

## Eschatology Shapes Ethics: New Creation and Christian Ecological Virtue Ethics<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

In the middle of the nineteenth century the (in)famous German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach declared: “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.” Twenty-five years ago award-winning environmental historian Roderick Nash claimed that “Christian eschatology was a poor basis from which to argue for environmental ethics in any guise” since a Christian view of the future leads Christians to ask “Why take care of what you expected to be obliterated?” Would a properly biblical view of God’s good future reshape our actions in the present? Would an earth-affirming eschatology change our ethic? If so, what kind of ethic? What virtues might a theology of (re)new(ed) creation require? I attempt to show in this paper how a Christian virtue ethics rooted in a biblical eschatology of new creation can help us do the difficult things that are and will be necessary to live within the boundaries of the earth.

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soul.”*

— Ludwig Feuerbach<sup>2</sup>

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2 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 287.

*“But lacking the qualities of virtue, can we do the difficult things that will be necessary to live within the boundaries of the earth?”*

— David Orr<sup>3</sup>

“I believe the kind of stuff I’m writing about [i.e., all saved Christians, dead and alive, get snatched into heaven; those with weak faith get left behind to fight the antichrist; a seven-year tribulation of plagues ravages the earth] is going to happen some day.”<sup>4</sup> So spoke Jerry Jenkins, co-author of the wildly popular *Left Behind* series of books, in an interview published some years ago in the *Chicago Tribune*. In other words, while the books may be fiction, the basic plot is not fiction but fact, based on the authors’ interpretation of the Bible. Given this future, Jenkins implied with his message, Christians should do and not do certain things. For example, Christians need not worry about the earth or its plethora of creatures. These non-human creatures will, after all, be incinerated in the (soon) coming apocalypse. Christians need not worry about porcupines or pine trees or tall grass prairies. All of that is of little or no value to a god who cares only for humans and their souls, and therefore it should be of little or no value to those who follow and worship this god.

This view of the future is powerfully captured by noted environmental historian Roderick Nash in his book *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*. In a chapter on “the greening of religion,” Nash comments on “the pervasive otherworldliness of Christianity.” He writes: “Christian’ aspirations were fixed on heaven, the supposed place of their origins and, they hoped, their final resting. The earth was no mother but a kind of half-way house of trial and testing from which one was released at death . . . . Indeed Christians expected that the earth would not be around for long. A vengeful God would destroy it and all unredeemed nature, with floods or drought or fire.” Nash’s concluding comments are telling: “Obviously this eschatology was a poor basis from which to argue for environmental ethics in any guise. Why take care of what you expected to be obliterated?”<sup>5</sup>

Nash’s view of Christianity fits well with that of mid-nineteenth century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, whose summary judgment is found in the first epigraph above: “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.” This claim by Feuerbach summarizes the logical deduction to be drawn from a world-negating view of the future and of reality more generally. A metaphysic and corresponding

3 David Orr, *Earth in Mind* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994), 62.

4 Jerry Jenkins, *Chicago Tribune* (March 13, 2002), section 5, p. 3.

5 Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 91-92.

anthropology in which spirit is separate from matter and soul is separate from body, with the former in each case more valuable than the latter, easily leads to an eschatology in which there is no reason to care for the earth.

Unfortunately, social scientific data reveal that many Christians today hold this view of the future and exhibit the behavior one would expect from such views. For example, a recent study by two political scientists concludes that beliefs of American Christians about the future are a major reason why climate change legislation has not made more headway. In a study entitled “End-Times Theology, the Shadow of the Future, and Public Resistance to Addressing Global Climate Change,” authors David Barker and David Bearce conclude that beliefs among evangelical Christians about the second coming of Jesus are a major factor underlying the resistance to addressing global climate change in the US. In the words of one blogger, quoted in the essay reporting this new study:

Likely the closest biblical examples of what could be considered climate change would be the end times disasters prophesied in Revelation 6–18. Yet these prophecies have nothing to do with greenhouse gas emissions; rather, they are the result of the wrath of God, pouring out justice on an increasingly wicked world. Also, a Christian must remember that God is in control and that this world is not our home. God will one day erase this current universe (2 Peter 3:7-12) and replace it with the New Heavens and New Earth (Revelation 21–22). How much effort should be made “saving” a planet that God is eventually going to obliterate and replace with a planet so amazing and wonderful that the current earth pales in comparison?<sup>6</sup>

### **Eschatology Shapes Ethics**

These introductory remarks illustrate my central thesis: eschatology shapes ethics. How we view the future affects what we do (or don’t do) in the present. And for critics of Christianity (and Nash is only one of many) this means that an escapist eschatology implies an ethic of neglect and exploitation. In other words, in seeking the cause of contemporary ecological degradation, one need look no farther than religion, and Christianity in particular. We are in the ecological mess we are

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6 For the blog, see <http://www.gotquestions.org/climate-change.html>. Quoted in <http://digitaljournal.com/article/349388>. For the original study, see David C. Barker and David H. Bearce, “End-Times Theology, the Shadow of the Future, and Public Resistance to Addressing Global Climate Change,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66 (2013): 267-79. As indicated in the text, end-times theology is one major factor. There are other reasons in addition to beliefs about the second coming of Jesus that have led some Christians to oppose climate change legislation.

in, it is argued, largely because the vast majority of Christians do not care about creation. And they don't care about creation because they believe God doesn't care about creation. Indeed the created world, they believe, will be destroyed. So why care for something that (soon) will be obliterated? Ethicist James Nash identifies escapist eschatology as one of the four main planks in what he calls the "ecological complaint against Christianity."<sup>7</sup> While each of these four arguments is deeply problematic, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to confirm the statistical data showing that many Christians, especially American evangelical Christians, believe that creation care is not important, in large part, because they believe that Jesus is coming soon, and assume that when Jesus comes again the earth will be destroyed. Eschatology shapes ethics.

All of the above prompts the question of this essay: Would an earth-affirming eschatology change our ethic? Would a properly biblical Christian view of God's good future—of heaven and earth renewed, as vividly described, for example, in Revelation 21-22—reshape our actions in the present? I think the answer is yes: a truly biblical view of God's good future would change our ethic and consequent behavior. More of us would become earthkeepers.

An important related question has to do with what kind of ethic. More exactly, how would a truly biblical eschatology inform a virtue ethic? What virtues might a theology of new (or renewed) creation require? In the remainder of this paper I explore these two questions.

One final preliminary word. This is part of a book project entitled *What Kind of Person Would Do Something Like That?: A Christian Ecological Virtue Ethic*. In other words, this essay is a modest attempt to take seriously David Orr's question, in the second epigraph, by showing how a Christian virtue ethic rooted in a biblical eschatology of new creation can help us do the difficult things that are and will be necessary to live within the boundaries of the earth.

## **(Re)New(ed) Creation Eschatology**

There are many possible biblical texts to examine, but I would like to focus in this essay on Revelation 21-22. What can we learn about God's good future from this mind-boggling text? There are five main points.<sup>8</sup>

**1. God's good future is earthy and earthly.** It includes a renewed heaven and earth. Having brought this world of wonders into existence, covenanted with it, and persistently worked to redeem it, God does not give up on it. This vision is of a new heaven and a new earth (*ouranon kainon kai gēn kainēn*), but the new here connotes new in quality, in contrast to what is old. New means

7 James Nash, *Loving Nature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), ch. 3.

8 These five points are from my book *For the Beauty of the Earth*, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 107-109.

renewed, renovated, reclaimed. In keeping with the great vision of Isaiah 65 and Ezekiel 40-48, God's good future is a renewed heaven and earth. Eugene Boring captures this well:

Even though the first earth and the first heaven have passed away, the scene continues very much as a this-worldly scene . . . . [This] is an affirmation of the significance of this world and history, even after the new heaven and new earth arrive . . . . [God] does not junk the cosmos and start anew—he renews the old and brings it to fulfillment . . . . God does not make 'all new things,' but 'all things new.'<sup>9</sup>

2. **In God's good future God himself will dwell with us and all of our creaturely kin.** In language reminiscent of John 1:14 and Ezek 37:27, Rev 21:3 declares that the home of God (*skēnē tou theou*) is among humans (*anthrōpōn*), that God will tent among us (*skēnōsei met autōn*). Indeed, the text emphasizes that God himself (*autos ho theos*) will be with us, and we will be his peoples. In language rooted deeply in the Old Testament (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; Ezek 37:27; Hos 1:23), Rev 22:4 makes clear that in the holy city God will be known face to face, and we will belong to God, his name emblazoned on our foreheads.
3. **In God's good future the separation between heaven and earth is overcome.** The now distinct realms of heaven and earth are in the future braided together—cojoined because of God's initiative. The holy city comes down (*katabainousan*) from heaven (21:2 and 21:10). Its arrival is no human achievement, its reality no product of human ingenuity. In keeping with God's character, God comes to us. Heaven is on earth. As in the parable of the gracious father (Luke 15:11-32), God initiates redemption. In the words of Justo and Catherine Gonzales:

No longer will there be a great separation between heaven and earth. It is not so much that the redeemed shall be taken to heaven but rather that God will come among us and be part of the new Jerusalem. In the incarnation of Christ, God came among human beings as one of them, but still in a hidden fashion. Now, in this new creation, God will not be hidden, but will come among redeemed humanity in a direct, unmediated way.<sup>10</sup>

9 M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 220.

10 Justo and Catherine Gonzales, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 138.

- 4. In God's good future evil and its consequences are no more.** Seven (the perfect number) elements of the old order are no more. The sea, symbolic of primeval chaos and the abode of the beast, is no more. Death itself is no more. Mourning and crying and pain are no more. No more parents mourning their kids killed in battle. No more cancer stealing life much too young. No more stillbirths. And all that is under God's curse is no more. The curse of Genesis 3 is repealed, lifted, abrogated. In the words of the old Christmas hymn, redemption extends "far as the curse is found." And, last, the night is no more. The realm of deception is banished. In sum, this apocalyptic vision vividly portrays a world of shalom.
- 5. In God's good future we inhabit a most unusual city.** There is no temple, no set apart place, for God himself is the temple. A Person has replaced a building. Thus nothing in this city is profane; nothing is not sacred. All is for the service of God. And this city is a gardened city. In this city flows the crystalline river of life, watering trees that line its banks. These trees provide fruit year-round, sustenance in every season, and their leaves are a healing balm for the nations. People of all kinds stream into this city, whose gates never close. Kings and paupers, friends and enemies—they all bring their glory and honor to the city. George Caird captures this important feature of the John's vision:

Nothing from the old order which has value in the sight of God is debarred from entry into the new. John's heaven is no world-denying Nirvana, into which man may escape from the incurable ills of sublunary existence, but the seal of affirmation on the goodness of God's creation. The treasure that men find laid up in heaven turns out to be the treasures and wealth of the nations, the best they have known and loved on earth redeemed of all imperfections and transfigured by the radiance of God. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a more eloquent statement than this of the all-embracing scope of God's redemptive work.<sup>11</sup>

What, then, does God's good future look like? These last chapters of Revelation beckon us with an earthly vision of life made good and whole and right. Heaven and earth are renewed and are one. God dwells with us, at home in creation. Evil and its minions are no more. All is sacred, fit to serve God. All is made new. In short, a world of shalom. George Caird provides a fitting conclusion:

John is told to write this, because this voice from the ultimate future has something urgent to say to the critical present: 'I am

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11 G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 279-80.

making all things new.’ This is not an activity of God within the new creation, after the old has been cast as rubbish to the void; it is the process of re-creation by which the old is transformed into the new. In Smyrna and Thyatira, in Sardis and Laodicea, in all places of his dominion, God is forever making all things new, and on this depends the hope of the world.<sup>12</sup>

This conclusion has been more recently echoed by N. T. Wright. In his book *Surprised by Hope* Wright summarizes well the biblical eschatology of new creation in Revelation 21-22:

We thus arrive at the last and perhaps the greatest image of new creation, of cosmic renewal, in the whole Bible. This scene, set out in Revelation 21-22, is not well enough known or pondered. This time the image is that of marriage. The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband.

We notice right away how drastically different this is for all those would-be Christian scenarios in which the end of the story is the Christian going off to heaven as a soul, naked and unadorned, to meet its maker in fear and trembling. As in Philippians 3, it is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth; indeed, it is the church itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, that comes down to earth. This is the ultimate rejection of all types of Gnosticism, of every worldview that sees the final goal as the separation of the world from God, of the physical from the spiritual, of earth from heaven. It is the final answer to the Lord’s Prayer, that God’s kingdom will come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>13</sup>

In short, the Bible teaches not an escapist but an earth-affirming eschatology.

### **Virtue and the Virtues: An Overview**

What has all this reflection on eschatology to do with ethics? And what is the

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-66.

<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 104. In an illuminating essay Richard Middleton puts forward “the exegetical case for a consistent understanding of redemption as the restoration of God’s creational intent.” His main claim is that “the logic of biblical redemption, when combined with a biblical understanding of creation, requires the restoration and renewal of the full complexity of human life in our earthly environment, yet without sin.” See J. Richard Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth: A Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption,” *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 73-74, 77. See the expansion of Middleton’s argument in *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), esp. chs. 2 and 8.

connection with virtue ethics? First, some background on virtue ethics, and then a brief foray into ecological virtue ethics in particular.

In my view, the most pressing ethical question is not “What are my duties?” (deontology) or “What are the consequences?” (teleology) but “What kind of person should I be?” (areteology). While obligations and consequences are important in ethics, concern for the virtues is even more important.<sup>14</sup> In short, I wish to emphasize character rather than conduct, though I full well realize that each shapes the other. I also realize that this emphasis on virtue goes against the grain of much ethical theory, which typically focuses on duties or consequences.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, my claim is that areteology is more basic than deontology or teleology.

My reason, in brief, for adopting a virtue-based approach to ethics is quite simple: what we do depends on who we are. Doing is contingent on being. To a large extent our actions arise from our desires and affections, our dispositions and inclinations—in short, our character. Jamie Smith captures this point well:

Much of our action is not the fruit of conscious deliberation; instead, much of what we do grows out of our passional orientation to the world—affected by all the ways we’ve been primed to perceive the world. In short, our action emerges from how we *imagine* the world. What we do is driven by who we are, by the kind of person we have become.<sup>16</sup>

What we do is driven by who we are. And who we are—the kind of person we have become—is best described by traits of character such as virtues and vices. This approach implies a critique of much contemporary ethics as too intellectualistic, too focused on rational principles and conscious deliberation. Such ethical theory has failed to notice or understand the pre-reflective and pre-conscious basis of (moral) action.<sup>17</sup> While rational reflection is important, the simple fact is that most of our actions are pre-reflective and pre-conscious, a result of having an intuitive and embodied feel for the world—a kinaesthetic way of being in the world shaped over time by habits, rituals, and routines.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the kind of person we have become depends on the stories we

14 For a masterful combination of all three, see Lewis Smedes, *Choices: Making Right Decisions in a Complex World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

15 As Charles Taylor, among others, notes: “The dominant philosophical ethics today, divided into the two major branches of Utilitarianism and post-Kantianism, both conceive of morality as determining through some criterion what an agent ought to do. They are rather hostile to an ethics of virtue or the good, such as that of Aristotle.” Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 282.

16 James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 31-32.

17 Like Smith, I am “pushing back against an ‘intellectualist’ account of action that assumes that what I *do* is the outcome of what I *think*.” Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 33.

18 For more on this, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), part 1, and Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, part 1.

identify with. Stories shape our character, and thus all human action is shaped in terms of narratively formed character. Smith, again, articulates well the central insight:

And that shaping of our character is, to a great extent, the effect of stories that have captivated us, that have sunk into our bones—stories that ‘picture’ what we think life is about, what constitutes ‘the good life.’ We live *into* the stories we’ve absorbed; we become characters in the drama that has captivated us.<sup>19</sup>

In the succinct words of Alasdair MacIntyre: “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”<sup>20</sup> Or as Smith puts it: “We need stories like we need food and water: we’re *built* for narrative.”<sup>21</sup> And these stories are not husks that can be shucked to get to the kernels inside, but are indispensable to knowing who we are. As Stanley Hauerwas reminds us “We do not tell stories simply because they provide us a more colorful way to say what can be said in a different way, but because there is no other way we can articulate the richness of intentional activity—that is, behavior that is purposeful but not necessary.”<sup>22</sup> There is, in short, a “narrative quality” to human action.<sup>23</sup>

So a virtue is a narratively formed praiseworthy character trait. And because we are shaped by competing narratives, we find ourselves living in a world of competing understandings of what virtuous living looks like. For example, one strand of folk wisdom states that “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” But what is cleanliness? What is a clean home? That depends on what narrative most profoundly shapes that home. An American family shaped by 1950s’ medically inspired preoccupation with germs and sanitation will have a different idea of cleanliness than a family that comes from Belize or New Zealand in the 2010s. Indeed, Jesus found himself in a lot of trouble over the matter of cleanliness because he understood the story of the Jewish covenant differently than the Pharisees. We may all agree that it is good to be clean, but the story we indwell will give us different understandings of what that actually means.

In addition, virtues are shaped by practices. As Hauerwas and Burrell put it, “in

19 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.

20 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (2nd ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216.

21 Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 129. His italics.

22 Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 76.

23 See Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 65-88. See also the seminal work of Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1-3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

allowing ourselves to adopt and be adopted by a particular story, we are in fact assuming a set of practices that will shape the ways we relate to our world and destiny.”<sup>24</sup> With the indwelling of a particular story comes a particular set of practices—of communal, embodied rhythms and routines—that shape and mold our dispositions. In other words, the meta-narratives or big stories we hear and with which we identify—of manifest destiny, of material prosperity, of a crazy carpenter from Nazareth—shape our character by enlisting us to engage in certain practices—reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, shopping at the mall, saying the Lord’s Prayer. These practices shape the kind of person we become—our virtues and vices—and hence the actions we engage in. And sometimes we see practices embodied in a person who displays for us what a life of virtue concretely looks like, e.g., a well-known saint such as Mother Teresa or a well-loved if unknown relative such as Uncle John. I suspect we all can name people we personally know, or know about, whose lives serve as examples of virtue to us. Such people are ethical exemplars or models of virtue who inspire us to live such a life ourselves.

So stories and practices shape character. But, furthermore, our practices over time color the way we see ourselves and the world. There is a connection between virtue and vision. As Gilbert Meilander states, “What duties we perceive—and even what dilemmas—may depend upon what virtues shape our vision of the world.”<sup>25</sup> We see the world differently, depending on how we have been formed by the virtues that constitute our character. C.S. Lewis captures this point well in *The Magician’s Nephew*, book 6 of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The creation of Narnia by Aslan looks and feels very different for wicked Uncle Andrew than it does for the children. While the children find Narnia alluring and understand the words spoken by the animals, Uncle Andrew shrinks back in fear and hears only barking and howling. Indeed, because of his evil character he is blind to what the children see and misconstrues both Aslan the creator and what is created. As the narrator comments: “For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are.”<sup>26</sup> What you see and hear depends on your character.

In summary, a virtue is a story-shaped, praiseworthy character trait formed by practices over time that disposes us to act in certain ways. It is a habitual disposition to act with excellence, molded by the narrative(s) we identify with and in which we dwell. We know what is truly good and how to live well by soaking in certain narratives of particular communities, with their corresponding practices, and by looking to people of virtue as role models.

24 Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, “From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics,” in Hauerwas and Jones, 186.

25 Gilbert Meilander, “Virtue in Contemporary Religious Thought,” in *Virtue—Public and Private*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 9.

26 C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 125.

## Ecological Virtue Ethics

In the last three decades serious work has been done on ecological virtue ethics. Beginning with Thomas Hill's pivotal 1983 essay "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments"<sup>27</sup> and with subsequent work by Bill Shaw, Geoffrey Frasz, Ronald Sandler, and Philip Cafaro, to name only a few of the principal contributors, the field is now well established. Evidence for this includes the publication of anthologies such as *Environmental Virtue Ethics*,<sup>28</sup> by Sandler and Cafaro in 2005, and monographs such as *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics*,<sup>29</sup> by Sandler in 2007. One sign that the field has developed its own identity is that it now has its own acronym: EVE.

The contributors to the new field of EVE develop and explicate various virtues. For example, Geoffrey Frasz speaks of benevolence as an environmental virtue.<sup>30</sup> This virtue is the active and consistent concern for the flourishing of both humans and non-humans. The expansion of the sphere of concern to include all living creatures—indeed, concern for whole species and particular places, large ecosystems and local watersheds—is what distinguishes benevolence as an environmental virtue from benevolence as such. Following Aldo Leopold, Frasz expands the concept of community to include nonhuman entities, both living and non-living. He also argues that the environmental virtue of benevolence implies the related virtues of proper humility, patience, and perseverance, as well as the character traits of imagination and attentiveness.

On his list of moral virtues Philip Cafaro lists care, patience, persistence, self-control, humility, respect, and self-restraint.<sup>31</sup> Along with these moral virtues Cafaro also lists intellectual virtues such as attentiveness and wonder, aesthetic virtues such as appreciation and creativity, physical virtues such as stamina and hardiness, and what he calls "overarching virtues" such as wisdom and humility. In another essay Cafaro comes at this issue by exploring the environmental vices of gluttony, arrogance, greed, and apathy.<sup>32</sup>

In one of the few explicitly Christian forays into EVE, Louke van Wensveen mentions care and compassion as ecological virtues, though she does not develop

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27 Thomas Hill, Jr, "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 211-24.

28 Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, eds., *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

29 Ronald Sandler, *Character and Environment: A Virtue-Oriented Approach to Environmental Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

30 Geoffrey Frasz, "Benevolence as an Environmental Virtue," in Sandler and Cafaro, ch. 8.

31 Philip Cafaro, "The Naturalist's Virtues," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 8/2 (Fall-Winter 2001): 85-99.

32 Philip Cafaro, "Gluttony, Arrogance, Greed, and Apathy: An Exploration of Environmental Vice," in Sandler and Cafaro, ch. 9.

her ideas in any detail.<sup>33</sup> In a more recent essay she develops a set of ecological virtues she calls “virtues of care,” which include humility, friendship, attentiveness, benevolence, and love.<sup>34</sup> These “cardinal environmental virtues” sensitize us to the needs of all creatures—human and non-human—and thus widen the scope of what counts morally. They are, therefore, crucial dispositions if we are to properly care for the world in which we live.

This is not the place to extensively review these various proposals. I merely wish to make two observations. First, much solid work has been done to establish the importance of ecological virtue ethics. Most of this work has involved a retrieval and appropriation of the Greco-Roman tradition(s) of virtue ethics. Second, while much work has been done in recent years on EVE, there has been precious little attention given to it by Christians; and yet we Christians have a rich tradition of virtue ethics from which to draw.<sup>35</sup>

In chapter 6 of my book *For the Beauty of the Earth* I develop a set of fourteen ecological virtues.<sup>36</sup> For example, the virtue of courage is moral strength in the face of danger. One of the four cardinal virtues for the Greeks, courage implies firmness of mind and resoluteness of spirit despite the fearful awareness of risk. In the Christian tradition courage was transmuted into fortitude.<sup>37</sup> Fortitude is tenacity in the face of opposition or stubborn persistence in the face of adversity. Ecological courage is a kind of fortitude or perseverance. In the face of apathy or ignorance or fear, ecological courage is the dogged determination to persevere in caring for the earth.

The vice of deficiency is cowardice, or the inability to overcome fear without being reckless. Paralyzed by fear, the coward lacks the ability to act when the situation calls for decisive or swift action. The ecological coward fails to properly care for pine tree, mountain meadow, or planet earth because of some overwhelming fear. The vice of excess is rashness. While courageous people honestly face

33 Louke van Wensveen, “The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Language,” in Sandler and Cafaro, ch. 1. This is adapted from ch. 1 of her book *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amhurst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000).

34 Louke van Wensveen, “Cardinal Environmental Virtues: A Neurobiological Perspective,” in Sandler and Cafaro, ch. 11.

35 In addition to van Wensveen, see also Celia Deane-Drummond, “Environmental Justice and the Economy: A Christian Theologian’s View,” *Ecotheology* 11/3 (2006): 294-310; James Nash, *Loving Nature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 63-67; Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 314-16; and Seth Bible, “Pursuing Ecological Virtue: A Critical Analysis of the Environmental Virtue Ethics Models of Ronald Sandler, Louke Van Wensveen, and Philip Cafaro.” Ph.D. dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011.

36 My argument, in brief, for referring to these virtues as *ecological* virtues is quite simple. While similar in many ways to the virtues as usually conceived, e.g., as naming a particular disposition, these virtues are sufficiently different to warrant the term “ecological virtues” because they have either an expanded scope (e.g., a focus on non-human creatures or a particular place) or a distinct meaning (e.g., courage as ecological courageous endurance) or both.

37 See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, I-II*, question 61.

their fear and persevere in spite of its sometimes paralyzing effects, rash people refuse to acknowledge their fear and thus act hastily or without proper caution. The ecologically rash stuff their fear and rush off to “save the earth,” but in so doing they often do more damage than good.

My undergraduate research student, Lauren Madison, has written insightfully on courage as an ecological virtue and its inextricable relationship to hope.<sup>38</sup> Lauren traces the lives of Kentucky residents who exhibit what she calls “ecological courageous endurance.” Despite great risk and fear, some people stubbornly resist the encroachment of “King Coal” on their land or into their way of life. As Lauren describes one woman, her “decision to hold her ground was not an easy one, but it was one of courage, born of a love that proved greater than fear or want of money.”<sup>39</sup>

### A Virtue Ethic for (Re)New(ed) Creation

With respect to eschatology, three virtues are especially germane: justice, love, and hope. Why these three? In brief, they name central features of a properly biblical eschatology. It is difficult to envision God’s good future of shalom without speaking of justice, love, and hope. As Martin Luther King, Jr. famously put it, “There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice.”<sup>40</sup> That is its trajectory. The ultimate *telos* of creation is that state in which wrongs are put to right and equity reigns supreme. So also with love. The biblical vision of the future cannot be described except by reference to love—the kind of love manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Love is, as Jesus teaches, the summary of the law and the prophets. And hope is a main ingredient in biblical eschatology. Indeed, hope is the life-blood of that yearning for shalom that marks those who follow Jesus. In sum, justice, love, and hope are central to the biblical vision of the future. But what exactly are these three virtues?

First, justice. For the Greeks, justice is rendering to each his or her due—rendering to each that to which they have a right. More exactly, as Nicholas Wolterstorff cogently argues, justice is what due respect for the worth of someone requires.<sup>41</sup> It is treating someone as befits her or his worth, and as such involves respecting the rights of that person.<sup>42</sup> So justice, at its core, is about respect—re-

38 Lauren Madison, “Courage and Hope as Imperative Ecological Virtues in Appalachia: A Case Study Approach.” (unpublished research paper).

39 *Ibid.*, 15.

40 Martin Luther King, Jr., in *A Testament of Hope*, ed. James Washington (New York: Harper One, 2003), 14; see also 20, 257.

41 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice In Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), ch. 7.

42 *Ibid.*, 85-87. For a brief mention of the rights of nonhumans, see 138, 146. For a more in-depth discussion of justice, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). In emphasizing justice as respect for rights, Wolterstorff is echoing the insights of fellow Calvinist Lewis Smedes; see, Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), ch. 2.

spect for rights. Justice is also about fairness. In whatever form—commutative, distributive, or retributive—justice concerns equity. For example, distributive justice has to do not only with the determination and rendering of goods based on legitimate claims to those goods, but also with the equitable allocation of goods. Justice means not playing favorites; it means being impartial and unbiased. Justice is the equitable respect for rights.

Thus the virtue of justice is the habitual disposition to act fairly. It is the ability to make decisions with equity, which is not to be confused with equality. The virtue of justice involves the ability to discern when to treat equals equally and unequals differentially; thus it implies the virtue of practical wisdom. So the virtue of justice implies respect—respect for the rights of others—and the just person knows how to respect the rights of others even when faced with competing rights. The virtue of ecological justice names the settled disposition to act fairly when faced with the competing rights or legitimate claims of creatures both human and nonhuman. It is a cultivated and practiced fairness with respect not only to oppressed women and racial/ethnic groups, but also to domestic animals and wild plants, endangered species and damaged ecosystems. Ecological justice is the steady disposition to render with equity to human and non-human alike that which their worth requires.

In my view, the virtue of justice is not a mean, and thus has only one vice, namely, injustice. Injustice is the propensity to be partial—to play favorites for no good reason or, more perversely, for personal gain. The vice of injustice names a disinclination to be evenhanded, impartial, or fair-minded. As such it fails to give others their due; it fails to respect their rights. Ecological injustice names the willingness to violate the rights of others, including the rights of non-human creatures.<sup>43</sup> Or if you think that non-human creatures have no rights, ecological injustice is the failure of human moral agents to properly exercise their duties to those creatures whose intrinsic value makes them objects of concern.<sup>44</sup> Ecological injustice is the habitual disposition to wrong creatures—human and non-human—whose worth calls for our respect.

Second, love. There are a number of helpful typologies of love,<sup>45</sup> and while this is not the time or place to delve into an in-depth discussion of the various types, we do need to make some distinctions. Benevolence is the promotion of the good of someone as an end in itself, without necessarily feeling moved to and without justice requiring it. In other words, benevolence is the willingness to promote the

43 Paul Haight, "Environmental Virtues and Environmental Justice," *Environmental Ethics* 33/4 (2011): 357-75.

44 Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics* (Temple University Press, 1988), chs. 1 and 6.

45 For example, C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960); Caroline Simon, *The Disciplined Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 37-39.

well-being of another, as an end in itself, even if the bonds of affection are absent and even if no one's rights demand it. It is willing the good regardless of affection. Agapic love (from the Greek *agapē*) is promoting the good of someone as an end in itself simply because that someone is your neighbor. As Wolterstorff puts it: "agapic love is that form of benevolent love which is bestowed on someone just because she is a neighbor."<sup>46</sup> This kind of love can co-exist with other forms of love, e.g., attraction-love, attachment-love. Indeed, most of the time agapic love is accompanied by these other kinds of love. Bonds of affection and attachment usually arise out of personal relationships, such as kinship or friendship, and produce a love that promotes the well-being of the beloved for its own sake. But agapic love may also exist by itself. It may, for example, "seek to promote as an end in itself the flourishing of someone to whom I am neither attached nor attracted, someone whose company I don't like."<sup>47</sup> Finally, again borrowing terminology from Wolterstorff, love as care is that form of agapic love that seeks to promote what one believes to be another person's good. But unlike benevolence, which promotes someone else's good as an end in itself provided justice does not require it, love as care seeks to promote someone's good while also insuring that the person is treated justly. Love as care "combines seeking to enhance someone's flourishing with seeking to secure their just treatment."<sup>48</sup> In this way doing justice is an example of love; justice and love are not contraries, as often thought, but there is justice in love.<sup>49</sup> So love as care names a kind of agapic love that includes justice.

Hence the virtue of love is the habitual disposition, often but not always rooted in affection or compassion, to care about another person.<sup>50</sup> It is the steady inclination to promote someone's good and secure their rights as ends in themselves and not as a means to some other end. The virtue of ecological love, as its etymology suggests, names the settled disposition to care about the house (*oikos*) and its inhabitants—to promote the flourishing of all creatures. It is the care we have not only concerning people but also animals and plants—family pet and backyard

46 Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 33.

47 *Ibid.*, 38.

48 *Ibid.*, 101.

49 *Ibid.*, 84.

50 In reflecting on Jesus's silence about the motives for love, Wolterstorff comments: "Jesus says nothing at all about reasons or motives for loving the neighbor: all he says is that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. He nowhere rejects caring about some people because one is attached to them, caring about others because one feels compassion for them, caring about yet others because one finds oneself attracted to them, and so forth. In all such cases one is doing what Jesus commanded, caring about the other, seeking to promote her good and to secure her rights as ends in themselves. All of us find that there are 'neighbors' who fall outside the orbit of the care evoked by our natural dynamics of attachment, attraction, compassion, identification, and the like. Our natural dynamics leave us indifferent to their good. In such cases, our care about them will have to be out of duty. Duty is the fall-back position. . . . If no natural dynamics motivate you to care about your neighbor, then care about him out of duty." In *Justice in Love*, 116-17.

tree—and special places—local river and favorite park. When these creatures and places are well-known and thus evoke loyalty and affection, care often comes easily. But people who embody this virtue promote the flourishing of nonhuman creatures and places even when affection is absent. So the virtue of ecological love is the habitual disposition to care about the earth and its many inhabitants.

Since the virtue of love is not a mean between extremes, there is no excess but only deficiency; hence there is only one vice. The vice contrary to love is carelessness. This is the habitual inclination not to promote someone's good and secure their rights as ends in themselves. It is the failure to seek as an end in itself the flourishing of someone else. There are at least two forms: malevolence and apathy. Motivated by ill-will, the malevolent actively seek to harm others. Filled with indifference, the apathetic by neglect allow harm to come to others. In either case, the goods of others go unrealized and their rights are flouted. Ecologically understood, malevolence is the habitual disposition to destroy other creatures and places. The ecologically malevolent intentionally wreak havoc upon the earth. Ecological apathy is the absence of any affection for human or nonhuman creatures. The ecologically apathetic are oblivious to and unconcerned about the havoc wreaked upon the earth. In either form the ecologically care-less do not mourn the loss of anything natural. They are puzzled when Aldo Leopold laments, "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds."<sup>51</sup>

Finally, hope. Hope is, to quote Emily Dickinson's famous poem, "the thing with feathers, that perches in my soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all." Hope is confident expectation of future good. It involves imagining some good future, believing that such a future is possible, and acting in such a way as to bring this good future to fruition.<sup>52</sup> So the act of hoping involves three things—imagining, believing, and willing. For example, I imagine my local lake purged of all invasive species and free of water contaminated by harmful bacteria. I believe such a future is actually obtainable, especially given the recent unveiling of a watershed-wide cleanup effort named "Project Clarity." And I will to act in such a way that this vision of the local watershed becomes a reality. For Christians the expectation of a good future is based on God's promises and God's character as a keeper of promises.<sup>53</sup> First and foremost, Christians hope because they worship a God who raised Jesus from the dead as a sign of the future restoration of all things.

Thus the virtue of hope is the settled disposition to act with confidence to bring

51 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 197.

52 Lewis Smedes, *Standing on the Promises* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), chs. 2-4.

53 Hope is different from optimism, since optimism is an inclination to put the most favorable face on actions or events, without adequate warrant or reason. See N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), ch. 5.

about some imagined good future. It is an inclination to live into an imagined world that is really possible, no matter how improbable. Ecologically speaking, hope names the settled disposition to yearn for God's good future of shalom, rooted in confidence that such a future lies in God's good hands. Ecological hope remembers the rainbow promise made to Noah, celebrates the Resurrection, anticipates the New Jerusalem.

There are two vices that correspond to the virtue of hope. The vice of deficiency is despair. Despair is the absence of any expectation of a good future. As its etymology suggests, it is the loss of all hope (*de-sperare*). Despair is cynicism of a profound kind, for it signals a failure or inability to trust. Despair is the hopelessness that leads, as Soren Kierkegaard powerfully describes it, to the sickness unto death.<sup>54</sup> Ecologically speaking, despair is hopelessness in the face of our aching earth. It is the inability to imagine or believe, in the face of pervasive ecological degradation and intractable ecological problems, that any liveable future on earth is possible. Despair is an abandonment of belief in the ultimate redemption of all things.

The vice of excess is presumptuousness. This can take two forms. Sometimes it has to do with what is called a presumptuous attitude. In contrast to the confident expectation of genuine hope, this kind of false hope exudes an over-confidence that takes the good future for granted. It is an unwarranted audacity of belief. Another kind of presumptuousness concerns the grounds for belief rather than the level of confidence. Not all objects of hope are worthy of trust. There are pretenders to hope in our anxious world. Prophets of easy credulity are lurking virtually everywhere. This species of false hope presumes that ecological healing will be pain free and/or won't demand much from us.

## Conclusion

Eschatology shapes ethics. And a truly biblical eschatology of (re)new(ed) creation should inspire us to become earthkeepers. More exactly, such a view of the future should motivate us to become people who embody ecological virtues such as justice, love, and hope. While many people of late have spoken of earthkeeping, few have done so as eloquently or insightfully as Wendell Berry. I conclude with some words of his.

The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it. And He has never revoked the conditions,

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54 Soren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

bearing on His gift to us of the use of it, that oblige us to take excellent care if it. If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?<sup>55</sup>

May we be empowered by the Holy Spirit to embody the virtues necessary to bear faithful witness to God's great good future of shalom.

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55 Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (New York: Northpoint, 1990), 98.