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Community Engagement Project – Scripts for Video Series

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Animal Ethics and Moral Status; Rewilding; Industrial Animal Farms, Care Ethics, and the Ethics of Meat-Eating

Animal Ethics and Moral Status

This series explores the question of the proper ethical treatment of nonhuman animals. In this section, we'll look at various criteria put forth by philosophers around what qualifies an organism to have moral status. That is, to be worthy of our moral consideration. Through this examination we notice the various justifications for human superiority, and the ways in which we've made our species out to be

special and distinct from the rest of animals. This supposed superiority is what allows us use animals in problematic ways, such as in animal factory farms, experimentation in research labs, or circuses and zoos. Therefore, we deconstruct those justifications of human superiority, those supposed differences between humans and other animals, that rob them of moral worth and permit us to mistreat animals. Our goal is to see whether there's a legitimate moral defense for the problematic ways in which we currently use animals. Or, if our current interactions with other animals are not morally justified, and therefore, we must change our practices.

Of course, note that humans and animals can be different in some ways, while also maintaining that animals have moral status for other reasons. In other words, differences between species doesn't equate to hierarchy and permission to treat animals with cruelty. These differences, then, would be considered non-moral differences, as they don't factor into moral status. I wanted to include this for the sake of clarity, but of course, we'll be examining potential moral differences in this inquiry.

Okay, let's begin with two hypothetical situations, so that you can observe your intuitions and whether they change as we move through the discussion. First, imagine you're watching a person walk their dog, and you witness someone come up and kick the dog, and then kick the person. In your mind, are these two acts equally wrong? Or does it feel more wrong to kick the person than the dog?

Or second, consider this example... You're eating a meal with chicken in it, as you hear from a friend that their dog was kicked, and you learn the news that a crate of cats was dumped in a nearby lake, and that one of the world's last remaining white rhinos was trophy hunted. You feel outraged at these abuses to the dog, cat, and rhino. Okay, that was the example. The question is, why is it that some people would find these all to be awful and morally disagreeable acts, while also eating meat from industrial animal farms? For example, chickens in industrial farms are kept in a 1ft x 1ft space, their beaks are clipped so they don't peck each other, and they're killed when they stop laying eggs. Clearly

this is a harmful act, but why do we object to hurting a dog while participating in meat consumption that hurts these farm animals, like chickens? Basically, why do some people care about certain animals more than others? Why is there an inconsistency in our attitudes, or a gradient among which animals matter most? Is there a legitimate moral justification for treating some animals better than other animals, and for treating humans better than nonhuman animals altogether?

It's a general goal of philosophy to make our actions and beliefs be consistent with each other, rather than being contradictory. This means we must treat different animals equally, and treat humans and animals equally, if their morally relevant characteristics are alike. In other words, we're only justified to treat humans and animals differently, if it's indeed the case that humans and animals differ morally. Similarly, we can only treat dogs and cows differently, if it can be shown that they differ morally. And so the question is, what makes something matter morally? Basically, how does one come to have moral status, and be deserving of moral consideration? This is the central question underlying animal ethics.

Throughout the history of Western philosophy, most philosophers have thought that only humans have moral status, simply because we're humans. In this view, only humans have intrinsic value, which means the value that something has in and of itself – that is, it doesn't require the addition of anything else to make it valuable, it has its own value. Meanwhile, this view goes, other animals are merely instrumentally valuable, which means that their value comes from their ability to help something achieve a goal – namely, that animals help humans meet their needs of food or clothes. Basically, on this view, animals aren't valuable in and of themselves, but they're only valuable because they help humans. In a nutshell, it's intrinsic value for humans, and instrumental value for nonhuman animals.

To be clear, this view comes from tradition – for example, our culture has historically raised farm animals for meat consumption, and we've hunted and fished. However, tradition, on its own, is not a legitimate moral justification for doing something. For example, it may be part of a culture's tradition

to own human slaves, but this clearly doesn't justify the practice of slavery. Other people seek to justify this unequal arrangement between humans and animals, by claiming that we have a need to eat animal meat in order to survive. But empirical data from nutrition science, shows that humans can be healthy without consuming meat. And still other people seek to justify this view of using animals for our human purposes, by pointing to economic benefits. That is, the claim that industrial farms contribute to our country's economy. However, again, the abolition of slavery in the U.S. South upset economic arrangements that depended on Black slave labor, but most of us would agree this abolition was the morally justified outcome. Hence, economic productivity on its own is not morally relevant.

So then, we're still left with this significant question – why do humans alone supposedly have this special moral status? Why do we matter more than nonhuman animals? If it were true that only humans have moral status, and no other organisms do, then we must demonstrate that there are morally relevant differences between humans and other species. I'll now share various criteria that philosophers have offered in the past, that would qualify humans for this special moral status. As I share these, we'll look at responses and rebuttals to see if the argument holds up.

So, many philosophers, including Descartes, answer this question of moral differences by pointing to rationality – or the ability that humans possess to reason, in order to find the truth of something. Other philosophers point to language, or self-awareness, or some other impressive cognitive capacity.

However, here's a response to that. Peter Singer says that whichever human characteristic you point to as giving us a special moral status that other animals lack, well, you can find examples of other animals displaying this trait to the same or greater degree than certain humans. In other words, any characteristic that we say is morally relevant, actually turns out to be shared across species and not unique to humans alone. For example, certain primates display cognitive abilities that a human baby, or

a severely cognitively handicapped person cannot. Indeed, the infant or cognitively disabled person may not be able to exercise rationality, or use language, or be self-aware. And yet, our intuition is that we wouldn't throw these people under the bus. And further, that it would be unjust to treat infants and disabled people worst than middle-aged, able-bodied people. Rather, we think these people of course still matter and deserve moral consideration. So this shows that intellectual capacities alone cannot give humans special moral status.

Or, another possible criterion for human's special moral status is that we belong to the Homo Sapiens species. But stop and reflect, does this seem right to you? If you say that it's simply our membership in the species homo sapiens that gives us special moral status, then how is this any different than the injustice of giving one social group greater moral consideration than another social group? For example, the sexism of valuing men over women, or the racism of valuing white people over people of color. Clearly membership in the species homo sapiens is not a good reason for special moral status, and we can reject this criterion as speciesism. Speciesism is defined as "giving preference to our own species over another, in the absence of morally relevant differences."

Fortunately, things take a turn here, as some philosophers have given criteria for moral status that expand the circle beyond humans. Bentham and Mill say that moral consideration requires something to have "sentience," that is, the ability to experience pleasure or pain. Singer says that pleasure is intrinsically good, while pain is intrinsically bad. Therefore, we should equally consider the pleasure and pain that any organism feels, not just humans. This expands the circle of moral status to nonhuman animals, who can also feel pleasure and pain. The idea is that if you're sentient, then it matters to you how your life goes, and so your interests must be accounted for. Recall our earlier example. If the person kicked a rock, you likely wouldn't feel that anyone was wronged. You likely feel that it's wrong because they kicked a dog and a person, who both feel pleasure and pain, and whose interests it's in to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Singer calls this the “equal consideration of interests,” meaning, we must equally consider the interests of all sentient beings. Since all sentient beings have an interest in avoiding pain, it would be unjust to value human’s interest in avoiding pain over other animals’ interest in avoiding pain. This doesn’t mean that we must treat animals identically to how we treat humans – as different species have different things that are good for them – but rather, it’s simply that we must consider the preference for pleasure and avoidance of pain equally amongst all species. Basically, human’s ability to feel pleasure or pain doesn’t matter more than other animal’s ability to feel pleasure or pain. And therefore, if we wouldn’t do some harmful act to a person, like kicking them, or raising them for meat, then we shouldn’t do this harmful act to other sentient animals either.

However, sentience as a criterion for moral consideration can also be criticized. If the ability to feel pleasure or pain evolved in organisms to help them survive and reproduce, then why is this survival strategy valued over other organisms who lack sentience but survive and reproduce in different ways? In this way, some philosophers argue that all living organisms, whether or not they can experience pleasure or pain, have moral status. Therefore, plants would also have moral status. Furthermore, some philosophers extend the circle of moral consideration to include holistic entities like rivers, mountains, and forests. However, this would be an entirely new video.

Finally, before wrapping up, there’s one last question to pose. Why should you care if nonhuman animals have moral status? I mean, if you eat meat, and all your friends eat meat, why should you care to stop? Well, recall that philosophers want people’s actions to be internally consistent. If you wouldn’t eat the meat of a human (ick), or the meat of your dog after it passes away, then why eat beef? If the reasons I’ve shared for the moral status of animals don’t matter, then you’re sort of saying that rationality, and the giving of reasons, doesn’t matter at all. Why give reasons for anything then? In this way, the floodgate is open – why not be a racist or sexist or speciesist, if reasons against these things don’t matter? Obviously this seems wrong, and so I hope you agree that carefully

considering these reasons is important to do. Of course, it's challenging to critically reflect on and change your own beliefs and actions, but this is part of the rich value of philosophy, and it's also where personal growth lies.

In conclusion, after hearing these arguments for moral status, where do you wind up? Do you think that only humans have moral status, or that all sentient animals (both human and nonhuman) have moral status, or that all living organisms, including plants and fungi, have moral status? And whichever position you're convinced by, what does this mean for how you lead your life and act in the world?

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Rewilding

In this video I'm going to share about the practice of Rewilding, which is increasingly gaining popularity, while raising a host of ethical dilemmas and questions of justice. I see Rewilding as a remedy for some of the horror stories of the times we're living in – namely, the 6th mass extinction that scientists say we're entering, in which current extinction rates are 1000x the Earth's typical background rate. Rewilding has this transformative potential because it can move humans from the position of being the agents of other species' extinctions, to humans as helpers in other species' rebounding population numbers, as they return from the brink of extinction and move towards flourishing.

So, how does rewilding work? Well, it is a cousin of ecological restoration work. Rewilding is done through the deliberate and carefully observed reintroduction of animals and plants, especially high-impact and keystone species, who are locally extinct from the places they traditionally lived. For example, the 2005 Pleistocene Rewilding Plan proposes the return of wild horses, lions, cheetahs, camels, giant tortoises, and elephants to the North American continent. Other less ambitious plans that still have great ecological value, might reintroduce beavers, quail, or Shagbark hickory trees. Beavers in particular act as ecosystem engineers to provide widespread benefits, including to humans. Their dams slow the flow of water and act as flood mitigation, while allowing water to infiltrate into the surrounding soil and re-fill a depleted groundwater table. They also create habitat for other species: the slow pools of water formed by their dams can attract insects, and hence fish and birds who like to eat these insects, and larger animals that prey on fish.

Philosopher Andrea Gammon adds the following characteristics to rewilding: it aims to restore damaged ecosystems to a state of self-sustained and dynamic functionality, in which human management becomes increasingly unnecessary; it's defended by trophic cascade theory, within the field of ecology; rewilding often entails removing impediments to migratory patterns, such as dismantling dams and fences; it re-imagines the relationships between humans and nonhumans, since it values the growing autonomy of nonhuman species to exist independent of human management; and

finally, unlike ecological restoration that aims to achieve a specific result, or a specific past ecosystem, rewilding instead embraces the emergence of new ecological possibilities. Restoration is more past-focused, while rewilding is more future-focused. However, rewilding can research the species that used to live in a place, as a broad, general guide for which species to reintroduce. It's just that rewilding is not set on perfectly replicating some past ecosystem. Of course, ethical issues abound, and I'm now going to discuss a number of these, in some detail.

First, there are dilemmas with rewilding megafauna like lions or bears. These animals likely don't appeal to the majority of folks, who fear encounters with large predators, in particular. Our culture has imagined that humans are outside of the ecological food chain – we can eat other animals, but not be eaten by them in turn – and therefore, we see it as de-humanizing to be the prey of another animal. This is due to our culturally held fear of death, as well as the existential anxiety of our own vulnerability, because we're organisms with a body that's subject to risk and potential harm. Furthermore, it likely turns out that giving large predators the respect they deserve, means honoring their boundaries and space, and not encroaching on their habitat, range, and migration routes.

Hence, if we rewilded large predators, it may be most ethical that we don't interact with them very often at all. While returning large predators to a region from which they're locally extinct is good for them, and likely has positive impacts throughout the ecosystem, it's nonetheless the case that rewilding animals who are less dangerous to humans may provide for more interaction between us and them.

There is a risk of using these animals in a problematic way – such that we're employing them simply as a tool to clean up the ecological mess we've created – and therefore, it's very important that rewilding is joined by narratives of these animals as partners in a shared vision of multi-species flourishing. For example, we shouldn't think of beavers as our little workers or slaves, but rather as

partners in which we share similar goals. Therefore, we should practice honor, respect, admiration, gratitude, and care for these animals.

Another important question is: whose land is being used for rewilding, and what are the varying power balances and interests among the stakeholders? Are the benefits of rewilding equally distributed among people, and does anyone become disadvantaged? For example, if mountain lions are being reintroduced to an area, are farmers able to weigh in on this decision, since their herds might face increased predation and there's a potential threat to their livelihood?

Another issue that Gammon raises is, what will happen to those cultural places, or those human-built monuments, that can be held dear by our society? Is it justified to demolish an old church or convert a cherished park for rewilding? Further, how can we rewild suburban and urban areas in which most people actually live? Of course, such suburban and urban rewilding would be with plants and animals who do not pose danger to people.

Another question is, what level of human involvement are we comfortable with in the rewilding process? Are we only comfortable with initially catalyzing the process through the reintroduction, and then following a hands-off approach? Or is it okay to do ongoing management and oversight of the reintroduced species? This question crops up because of a sense that with too much human management, the rewilded species are sort of treated more like zoo animals, or the plants of a botanical garden, rather than wild species in their habitat. And some environmentalists find it more valuable for these species to have autonomy and independence from human involvement.

In any case, rewilding projects that actively involve local community members have the potential to bring a fresh excitement to a place. This includes people connecting to a place through learning the ecological history of that landscape, including which animals used to live there. Rewilding can also connect people to each other as stakeholders in the future of that place, and whether the

ecosystem will be cared for; and it allows new relationships and experiences of awe to arise between people and the reintroduced animals. Rewilding represents a scaling back of human dominion, it's the intentional ceding of power to animals who have been historically disenfranchised through excessive hunting, trapping, habitat loss, and the like. Rewilding restores autonomy to animals, and control over their lives, so that they can carry out their lives as they would like.

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Care Ethics, Industrial Animal Farms, and the Ethics of Meat-Eating

In this video I'll introduce a new framework, care ethics, which can give us another way to think about our moral responsibilities to other animals. I'll share a weak and a strong version of care ethics, and then I'll show how care ethicists make sense of the industrial farming of animals.

We'll begin with the weaker version. Here, care ethics asserts that we should show moral concern for other animals, because they share many of the same biological needs and capabilities as humans do. This includes the need for food, water, a clean environment or intact habitat, companionship and interaction with other members of one's own species, exercising behavior that's typical for that species, and capabilities such as sensation, movement, and emotion. Both humans and

nonhuman animals share these basic needs and capabilities, right? Well, since we humans value meeting these needs, care ethicists say we should also extend acts of care towards other animals to help them meet these similar needs. Basically, care ethicists assert a degree of moral responsibility to help nonhuman animals meet their basic needs, as well as not prevent them from meeting their needs themselves. This moral responsibility to care for other animals arises when they have no other option to meet their needs by themselves, and if we're capable of helping them in that situation. Further, if it wouldn't prevent our already existing obligations to care for certain people with whom we have close ties.

Here's an example: let's imagine I come across a turtle on a rural road in which cars drive over 60 mph, and I'm worried it'll get hit attempting to cross. Let's also pretend that I'm a father who must care for my young daughter and my pet cat, but they currently don't need my help. Since my current obligations of care towards my daughter and cat aren't pressing at the moment, I can pull over on the road and show moral concern for the turtle by helping it to safely cross.

Okay, now I'll share the strong version of care ethics, as it relates to how we treat other animals. Here, care ethics says that we assume a moral obligation to animals when we enter a relationship of dependency. That is, when we humans act in a way that makes these animals dependent upon us for their survival, functioning, and well-being. In other words, this category of animals wouldn't be able to meet their basic needs and goods without our help and care. Think, domesticated pets like cats and dogs, as well as domesticated farm animals, like chickens, goats, and cows. Now this next part is important: it must be our human action that created the dependency. If the animals entered a relationship of dependency with us by their own actions, on the other hand, which by the way is what ecologists call a parasitic relationship, then we don't have a responsibility to care for them. And finally, note that the greater the degree we have made other animals dependent upon us, the larger is our moral obligation to care for them.

So then, when it comes to domesticated farm animals, it's clear that the strong version of care ethics is what applies to them. This is because we have made them dependent upon us for their survival and daily functioning, through the historical process of domestication. In this process of domestication, we captured these animals from their previous habitat, and held them at our human settlements and towns, while selectively breeding the ones whose characteristics we wanted to encourage in the next generation. Gradually, these animals became entangled with our human lives, and they went from total independence from humans to a partial dependency on humans, as we now see. So, this is just to say that humans initiated this relationship of dependency, and therefore care ethicists say we have a moral responsibility to care for these farm animals.

Of course, when we look at how most of these farm animals are being treated today, it's in the context of industrial animal farms. Here they face acts that are akin to torture** (evidence). Therefore, care ethics asserts a strong moral obligation to abolish factory farming, that citizens refuse to purchase its animal products, as well as asserting that we should advocate for its legal abolition.

Okay, so this leaves the question: does care ethics allow the consumption of animal products outside of industrial animal farms, say, on organic farms? Or does it not, is veganism required by care ethics? Well, as it turns out, most care ethicists don't rule against the use of animal products full stop, but instead they say that animals raised by people should be treated in a caring manner. So full veganism is not required. A follow-up question then is, does care ethics permit the consumption of meat, if the animal is treated with care throughout its life? Basically, if you treat the animal in a caring manner and it lives a great life up until its slaughter for meat consumption, is that morally wrong for care ethicists? What we're getting at here is, care ethics may not promote veganism, but does it promote vegetarianism? Or not, can you still eat meat on this account? And in order to answer this, we must explore a key question: is slaughter itself a harm? You'll notice that the common, overlapping feature between industrial animals farms and organic farms that raise animals for meat consumption, is

that slaughter remains part of the practice, a premature death remains part of the practice in either case.

So, let's explore this question now. Is slaughter itself morally harmful? Can we call premature death a moral harm? Here are some responses that philosophers give. Death can be called a moral harm because it entails the irreversible loss of future opportunities for finding pleasure, meaning, or pursuing one's subjective good. Put another way, death is seen as a harm in this view, because it puts a final ending on any possibility of new opportunities for pleasure-seeking or meaning-making to arise. Death makes it so it's no longer possible for these new opportunities to come about. So in the context of industrial animal farms, a premature death through purposefully slaughtering the animal – even if it's done in as painless a way as possible – would still be a moral harm. If this account is true, then even organic animal farms would include this final harm of death. A care ethicist could argue that raising animals with the intention of slaughtering them, and at a younger age than they would otherwise likely live to, is an uncaring act.

Okay, so that's one view that care ethicists might take on killing farm animals for meat consumption, and this key question of whether a premature death through slaughter is a moral harm. However, a care ethicist could equally argue that if the farm animals are treated in a caring manner and lead fulfilling, happy lives up until the moment of slaughter – which is unforeseen by them, quick, and could be made painless – then the harm of death is miniscule in comparison to the goods they achieved throughout life. On this view, death is still a moral harm, but it's small compared to the pleasurable and full life these animals lived, up until their slaughter. Therefore, this view says, farm animals belong on organic farms that treat these animals in a caring manner, not in industrial factory farms.

And there's further support for this view. Farm animals can help to compost food scraps – eating leftovers from the dinner table or the field – and turning this into nutrient-rich manure that can then be

worked into the soil. Also, grassland ecosystems co-evolved with grazing animals, meaning that grasslands require some degree of grazing pressure to mow them back down. Regenerative grazing, or rotational grazing, is a method of moving dense herds of grazers like cows, from one small enclosure to the next, while allowing the mowed-down grass in the previous enclosure to have a long rest period before the herd returns to that specific plot. Having this rest period allows grassland plants to grow taller above surface in between grazings, and put deeper roots into the soil beneath surface. And this sequesters carbon from the atmosphere and stores it in the soil, while also creating habitat and food for soil microorganisms that are essential to the soil food web.

So, let's take a step back and review. So far we've looked at two views of care ethics on whether it's morally justified to consume animal meat. The first view argued that meat consumption isn't a relationship of care with these animals that are dependent upon us, while the second view argued that it's still possible to care for animals while slaughtering them for meat. Now, I want to put this in a fuller context. When animals rights activists and animal ethicists think about liberating animals from industrial farms, they usually consider four alternative options. These are: organic and regenerative farms, farm sanctuaries, releasing these farm animals into the wild, and finally: sterilizing these animals so they cannot reproduce and will go extinct, and then caring for the currently alive generation of farm animals until they pass away of natural causes.

We've already talked about what life might look like on organic and regenerative farms for these animals. Well, farm sanctuaries are spaces where farm animals can lead their lives as they typically do, when they're not being restricted in any way, and there are still people around to assist in their care. In this setting, these animals are able to pursue their subjective good, are treated with care, and die of natural causes, rather than being prematurely slaughtered for meat. Thirdly, releasing farm animals into the wild, while not a commonly held position, would likely have disastrous effects on other ecosystems

and the species living there. Moreover, it's not certain that these farm animals could survive on their own, and so this could be argued an act of cruelty, since you're likely assuring their death.

And lastly, it seems odd for an animal rights activist, or an animal ethicist, to genuinely care about farm animals, to want their suffering to end, and also to disagree with the practice of slaughter, and then to propose a solution of extinction. If slaughter is morally harmful, then extinction is a species-wide death, and this seems much more harmful. This would be treating one harm with an even greater harm. Indeed, extinction has been called a "double death," because both an individual member of the species dies, and the entire species perishes, so that there's no possibility for any individual in that species to ever live again. In other words, the "double death" is that, say, both an individual cow and its entire species dies. The people who suggest this option usually do so because they see the relationship of dependency that farm animals have upon humans, as necessitating exploitation. They think that this dependency will absolutely bring human domination over these animals. However, dependency does NOT equal exploitation. For example, a young child or a grandparent with dementia may be dependent upon our caregiving, but this doesn't justify our abusing them. And so the conclusion seems to be that it is NOT a caring act to let a species go extinct just because they cannot live without us.

So what do you think about care ethics as it relates to the proper moral treatment of other animals? Do you like this ethical framework? And if you wish for an end to the suffering of farm animals under the industrial method, then which alternative do you find most appealing? The organic farms and the farm sanctuaries seem to be the two best options. The best we can do is to explore how we can create enabling conditions for farm animals to lead their best lives – conditions which enrich both their and our lives through the relationships of care that are formed. Of course, organic farms could still slaughter animals for meat consumption, and so you'll have to decide for yourself what you think about this ethical question.

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Agroecology, Mutual Aid, Community Gardens, Economic Degrowth, and Environmental Care Ethics

In this video series, I'll describe a number of concrete, hands-on practices, as well as a new ethical system. These practices are, first, agroecology as an ecologically regenerative method of food production and land-tending; second, mutual aid as a horizontal system of freely helping others in need, in order to alleviate suffering and enact solidarity within a community. Third, community gardens as a synthesis of agroecology and mutual aid within cities, and as an effort to increase natural spaces within cities. Fourth, economic degrowth as a program for placing economics in its proper role of supporting comfortable human lives, rather than enacting grave social and ecological injustices. Finally, I'll describe an ethical system that's embodied by these practices – environmental care ethics. My goal is to show how these practices and ethics can weave together ecological justice and social justice, within the same space.

Agroecology

In this section I'll offer a broad survey of the diverse practices wrapped into agroecology. However, let me first say that agroecology, regenerative agriculture, permaculture, and other labels for the same umbrella of practices, are not historically new. These techniques originate in various Indigenous culture's food systems, and seek to mimic the exchanges and interrelations observed in ecosystems.

So to start, why do we need agroecology food systems? Many people are aware of the common issues associated with industrial agriculture. These include: heavy machinery that compresses the soil; constant tillage which disrupts the soil food web, plant roots, and mycelium of fungi; a monoculture of a single plant which does not allow the full breadth of nutrient cycling throughout the soil; chemicals sprayed as herbicides and pesticides that can drift in the air and contaminate plants on organic farms, or wind up in our food and be carcinogenic to humans, or they flow into rivers, lakes, and oceans and threaten aquatic life through eutrophication. And finally, industrial agriculture is rapidly depleting topsoil, rather than maintaining or boosting it.

Agroecology food production, on the other hand, is quite different. Synthetic chemical sprays are not used, but rather compost, compost teas, and mulch are frequently used to add necessary nutrients. Tillage is either drastically reduced or not used at all – which also means that soil-compressing heavy machinery is not on the land as often. Plant diversity is embraced through polyculture farming, and companion planting and intercropping are employed in the form of plant guilds – this is where plants that form synergies together are grown in close proximity, so that the nutrients one crop desperately needs can be supplied by its neighboring plant that we know accumulates this specific nutrient. Companion planting also attracts beneficial insects and pollinators and deters "pests," or those insects that prey on food crops.

One of the best known examples is the Three Sisters technique, that comes from various Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. This is where you plant corn/maize, pole beans, and squash (or pumpkins, gourds) together – the corn is planted first, and once it has a head start and is perhaps a foot high, the beans are sown around its base, which climb vertically up the corn stalk as up a trellis. The beans are nitrogen fixers, and supply nitrogen to the corn roots. The squash are then planted to spread horizontally across the ground, thereby shading the soil to conserve soil moisture as well as suppress any "weeds" (undesirable plants).

There might also be succession planting, where multiple plantings of the same crop – such as lettuce – are sown several weeks apart, to ensure continuous supply. Crop rotation is very important too, to prevent disease or undesired insects from preying on the plants. Additionally, agroecology emphasizes perennial food systems. These may feature perennial vegetables like asparagus or rhubarb, herbs like chives or thyme, fruit shrubs like raspberries or currants, and perennial agroforestry systems, such as: fruit and nut tree orchards, multi-story food forests, silvopasture, alley cropping, riparian buffer zones, windbreaks or hedgerows, and more.

What are these? A food forest seeks to make use of space efficiently through multiple layers, with both horizontal and vertical growth. From top to bottom it has: a canopy layer (such as a large fruit or nut tree), a low tree layer (a dwarf fruit tree), a shrub layer, an herbaceous layer, root vegetables, ground cover, and finally vines and vertical climbers. Silvopasture is where you graze chickens, pigs, or other farm animals in a semi-forested fruit or nut tree pasture, collecting the tree and animal products and using the animals' manure for compost. Alley cropping is where you plant south-north rows of fruit or nut trees, with vegetables grown in the space between.

Riparian buffer zones are forested areas along rivers or streams, to help stabilize riverbanks and prevent erosion, while creating habitat for animals and offering some tree products. Windbreaks and

hedgerows are trees planted in a row that shelters your crops from the prevailing wind, to prevent wind damage on your crops. Basically, agroecology emphasizes the use of trees in food systems, for their groundwater-holding capacity, carbon sequestration, topsoil regeneration, animal and insect habitat, harvestable products, cool shade in hot weather, and more.

Many of our common vegetables are annuals and are still grown in agroecology food systems, but are part of a broader polyculture, rather than being grown in a monoculture. Also, typically, cover crops that are cold-hardy are grown between the vegetable's fall harvest and the planting next spring, so that there are always living roots in the soil year-round, rather than letting fields lie fallow between seasonal plantings – cover crops allow topsoil to be regenerated as biomass accumulates, soil organisms are fed, nutrients are cycled underground, and carbon is sequestered. Further, a richer topsoil is able to absorb and hold more water in place – acting as a buffer against flooding – and cover crops provide habitat for animals. In a time of species extinction and expected drought or heavy rainfall, these are vital practices.

One final practice to examine is that of swales. Swales can help to grow food on steeper hills that most farmers would overlook. Swales are basically ditches dug horizontally across a slope, with soil mounded higher on the down-slope side of the ditch. They're basically earthworks. When it rains without a swale system, rainwater flows downhill and pools at the bottom of the hill, leaving the soil mid-slope often too dry to allow food production. However, with one or more swales, water is collected and held mid-slope, and infiltrates into the groundwater table there, now allowing the soil moisture necessary for plant growth. Perennial food crops are then planted in the swale mounds, on the downhill side of the swale, both to stabilize these banks and to allow the plants to draw water from the swale. It's said that water is life, and a central principle here is to first restore water to dry soil before growing plants.

So, as you can see, there's a wealth of information and practices here to learn, and I've only offered a broad survey. The idea is to understand the garden or farm as a holistic system in which all parts are interconnected, internally within the farm system, and externally to the surrounding landscape. We're essentially harnessing lessons from ecology to regenerate the land while growing healthy food. Often, agroecology spaces are beautiful and pleasant to be in, offering a rich multi-sensory experience of colors, smells, sounds, and so on. Since agroecology practices regenerate topsoil, or create animal and insect habitat, and harness lessons from ecology, it can be seen as an intersection between farming, or food systems, and ecosystem restoration. I hope you explore it more!

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Mutual Aid

Are you wanting to change some unjust or undesirable circumstances in your life, and you don't want to wait for the next election or write your elected representatives and hope they'll make the right decision? Well, you may find mutual aid interesting. Dean Spade, the author of "Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And the Next)", defines mutual aid this way. "Mutual aid projects are a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions. This is not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on representatives, but by

actually building new social relations that are more survivable." (What is Mutual Aid? (Classroom Version))

Mutual aid is people directly helping others in their community, whether there's an unmet need during an emergency, or they're among society's most marginalized and struggle in daily life. Mutual aid takes as its starting point the assertion that the government isn't distributing resources evenly, is leaving many people struggling, and therefore community members are rising to fill the gap. Let's look at some examples of mutual aid to make this clearer.

New York City, despite having a large city budget, had 22,000 households still displaced by Hurricane Sandy a year after it first hit in 2012 – that is, without electricity, heat, or running water. A mutual aid network, basing its work on the specific needs community members were struggling with, organized volunteer drives and donations, and distributed food, water, warm clothes, and blankets directly to the displaced residents. Similarly mutual aid could mean free food fridges and giving warm clothes and blankets to unhoused people in your community.

If you're in a low-income community that's being gentrified, then mutual aid could be collective rent strikes or rent relief to help fellow tenants facing eviction. It might mean helping these neighbors access their housing rights and understand the documents, or joining them to housing court, to help them resist eviction. Or, it might mean forming groups that protest landlord's inaction on maintenance repairs, or landlords who refuse to return housing deposits, by directly protesting at their business or home.

Mutual aid might also mean supporting incarcerated people. This could be by making pen pals in prisons in order to build relationships, so they have advocates outside the prison, and helping their loved ones to visit, if the prison is far from their home or transportation is difficult. It might mean preparing for their release by coordinating a ride for when they get out, bringing food and fresh clothes

to them on this day, or a phone so they can call their contacts, or providing information about other services. Or it could mean forming a community bail fund to pay a person's bail so that they're not locked up as they prepare for their defense. And broadly, mutual aid in the incarceration context could be building movements against racist policing and for-profit imprisonment, movements that are led by those people most affected by these issues.

Folks who are concerned about the increased funding of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and border patrol agents, and the rising deportations that follow, are forming rapid response networks that warn each other of immigration raids and help hide immigrants. They're also helping immigrants do safety training so that their kids or loved ones are taken care of in the case of deportation. The group No More Deaths in Arizona is putting out water and other supplies in the desert for immigrants who are crossing, to prevent deaths from extreme heat.

Mutual aid could also mean forming child care collectives, so parents can partake in political activities or have a night off. It could mean being an advocate for vulnerable people, like trans folks, and accompanying them to medical appointments or public hearings. Or you may find individuals or groups who want to share resources, such as land for community gardens, but they need help building these structures. So perhaps you share your time with them through volunteering, and they share their resources. There might be a community seed library that freely shares seeds or plant starts, to help new gardeners get started. The possibilities are only limited by our imagination.

So now that we've looked at examples of mutual aid, let me re-cap some key points. The mutual aid perspective says that we can't rely on the government to properly address the needs of the most vulnerable, it says that you're not alone in your struggle; rather we are together. Moreover, the issue is with the broader systems within which we live, the problem is not in the individual targeted. Mutual aid says, we're going to take matters into our own hands right now, rather than depending on systems with

a clear history of causing harm. That way, we can help each other this very moment, instead of waiting for the uncertain possibility of help.

Mutual aid forms cooperative projects and networks to share things; it builds collective power; and it allows us to meet new people in our neighborhood or community and learn about their skills and needs. It helps us form a mutual understanding of how current systems function and dysfunction. This not only makes our communities more resilient to current challenges, but prepares us for future challenges in a time of climate change and economic instability. Therefore, mutual aid is direct political participation, as it engages with the issues that matter most to a neighborhood or community.

Additionally, mutual aid is distinct from charity. Charity can be understood as wealthy individuals and institutions giving tiny amounts of aid to poor people. Hovering in the background of this relationship, is the assumed moral superiority of the giver of aid over the receiver of aid. This is often to enrich their own image, and usually only provides for mothers or children. In this way, the wealthy determine who is a deserving or undeserving poor person. Dean Spade notes that while charity blames people for their poverty, mutual aid blames our economic system for creating poverty, and it asserts that everyone is entitled to meeting their basic needs. He continues that while charity is top-down and based on control and hierarchy; mutual aid is horizontal and based on solidarity, liberation, and participation.

Successful mutual aid projects take lasting commitments, and a lot of effort to collaborate and resolve conflicts amongst ourselves. They also mean we must bravely confront the sad ways in which our current systems fail to meet our needs. Yet, it's also incredibly gratifying and transforms us from passive observers into motivated and proactive builders of the new systems we desire and need.

In conclusion, mutual aid seeks to build new systems in the shell of the old, by forming the horizontal systems of care that we desire, within the oppressive systems we currently face. As increasing

numbers of people build, practice, and scale up these horizontal systems, the idea is that much like a teeter-totter, the status quo for how we meet our daily needs begins to change for the better.

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Community gardens

Community gardens have enormous potential to weave together social and ecological justice. In this video, I'm going to name nine benefits that they're capable of offering. Note that these community gardens can be in urban, suburban, or rural places, although for the purposes of this video, I have in mind urban community gardens.

First, community gardens respond to food deserts in cities. These are areas without access to healthy food, where grocery stores are miles from where many people live. Here's a statistic: 15 percent of American households and one in five American children are undernourished." (Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid). If you're living in poverty, you may not have access to transportation, like a car, and have to rely on public transit to visit these grocery stores, making shopping a few hour ordeal. Or, you may not have the money to shop at these grocery stores. The result is that many city-dwellers living in food deserts buy their food from gas stations or fast food joints.

Food can either be medicine, or poison, and one reason why poverty status is a risk factor for poor health, is because the cheapest foods are the least healthy. This is because government-subsidized commodity crops like corn, soy, or wheat, lower the price of unhealthy foods like white bread, high fructose corn syrup, CAFO meat, etc. Meanwhile healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, or whole grains are more expensive and inaccessible to poorer people. Therefore, community gardens allow people living in food deserts to access healthy, local produce. They can also be partnered with mutual aid networks and food pantries or free fridges to distribute the produce. Transforming a vacant lot that isn't be used for anything, into a site of food production amidst poverty, seems like a worthwhile project.

Second, community gardens allow urbanites who have little access to natural spaces outside of the city, to experience natural areas within the city. For example, these gardens are often spaces of denser bird and insect life, compared to surrounding areas. This helps people learn an environmental ethic through forming an emotional connection with their gardens and food source. People learn about where their food comes from, which fruits or vegetables grow in which seasons, and they begin to care for the ecological health of their local environments. Indeed, they may realize in a more full-bodied way their dependence on and interconnection with the plant world.

Third, community gardens make a neighborhood more aesthetically pleasing and beautiful, by cleaning up potentially trash-filled vacant lots, which can also be hazardous, and turning them from an eyesore to a vibrant place!

Fourth, community gardens have lots of environmental goods. Many urban soils are contaminated by pollutants from industrial factories, waste sites, dumping, or lead from house paint -- and environmentalists have tended to overlook urban areas. Yet, these soils can be restored with compost, mulch, organic matter, and even fungi that sequester heavy metals. And through composting,

the community reduces their garbage waste. Restoring degraded soil helps to sequester carbon, boost soil microbial life, and create nutrient-rich food; in fact, studies show that healthier soil leads to more beneficial microbes in your gut microbiome. Air pollutants are absorbed by plants, while releasing oxygen to make the air cleaner; getting your food locally decreases “food miles” (or, the need to use fossil fuels to travel to a grocery store, and its resulting pollution). Plants also absorb rainwater, and reduce runoff into sewer systems that carry pollutants into rivers and lakes.

Fifth, these communal garden spaces foster community-building! You can meet new people in your neighborhood, make friends, deepen connections, or counter loneliness. Community garden members usually gain a sense of pride in the well-being and appearance of their neighborhood, and begin caring for that environment and its residents. People can learn how to coexist in a multicultural environment, and gain a sense of belonging and home, as well as appreciation and gratitude for each other and the nonhuman life within the garden.

Sixth, community gardens can be a space of education in food-growing techniques, environmental issues, other mutual aid work, or political education. For example, a person of color in a low-income community might talk with others to reach consensus on a shared sense of oppression within the neighborhood, and what they can do about it. These gardens can be a space of rehabilitation and skill-building for marginalized peoples, like the unhoused, disabled people, veterans, and people recently released from prison. Seventh, community gardens can encourage a healthy lifestyle, through sharing recipes for healthy cooking, as well as the physical labor and exercise of tending to the garden.

Eighth, community gardens are one step towards local food security, and even food sovereignty, in which a community has full control over its food source. In a time of rising shocks to supply chains through climate change and economic instability, meeting your food needs in this “hyper-local” way is only a good thing.

Finally, in a fast-paced world, gardening is an opportunity to slow down, connect with nonhuman life, and connect with other people who have similar interests. This slowing-down allows time for reflection, and deciding which parts of our busy to-do list are actually worthwhile, and provide meaning to our lives. They are places both of peaceful rest, and purposeful hard work.

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Economic Degrowth

"Degrowth" is a multifaceted paradigm and movement that charts alternative environmental, social, political, and economic relations, while critiquing the ideology of economic growth. In particular, economic degrowth advocates that we decarbonize and gradually and increasingly wean off of fossil fuels each year, which will require a careful economic contraction. However, before I describe this in depth, I want to share some brief context that highlights why it's important we show restraint in our economic activity. After all, economics and ecology are highly connected – the Greek roots of ecology translate to "the study of the house or home," while the Greek roots of economy translate to "the management of the house or home." How can we look at one without looking at the other?

So, to start then, economic degrowth matters because globally, humanity's ecological footprint is such that we're using 1.5 Earths. This means we're in a state of "overshoot," and have exceeded ecosystems' carrying capacity by using resources faster than they can regenerate on their own. This of course leads to a net degradation of ecosystems. Put differently, looking at all humans combined who are living today, we're using resources at a rate that is excessive given the size of planet Earth, and which would only translate to using resources at a steady-state equilibrium, or a steady balance between give and take, if this planet happened to be 1.5x larger than it actually is. Clearly, this trajectory isn't sustainable.

However, it's important to recognize that this resource extraction is highly uneven across countries. For example, if every person lived the high-energy American lifestyle, we'd need 5 Earths, while poorer nations throughout the Global South consume far less energy. Then, within the U.S. alone, the military and the wealthiest top 1% consume far more resources than those who are less affluent or are living in poverty. Thus, economic degrowth specifically targets the affluent and high-polluting Global North countries – that is, U.S., Canada, Western Europe, New Zealand, Australia, China, Russia, and possibly Japan.

Degrowth economists suggest we place limits on energy and resource consumption that progressively decline each year, as a way of de-carbonizing and tapering off fossil fuel dependence, in order to curb climate chaos and ecocide more broadly. There are strong correlations between fossil fuel consumption and economic growth, as measured by its proxy, Gross Domestic Product (or GDP). Growth, as measured by GDP, means that we're producing ever more goods each year. Currently, our economic system requires that we produce more goods this year than the last, and so on into the future; in other words, it requires constant and unending growth. Again, this economic production is tied to the use of fossil fuels. Some economists estimate that 80% of the global economy runs on fossil fuels.

Therefore, the suggestion of an annually declining use of fossil fuels, is sure to lead to an economic contraction. However, this doesn't mean material depravity and suffering for the populations enacting economic degrowth, although this is what critics of degrowth like to point to. Some sectors of the economy can decline while others are maintained or even elevated. The sectors that need to decline are the resource-extraction industries, which are high in energy use and destroy ecosystems through logging, overfishing, mining, etc. However, we can and should still put resources into social services, like libraries, schools, preventative healthcare, and so on. Sectors focused on providing services, rather than the sheer production of new materials or consumer goods, often use less energy and resources, and therefore these are easier to maintain under degrowth.

So, how do we consume less energy and resources then? Degrowth economists say we need to restructure economic activity, which can be broken down into the interrelations of four aspects. These are: the population of a society, the proportion of them that are employed, their average annual hours worked, and the economic production per hour worked. Thus, to shrink the economy and its energy and resource demands, degrowth economists have suggested things like: caps on resource and energy usage that annually decline, as I've noted already; worktime reduction, such as to part-time work at 20 hours/week; a universal basic income, especially to ease the transition towards working less; fair access to land for food production; and new indicators of well-being, beyond the ones mainstream economists currently use, such as relative income, affluence, and consumption levels.

Indeed many studies by economists, psychologists, and sociologists show that beyond a certain income level, further income does not boost happiness, but rather, increases in well-being come from non-material things such as meaningful interactions with people, or experiences doing something that you enjoy. In other words, if your basic needs aren't met and you live in poverty, you'll understandably face some degree of suffering. But once your basic needs are met and you have financial security, greater affluence doesn't translate to greater happiness. Therefore, degrowth suggests we value new

indicators of well-being, or human flourishing, such as: community, friendship, connection with nonhuman life, personal development, or spiritual or religious pursuits.

Also, I imagine that debt jubilees, workplace democracy, and collective ownership of the means of production (such as land, infrastructure, food production, housing, energy, medical care, etc.) would be goals of economic degrowth as well, although I haven't seen this yet in the literature.

I now want to focus on Degrowth's critique of economic growth. To be clear, the goal is not "green growth," but degrowth. I'll try to make this distinction clear. Let's look at the examples of solar and wind power, and electric vehicles. These things could fit into Degrowth and be helpful, only *if* they can allow us to reduce fossil fuel usage and reduce our reliance on cars and the amount of time we spend driving and emitting carbon. After all, transportation is a major carbon emitter. Of course, it should be noted, that investing in public transportation can do more to reduce transportation-associated emissions, since people are essentially carpooling on buses or trains, rather than every individual owning a private car. This point shouldn't be underestimated, because even the construction of a single electric vehicle, solar panel, or wind turbine, requires the mining of rare earth metals, and the manufacturing of pieces with furnaces that are heated with fossil fuels, and so on. In this way, public transportation is far more energy-efficient than every individual owning an electric vehicle.

It should also be noted that reducing the working week to, say, 20 hours/week, as suggested before, could do much to reduce the carbon emissions associated with driving. We even saw such reductions in carbon emissions associated with transportation, during the early Covid-19 lockdowns. However, on the green growth side, solar and wind power, and electric vehicles, can be marketed and implemented within an economy that remains focused on growth, as we have now. What we're basically doing now, with green growth, is we're adding these clean energy options to the marketplace, but we're not reducing the problematic use of fossil fuels. Green growth is essentially a greenwashed

capitalism that pretends to confront the problem of emissions, while its core remains intact, and this is what's driving climate chaos and ecocide. To put it differently, the overarching economic system that solar and wind power, and electric vehicles, gets implemented in, remains the same under green growth. New tools, same system of global capitalism. Yet, what's primarily needed is a change in the economic system, the new energy options and vehicles are only secondary in importance. The new tools are great, but fundamentally, the economic system needs to change.

Degrowth then, calls for a displacement of growth as the primary measure of socioeconomic development. The profit motive and the need for constant growth – which are both central to capitalist economics – encourage the ever-expanding exploitation of the earth's resources, and human labor. Degrowth economists say this simply must cease, in order to relieve suffering of all kinds, now and into the future. Basically, degrowth is calling for an end to the "extract and dump" economy – in which we mass-produce items that are poorly crafted and designed to break down quickly (and this is called planned obsolescence), and which then end up in landfills or oceans.

Instead, degrowth economists suggest we move into a "sufficiency economy." Here, we would have enough materially to live well and not be in poverty, but we wouldn't indulge in many of the unnecessary and luxurious items that affluent people currently consume. Of course, capitalist discourse tells us that anything short of luxury or material excess means that we'll necessarily be in shambles and suffering. This is plain false, and is a narrative that encourages us to consume and to attempt to climb the economic ladder. It's a narrative that deters us from exploring other forms of meaning outside of economic sources, which would allow us to practice some restraint in our economic activity. Basically, degrowth asserts the possibility of human flourishing under material frugality and a sufficiency economy, and it encourages serious reflection on the types of material items, tools, infrastructure, and technology that can facilitate living well (the "Good Life").

Importantly, a degrowth economy or sufficiency economy would feature what's called a "steady-state equilibrium." This means there's a net neutrality between the give and take of resources -- between the regeneration and use of resources, such as trees for example. After all, we use wood for all sorts of products. Under a steady-state equilibrium, the resource use takes place within the limits of the ecosystem's carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is the scale of use for any practice or industry, that can be tolerated by that ecosystem given the relative abundance of the resource being used, without leading to a net degradation of that resource. For example, under a steady state, trees and forests would be regenerating at the same level as they're being cut down. This is because the scale of logging would be fitted to the size of the forest and the rate at which trees are regrowing. Rather than clearcutting a forest, for example, one could cut perhaps 10% of it, especially those trees which are becoming diseased but still have viable wood, while replanting or allowing the forest's regeneration of the amount that was cut, prior to cutting again.

Although note, given the reality of massive deforestation which the Earth knows today, and given the many benefits of forests (such as habitat, carbon sequestration, feeding the soil food web, groundwater retention, hunting or foraging for food, medicinal plants, or the aesthetic pleasure, calm, and peace we find there, to name a few), it may be wiser to pursue a net reforestation. In other words, it may be wiser to aspire for more than a net neutrality between the use and regeneration of trees, and instead reforest and revegetate more trees than we use. To step back, notice that when it comes to interacting with any "resource," such as trees, there are important distinctions between non-use (not using the resource at all), abuse (excessively using it), and the middle road of sustainable use. A steady-state equilibrium that achieves net neutrality between the give and take, let alone net reforestation, are in the category of wise, sustainable use.

I now want to make a new point about Degrowth. Economic degrowth advocates an "informal" economy, in the form of a household, neighborhood, and community economy. And, it advocates we

put resources into building a vibrant informal economy, at the scales I just mentioned, as we deliberately contract the “formal” global economy. Thus, degrowth aims to re-localize and turn our homes and communities into places of sustainable production, rather than unsustainable consumption. For example, people growing food in their lawns, as well as having widespread community gardens, are ways of doing this.

This re-localization of a community economy is important, because the sheer scale of the global economy often requires additional supply chains, underlying infrastructure, and parts for repair, simply to maintain itself. These accessory supply chains and transportation infrastructure that prop up the global economy are themselves incredibly far removed from people’s everyday wants and needs, which the formal economy allegedly claims to serve. When an economy reaches a certain size, many of the puzzle pieces required for its functioning are not the food, housing, clothes, or medical care that people often exchange with and need the most.

Rather, these accessory parts are the lubricants of the industrial economy, and things we wouldn’t need if we could meet our needs locally in a community economy through, for example, fair access to land and a cultural shift in even wanting to do this! These accessory parts allow profits for ‘middleman’ connector industries, while also allowing the international trade that supports profits of yet other industries and companies. However, these accessory parts and supply chains, by themselves, are not necessary to our bodily health and basic needs. They’re only necessary to a massive economy that is wrecking the planet. Moreover, the sheer economy of scale squashes tiny communities and small producers, who cannot compete with the economic activity of larger companies. This is because larger companies buy their input materials in bulk at a cheaper price, and produce greater quantities of the finished product, allowing them to sell it at a lower price while keeping the company afloat. The small producer has to market the finished product at a higher price to stay afloat. Therefore, small producers, such as those needed in an informal community economy, have their markets undermined by the larger

industries. In a nutshell then, degrowth wants us to gradually trend toward and enact small, local economic activity *only* – as opposed to having local economic activity while also retaining a global economy. The sooner we downsize global economic activity, the less damage is done to the biosphere, and the safer our collective future becomes.

There is one final point to make, and that's the distinction between maintenance and growth of an economy. As the global economy grows larger, its maintenance costs also increase, as a larger apparatus must be supported. Thus, annually increasing amounts of energy are consumed just to maintain the preexisting structure, in addition to the energy- and resource-consumption required to grow it yet larger. There are the maintenance costs to preserve the economy, and the growth costs to enlarge it, and yet as the economy grows larger, the maintenance costs also increase. Clearly, this too is an unsustainable trajectory.

This distinction is useful because it can help us think about the economic deceleration of the future. If degrowth is not intentionally enacted, then the global economy will still decline. This will happen as planetary boundaries are transgressed, and the ecosystems that comprise the foundations of economic activity are pulled out from beneath us. If the global economy declines in this way, rather than through a deliberate degrowth, then we're likely to see two phases. First, a phase in which the economy no longer grows but can still maintain itself – the maintenance costs are met but we lack the resources for further growth. Second, this will be followed by a phase in which the global economy cannot even meet its maintenance costs, and thereafter, a net decline begins. On the other hand, if degrowth is enacted and the global capitalist economy is replaced via intentional planning, then the steady-state equilibrium we hope to reach would be below the current economy's size, and hence in this scenario too, enacting a net decline would be of the first order.

In other words, a net decline in fossil fuel use, and economic activity, as suggested by degrowth, appears to be inevitable, even if degrowth isn't acted upon. The crucial difference however, is that in one scenario the economic decline is consciously planned, while in the other scenario, the global economy declines in an unplanned, haphazard way, which is likely to bring socially unjust ramifications. So, which route do you find more desirable? Obviously, most people don't want to consider a decline in economic activity at all, and this discussion would instill fear in them. The fear, while understandable, I think comes from a concern that our basic needs wouldn't be met, and there would be great suffering in the process. In my opinion, this only strengthens the argument to contract the economy in a consciously planned and responsible manner. That is, in a way that reduces the polluting and destructive industries while investing in social services. I also want to say, that it's possible for these social services to be community-led initiatives, rather than corporate- or government-led, and I hope you'll reference my video on mutual aid for that.

In conclusion, economic degrowth is, in my view, one of the single most important remedies to curbing the extent of climate change. However, we must be realistic, and I'm sure you're thinking it already – this directly confronts and goes against the status quo of our economic system. Currently, the key pieces of the economy are owned by a wealthy minority, which we all work for them, while they collect passive income. Systems of power, and those who pull their levers, seek to perpetuate their power. Think of this as a positive feedback loop. Therefore, I sincerely hope that folks viewing this find economic degrowth to be a highly encouraging bundle of ideas and practices. But clearly, know that it will take a persistent struggle, as is the way of overturning any entrenched injustice.

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Environmental Care Ethics

In this video I'll describe how care ethics functions as a system of ethical decision-making, and show its connections to caring for the animals, plants, ecosystems, and more, that make up the non-human world that we call “nature.” However, my goal is not to say that caring for people is more

important than caring for the non-human natural world, or vice-versa. They are equally important, and towards the end of this section, I'll briefly discuss ecofeminism to show why both social and ecological injustices must be confronted together.

Before I begin on care ethics however, I'd like to read some statistics on the prevalence of loneliness in the United States, from healthcare research group Ipsos, and the insurance company Cigna. Keep these statistics in mind as I explain care ethic's focus on relationships over individuality.

Loneliness Statistics

"In partnership with Ipsos, Cigna fielded a national online survey of 20,000 U.S. adults to explore the impact of loneliness in the U.S. The survey revealed that most Americans are considered lonely, as measured by a score of 43 or higher on the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a 20-item questionnaire developed to assess subjective feelings of loneliness as well as social isolation."

"NEARLY HALF of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone (46%) or left out (47%). ONE IN FOUR Americans (27%) rarely or never feel as though there are people who really understand them. TWO IN FIVE Americans sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful (43%) and that they are isolated from others (43%). ONE IN FIVE people report they rarely or never feel close to people (20%) or feel like there are people they can talk to (18%). ONLY AROUND HALF OF AMERICANS (53%) have meaningful in-person social interactions, such as having an extended conversation with a friend or spending quality time with family, on a daily basis." https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combatting-loneliness/loneliness-survey-2018-updated-fact-sheet.pdf .

Okay, so let's begin. Care ethics was developed out of feminist philosophy, by thinkers such as Karen Warren, Carol Gilligan, and Ynestra King. It is its own ethical system, alongside a consequence-

based utilitarianism, a rights-based deontology, and an agent-centered virtue ethics. We can start the discussion by noticing the overlap with virtue ethics, in that care ethics encourages virtues such as kindness and generosity, compassion, acceptance, deep listening and aiming to understand the other person, and the consideration of others with whom we're in relationship with. Care ethics encourage us to build habits and engage in practices that promote these virtues. Care ethics diverges from virtue ethics, however, in that it emphasizes relationships, rather than virtue ethics' emphasis on the individual moral agent and the virtues this moral actor displays in any given ethical dilemma. As we will see, these virtues of care, kindness, and compassion, logically flow from care ethicist's focus on relationships. So, I'll now describe care ethicist's analysis of the individual self – that is, our personhood and identity – to show what they find wrong with one way of understanding the self. I'll then share how care ethicists prefer to understand the human self, by highlighting the relationships, interdependence, and inter-being that makes us who we are.

Okay, so we can ask questions like: Who are we, at a very basic level? What is the self? What makes up a person's identity? Care ethicists respond to these by rejecting the idea that we're fundamentally separate, isolated individuals who only associate with each other accidentally, or for our own purposes of self-gain and accumulation. In other words, they think that at a deep, fundamental level, we are not isolated from one another. This is the wrong way to understand our basic human nature. In fact, they say it is this atomized and separate self which is the most egotistical, competitive, and greedy. It is this isolated, individualistic conception of the self that becomes concerned with one's own image, status, and power at the expense of others, and is willing to instrumentalize or use others as a mere tool in order to maximize their self-interest.

Rather, care ethicists view the individual as fundamentally interdependent with other individuals. Accordingly, they highlight the communities, networks of friends and family, and cultures in which we're embedded. We necessarily engage in multiple relationships with other people, and we're

formed by these relations with them. Further, we rely on the care of others to develop and maintain our capacities. Without parents or a family we wouldn't be able to survive as a baby; without friends or teachers we wouldn't adequately develop throughout adolescence; and without the broad culture sphere to selectively draw on, we'd struggle to construct our personal identity.

Basically, care ethics understands the self, our individual personhood, to be fundamentally a self-in-relation. Our relationships with others, human and nonhuman, comprise who we are, and these relationships have inherent value, rather than instrumental value. That is, relationships matter not because of what they achieve for the individuals in the relationship – as is the case for an impersonal transaction, such as making small talk with the cashier while buying food. Rather, relationships matter for their own sake because relating to others, and giving and receiving care, are basic parts of our humanity. How we relate to others is a part of our identity and informs who we are as a person.

For environmental care ethics, it's also true that we necessarily engage in and formed by our relationships with other non-human organisms and entities. Consider the many nonhuman beings who oxygenate the biosphere, filter water, photosynthesize and support the soil food webs upon which our food depends, or even connect us to our capacity for empathy and aesthetic delight, and more. Environmental care ethics recognizes the interdependent web of life – the ecological community, our membership in it, and our connections and dependence on other nonhuman organisms. Hence, they encourage us to include nonhuman individuals, species, and ecosystems, alongside humans, in our web or network of giving and receiving care.

These relationships – whether between parents and children, community members, your pet, or a forest you frequently visit – are viewed as ethically significant. It's the specific relationships we have with others, human and nonhuman, that generate moral responsibilities. Again, these are relationships that we actually have with other people and nonhumans, in which we rely on each other's caregiving to

survive and function. Hence, to care for another is to enact moral responsibilities and virtues that promote and maintain healthy relationships between the moral agents embedded in that network. Creating and preserving healthy relationships of care allows for (inter)personal development, social cooperation, community, mutual support networks, and on the ecological end, the maintenance or regeneration of ecosystems, rather than their degradation.

Care ethics highlights the unique and contextual needs and concerns of those people receiving care, who we are in relationships with. Care ethics is attentive to how individuals are emplaced in the world – their position in society, their intersectional identity, the power dynamics they face, and their resulting lived experiences. In this way, care ethics approaches ethical dilemmas with a focus on the particular facts that are relevant in a case – at the level of the individual, household, community, culture, institutions, and law – rather than applying pregiven principles that ought to be used universally for any bearer of rights.

Care ethics also emphasizes the role of emotion to be just as important in the process of moral decision-making as rationality, or reason. Hence, concern for other's welfare, having compassion, empathy, and being caring, are all emotive orientations that inform one's ethical approach. Since we experience the world as both rational and emotional beings in daily life, care ethics appears highly fitted and applicable to our actual lived realities. Moreover, as I discuss in greater depth in my section on hope and grief, care ethics' emphasis on emotion is a strength because our emotions connect us to the suffering in the world. For example, when our hearts are open and we welcome, rather than reject, feelings of grief around environmental destruction, such as the rapid deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, then we're more likely to be moved and respond in a caring way. An open heart that feels the pain of others is more likely to act to alleviate that suffering.

So what are some implications of care ethics? Notice that focusing on interdependence, rather than individuality, allows us to approach each other with humility and respect. That is, we negotiate how to respectfully interact with those who we're in some sort of relationship with, in a compassionate and non-exploitative way. For example, when a small town realizes its dependence on a forest for their livelihoods, they're more likely to inquire into the appropriate caring relationship to have with that forest, so that they don't quickly degrade it and undermine their livelihoods.

Here's another interesting implication of care ethics. It could be argued that helping others and being altruistic can only be seen as self-sacrifice if one is operating under a mindset of the isolated and self-interested individual that strives to maximize their own good at the expense of others. On the other hand, if we're fundamentally connected to and reliant on each other, even while maintaining our unique differences, then helping and caring for another person is precisely to feed into the web of caring relations that is the foundation of our own being. Since our daily functioning depends on the caring actions of others, to care for another is to reciprocally support that web of caring relations from which we all collectively draw.

Care ethics matters because we're always already interdependent with each other, and yet we're not acting like this is true. Epidemics of loneliness indicate that we're often isolated from one another, and a quick look at massive wealth inequality shows that many people are not cared for, and are excluded and marginalized. There are those who are pushed to the edge of our society, who are deemed less worthy of care. And there are hundreds of millions of animals who are treated with cruelty in factory farms and medical testing labs.

Therefore, care ethics' emphasis on the value of interdependencies of all kinds, with both humans and nonhuman beings, reveals the problems and shortcomings in paradigms or world-orders that deny our embeddedness in, and dependence on, human community and the ecological world. In

other words, since these interdependencies are vital to our collective well-being, any time a society is not structured around acknowledging and supporting these interdependencies, it will surely cause problems and injustices. We are fundamentally dependent on other people, and the nonhuman natural world, and therefore care ethicists would say that the social and ecological injustices we face today, are at root problems of not caring for those who we're interdependent with. To put it differently, care ethicists understand ecocide, or environmental destruction, to be a result of moral disregard for nonhuman life, and a cutting of our caring ties with them.

Ecofeminists in particular highlight this point, that social and ecological oppressions are interconnected, and similarly that justice in both areas is interconnected. Ecofeminists emphasize the connections between oppressing women and oppressing the non-human natural world. However, it can be broadly said that how we treat other people – both interpersonally, culturally, and institutionally – forms the same approach in how we treat the non-human, natural world. In this way, the exploitation of other animals or plants, our neglecting to extend moral care towards these deserving others, and the abuse of ecosystems, can continue so long as we also fail to treat people in caring ways.

To be clear, ecofeminists think that our moral disregard for some groups of people and nonhuman life, is rooted in a common mindset that is uncaring. Therefore, it would be incomplete to care for either people or nonhuman life, but not the other. Rather, the ethical prescription is that we must treat both people and nonhuman life in caring ways! A mindset that is uncaring to both, must transition to a mindset that is caring to both. The paradigm shifts that we so desperately need, from cultures of social and ecological degradation to cultures of social and ecological renewal, cannot afford to selectively confront some injustices while leaving others unattended. These paradigm shifts must be mutually beneficial for all members of the web of life, human and nonhuman.

I'll conclude this section by making one final point as to why care ethics matters and can help us through the times we live in. And that is, the effects of greenhouse gas release and pollution extend forward into the future, even if we were to hypothetically cut emissions and pollution to zero by tomorrow. Thus, while mitigating climate chaos must continue to be pursued with urgency – since mitigation will lessen the severity of those effects that become baked into the future – adaptation efforts can strongly benefit from practicing care ethics.

A basic prediction might be that those communities who enact care for each other, their local land, and its nonhuman species, will be more resilient to the impacts of climate chaos and economic instability, than those communities in which individuals remain isolated and do not cooperate. In other words, one might predict that communities who practice care for humans and nonhumans, such as through mutual aid networks and ecologically regenerative practices like agroecology, will be more secure in the face of mounting challenges. For a variety of reasons then, practicing care for those who we're in interdependent relationships with, can lead to positive change.

So, what do you think about care ethics? Do you find it an enticing ethical system? Do you like it but feel that it's missing something? If so, what? Do you agree with care ethicist's and ecofeminist's diagnosis of social and ecological injustices? Do you agree that at root, we need strong caring relations to move towards social and ecological justice?

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The Problem of Inconsequentialism, Why Grieving Matters to Acting Hopefully, and Environmental Virtue Ethics

Introduction – A Basic Dilemma

If you're alive today, then you face a basic dilemma. That is, as we grow up we become increasingly aware of the world's many problems, its dire emergencies and injustices, its darkness. Even if we cannot describe these issues analytically, or we lack the right language to fully make sense of it, we nonetheless feel the weight of the world in our hearts. This common sentiment leads to a diversity of responses. Some of us might research a particular issue that bothers us – like climate change, social inequality, pollution, permanent war, human trafficking, or police violence – and then try to spread awareness of that issue to get others to care. We might also feel moved to engage in some sort of activism around the issue.

Others are understandably daunted and overwhelmed by the severity and enormity of some crisis, and shy away from research and activism in favor of less stressful, more pleasant activities. And indeed, there are many other places to put our attention, many forms of entertainment to engage

instead. Some people call this “burying your head in the sand” and unfortunately, it’s very easy to do. But we shouldn’t blame people who divert their attention from the world’s crises – I mean, these issues are often heart-wrenching, and research or activism demands our time and energy. Many of us are overworked and busy, and we may not want to use our little free time to delve into a sad topic. In fact, we might feel that learning about it will only drain our remaining energy. Furthermore, we might feel guilty because we contributed to an issue – like driving a car and releasing greenhouse gases – and this guilt tends to close us down too.

At the same time, it’s not healthy to repress anything of serious importance, such as climate chaos, mass extinction, toxic pollution, social inequality and poverty, etc. Otherwise, the awareness of the issue, like climate chaos for example, when repressed or rarely spoken about, never actually leaves the person. Instead, this repressed awareness leads to a numbing, it becomes a source of anxiety for the person, which in turn can possibly express itself in regrettable behaviors.

And so the big question I’ve been leading up to is this: how can we open ourselves to these urgent crises, such as mass extinction and climate chaos and the damage we’ve wrecked on this planet, without sinking into despair or apathy? Without becoming misanthropic towards the human species, and thinking that people are entirely evil and there’s no sense in even trying to create positive changes? On the contrary, how can we open ourselves to these pressing issues while maintaining hope for positive changes? And also, what does it even mean to be hopeful in these times of vast social inequality and environmental destruction?

Note that this dilemma between courageously opening ourselves to a crisis, or diverting our attention and looking away, is nothing new. Previous generations have had their own crises and injustices and have similarly been confronted with this choice of how to respond. The question is

whether we treat a crisis as an invitation for personal growth, and as an opportunity to reimagine new systems to live by.

In the videos that follow, I'm going to suggest that when faced with darkness, we should bravely peer into it, but that this is only possible if we have a support network or community to help us with the processing. I'm going to suggest that the despair we fear would envelop and swamp us if we were to closely examine some crisis, is not a permanent rut we get stuck in, but is only a temporary feeling – even if we cycle in and out of it throughout life. Rather, I'll suggest that acknowledging and experiencing our grief about the state of the world can be a transformative process, which can lead to courageous action and acts of care for those who're most marginalized. This goes for marginalized and oppressed groups of people, and those nonhuman animals, plants, ecosystems, etc that have been marginalized as mere "economic externalities" to the functioning of our current society.

To conclude, let me tie things together and describe where we're going in this video series. First, I'll share about the collective action problem known as the "Problem of Inconsequentialism." I'll show how this perspective risks feeling disempowered as individuals seemingly unable to effect change in a large society, and yet also illuminates something about how positive change can emerge. This disempowerment will be set up as a problem that gets resolved throughout the remaining videos, which will be the bulk of my work in this series. In these videos, I'll discuss grief work, Joanna Macy's concept of "active hope," and virtue ethics, all of which can be seen as a highly empowering response to the Problem of Inconsequentialism. The goal of this series is to show the viewer why apathy, despair, and inaction are both unhelpful in creating a brighter future, and that they can be worked through, in favor of embracing uncertainty and acting courageously in the face of the unknown.

The Problem of Inconsequentialism

The “Problem of Inconsequentialism” is what’s known as a “collective action problem.” Now, I know I just defined one piece of jargon with yet more jargon that you may be unfamiliar with, so let me unpack this. They describe issues of scale between the individual and the collective. The Problem of Inconsequentialism that I want to focus on, observes a paradox: when individual actions, if even seemingly harmless at the small individual level, are aggregated together at a large scale, the consequences can become disastrous.

For example, driving a car 10 minutes into town once a day is pretty benign — the carbon emissions are so low they’re negligible, and we can assume that no animals were hit. But when this simple drive is multiplied across some billion drivers worldwide, the net result is clearly harmful — the carbon emissions from transportation are noticeably high, and many animals have lost their lives. And it cuts the other way: for people who wish to do something about the issue of transportation-related carbon emissions, their individual change — say, biking to town — is but a drop in the bucket. The impact of their biking to town is so small that it’s inconsequential to lowering overall emissions, and it will be until change happens at the larger scale of the collective. That is, until the majority of us, or all of us, are also biking rather than driving. And so the point of this collective action problem is that either negative or positive change doesn’t manifest and fully reveal itself until replicated by the collective, rather than at the individual level.

Now that can feel like a depressing or disempowering thought, that my activism or perceived solution to a problem makes no difference, and won’t until everyone does what I deem to be a helpful response. And since there’s no guarantee that everyone will follow suit, or agree that my method of change is the best route, then what’s the point of doing anything at all? This is a challenge, and I pose it early in the series so that you can keep it in the back of your mind as you consider the perspectives to come. Namely, these perspectives are virtue ethics, grief work, and active hope. In the following

sections I'll share some responses that validate an individual's activism, regardless of what it achieves. I find these responses to be highly empowering and encouraging, and I hope you do too.

But keep in mind: ethical perspectives that validate an individual's actions, regardless of those action's consequences or large-scale effects, don't change the fact that we DO need system-level change. Change at the collective scale is required to create more socially and ecologically just systems to live by, but the need for this collective action is compatible with virtue ethics, grief work, and active hope. Therefore, the challenge is to lean into change-making at the individual level, and doing so for its own sake, and finding meaning in it despite the consequences it brings about, while simultaneously pushing for our forms of activism to be replicated by others at a collective scale.

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Why Grieving Matters to Acting Hopefully – Part One

In this section I'm going to draw on the work of two figures to make the case that a person cannot fully act hopefully, until they have grieved the issue they're confronting. These figures I'll draw on are Joanna Macy, who is a Deep Ecologist, Buddhist scholar, and anti-nuclear activist, as well as Francis Weller, a psychotherapist, grief worker, and writer. I'll begin this video by setting some context – I'll first share Francis Weller's "5 Gates of Grief," which are different openings into experiencing feelings of grief. It helps to understand the many entryways to grief, before diving into our discussion. In the remainder and majority of the video, I'm going to examine why it's important to grieve, why we resist

grieving and instead engage in denial, and the costs of not grieving. Then, in part two of this section, I'll transition to a discussion on how we can begin to grieve, and what becomes possible or emerges when we do grieve.

Let's begin with Weller's 5 Gates of Grief. First, he notes that, "Everything we love we will lose." A part of life is experiencing the death or loss of a friend, family member, lover, pet, house, or what have you, and this is a primary cause of grief. Second, we may grieve because our culture can deem some parts of our personality to be unacceptable or unwelcome, and this prevents full self-expression because we're worried about strong judgment from others. We then have to mask parts of ourselves, and Weller says this "loss of our integrity and entirety, this inner loss," is also cause for our grieving.

Third, he says "we grieve the sorrows of the world," which the news saturates us in, and which we're reminded of daily. Fourth, "we grieve the loss of the beauty that we expected in life." This is the loss we feel when expectations of living more beautifully are not met. Finally, ancestral traumas that have not been resolved, and which continue to haunt and harm us, are the fifth gateway to grief. Weller defines ancestral traumas as, "colonization, slavery, genocide, resource extraction industries, and all the other horrors that have occurred on this continent."

While the first two openings into grief are very insightful and important, I consider the last three to be most relevant to our discussion. While the first two concern grief at an individual level, the last three concern grieving over crises and injustices at a global scale, such as ecocide, social inequality, and war.

So why does it matter that we grieve? It matters because we're linked to the world – and by the world I mean other people, ecosystems, and animals. And we're linked to them through our care, and conversely, through our grief for their suffering. So if we don't allow ourselves to feel and process this grief over some form of suffering, then we cannot begin to act towards alleviating that suffering. And as

we'll see, we can only process our grief if we have a community and support network to help carry us. We cannot do it alone, and trying to do it alone, usually leads to ignoring and suppressing those feelings of grief.

An initial question to explore is, since it's important to grieve, why is it that so many of us resist these hard feelings of grief, sorrow, and despair around some issue or crisis? Why is it that we resist consciously experiencing and sitting with these difficult emotions? This resistance itself is no small issue. Joanna Macy says, "Of all the dangers we face, from climate chaos to permanent war, none is so great as this deadening of our response." She suggests that we tend to resist these difficult emotions, because they bring a loss of control, and this uncertainty can be uncomfortable. This might be uncertainty over how to respond to climate chaos, for example, or uncertainty around what the future impacts of climate chaos will be. And this uncertainty is understandably nerve-wracking.

In part though, our culture seems especially poorly equipped to handle uncertainty. Science, modern medicine, and technology have brought many benefits, but also have a shadow side. This shadow is that it's led to our culture prioritizing shortcuts, techno-fixes and other quick and shallow resolutions to deep and complex issues. In other words, we typically enter a "Solve it and make the problem disappear!" mode of operating, rather than experiencing the hard emotions the problem invokes in us. Uncertainty marks our present age, it's a quintessential feature of the times we're living in as multiple crises converge, and this contradicts and upsets values of comfort, certainty, security, control, and always having a plan. Indeed, these are values that many Americans hold onto, and so embracing uncertainty runs counter to our habits, outlooks, and orientations. I mean, if we bravely and honestly open our eyes, then we're living in very challenging times, and they deeply unsettle the habitual ways of moving through the world that we've become accustomed to. Therefore, it's no wonder that we often ignore, bury, and suppress feelings of despair and grief.

And as a quick side point, for the sake of drawing connections, I want to note that boys and men in our culture are not often raised to learn emotional intelligence skills. They're not raised to be aware of their emotions and process them in a healthy way. Instead, it's often the case that showing any sadness makes male-identifying people vulnerable to bullying or shaming. Of course, this is the classic example of how patriarchy – as a hierarchical system of male privilege over women's subordination – also hurts men, although not nearly as much as it disadvantages women.

However, suppressing these hard feelings of grief and sorrow, which connect us to suffering in the world, comes at a cost. It exacts a toll. Both Macy and Weller describe how not allowing yourself to grieve, leads to a psychic numbing. This is the "deadening of our response" mentioned before in that line from Macy, it's a closing of the heart where we become numb to how some crisis makes us feel. Basically, this is apathy, the psychological state of simply not caring. We all know people who are apathetic, and likely have felt it ourselves at times. Noticing apathy in ourselves or other people is not a moral judgment, but is just an interesting observation at how easy it can be to experience.

So, what are these costs of a numb heart? These costs of a psychic and emotional deadening? Well, first, it diverts our energy from positive, constructive, and creative uses, thereby preventing any action towards bringing about the desired changes. Macy says, "the energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more crucial uses, depleting the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies."

And second, a numb heart makes us more likely to be complicit in some moral wrongdoing. A numb heart is more likely to continue supporting some moral wrong. For example, if we become apathetic about climate change, then we're more likely to continue participating in practices that pollute the earth. Weller says, "when the heart is closed and cut off from the living essence of life" … "we lose a sense of the sacredness of the world" and this allows us to desecrate places. In other words,

environmental destruction is only possible if your heart is closed off from the world, if you're blocking any hard feelings that the world's suffering causes in you. Seen in this light, one could argue that environmental destruction is a crisis of the human heart.

Of course, engaging in denial and refusing to look at the evidence of some crisis, only keeps alive the source of despair that we're running from. For example, if we're numb to the evidence of social inequality and the damage done to people through poverty-related diseases, because it's too sad to consider and we don't wish to feel this sadness, then this only keeps alive and unquestioned the very social inequality that's causing the sadness we're avoiding. In a nutshell, Weller says, "a numb heart doesn't act to alleviate suffering." And obviously, by not acting, the source of suffering remains intact.

Weller has more thoughts on why we avoid grieving, and its costs. He says, "we have this projection onto sorrow and grief as if it is some depressed state, but it only becomes that way because of our avoidance. We become oppressed by the weight of all the unexpressed grief in our lives." In other words, when we choose not to process feelings of despair and instead become numb to them, the despair actually doesn't go that far away. It sort of lurks beneath the surface. We might think that if we open ourselves to the despair, we'll get lost in it. But what Weller is suggesting here, is that since the despair comes from an avoidance of grieving, the only way to resolve these feelings IS to process them – it IS to let yourself grieve! In this way, Weller understands grieving as a transformative process, and our culture has misunderstood the role of grief. While many of us associate grief with despair, Weller is saying that we feel despair because it's pent-up from not grieving! If we do grieve, then we can move through the despair.

(Full references for these sections are listed after Part Two)

Why Grieving Matters to Acting Hopefully – Part Two

In the previous video, I discussed the importance of grieving, why we resist grief, and the negative consequences that come when we do not grieve. I want to transition now and explore several key follow-up questions. First, how can we lean into grieving and grief work? How can we begin allowing ourselves to experience these feelings of sorrow that we have muted? And second, what becomes possible when we do grieve? What can emerge after grieving? These are the questions to which I now turn, and I'll take them in order.

We can start creating a culture that embraces grief work, especially within activist circles who wish to engage with some issue or crisis, by first forming support networks and communities of care. These can start small, and even remain small, such as a group of three friends. Weller says that our culture asks us to process our sorrow in private, and yet isolation and lack of a support system are the worst conditions in which to process grief. Rather, we need community to process grief, and indeed, historically grieving has been a community-wide process. According to Weller, grief requires two things in order to be worked through: containment, and release. When grieving is properly carried out, a support network or caring community acts as the container that holds a person's grief, and the grieving person alone must release it. But if we grieve in isolation, then we must simultaneously be our own container for the grief, and the one struggling to release it. This is a big demand, and so usually we can't grieve in isolation, or if we try, it's very emotionally taxing.

At this point, I hope the viewer is seeing connections between, on the one hand, the need for community in supporting grief work, and on the other hand, my section in a previous video on environmental care ethics and their focus on caring relationships. A strong case could be made that forming tight-knit communities and support networks where we can care for each other, and rely on each other, is absolutely essential to making a brighter world. If it's all too easy to feel despair in our

current world, then on the path to building a better world, we must practice methods which produce caring and cared-for people. As social beings who are already interdependent with each other, we both long for and absolutely need community. If we do not build community and support networks on the path to a socially and ecologically just world, then we're only recreating one of the problems of this world – that is, a lack of community – which we're claiming we want to get away from.

As I'll discuss next, grief work empowers people to be more engaged with issues that matter to them. It can allow people to be more engaged activists who are less likely to burn out. And yet, grief work requires community and support networks. These support networks and relationships of care are also what can allow us to overcome loneliness, practice mutual aid to relieve the suffering of other community members, and, as ecofeminists would have it, as we treat each other with care we also move into treating the nonhuman natural world with care. I'm highlighting this because I want the interconnections between community, care ethics, grief work, and a hopeful activism, to be clear to my viewers.

So far, I've sort of painted the picture that in order to begin grieving in a sustained manner, we first need community or support networks to act as a container for our grief. While this is true, the reality is that it's more of a feedback loop between grief work and community, rather than a linear process in which community comes first and grieving comes second. This is because grieving can also come first, and lead people to discover support networks, which then help people do further grief work. It's an interplay between the two, and they can boost each other.

Joanna Macy thinks that when we share with other people our feelings of pain or sorrow about some type of suffering in the world, we tend to form strong communities with those people who also grieve the thing we're grieving. She thinks that since many other people also feel pain for the suffering in the world, grieving can lower the walls between people, and draw them into community and

solidarity. In this way, people who grieve the same thing, can bond over shared feelings of despair, anger, disappointment, and a shared goal to actively respond to the crisis in some way. Macy says, “our pain for the world can be the beginning of a journey where we go out in search of our allies to build another reality.”

Obviously, not everyone who you share your grief about, say, climate change with, will empathize with you. However, those people who do share your grief around climate change, are likely to form a tighter group after everyone goes around expressing how they feel, and as people realize that others are having similar experiences. Of course, even just opening up about your grief around climate change, is making yourself vulnerable in a way that invites other people to soften their shells and become vulnerable with you.

This is how a support network can emerge, and trust can be gradually built, which then allows space for people to grieve in the safety of caring others. One effect is that this community validates your own feelings, as you realize that you’re not somehow weird or crazy for being bothered by the suffering of others. You’re just empathetic and have an open heart, and this is good! This is what’s needed in a time of numb hearts! Recall the line from Macy about how no crisis is worse than the deadening of our emotional response. Being validated by others about how we grieve, say, the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, is empowering and teaches you to trust your intuition and emotional responses. Trusting your inner responses, and not being filled with self-doubts, is quite empowering! Again, as Macy says, these emotional responses and feelings of sorrow, are reflecting to us our love for the world. The pain we feel on behalf of the world’s suffering, and our love for the world, are two sides of the same coin.

And there are other valuable emotional and psychological gifts that emerge from grieving, according to Macy. She thinks that sharing our feelings of pain with others can lead to a shift in our

identity. This is because the concerns and issues that we grieve, cannot be reduced our own individual welfare. We're grieving suffering that's happening to other people, other nonhuman animals or plants, or to ecosystems, and these are all outside of our own individual well-being. She says, "our concerns are far larger than our own private needs and wants. Pain for the world—the outrage and the sorrow—breaks us open to a larger sense of who we are. It is a doorway to the realization of our mutual belonging in the web of life."

Therefore, Macy thinks that grieving shifts our identity by expanding our circle of moral consideration. This is the breaking open to a larger sense of ourselves, that she describes. That is, we empathize with a wider circle of issues, crises, disadvantaged people, or disadvantaged nonhuman beings, that are all outside of ourselves. Again, if you've viewed my section on environmental care ethics, consider the connection between this expansion in moral consideration, and care ethicist's focus on relationships rather than the individual, isolated self. The care ethicist would say that since we're in different types of relationships with those outside of ourselves, their suffering is felt by us, and leaning into our empathy for their suffering connects us to them.

Hence, for Macy, grieving is a transformational process. There is another side that we come out on, and what's changed is that our old defenses have fallen, so that we're now more open to, and morally considerate of, the suffering of others in the world. Macy says that "going to pieces, however uncomfortable, can open us up to new perceptions, new data, and new responses. Whereas suppressing grief and becoming numbed will stifle the flow of new information into our awareness, if we do grieve we can re-awake with fresh perspectives and approaches to a problem or crisis." In this way, grieving can clear the baggage that had swamped a person with despair, and with these mental obstacles out of the way, we can begin to honestly face an issue and think about remedies, responses, shifts in the systems we live in, and internal shifts within our own outlooks.

Additionally, grief can be understood as a type of protest against the conditions that created suffering, which led to our feelings of despair and grief. Grief can be seen as protest, because it says, I refuse to remain numb. Instead, it's saying, I am expressing how the conditions of our society make me feel. Hierarchical societies such as our own, which create injustices for oppressed and disadvantaged groups of people, try to manage the misery of these injustices, by telling the oppressed person that their misery is within them, rather than within society. There's an attempt to blame the individual, or locate the feelings of discontent as originating within the individual, as somehow separated off from their participation in wider society. In a nutshell, this is the line of "see a therapist! There's no need to change how our society is organized!" (Although I of course acknowledge how helpful therapy can be) On the other hand, leaning into one's grief is to acknowledge that the source of grief comes from those oppressive institutions, policies, and practices that inform our daily lives. Grieving then, can remind a person that they are sane, that they're not the issue, but rather, the issue is within the systems we occupy.

I would also argue that embracing uncertainty is a mature psychological and emotional outlook. This is because it threads the needle between optimism and pessimism. An optimist may naively assume that the world's problems are sure to resolve themselves, and this excuses that person from taking real actions to respond to an issue. Pessimism is the more likely outlook that a person will develop upon confronting these global-scale crises like climate change, social inequality, and pollution. There's a sort of safety in pessimism, and given how deep these issues run, someone might think it's more likely that things will continue to stay the same, or even get worse.

Indeed, a lack of improvement in global affairs even serves as evidence to the pessimist that their position is correct. And yet, the pessimist is also a defeatist, because they believe that things cannot possibly improve, and so they don't even try to light a candle in the dark. The pessimist sticks to a determinism which says the world will continue to deteriorate in an unchanging, clockwork-fashion,

and that there's nothing we can do to change that. Yet, through this belief and their resulting lack of activism, the pessimist creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which matters do appear to worsen.

The third option of embracing uncertainty is mature, therefore, because a person takes actions that are aligned with their values – in an attempt to make the world more beautiful – without knowing whether the results they desire will ever materialize and come about. Releasing the expectation of certain results and acting on your values, is still compatible with pushing for systems change. Your actions are such that they push for systemic change, it's just that you've accepted the possibility of external failure – in the sense of our systems not changing – but your meaning is derived internally from acting on your values for this more beautiful world. Whereas the pessimist doesn't dream of a brighter future, trapped as they are in their certainty that matters will never improve, those people who embrace uncertainty do dream of a brighter future. It's just that they acknowledge that getting there will take persistent work, and they acknowledge that the brighter world might not even come about.

Joanna Macy offers a relevant distinction between active and passive hope, and says that active hope is a verb rather than a noun, that being hopeful is in the action, it's in the doing. It's not that we *have* hope so much as we *enact* hope through our actions. Passive hope, she says, is the sort of idly sitting by and wishing that others will solve the problem – for example, that engineers will develop technologies that can help with climate change. And yet, with passive hope, the person excuses themselves from taking concrete actions in their local community, or wherever they can make a difference. Both passive hope, and hopelessness, are positions of anxiety that make us preoccupied with the past or future, and pull us out of the present moment. Active hope, however, occupies the present moment as we engage with the world, and this is where we're most empowered.

Active hope embraces uncertainty, not-knowing, and a lack of forecasting the future that we so desire, in order to plan our lives around some reliable certainties. Macy says that embracing uncertainty

shines a light on one's intention for acting, and this gets at virtue ethics, which will be my next section. Yet, suffice it to say that our intention for courageously acting in a world whose future is cloaked in uncertainty, is the source of meaning that Macy arrives at. She focuses on the intention and motivation for acting, the future vision of a peaceful and just world that we're reaching toward. Navigating the gap between the world as it currently is, and the more beautiful world we desire, is fueled by our intentions, as we practice active hope through actively engaging the world.

I want to conclude this section by sharing something that helps me stay sane in the face of overwhelming crises and forms of suffering in the world. And it's this: we humans co-create the world together, it is socially constructed, we've made it as it is, and we can make it otherwise. Imagination, and of course biophysical laws, are the limit of what's possible. When the values held by a group of people are sufficiently aligned – that is, when a group of people shares an understanding of how some problem functions and what can be done about it – change becomes very possible. Embracing uncertainty also means acknowledging that the brighter future we want *can* emerge, and so we should have humility towards our present conclusions around what's possible or not. We should take our present conclusions with a grain of salt.

Instead, we should recognize that the attitudes we hold around change-making, are shaped by society's and earth's present conditions, which obviously aren't pretty. And yet, these conditions can change, but only if we act with courage in the face of uncertainty. It would be foolish if we were paralyzed into a state of inaction, simply because we believed our current conditions, at the darkest hour, to be unchanging and eternal. We can imagine a future vision of human and nonhuman flourishing, and take actions now that move us in that direction, and even if we fall short, then at least matters will have improved some. Therefore, embracing uncertainty and practicing active hope is, I believe, the most wise option between pessimism and optimism, and between denial and doom.

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Environmental Virtue Ethics

In this video, I'll briefly lay out the basics of virtue theory, before taking it in an environmental direction, and asking which virtues can help us be responsible members of the wider ecological community, of which we are a participant.

Okay, so virtue ethics is an ethical theory that emphasizes the character of the person or moral agent, who is acting in an ethical dilemma. Virtue theory asks, what would a virtuous person do in this situation? It doesn't focus on the consequences of acting and how an action affects overall pleasure and pain, like utilitarianism, and it doesn't focus on universal moral duties to take ethical actions, like Kantian deontology. Instead, virtue ethics centers around the character traits and intentions within the person who is acting, and it claims that by becoming a virtuous person, we will automatically act virtuously in an ethical dilemma. Examples of virtues include courage, generosity, honesty, and care.

Aristotle, the founder of virtue theory, thought that we become a virtuous person by forming habits which establish this virtue, or character trait, in us. The virtue then becomes part of our cognitive and behavioral way of being in the world, and it manifests in our responses to issues we encounter. At first, learning a virtue entails mimicking a virtuous person who is a moral exemplar, but gradually and eventually, we begin to express that virtue ourselves, without their guidance. Alongside looking to a

moral exemplar, we can also ask the question, which cultural practices and systems produce virtues in us? Of course, a critical eye will also take notice of which cultural practices and systems produce vices in us, such as selfishness, greed, or competition. Since individuals are always embedded in multiple, larger systems that interact with each other, it's important to be aware of which behavioral traits are encouraged or discouraged by these social, political, and economic systems.

Now, Aristotle thought that if our actions, thoughts, and feelings are in sync and aligned with one another – that is, how we think and feel about an ethical dilemma, and how we act in it, are all aligned – then a virtue can be successfully expressed. This alignment between actions, thoughts, and feelings, is what produces human flourishing or well-being, according to Aristotle. I just want to highlight again that virtue ethics says, it's not necessary to know what the results of our action will be, but rather what's crucial is that our actions, thoughts, and feelings are aligned and express a virtue. In other words, are you acting by your values? I want to pause on this for a moment, because I think it's quite liberating and powerful!

For example, imagine taking a 1,000 year perspective on our current moment of climate change, increasing levels of pollution, and environmental destruction. Imagine multiple scenarios where the extent of ecological wreckage varies from very little, to very great. Clearly we would prefer the damages done, a thousand years from now, to be as minimal as possible. However, from our current vantage point, there is only a blanket of uncertainty, and we cannot know how the aggregation of polluting actions by industries and individuals will play out in the future. Is this uncertainty a problem? Is it frightening, does it stifle your ability to act to reduce suffering? For many people, uncertainty is uncomfortable, and we would first like to know how our actions will impact something, before taking that action. This is a sort of utilitarian tendency to calculate a cost/benefit analysis, before engaging in some action. However, this approach isn't so possible when it comes to how climate change will unfold throughout the next hundreds of years.

If you take virtue ethics to heart though, then this uncertainty isn't a roadblock to acting now to alleviate current and future suffering. Indeed, Catherine Ingram says that courage is the ability to act bravely on your values, without knowing whether things will work out the way we hope they do. And here's an even greater existential challenge: a person could accept that some particular issue is overwhelmingly likely to continue to deteriorate, and yet still act to change that problem. What I'm trying to convey to you is – it's not just that we may be uncertain what the results of our actions will be, but also, it's that we may accept that our actions are unlikely to change something, but we act anyway, because that's acting on our values and virtues. And, at the end of the day, acting on our values and virtues means we're being honest to ourselves, and little matters more than this authenticity. Personally, my embrace of uncertainty is such that I hold out hope that currently daunting issues can improve for the better, and so I'm not trying to say that we must embrace doom and gloom but act anyway. I am saying, however, that virtue ethics holds up as a coherent ethical system, even if doom and gloom were accepted. Is this not liberating?

In Buddhism there's a line that an expectation is nothing more than a premeditated disappointment. This is because they think an expectation is an attachment to a particular future outcome, and if this outcome doesn't come true, then we become crushed. And so they say we're essentially setting ourselves up for disappointment at the very start, by expecting certain things to come about. For Buddhists, this is one source of our mental suffering. As you may have noticed, expectations and attachment to future scenarios, is similar to the utilitarian tendency to want to know what the consequences of our actions will be, prior to acting. In this way, virtue ethics is extremely freeing because it doesn't place moral weight on the consequences, but instead on the virtues and values that are acted upon. I encourage you to pause the video and reflect on your thoughts and feelings about this ethical system. Do you see the promise in virtue ethics, do you find it liberating?

I'll now turn to environmental virtue ethics, in particular. Given the ongoing crisis of environmental destruction, and how this hurts the welfare and interests of nonhuman beings with who we share the planet, as well as hurts humans through our dependencies on the natural world, it seems that we would benefit from practicing virtues which extend kindness to nonhuman organisms and ecosystems. Some questions, then, are: which virtues allow us to be good land stewards or ecological citizens? Can we recognize and practice virtues that lead to both human and nonhuman flourishing? What could a conception of human well-being, or flourishing, or the good life, look like, if it required the flourishing of the natural world too? These are the questions I'll explore now.

I'll start by describing an article written by philosopher Philip Cafaro, who reviewed environmental virtues displayed by Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson. Cafaro found five common themes amongst these 3 thinkers, and I'm going to spend some time unpacking these.

The first theme was a wish to reframe economic activity, and resituate its role in our lives. Namely, a desire to reframe economics from a machine that drives unending extraction, production, and acquisition, to a tool placed in support of allowing decent, comfortable human lives. Indeed, Thoreau's voluntary simplicity and frugality – that is, his intentional pursuit of a simple lifestyle – represents a disillusionment with the overwork he perceived in society. Thoreau wanted to frame human flourishing as stemming from experiences and relationships, rather than from material accumulation, economic gain, or the pursuit of wealth. Thoreau believed that practicing simplicity and limiting one's use of external items could do quite a few helpful things. It could reduce our footprint on the land, allow us to be aware of the ecological consequences of our actions, lead to greater freedom to develop ourselves, and allow us to pursue knowledge of ourselves, and knowledge of the natural world.

According to Thoreau, simplicity promotes freedom because by spending less money and being materially frugal, a person can reduce the hours in their lives that they exchange for an income at the workplace. Work often comes on the employer's terms and can even stunt rather than encourage personal development. Therefore, for Thoreau, practicing simplicity allowed a person to work less, and have more time to develop themselves.

Moreover, Leopold believed that wealthy Americans couldn't improve their quality of life by further increasing their wealth. He thought they had reached a threshold at which any higher enjoyment in life would come from non-material areas, rather than from more wealth. Leopold suggested becoming perceptive, observant, and knowledgeable of one's surroundings and its ecological history, as a way of enhancing our lives while preserving wild nature intact.

As a brief aside from the article, note that another environmental thinker, Rosalind Hursthouse, also places great value on the virtues of frugality and contentment with simplicity. This is because many environmental harms derive from the production of luxury goods that are not deeply fulfilling or meaningful. These harms ripple out from the entire process of extracting raw materials, their transport across the globe, manufacturing, and eventual waste disposal. Hursthouse also warns against the vices of greed and excess – or, what some have called "mad emperor's disease" -- the drive for ever-more material accumulation, private ownership, and the power that wealth delivers.

The second theme that Cafaro identifies among these thinkers, is an embrace of the naturalist disposition. That is, the attitudes, habits, practices, and orientations of a naturalist. In particular, this means using careful observation and science as a way of knowing the nonhuman world, while also supplementing science with appreciation, celebration, and personal relationship with the nonhuman world. In this way, practicing gratitude, and being aesthetically tuned in to your surroundings, can allow you to establish strong connections with a specific piece of land. And, being strongly connected to a

place is the first step to conservation, as the connection often creates a desire to ensure the well-being of that place.

Third, these thinkers share a commitment to non-anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism translates to human-centeredness, and so Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson, are committed to not being solely focused on the welfare of humans – they want to focus on the welfare of nonhuman organisms and ecosystems too. They gain perspective by setting aside our human goals and purposes, in order to place attention on the lived realities and experiences of nonhuman beings. They think this can allow us to grasp the inherent worth, and value, of these nonhuman beings. Furthermore, this commitment to non-anthropocentrism comes with an acceptance of limits. Thoreau urges us to use only what we need from the surrounding ecosystem, to leave a fair share for other organisms, and to practice gratitude for us all meeting our needs. For Leopold, we must transition from the conqueror of the ecological community to plain citizen of it. And Carson says that the times we're living in challenge our maturity to master ourselves, rather than mastering and cementing our control over nonhuman nature.

Fourth, these thinkers share a desire to know, experience, and appreciate wild nature, and support the protection of wild places both near and far from home. Carson thinks that interacting with wild nature allows the expansion of our imagination, and teaches us humility. Leopold thinks that experiencing wilderness can teach lessons about freedom and self-management.

Fifth and finally, the three believe that life is fundamentally good, for both humans and nonhumans. She recounts joyful stories from interacting with birds and asks, "Can anyone imagine anything so cheerless and dreary as a springtime without a robin's song?" Therefore, Carson believes that preserving wild nature leads to well-being and flourishing in our human lives – basically, that our well-being is tied up with their well-being. Leopold thought that when a biotic community maintains its integrity, stability, and beauty, it generates virtue in nonhuman individuals and species, as well as within

us. Therefore, Leopold invites us to frame human flourishing in terms that maintain these qualities of a biotic community, of which we're also a member.

I'll now turn to a few other philosophers, to share some more environmental virtues that can help us be good members of the ecological community. Thomas Hill Jr. thinks that understanding the place of humans within the biosphere, instills a humility at the relative insignificance of our daily human lives. Consider, for example, the experience of looking up at the stars in the night sky, and feeling the smallness of humans. This humility, he thinks, can lead to a respect for the natural world, and seeing all parts of the nonhuman world as possessing intrinsic value, rather than being a mere resource to be used for human purposes. Then, Hill says the virtue of self-acceptance means understanding the commonalities and shared traits between humans, nonhuman animals, and non-sentient nature, and subsequently acting with respect towards these others. In other words, he thinks that accepting our animality, or, those parts of ourselves that we share with other animals or even non-sentient nature, can lead to an attitude of respect.

Hursthouse, who I mentioned earlier, suggests the virtue of prudence. She defines this as overcoming shortsightedness and short-term thinking, and instead considering how to achieve over the long haul those human goods that matter most. Indeed, change can come from including in our moral consideration those who we could easily exclude from a solely self-interested point of view. One such group that could easily be excluded by those alive today, are those unborn people of the future. Since future generations fundamentally lack a voice in today's political participation, we must be proactive about representing their welfare, interests, and rights.

Finally, Hursthouse encourages that we cultivate awe and wonder for the natural environment, because this emotional state can motivate respect, honor, admiration, curiosity, and care toward nonhuman others.

I now want to add three virtues that I find highly valuable for the times we're living in. The first one is, a willingness to reflect on, deconstruct, unlearn, and let go of habits, attitudes, and lifestyle practices that are harmful or uncaring towards other people and nonhuman others. We can call this, the virtue of humility, and recognition of fallibility. The question is, can we identify socially and ecologically harmful attitudes or practices that we engage in, and let go of them? Can we be honest with ourselves and recognize where we've gone wrong, and try to change our ways? Namely, are we willing to admit that the energy-intensive lifestyles of many people in affluent nations have harmful social and ecological repercussions? Are we willing to admit that we're probably one of those people, or at least in some ways? And then, are we willing to embrace humility and uncertainty as we apprentice ourselves to a different lifestyle that's harmonious with the natural world and other people. In this sense, a person is living their life by an exploration and inquiry into the proper human role as a member of a wider ecological community.

Second, I'm in agreement with the ecofeminists and environmental care ethicists, in that I highly value the following cluster of virtues: empathy and connecting to other's experiences, having an open heart to other's suffering, emotional awareness, and a willingness to grieve. As I discuss more fully in my section on hope and grief, these virtues matter because the pain we feel for the suffering of other people, or nonhuman beings, is precisely what connects us to them. If we close our hearts and become numb to some crisis, such as the 6th mass extinction, then we're more likely to remain complicit in contributing to the problem, and we don't act to alleviate suffering. However on the other hand, if we open our hearts and allow ourselves to feel pain on the behalf of another's suffering, and if we release this pain through grieving with a support network of other caring people, then we're more likely to metamorphose and begin acting to alleviate that suffering.

Third, I want to add imagination as an important virtue for our times. As we age and gradually leave childhood, the faculty of imagination gets ignored, it receives little praise or conversation in homes

and schools, or it's dissuaded against in implicit or explicit ways. Meanwhile rationality, or our ability to reason, is instead promoted. However, cultivating a rich imagination is a useful tool for envisioning other social and ecological possibilities, and different forms of arranging daily society. We can use our imaginations to respond to questions like, how could we meet our basic needs in a different way than we currently are, in ways that aren't socially and ecologically harmful? For example, how could our farming systems and food-production landscapes look and function differently? What might it look like to grow food in polycultures, rather than monocultures, or to practice agroforestry food systems? Can you imagine taking aesthetic delight in the landscape that's producing healthy food, a food system that's also boosting topsoil and creating habitat for insects and animals? Let yourself imagine this, how would you feel about such landscapes?

Imagination is especially pertinent as a virtue because under global capitalism, whose industries and excessive use of the natural world spews great harm, the reproduction of daily life appears to us as natural, inevitable, final, and unchanging. Basically, daily life appears cemented in stone, and like it cannot be changed. It can be difficult to see alternatives to how we're currently living, or if we do have a vision in mind, it can be difficult to see the transition or bridge to that better world. Imagination can shine through the cloak of inevitability, this façade that daily society will always be as it currently is, and reveal that we don't have to be living in a way that perpetrates social and ecological degradation. Imagination can help us consider alternatives, and ways to get there.

Before I conclude, I'm going to take a quick detour to look back at the Problem of Inconsequentialism, which we outlined at the start of this video series. Namely, I want to briefly explore what virtue ethics might mean for activists, especially those who struggle with burn-out or finding meaning in their activism. There are two culturally engrained beliefs that dissuade people from activism, and you might be familiar with some variation of their formulations. They go something like this, "a single individual cannot change the world, and change only matters if it's large-scale." But let's stop and

think about this – do most of us have the ability to affect large–scale change? No, and so these twin beliefs are very disempowering. For most of us, we necessarily reach a small audience with our activism – we often can only reach those people in our lives or in our community. Although, of course, the ability of the internet to amplify our voices can potentially change this to some degree.

Yet, the question remains, since we can typically only impact a small group of people through our words or actions, does this take away its meaning? Does a small impact mean that our actions or sharing of words or ideas are no longer valuable? Does it not matter whether we put the energy into these activities, since they're unlikely to create large-scale change? A virtue ethicist would likely answer that: small-scale change is both more possible than large-scale change, and it *does* have moral significance. It matters, it is indeed worth our effort. For example, imagine if your mind was changed on a topic that is important to you, by a video essay that you listened to. You would likely feel grateful for the new perspective you became aware of, and even if this video essay only helped 10 people, its producer is still impacting each of them in a deep way. In this way, depth can be prioritized over breadth – perhaps it doesn't matter how many people we reach, but how deeply we move the few people we do reach.

This embrace of depth over breadth can help activists to find meaning in their activities, even if they don't create the large-scale changes desired. However, you may have noticed that this still presumes that our activism's significance comes from the people we reach, it's just that now it's from the depth of the impact rather than the sheer number of people impacted. In other words, this depth over breadth perspective, while helpful, still pins its meaning to an external source. Therefore, the virtue ethics perspective is empowering for the activist, because the meaning is internal to the activist, or person, or moral agent, who is acting in some way. Again, this moral significance comes from aligning your actions with your values, and acting on virtues that you deem meaningful, such as compassion, care, and courage.

To circle back and conclude this section then, there are a number of environmental virtues that seem to help us act virtuously towards the nonhuman world. Of course, the distinction between environmental and social virtues is often blurry, as these virtues help us be good people to each other too. In sum, we reviewed the following virtues: voluntary simplicity, material frugality, and reframing the role of economics in our lives; an embrace of the naturalist disposition and forming strong ties to a specific place; a commitment to non-anthropocentrism and an acceptance of limits; a desire to experience and protect wilderness; a view of life as fundamentally good for humans and nonhumans, and that our flourishing depends on their flourishing; acceptance of our own animality, or our commonalities with other animals; prudence, overcoming short-term thinking, and considering future generations; cultivating awe and wonder for the natural world; humility and recognition of fallibility; empathy and a willingness to grieve; and finally, imagination.

So, what do you think of these virtues? Are there any that you don't find valuable or necessary to practice? Do you see yourself habituated in practicing any of these now? And, as this is the last video in this series, have you felt yourself changed by these perspectives on grief work, active hope, and virtue ethics?

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