtues derive their meaning from the experience of a moral life. These virtues will ideally lend us to hold the right dispositions, to act for the right reasons, and with the appropriate emotions (Jamieson 2008, 86). It was for this reason that

Jamieson and Gardiner appealed to a return to character in order to overcome the moral corruption that climate change has caused.

Species virtues do not properly align with this conception of virtue as they are not character dispositions that individuals can embody. As Jenkins notes “whatever specific virtues parenting the planet might entail, they would not be habits realized within individual action”(Jenkins 2016, 88). However, in proposing species virtues, authors like Thompson and Krakoff move away from individual agency, proposing virtues that instead need to be adoptable by humanity as a whole. Neither author properly identifies *how* such virtues are supposed to be achieved if they no longer focus on individual character. This is because they are too broad in scope and are not relevant to an individual’s conception of flourishing. While these species virtues are proposed in order to overcome the challenges of humanity, they are not dispositions that will lead to individual flourishing. For this reason, species virtues are not character dispositions that we can expect individuals to hold.

Despite the problems of these species virtues, returning to individual virtues to develop our character is still conducive to overcoming the problems of climate change. As many authors have suggested overcoming climate change is conducive to a life of flourishing. As Jamieson states, within the Anthropocene the virtues “can provide guidance for living gracefully while helping to restore in us a sense of agency” (Jamieson 2014, 8). However, the cultivating of character is not possible when discussing species virtues. Species virtues do not emphasise the experiences of an individual moral life. Rather, they emphasise the survival and flourishing of humanity as a species. All the while they ask us, as individuals to experience the collective geological and moral force that has led to the climate crisis. They do so, because they are seen as the necessary characteristics that will allow for humanities survival, but also its flourishing. However, in doing so they move away from the emphasis of individual character that Gardiner and Jamieson saw as necessary in order to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. In moving away from this individual character, and the necessary dispositions to cultivate it, people are no longer motivated to act.

2.3 Motivation

Returning to Gardiner’s work, he identified many problems that arose from the moral corruption of climate change. According to Gardiner, one way to overcome this is an appeal to a moral motivation in which he suggests good character may counteract the corruption that we see climate change causing. Gardiner states, “Our best chance of addressing the storm

seems to rest with ethical motivation” and that developing people’s character is central to this task (Gardiner 2011, 442). It is this “ethical motivation” that Gardiner describes that is best fulfilled by focusing on the virtues and individual flourishing. Similar to Gardiner, Jamieson sees a need to return to individual virtue in order to accommodate the changes to our moral responsibility that climate change will cause. Jamieson states that “focusing on the virtues helps to regulate and coordinate behaviour, express and contribute to the constitution of community through space and time, and helps to create empathy, sympathy, and solidarity among moral agents”(Jamieson 2007, 15). In this way, the behaviour of a virtuous character can be amplified to affect the behaviour, attitudes and moral character of many other people. Such an act is describing that “ethical motivation” that Gardiner identified as an antidote to the moral corruption that climate change causes.

Climate change – being a problem of indirect causation and temporal lag – means that we are very unlikely to be motivated to act. Jenkins notes, “cognitive psychology shows that probabilistic issues involving indirect causation fail to trigger motivation moral emotions” (Jenkins 2016, 83). Jenkins claims humans simply lack the moral resources to properly develop a responsibility for the problems that arise from the wickedness of climate change. He suggests that the appeal to virtue from both Jamieson and Gardiner comes from “developing personal resilience for a time of unsolvable problems”(Jenkins 2016, 85). However, Ronald Sandler argues that virtue can motivate us to overcome such wickedness, rather than merely cope with it. In addressing the wickedness of climate change, he identifies the problem of inconsequentialism, a familiar problem within environmentalism. This problem is when “a person’s contribution... is nearly inconsequential to addressing the problem and may require some cost from the standpoint of the person’s own life”(Sandler 2010, 168). Such a problem raises the question of why we should do anything at all when the individual cost is so high, and the perceived benefits are so inconsequential. Sandler highlights that many aspects of a virtue ethic are well suited to addressing this problem, and can “justify modifying one’s behaviour in response to longitudinal collective action problems” like climate change (Sandler 2010, 178). This also includes the “amplifying effects” of one’s actions in which the virtuous behaviour of one person may go on to impact the behaviour of others or may even create larger systematic reform. The amplifying effects of a virtuous character “will inform character trait evaluation within virtue-oriented ethical theory.” (Sandler 2010, 178). In this sense, virtue ethics is able to overcome the moral corruption of climate through the way that the virtues – and therefore virtuous people –

motivate us to act. However, in order for these amplifying effects to take place, such virtues have to be embodyable in individuals.

If we wish to see the amplifying effects of virtuous character that Sandler identified, we must also be able to properly individualise and classify the virtues. For this reason, returning focus to those character traits we *can* embody, will give us the motivation to challenge the systemic issues of moral corruption. Even if we are not successful, we are motivated to embody those virtues that will allow us to live meaningful lives even when there is not enough time enough to solve these problems. So long as those virtues focus on individual character, they can motivate us to change our behaviour. However, if we propose virtues that are global in scope and impossibly difficult to adopt, then our motivation to act upon these unreasonable character traits is lost. As we have seen, species virtues are unable to be properly individuals due to the scope of their demands. It is because of our cognitive incapability to imagine ourselves as a whole geological force that has caused climate change, that we are unable to embody species virtues. Due to this, it is unlikely that these virtues can motivate us to change our behaviour in any meaningful way compared to individual virtues. The motivation to exemplify virtues stems from our ability to embody them as individuals. This is something that species virtues lack because they cannot describe how they are supposed to form as character traits for the individual to embody.

2.4 Teleology in the Anthropocene

Species virtues are so large in scope that we struggle to understand what it means to adopt them within ourselves. Both Krakoff and Thompson propose different virtues in order to overcome the challenges of the Anthropocene. In promoting a planetary stewardship, Krakoff suggests that we are creating “an account of a fully realized human life” (Krakoff 2011, 162). Fulfilling the requirements of that planetary stewardship is what leads to that flourishing. Similarly, Thompson’s responsibility for the biosphere “gives rise to the possibility of a new form of human goodness”(Thompson 2012, 214). While both authors suggest that their species virtues may reconceptualise how we consider human goodness, this is not in reference to individual flourishing. The way both authors paint these as virtues, means that individuals are not able to properly embody them. Rather they are only obtainable for collectives, namely humanity. Both authors are trying to offer dispositions that will allow us to overcome Anthropogenic climate change. For these reasons, the ends that these authors are trying to reach in proposing these virtues should not be dismissed. Nonetheless, if species

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virtues are to motivate us in any meaningful way, some connection has to be drawn between species flourishing and individual virtue.

Jenkins notes a clear divide between the species virtues and the individual virtues that lead to our flourishing. As such, Jenkins proposes an ‘adaptive feedback’ in order to bridge the gap between these two sets of virtues. This feedback entails that species virtues would change the ways in which individuals and cultures interpret what it means to flourish as an individual (Jenkins 2016, 95). It comes from a dissatisfaction with the current state of humanity within planetary systems, which may motivate us to reconsider our visions of human flourishing (Jenkins 2016, 90). This feedback leads to “certain practices of collective agency in planetary systems conduce to realize goods that could alter how individual persons understand and pursue the goods internal to their own flourishing” (Jenkins 2016, 95). The goal of Jenkins here, is to bridge the gap between these two sets of virtues and in doing so realise how these species virtues may alter the flourishing of the individual (Jenkins 2016, 94). In this way, what it means to flourish as an individual may be dictated in part, by what is necessary for the flourishing of the entire species. For these species virtues that Krakoff and Thompson propose, Jenkins thinks that for them to mean anything for the practice of an individual life, “the species role must uncover some facet of goodness important for interpreting how to live an individual life well” (Jenkins 2016, 94). In order to bridge these two different concepts together, Jenkins returns to a “respect for nature” similar to Jamieson. He states that a respect for nature within this context “names a dispositional commitment to rethink the goods of a life in light of what seems good for the conditions that support all life” (Jenkins 2016, 95). However, in doing this we are left wondering what virtues we can embody in light of this reconceptualization of human flourishing. Jenkins does not offer any insight into this. While he proposes one single virtue, it is only put forth in order to reconceptualise what it means to flourish as individuals. With that reconceptualization comes possible new or adapted virtues. We as individuals must be able to classify embodyable virtues, so that we can act in ways that are conducive to larger species virtues of planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere. However, a respect for nature that Jenkins suggest does not offer a way to return to individual virtue and character in the way that Jamieson and Gardiner originally proposed. However, what Jenkins may be pointing towards is a way in which planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere may contribute towards a human teleology within the Anthropocene.

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For example, in his book *Character and Environment* Ronald Sandler offers a comprehensive account of the considerations and the necessary virtues of an environmental virtue ethic. Here he spends a considerable amount of time developing a pluralistic conception of human flourishing from which to base his proposed environmental virtues. He states it as:

“A human being is ethically good (i.e. virtuous) insofar as she is well fitted with respect to her (i) emotions, (ii) desires, and (iii) actions (from reason and inclination); whether she is thus well fitted is determined by whether these aspects well serve (1) her survival, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) her characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, (4) the good functioning of her social group, (5) her autonomy, (6) the accumulation of knowledge, (7) a meaningful life, and (8) the realization of any noneudaimonistic ends (grounded in noneudaimonistic goods or values) – in the way characteristic of human beings” (Sandler 2007, 28)

There are two characteristics that are important to note within this concept of human flourishing that Sandler puts forth. Firstly, it is teleological, as character traits are evaluated according to their conduciveness to promote certain ends. Secondly, this account of human flourishing is pluralistic. It promotes ends that are both agent relative and agent independent. By this, Sandler’s teleology promotes ends that are both unique to the individual (i.e. autonomy and a meaningful life) and extend beyond individual agency (i.e. promoting species survival). In doing so he incorporates a concept of species survival and continuance into what it means to flourish as an individual. However, he does not reduce the role of individual agency in the way species virtues do. Rather he incorporates species survival into what it means to flourish as an individual. From here Sandler outlines an entire typology of 27 unique virtues that aims towards this concept of human flourishing (Sandler 2007, 82). He states, “as long as we depend on the natural environment for [our basic goods], dispositions that maintain access to them in sufficiently unpolluted states are justified, whereas dispositions that undermine their quality and accessibility are unjustified” (Sandler 2007, 43). It is here that Sandler ties sustainability to what it means to flourish as both an individual and a species. He identifies something that has been widely recognised by other environmental virtue ethicists. That is, that sustainability is a prerequisite for a life of flourishing. In our current state of ecological devastation, sustainability defines what a life of flourishing is. As Vucetich and Nelson (2010, 542) succinctly point out, “sustainability may well be the primary scheme for describing and evaluating what it means to be a good person or good

society in today's world". Through his teleology, Sandler is able to incorporate species survival into what it means to flourish without diminishing the role of individual virtue.

This is what both Krakoff and Thompson attempt to do in describing their species virtue. Both authors understand a need to reconceptualise what it means to flourish as individuals in order to create a sustainable world. However, they do this through proposing virtues that are global in scale. These species virtues do not motivate us sufficiently enough because as Jenkins noted, these species virtues cannot properly inform the contents of a moral life (Jenkins 2016, 89). Virtues are meant to contribute to individual flourishing, and yet we as individual are unable to embody the virtues of planetary stewardship or responsibility for the biosphere. What is missing is a way to individualise these species virtues so that they are relevant for individual flourishing. Jenkins proposes an adaptive feedback, in which individual flourishing may be dictated by species virtues. However, he only offers a respect for nature as a single disposition for individuals to embody. In promoting a teleology like Sandler does in which individual flourishing is considerate of species survival, the virtues become directly relevant to individuals. In this way, it offers a more comprehensive account of individual flourishing within the Anthropocene, while also taking into consideration the concerns of both Thompson and Krakoff. This is because we have a typology of multiple virtues that aim towards species survival and individual flourishing. In this sense, the virtues that we habituate in order to flourish as individuals, also promote the survival of the species. Within the Anthropocene, that means virtues that aim towards a sustainable world.

2.5 Thinning the Virtues.

Despite species virtues not being embodyable by individual agents, some authors may object to this and claim that we need to reconsider what the virtues actually are. Many authors have suggested that we need new conception of virtue, and rethink how existing virtues adapt to the challenges of climate change. This appears throughout much of the literature, but particularly from Allen Thompson. In justifying a responsibility for the biosphere as a virtue, he appeals to another new virtue – *radical hope*. Specifically, Thompson draws from the work of Jonathan Lear who conceptualises this virtue. Lear provides an account of Plenty Coups who was the last principal chief of the Crow Nation, who were faced with the cultural upheaval of their society in the face of advancing colonization (Lear 2009). Many of the values that they held to be important parts of a good life were removed or destroyed due to European settlement. As Lear states, "with the destruction of this way of life came the destruction of the end goal – the *telos* – of that life" (Lear 2009, 55). As such, Plenty Coups

came to the realisation that the traditional way of life for the Crow Nation was coming to an end, since what they conceived of as ‘good’ was intimately tied to these traditions (Lear 2009, 92-93). What Plenty Coups stated in the face of this cultural upheaval is that the Crow Nation “must abandon the goods associated with our way of life – and thus we must abandon the conception of the good life that our tribe has worked out over centuries. *We shall get the good back*, though at the moment we can have no more than a glimmer of what that might mean” (Lear 2009, 94). What Lear identifies Plenty Coups exhibiting in this statement, is the virtue of radical hope in which individuals have “the hope for *revival*: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible” ” (Lear 2009, 94). It is this virtue that Thompson utilises to justify reconceptualising our current virtues.

Thompson uses this account of radical hope in the context of climate change, suggesting we need to adopt a radical hope in order to cope with similar cultural upheavals. In particular he thinks that due to climate change our conceptions of what it means to be environmentally virtuous and to flourish “have to be thinned out before reemerging in new and culturally novel forms” (Thompson 2010, 49). As such Thompson thinks that climate change will ultimately change many cultural aspects of our ethical practices, and that stripping these culturally dependent frameworks from the virtues, will allow us to thin them down from our culturally thick concept of the good (Thompson 2012, 212). Krakoff also questions what virtues might be cultivated to address the new conflicts within the Anthropocene and responds with a planetary stewardship as a possible answer. Similar to Thompson, Krakoff is working from the understanding the Anthropocene requires a new conception of virtue (Krakoff 2011, 166). While she does not appeal to a radical hope in the same way Thompson does, she shares similar sentiments in which we have to strive for such a virtue, even though what it means to flourish within that context is not yet realisable to us.

As such, it could be said that the criticism that these species virtues are not embodyable by individual agents is merely a culturally thick concept that we have to thin down in order to properly embody them. Specifically, what it looks like to possess the virtue of planetary stewardship or responsibility for the biosphere are not yet realisable to us. It is not until we *thin* current conception of what the virtues can be, that we can make these species virtues realisable to individuals. Thompson proposes radical hope in an effort to reconceptualise responsibility and justify responsibility for the biosphere as a virtue. Thompson’s claim means that we cannot properly see what planetary stewardship, or responsibility for the biosphere look like because they are beyond our conception of what a good life looks when

such virtues are adopted. However, with this radical hope we can believe “that someday the good will return in a presently unimaginable form”(Thompson 2012, 214). With the use of radical hope, we are hoping that such virtues can be properly realisable by us, in order to create a habitable world; a world in which species virtues are realisable for us as individual agents. In this way, the adoption of the species virtues that Krakoff and Thompson propose, rely on the faith that such virtues lead to a new conception of human flourishing within the Anthropocene.

2.6 Adapting the Virtues.

I am sympathetic to Thompson’s account to appeal to radical hope in order to justify these species virtue. The reimagining of the virtues amidst the Anthropocene is something that many authors have expressed. All the authors mentioned so far have proposed new virtues, or reimagining’s of previous virtues in order to cope with climate change. The whole venture of climate virtue ethics and the proposal of new or adapted virtues works under the assumption that with new virtues, comes new conceptions of the good. As Thompson puts it, “genuinely new forms of human goodness entail new virtues, just as genuinely new virtues implicate new forms of the good life” (Thompson 2012, 214). However, the proposal of species virtues still makes it unclear how such virtues are embodyable by individual, even if it requires thinned conception of virtue. If planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere are to be promoted as virtues, we must also have some account of what those virtues look like. While species virtues are proposed within the Anthropocene, we are unable to properly embody them as individuals. These species virtues are global in scale and transcend the capabilities of a single individual to embody them.

Within virtue ethical theory, virtues are those characteristics that lead to a life of flourishing. While their conception of that flourishing varies, they are character traits that the individual *needs* to habituate in order to lead that life. If that is the case, the question remains how these species virtues are to be adopted. If we are going to adopt virtues that aim towards a concept of human flourishing that is not yet conceivable as Thompson suggests, those virtues have to be at the very least embodyable by individuals. This is why Gardiner and Jamieson proposed a return to individual character. It was in the face of a conceptual emergency within the Anthropocene that they turned to individual character as an antidote. This is something that Jamieson himself even elaborated on. While he does not root virtue in the same teleology as Sandler or appeal to any sort of “natural goodness”, he sees the virtues as a way of reducing our contribution to climate change while also living meaningful lives, regardless of what

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others do (Jamieson 2014, 186). As such he proposes “green virtues” made up existing and adapted virtues, as well as new virtues suitable for the Anthropocene. In this way he is promoting a *thinned* version of existing virtues that are able to be adopted by the individual, while also taking into consideration the normative demands of climate change. These green virtues are proposed by Jamieson in order to offer characteristics for individuals to embody in order to cope with Anthropogenic climate change. Similarly, Sandler’s teleology offers 27 unique virtues for us to embody, while also taking into consideration the continuation of us as a species. Species virtues do not offer us these individual virtues. Rather, they ask us to see ourselves as a collective, and thus we lack the motivation and capability to adopt them.

These different conceptions of virtue offer an idea of what it looks like to flourish in the Anthropocene, despite the uncertainty that comes with it. Comparatively, species virtues have no conception of what it looks like for an individual to habituate species virtues. Rather than propose virtues to overcome the motivational challenges of climate change, species virtues ask us to have faith in an unknowable conception of human flourishing. It is not clear what it looks like to “do what is characteristic of a planetary steward” or “have responsibility for the biosphere”. What I think ought to be done, is that these concepts can be incorporated into a teleology for what it means to flourish, within the Anthropocene. Rather than isolate these species virtues, they can be incorporated into a pluralistic teleology in which planetary stewardship is an end that is aimed towards, similar to what Sandler proposes for human survival. In doing so this teleology can transcend the cultural framework that Thompson saw as needing to be thinned in order to reimagine what the virtues are. This is also what Jenkins alluded to in describing an adaptive feedback when he states that species virtues “may put pressure on culturally particular visions of human flourishing”(Jenkins 2016, 90). In this way, current conceptions of what the virtues are can be thinned in ways that accommodate for the cultural changes that Thompson described. Virtues such as ecological sensitivity, courage, and voluntary simplicity may take new meanings as we overcome the challenges of climate change. However, these virtues remain embodyable by individual agents, and not conceptualised in a form that is not currently realisable to us. This allows us to describe these species virtues in terms of different environmental virtues that more aptly apply to individual agents.

These different environmental virtues are able to account for the thinning that is necessary to overcome the cultural upheaval that climate change will cause. As Ronald Sandler states, “the virtue-oriented approach does not provide a finite set of rules or principles that can be applied

formulaically by anyone in any situation to yield a unique action-guiding prescription. The approach is pluralistic and uncodifiable” (Sandler 2007, 111). How the virtues manifest and influence our behaviour are dependent on a variety of tools, such as role models, v-rules and community deliberation” (Sandler 2007, 111). In this way, the virtues paint a clearer picture of what a virtuous person may look like within the Anthropocene. Rather than promoting a single virtue that is necessary for the Anthropocene, we have a multitude of virtues that form and develop our understanding of what it means to flourish in a climate-changed world. By focusing on virtues that promote individual character, we are offered a clearer conception of what it means to flourish and overcome the challenges of Anthropogenic climate change. If we hold it to be true that these species virtues that Thomson and Krakoff propose are teleological claims of what it means to flourish rather than as virtues themselves, we are more prepared to define what virtues correspond to these conceptions of human flourishing. In doing so, we may be able to more readily overcome the moral corruption that has amounted within our societies due to climate change.

2.7 Conclusion

Virtue ethics first and foremost promote character traits that are necessary in order to live a life of flourishing. While the way those virtues are defined may differ, what remains the same is that they are able to be possessed by an individual agent. Despite this, authors like Krakoff and Thompson have proposed different species virtues. While aiming to reimagine a life of flourishing within the Anthropocene, these virtues are not able to be properly adopted by individuals. They are global in scale and fail to properly address how such character traits ought to be habituated by a virtuous person. Moreover, this leads to a demotivation that was once the first appeal to individual character that Gardiner and Jamieson saw. As a result, species virtues fail to offer a conception of individual flourishing while also offering no motivation to overcome the problems of climate change. Authors like Willis Jenkins have attempted to bridge the gap between species virtues and individual flourishing through an adaptive feedback, in which individual flourishing is dictated by species virtues. However, he fails to define what the individual virtues ought to be in light of this reconceptualization of individual flourishing. What I have suggested is that we incorporate these species virtues into a pluralistic teleology that can account for species survival. In doing so we are able to derive individual character traits that a person ought to embody in order to achieve this conception of human flourishing. Authors like Thompson may object to this and state that in light of the cultural upheaval we face, a reimagining of the virtues can justify the application of virtues

that operate at a species level. However, the question remains how such character traits are supposed to be embodied by the individual. In returning to individual virtues, we not only appeal to a sense of character to overcome the moral corruption of climate change but make the virtues more relevant to individuals.

3.0 A Return to Individual Character

In this section I aim to highlight how a return to individual virtue not only allows us to cope with the challenges of climate change, but also gives us the tools to enact larger change to overcome the moral corruption that Stephen Gardiner described as “the perfect moral storm”. Specifically, I will illustrate how through public virtues, we may be able to create the changes necessary to combat the apathy we see towards climate change. Through promoting the flourishing of our communities, we are more equipped to create institutional reforms that allow us to not only combat climate change but encourage more virtuous behaviour. I will address the criticism that species virtues may be interpreted as possible public virtues. In particular, I aim to illustrate how the dispersal of responsibility of species virtues do not motivate us in the ways necessary to overcome climate change. Instead, I will show that a return to individual character offers us the moral tool of role models to encourage virtuous behaviour. From here we may be motivated to take the actions necessary to flourish within the Anthropocene. Combined with public virtues, this may allow us to cultivate the moral communities and institutions necessary to properly overcome the corruption that climate change causes.

3.1 Public Virtue

In returning focus to individual character within the Anthropocene, we gain access to an overlooked subset of virtues. When we talk of individual virtue, much of the conversation within environmental virtue ethics revolves around personal virtues. These are those character traits we exhibit at a personal level, that directly aim towards our individual flourishing. For example, we may decide to take ourselves into the wilderness to reconnect with nature and exercise the virtues of wonder and ecological sensitivity. With the aim of habituating these virtues, we are directly aiming towards our own flourishing through this practice. This is very in line with how environmental role models have been considered in the past, as these are the personal virtues that we associate with them. The most obvious example within the western conversation of environmental virtue ethics is Henry David Thoreau. Spending much time reflecting on the natural world, Thoreau has been a major influence on

nonanthropocentric ethics for environmental philosophers. Philip Cafaro has highlighted many virtues that Thoreau cultivated through his writing as a naturalist. Thoreau offers a link between wild nature and human flourishing that gives rise to many personal virtues that allow us to properly orient ourselves with the natural world (Cafaro 2012, 79). Through this, a picture is painted of what an environmentally virtuous person looks like. However, in doing so ethicists run the risk of neglecting those virtues that aim towards positive environmental impacts in the form of political and social change. As Sandler notes, “Virtues of environmental activism have been somewhat overlooked and underappreciated by environmental ethicists in comparison with other environmental virtues... it is tempting to contemplate our environmental heroes as walkers in the woods or hikers of the mountains. The image is of an individual with personal excellence flourishing in harmony with and appreciation of the wild (or near wild environments)” (Sandler 2007, 49). However, the virtues that lead to greater social change have become more prominent with the rise of greater political activism for climate change. Ethicists should not ignore the impact of such virtues when looking at anthropogenic climate change.

As we aim towards a life of flourishing, the cultivation of character also includes *public virtues*. Public virtues promote the flourishing of the community rather than the direct flourishing of the individual. However, the difference between public and personal virtue is one of emphasis rather than essence (Treanor 2010, 13). One may hold the virtue of compassion in their personal life and exercise it accordingly. They may be compassionate towards those directly around them. However, they may not exercise the same virtue to the benefit of the wider community, instead merely showing disinterest in community affairs. As such, what differentiates these from personal virtues is that “public virtues are character traits that bring us into virtuous relationships with our communities and environments (Treanor 2010, 18). However, in doing so the individual nonetheless indirectly benefits as a result of these virtues, through the cultivation of the community (Treanor 2010, 15). As Brian Treanor points out, often times environmental virtues more generally focus on the benefit and flourishing of the individual agent, to the neglect of the benefit of the community. However, we as humans work and exist within those groups. As such, “we cannot fully flourish unless we flourish as *members of a community*”(Treanor 2010, 22). Public virtues and the promotion of community flourishing is essential for our own individual flourishing.

For example, those who create community gardens, local cooperatives, lecture on the problems of climate change, and engage the community in meaningful ways, are all

opportunities to cultivate public virtues. These public virtues may include but are not limited to, self-sacrifice, commitment, neighbourliness, humility, wisdom, learning and care (Treanor 2010, 19). Similarly, activists who protest the continuation of fossil fuel usage have the opportunity to exercise similar dispositions. Ronald Sandler highlights multiple possible virtues of environmental activism (Sandler 2007, 82). Some of these virtues include cooperativeness, perseverance, and optimism. Brian Treanor also identifies a subset of public virtues in the form of *political virtues*. Political virtues are held by those who are intellectually, and practically engaged with the issues that can lead to community flourishing (Treanor 2010, 18). They may manifest more prominently in people who are politically engaged and thus these virtues will feature more prominently in their individual human flourishing. People who hold these specific political virtues may act as educators, political commentators, environmentally focused politicians, and environmental lobbyists.

While Trainor makes a distinction between public and political virtue, he implies that all public virtues are inherently political due to the values that public virtues promote (Treanor 2010, 18). For example, someone who creates a community garden from a sense of neighbourliness implies certain political values. These may or may not include developing less dependency on monocultural practices, a greater sense of solidarity within communities, food sovereignty, and connecting more with the land we use. In this sense, public virtues can be broadly political. Public virtues strive towards community flourishing through the promotion of implied political values. For this reason, when speaking of public virtues, I am referring to *all* public virtue that promote the flourishing of the community, including the political virtues as defined by Trainor. What remains the same throughout all these accounts is that these public virtues are aimed towards community flourishing.

Whether it be through activism, politics, or community engagement, the ways in which these public virtues show themselves is very dependent on our individual circumstances. Much like personal virtues, public virtues are non-codifiable and do not prescribe strict ethical action guidance. As Philip Cafaro says, we must “find sustainable ways to engage in politics. Ideally, we will find political roles that we enjoy” (Cafaro 2005, 153). There are many opportunities to exercise these public virtues to promote the flourishing of the communities we are a part of. Within the Anthropocene that means partaking in activities that are conducive to the survival of our species. Let us return to Sandler’s pluralistic teleology briefly. In promoting a teleology that includes species survival, we change what the virtues are and how they manifest themselves. This also applies to public virtues that promote the

flourishing of the community. Much like individual flourishing, community flourishing ought to promote species survival. As such, public virtues promote ends for the community that ensure its continuance within the Anthropocene. This would lead to larger social changes within our communities, as many of our current practices and societal habits are not conducive to overcoming Anthropogenic climate change. As such, many of the public virtues that aim towards species survival would greatly influence a community's view of what "the good life" is (Treanor 2010, 16). In this way, public virtues are capable of creating the necessary conditions for larger, species wide changes to what constitutes human flourishing. However, unlike species virtues they are embodied traits for individuals, rather than abstract virtues that relate to our entire species and the responsibility it has. Public virtues offer individualised character traits that can lead to community flourishing in a realistic and motivating way. With this comes a far greater potential for institutional change beyond personal virtues, as public virtues have the potential to reform our unsustainable practices at a larger scale. By returning focus to individual character within the Anthropocene, we are able to highlight ways in which these public virtues may overcome the larger institutional issues that arise from climate change. However, such issues are not solved with public virtue alone. We have to ensure such public virtues are supported with the right environmental dispositions to lead to effective change.

3.2 Personal and Public Virtue

While public virtues may be effective to creating larger community change, this has to be supported with the virtues that lead to environmentally sound progress. For that, it is important that we also cultivate personal virtues alongside them. This is not only necessary for our own flourishing, but to also ensure that community flourishing aims towards environment sustainability. Both personal and public virtues are necessary for a life of flourishing. Personal virtues are important to cultivate the attitudes, emotions, and actions necessary to live sustainably on this world. Wonder, ecological sensitivity and simplicity can help us act in ways that realise what a life of flourishing looks in respect to the natural world. Beyond coping with anthropogenic climate change, personal virtues allow us to gain a better insight of our position within nature as both species and individual. It allows us to understand how we have faltered up until this point to allow climate change to occur. As Cafaro states, "To know nothing of wild nature is thus necessary to fail to properly contextualise our own lives". (Cafaro 2012, 87). Personal virtues help to rightly orient us with nature, and to understand that "human excellence and nature's excellence are necessarily entwined" (Cafaro

2012, 84). However, it is public virtues that can instil us with the necessary dispositions to create larger systematic changes so that all people may realise this “good” life. Given the constrained timeline we now have to mitigate our emissions, public virtues are critical to realising our survival and flourishing. It seems that “political engagement is at least as important as simplicity, arguably more so... Today environmentalists need a bit less communion with nature and a bit more political organizing”(Treanor 2010, 21). However, focusing on those virtues that can bring about community changes, have to be supported by personal virtues.

It can be difficult to fully conceptualise how virtues (both public and personal) can create the change necessary to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. It is easy to see how a local politician can uphold virtues of self-sacrifice and humility in order to serve virtuously as a public servant. While the benefit of these public virtues are more noticeable at a local level, they can be focused at a local, national or even global level (Treanor 2010, 19). Rachel Fredericks perfectly illustrates this through the ways in which *courage* may act as a public virtue at both a local and national level (Fredericks 2014, 348). She recounts the story of Julia Butterfly Hill who is well known for protesting against the logging of redwood trees in Humboldt County. In spending months aloft in the redwood trees Hill had to face extreme weather and storms, as well as constant harassment from police and loggers. She did this in order to save a large section of trees from commercial logging. Such acts “certainly seems to requires physical courage in addition to the moral courage involved in taking a stand on behalf of those trees” (Fredericks 2014, 349). Acting as a single individual, Hill was successful in stopping the logging of the trees, despite the apathy from both corporations and government institutions. Likewise, Fredericks illustrates the ways in which activists and protestors exhibit both physical and moral courage. When activists protested against the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, they faced physical dangers through arrest and jail time. However also nonphysical danger through dangers associated with being arrested, demonised by the public, and taking time from other commitments like family and work” (Fredericks 2014, 348). While this was the protest of a single piece of infrastructure, such movements have been large enough to completely transform institutions, whether through reformation or revolution. These public virtues, while dispositions of individuals have scalable impacts depending on how they are exercised.

Both these examples do not merely show how public virtues may be used to create institutional change from one’s individual character. They also illustrate the ways in which

personal and public virtues inform one another to make proper virtuous decisions. This highlights the reciprocal nature of the virtues in which “exercising political virtues cultivates and supports other virtues, which, in turn, support political virtue”(Treanor 2010, 23). From Hill we see the way in which personal virtues like ecological sensitivity and wonder can also inform our public virtue so that we can act courageously in the right ways. Similarly, activists who protest climate apathy do so because “of their commitment to the value of environments” and exercise virtues of attunement and farsightedness alongside courage (Fredericks 2014, 349). It is these personal virtues that allow us to not only strive for a climate positive future, but also ensure that the community we create is one that is harmonious with nature. In the Anthropocene, it is essential we see the value of public virtue for the role it has in creating change. However, we must also not lose sight of the personal virtues that allow us to properly respect and attune with nature.

3.3 Responsibility

Looking at these public virtues, we may wonder how they differ from species virtues. After all, public virtues look to promote the flourishing of the community and indirectly benefit the flourishing of the individual. One may argue that the species virtues of Thompson and Krakoff indirectly benefit the individual by promoting the flourishing of a larger community – humanity. Planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere offer an indirect benefit for the individual, insofar as they create a habitable world to continue living on. When it comes to our responsibility as planetary stewards “the flourishing of life on earth... depends on exercising this power well”(Thompson 2012, 218). Thus, these species virtues may be construed as more inclusive public virtues that is shared among members of humanity.

Thompson in particular roots his virtue of responsibility for the biosphere in a *shared* responsibility for the global climate. Drawing from Iris Marion Young’s definition of political responsibility, he states that this responsibility is “distributed to each because the contributions of each member ‘cannot be isolated and identified’ “ (Thompson 2012, 211). As such, the outcome of this responsibility in which we create a habitable planet does not belong to any one individual. Instead, we as humans “have a shared moral responsibility for global climate change” (Thompson 2012, 211). In this way, Thompson is proposing a new virtue through conceptualising the responsibility for climate change as a collective one. Much like Treanor, Thompson recognises the link between individual flourishing and the wider community. He states “insofar as a person plays the role of global citizen, she is made good

by the virtue of political responsibility” (Thompson 2012, 216). This species virtue is rooted in the idea of a “world citizenship” in which we cannot annul our status as part of this collective, and so we bare this shared responsibility.

From this we may start to see how a responsibility for the biosphere may act as a public virtue. However, when describing public virtues, they are often dispositions held by the individual. One can exhibit neighbourliness, hope, or self-sacrifice towards their community in order to help it flourish. While the impact of these virtues may not be global in scale, they nonetheless have the ability to aim towards community flourishing. Thompson describes the virtue of responsibility as “a capacity with respect to taking care of multiple requirements that accompany one’s role, to be willing and able to do one’s best (with a reasonable chance of success) to ensure that things come out right” (Thompson 2012, 216). Thompson highlights that this responsibility does not fall on any one individual (Thompson 2012, 211). It is shared among all, as we cannot properly isolate and define where such responsibility lays. With that comes an understanding that no one individual can uphold it. However, when this responsibility is transformed into a virtue and extrapolated towards a global biosphere, it is unclear how one is supposed to do their best in ensuring the ideal outcome for the global climate as an individual. If such a responsibility requires a reasonable chance of success, the virtue of responsibility for the biosphere is too demanding for the individual and arguably impossible to uphold. Even if we concede that responsibility for the biosphere is a virtue we can develop, we are left wondering how to properly fulfil that responsibility. Since we cannot uphold the requirements to fulfil a responsibility for the global biosphere, framing it as a public virtue becomes problematic.

What I think is more realistic, is to acknowledge such a responsibility cannot reasonably be portrayed as an embodyable virtue. Both planetary stewardship and responsibility for the biosphere are aiming towards dispositions that can ensure a habitable climate for humanity to flourish and overcome the corruption of climate change. Part of that corruption stems from a displacement of responsibility to act, as it “is difficult to identify the agents and the victims or the causal nexus that obtains between them”(Jamieson 2010, 436). Thompson aims to overcome this and reform this responsibility in the form of a virtue. However, it is unsuccessful because a responsibility for the entire biosphere is not something that can be properly undertaken. Even when we understand that we have a responsibility to change our actions, “issues involving indirect causation fail to trigger motivating moral emotions”(Jenkins 2016). There is a difference between justification in the form of political

responsibility, and motivation by painting that responsibility as a virtue. In framing this responsibility as a virtue, we are unable to properly fulfil this responsibility. So long as the narrative of climate change is dispersed as a collective responsibility in the way Thompson does, the incentive to act is likewise diffused.

While focusing on the larger collective of humanity, these species virtues do not act as public virtues. While Thompson tries to link a responsibility for the biosphere to the concept of a global community, framing this responsibility as a virtue disperses that responsibility once again. The political responsibility that Thompson outlined is not a virtue that we can readily embody. Moreover, dispersing this responsibility among a collective reduces our incentive to act. In such instances, a turn to political institutions would help to overcome these issues. However, as we know Gardiner identified how climate change has made these institutions morally complacent. Nonetheless, fulfilment of the political responsibility that Thompson outlined can begin to be fulfilled through a return to individual character and public virtue. The complexity of climate change makes it difficult to highlight how responsibility can be assigned to any one agent or individual (Jamieson 2010, 440). However, through political institutions we are able to shift this responsibility to those who have a greater capacity to solve the issue. It is political institutions that are legitimised through the delegation of citizen responsibilities to them (Gardiner 2011b, 54). Ideally this would mean assigning the responsibility for the global biosphere. However, the temporal lag and geographic disparity of climate change has left many of these institutions vulnerable to the corruption of climate change. When institutions fail to act and “the attempt to delegate effectively has failed, then the responsibility falls back on the citizen again, either to solve the problem themselves or, if this is not possible, to create new institutions to do the job” (Gardiner 2011b, 54). Due to the large scale of climate change, individuals are unable to properly solve the problem themselves when institutions fail. We are left wondering what solutions there are if responsibility cannot be properly fulfilled by individuals, and institutions are too susceptible to the moral corruption of climate change. However, as Gardiner noted we do have the capacity to create new institutions to uphold the political responsibility that Thompson identified. So long as we have the motivation and character, we can reimagine such institutions in a way that allows for the systematic changes necessary to overcome the apathy caused by climate change.

3.4 Role Models

By returning to individual virtues, we are able to access moral tools that help develop our moral character. These tools not only help us to flourish but motivate those around us to walk a similar path. One clear way in which we may realise what it means to flourish within the Anthropocene is by looking at those individuals who hold the necessary virtues to do so. The use of role models has been widely acknowledged as a critical part of our moral education and development towards being more virtuous individuals. This is also something that Sandler acknowledges when describing principles of right action within his work (Sandler 2007, 111). However, he does not offer a strong account of the ways in which role models may develop our understanding of the virtues. Nonetheless, by looking to role models we can not only see the way in which the virtues manifest, but also be motivated to embody them ourselves.

Linda Zagzebski has gone to great lengths to emphasise this within her book *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Zagzebski, 2017). While the term exemplars may be misleading, she notes that role models do not have to be fully virtuous people. She does not think that “exemplars must be admirable to the highest degree in every one of their acquired traits... these people are exemplars of a certain trait – courage, compassion, justice” (Zagzebski 2017, 65). It is important to note here that Zagzebski identifies the virtues through the emotion of admiration. While her theory is still eudemonistic in that it aims towards a life of flourishing, that flourishing is dictated by what is admirable rather than a strictly defined teleology. Nonetheless, her insight into role models is relevant as it offers insight into the way such people can act as a tool to individuate, classify and cultivate the virtues within ourselves (Croce and Silvia Vaccarezza 2017). It is by looking to role models of particular virtues that we can derive how to act in ways that are aligned with the virtues those role models hold. A better way to illustrate this is by giving an example.

Rob Greenfield is a self-proclaimed activist, environmentalist and humanitarian who has dedicated much of his time to living a more sustainable life. He holds that our actions as individuals matter, and have the power to influence the world around us (Greenfield 2021). Many of the projects he embarks on has him living to extremes in order to highlight alternative ways of living that are more conducive to a sustainable and habitable world. He became well known after living an entire year off of food he foraged and grew in his own backyard. He did this to highlight the ways in which we can be less reliant on mass monocultural systems of agriculture. Since then, he has focused on reducing his material

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possessions down to where they can all fit in a single backpack. Much of his attention is placed on community engagement and solidarity, while also promoting actions that will lead to a more habitable world for all of us. From his work he donates 100% of his media earnings to charity in order to stay below the U.S. poverty level.

Looking to Greenfield's activities we may identify a number of virtues being exemplified. We might see him as a role model for personal virtues of frugality and temperance through the reduction of his own possessions. His justification for living this way stems from an understanding that western consumerist ideals are not conducive with a habitable world. Likewise, we see public virtues of self-sacrifice and neighbourliness exhibited through the money he donates to charities and invests in local communities. Rob Greenfield may not exemplify all of these virtues and may not be a fully virtuous person. He nonetheless serves as a role model from which to learn about key environmental virtues. It goes without saying that the practices of Rob Greenfield are extreme. He openly admits that, and does not advocate for everyone to live the way he does (Greenfield 2021). However, as Linda Zagzebski reiterates, "Living virtuously sometimes puts the aspects of life we naturally desire at risk. In fact, that is one of the reasons we admire exemplars. We see that they find something more important than health, long life, and comfortable circumstances, and we find that uplifting" (Zagzebski 2017, 160). In foregoing many of the luxuries and conveniences of modern life, Rob offers a reconceptualization of what it means to flourish within the Anthropocene. He does so through the habituation of both personal and public virtues that he has cultivated throughout the years. While not all of us will choose to relinquish ourselves of our possessions, we develop an understanding of the ways in which we can exercise the virtues that role models like Rob Greenfield exemplify.

What role models like Greenfield do, is give us an idea of what it looks like to adopt the virtues within the Anthropocene. Thompson suggest we need to reconceptualise the virtues to cope with the cultural upheaval that climate change will cause if we are to survive it (Thompson 2010, 44). He states that many of the changes necessary in order to achieve this will requires major lifestyle changes and conceptions of what it means to live well. This requires a radical hope in which "an inadequate grasp of the good should not lead one to believing it is not to be hoped for" in order to achieve this (Thompson 2010, 49). Thompson uses this radical hope to justify the emergence of the new species virtue in the form of responsibility for the biosphere. However, as I have illustrated such virtues deemphasises the role of the individual within the conversation around virtue ethics. This causes them to lack

the necessary role models to inform what virtues are necessary in the face of this cultural upheaval. However, a role model like Greenfield can act as a source for what the virtues may look like. Rob offers an idea of how we may move away from the unsustainable practices that contributed to climate change, by exemplifying different virtues of simplicity and neighbourliness. In doing so, we see the ways in which role models may not only classify and cultivate the virtues, but also conceptualise what a life of flourishing may look like in this new imagining of our world. This is something that is not gained if we focus on species virtues like Thompson and Krakoff promote.

For example, Sarah Krakoff offers multiple examples of collectives and communities that she thinks are acting with the planetary stewardship necessary to move into a new stage of humanity (Krakoff 2011, 157). These range from cities and government agencies to the Inuit community and religious groups. She describes how cities throughout the US have established their own emission reduction targets, and goes on to describe how such acts put pressure on state and federal governments to enact policies to meet certain climate targets (Krakoff 2011, 158). She states such activities “reflect a shift in the way that we conceive of our role on the planet, and the identities that we are constriction to make our lives have meaning”(Krakoff 2011, 162). However, such accounts fail to offer proper role models to us. We cannot derive virtues from these examples of planetary stewardship, as the characteristics they exhibit are not embodyable by individuals. The ways in which larger collectives act do not offer the same insight into the virtues as individual role models do. Since role models for planetary steward exemplify that species virtue, and species virtue are not dispositions that individuals can embody, the role model becomes ineffective. As such, we have no point of reference from which to develop planetary stewardship within ourselves as a virtue. Simply put, we do not know what the characteristics of a planetary steward are.

However, there is something interesting to note here. In her portrayal of Carbon Rationing Action Groups (CRAGS) as a role mode of planetary stewardship, she describes a member of the organisation (Krakoff 2011, 161). She refers to a CRAG member by the name of Jacqueline Sheedy who reads by candlelight, hauls freshwater to her community by bicycle, and aims to only burn wood as a source of heat. While Krakoff doesn't give us many details about this person, we see how she may be offering a justifiable role model. Rather than exhibiting a planetary stewardship, we see possible virtues of neighbourliness or simplicity. Not just from one individual, but for all who partake in the collective CRAGS community. In using its member in order to articulate the practices of CRAGS, she has effectively offered a

justifiable role model of both personal and public virtue. What we see is not a collective exhibiting a single virtue of planetary stewardship, but rather many individuals exhibiting various public and personal virtues to form a collective. We may say that CRAGS holds a planetary stewardship to some degree, however, that arose from embodyable virtues that allowed such stewardship to arise. Such collectives begin by first having role models from which to inspire us to act virtuously.

What we can understand from this is that focusing on individual character offers us access to the ethical tool of role models. Such role models offer insight into how the virtues manifest within us. By looking at a role model like Rob Greenfield, we start to see ways in which role models can help us actualise these virtues. Thompson resorted to a radical hope in the face of our cultural upheaval, as a way to cope with the unknowingness the Anthropocene. However, particular role models like Rob Greenfield can offer us insight into what this looks like. While Krakoff attempts to convey a planetary stewardship through different communities and institutions, these fail to offer the role models necessary to classify the virtues. However, by looking at the individuals who make up those collectives, we see the formation of virtuous communities.

3.5 Building Community

The motivation to overcome our moral corruption stems from those role models who exemplify the virtues. The motivation that role models trigger can stir the necessary actions to create new communities in order to overcome the apathy we see towards climate change. This is especially true of public virtues that aim towards the flourishing of the community. Paired with public virtues, role models can act as motivators to encourage beneficial actions within communities that allow us to reimagine the institutions that Gardiner saw as morally complacent.

This can be seen if we return to the CRAGS example that Sarah Krakoff offered. While Krakoff aimed to use this example of a community embodying planetary stewardship, such an example cannot act as an effective role model. Rather, what we see in these collectives are a number of individual people all exhibiting virtuous behaviour. People who are part of these communities that aim towards a low-carbon lifestyle, are doing so as they believe such actions lead to community flourishing. As Krakoff herself states these people “are creating daily habits and rituals that make our [their] lives feel good and meaningful”, and such activity is aiming towards a fully realised human life”(Krakoff 2011, 162). As such, public

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virtues of self-sacrifice, community concern, humility and care are necessary in order for these communities to be realised. Returning to the example of Rob Greenfield, while he exhibits personal virtues of simplicity and frugality, he also exercises virtues of self-sacrifice and neighbourliness. These virtues have manifested themselves alongside his personal virtues in order to create community projects that aim towards collective engagement and solidarity. Many of the projects he partakes in rely on community engagement, as he himself as professed that he is reliant on the goodwill of others (Greenfield 2021).

Through exemplifying these public virtues that aim towards community flourishing, these individual role models motivate those around them to act similarly. This motivation causes others to join them in their efforts to realise the full flourishing of the community and the individuals within them. When this is paired with a pluralistic teleology, that flourishing also includes species survival. As such, personal virtues such as ecological sensitivity and simplicity go on to inform the ways in which individuals aim towards community flourishing. This will look different depending on the community, its situation and cultural norms, as virtues are pluralistic and non-codifiable (Sandler 2007, 111). What is true, is that through role models that exhibit public virtue alongside personal virtues, we *can* be motivated to act in ways that form new communities that replace the corrupt institutions we currently have. These corrupt institutions that have not been motivated to uphold the necessary virtues that will see us through the Anthropocene.

Climate change has put humanity in a dire situation. It is understandable to doubt whether or not the motivational capacity of role models is enough to create the institutions necessary to solve the issues of climate change. Treanor notes that exemplars of public virtue may sway *some* people, however, he doubts whether this is enough to overcome our environmental issues (Treanor 2010, 16). Likewise, Sandler questions the efficacy of role models when he states that “it is not often the case that what a single person does impacts the behaviour of many others or is crucial to bringing about systematic reform”(Sandler 2010, 178). Both authors recognising the importance of role models and their motivation capacity within virtue ethics. Nonetheless, there is doubt whether or not this is enough to motivate people to create institutions to replace the corrupt ones we currently have.

It is still questionable whether role models or the virtues more widely have the capacity to overcome the moral corruption of climate change. However, both Gardiner and Jamieson recognised that the virtues were an important part of creating new institutions. Jamieson

believed that the virtues helped to create the solidarity and sympathy necessary to creating such communities (Jamieson 2007, 15). Gardiner also saw virtue as an important part in channelling our motivation and character to overcome the corruption that so many institutions have fallen prey to (Gardiner 2011b, 442). Refocusing on individual character allows us to realise what it means to flourish within the Anthropocene, despite this uncertainty. With that comes the cultivation and promotion of public virtues that aim towards community flourishing. Part of that community flourishing involves grappling with the uncertainty of our future and aiming to survive as a species. While role models and their motivational capacity may not be solely enough to overcome the corruption that so many institutions have fallen prey to, they offer us a *chance* to create opportunities to overcome this corruption in a time where very few chances are available to us. This has to be paired with the personal dispositions that allow us to realise a life of flourishing that is conducive with the natural world. However, such opportunities only arise once we return to the individual virtues that cultivate them. While the virtues may only be enacted by individuals, they have the potential to change our corrupt ways, so long as we have the motivation to do it.

4.0 Conclusion

Climate change poses an immeasurable threat to humanity. So much so that we are not properly able to conceive of the dangers it poses to us, or the impact we are having on the world. We are removed from the consequences of our actions through both time and space and fall victim to a moral apathy in which nothing meaningful is done. Gardiner and Jamieson have proposed we return to individual character to motivate us to overcome this moral corruption. While authors like Krakoff and Thompson extrapolated on this by offering differing species virtues, they deemphasise the capacity for individuals to adopt such character traits. In turn, we return to a moral complacency in which we are no longer motivated to overcome the moral corruption that Gardiner identified. However, this can be overcome by reimagining what it means to flourish as a human by recognising the survival of the human species as part of our individual flourishing. In doing so, we are able to cultivate the proper virtues that aim towards this end.

Once we return to a concept of individual character, we can return our focus to public virtues that lead to the betterment of our communities. Paired with personal virtues, we can cultivate our character to overcome the corruption of climate change at a systematic level. With the help of role models to motivate us, we can start to form communities that offer us a new

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conception of flourishing within the Anthropocene. Through this we may have the opportunity to recreate institutions that no longer fall victim to the moral corruption of climate change. It is by returning to our individual character, those virtues that lead to a life of flourishing for both ourselves and our community, that can offer us this hope. If we are lucky enough and seize the opportunities to act virtuously, we may be able to overcome our own apathy in the Anthropocene.

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