

# DECOLONIZING ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY FOR PLANETARY HEALING

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# ABSTRACT

Colonial mindsets and structures in the Western world drive broken relationships between human beings and non-human nature. In 2019, Kyle Whyte identified a tension between the rapid societal transformation required in response to climate change and the considerably slower pace at which remediation of trust, inequity, and imbalances of power happen between people within the colonial construct. This thesis offers a diagnostic tool to begin grappling with the question of how to heal broken relationships with each other and with non-human nature. Problematic assumptions in Western natural laws and environmental ethics undermine efforts to address worsening ecological crises in the Anthropocene – the geological time period defined by increasing instability of Earth system processes from human activity. Drawing on the ideas of scholars Charles W Mills, Serene Khader, Deborah McGregor, and John Borrows, I explore a philosophy of planetary healing - an interdisciplinary, multicultural approach to justice, health, and well-being.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The concurrent ecological and social crises unfolding on a global scale are symptoms of deep fissures between people, human-made systems, and ecosystems. In the field of philosophy, questions pertaining to the moral relationship between humans and nature are matters to be dealt with in a particular branch of ethics called environmental ethics. The isolation of environmental ethics within academia demonstrates how disconnected the Western worldview is from a healthy relationship with nature. The goal of this project is to critically examine the concept of nature in Western ethics and epistemology with the purpose of reorienting the project of environmental philosophy toward a philosophy for planetary health and well-being from a decolonized justice lens.

I was drawn to environmental philosophy by a desire to better understand and articulate my personal relationship with nature and my concern about the deterioration of humanity's connection with the natural world. Growing up in Toronto at the edge of the largest urban ravine system in the world, the ravine is a character in my childhood story – a teacher. From my explorations, I observed animal population cycles and stark seasonal changes to the landscape. It was exciting and jarring to spot the evidence that deer, coyotes, foxes, or rabbits had visited our backyard. We shared an unlikely space where urbanization and wildness intersected in an awkward harmony. Later in life, I began to explore the history of this land and the stories of people who had shared its gifts under the Dish With One Spoon Treaty. The Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations have stewarded and lived in relation to their traditional territory long before I learned to love it. Like many white environmentalists, my passion for protecting nature as an adult was precipitated by positive childhood experiences engaging with the natural world. This is one of the privileges of my ancestry, skin colour, and economic status. I learned about environmentalism in order to protect *other* beings, not myself or my family. I did not worry about getting sick from the water coming out of the tap. My childhood home was not built beside a landfill. And though my ancestors faced relocation, prejudices

and financial hardships, we were afforded privileges by the settler colonial system in Canada. As settlers, we have benefited from the oppression and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup> and other oppressed communities.

A degree in chemistry, particularly a class on atmospheric chemistry, validated my worries about global warming. From then on, addressing climate change was part of my environmentalism. This is when environmentalism became about *my* future. I worried about the consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather events, negatively impacting the health and well-being of people around the world. I read books and followed the international reports about climate change. I purposefully learned skills that allowed me to make environmentalism my career at a national environmental charity in Canada. My colleagues are courageous, skilled people who seek justice for communities and ecosystems facing environmental degradation and threats. I have observed how legal and political systems interact with capitalism and wealth disparity to prevent access to justice and enable the continued destruction of our Earth system. Environmental disasters exacerbate existing injustices. Record-breaking heatwaves can be fatal for people who do not have access to air conditioning. People making less than minimum wage have few options when floodwaters make their homes inhospitable. Remote communities with no summer road access cannot easily escape disasters. These are just a few over-simplified examples. Globally, the people who are suffering the worst impacts of climate change are most often the people who contributed least to the human activities that drive climate change. These injustices solidified my conviction that the status quo needs to change.

My personal history and identity shape the lens through which I see the world. I am a white, non-Indigenous, cis, female environmentalist. My identity factors into the methodology of this project. I read with a critical eye the canons of environmental philosophy in the Western tradition that described an

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'Indigenous' throughout this project when referring generally to the philosophies, epistemologies, and laws of Indigenous Peoples. In the Indigenous Circle of Experts' report and recommendations for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, 'Indigenous Peoples' are defined as: "The original people inhabiting lands and territories before the arrival of European settlers. Canada's constitution recognizes three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples (referred to as Aboriginal Peoples in the constitution): First Nations, the Métis Nation, and the Inuit." (ICE, p. 103-104)

environmentalism with which I was most familiar to see the hidden intuitions and assumptions. I appeal to Indigenous worldviews and scholarship about decolonizing Western philosophy with humility and openness because these ideas challenge the foundational assumptions of my worldview. This thesis was written through an interdisciplinary approach. Arguments in this project are drawn from the works of non-Indigenous and Indigenous scientists, feminists, legal scholars, environmental justice activists, and health science scholars. Listening to Indigenous and Black environmental justice activists revealed that environmentalism in North America and environmental ethics are founded on and center Western cultural norms and moral values. Neither field has done enough to grapple with their proximity to colonialism and their false objectivity. This thesis looks critically at the dominant worldview with the objective to identify its flaws and to explore a decolonized environmental philosophy for living our lives and seeking justice in the context of ecological collapse. My aim is to uncover foundational assumptions in Western natural law philosophy, science, and ethics that reinforce injustices and negatively affect well-being.

Colonial mindsets and structures in the Western world drive broken relationships between human beings and non-human nature<sup>2</sup>. This thesis offers a diagnostic tool to begin grappling with the question of how to heal battered and broken relationships with each other and with non-human nature. Through an exploration of the concept of nature in Western legal philosophy and ethics, I aim to uncover problematic assumptions that underpin legal and academic narratives pervasive in Western natural laws and environmental ethics. I trace the concept of *colonial nature*<sup>3</sup> in Western natural law philosophy and ethics and explain that it remains the dominant view of nature in the Western world. Skewed by centuries of the supremacy of male European perspectives and patriarchal, capitalist political arrangements, this concept

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<sup>2</sup> I chose the term non-human nature, used by Dryzek and Pickering in the *Politics of the Anthropocene* (2019), to describe the components of our Earth system that are distinctly not human while recognizing that we are all nature. There are many terms used in the literature to describe these entities and beings in our Earth system, such as 'the natural world', 'nature', or 'more-than-human nature'.

<sup>3</sup> I chose to describe the concept of nature in the Western world as 'colonial nature' - which is not a term used in any of the literature I reviewed. Through this thesis project, I construct the definition of this term and use it to demonstrate a unique conceptualization of non-human entities in the Western world that developed during a period of intense colonization.

of nature undermines efforts to address worsening ecological crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss that characterize the Anthropocene – the geological time period defined by increasing instability of Earth system processes from human activity. *Colonial nature loving* describes an attitude toward non-human nature that emerges in Western cultures against the backdrop of the colonization, industrialization, and mechanization of land and people throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The attitude shapes an environmental lens that is imperceptive to environmental justice and dismissive of Indigenous scholarship and activism.

In contrast to the *colonial nature* concept, Indigenous natural law philosophies and epistemologies present alternative ways of relating to non-human nature. There is a challenge arising from a tension identified by Kyle Whyte, an Anishinaabe climate justice scholar and activist, between rapid societal transformation required in response to ecological crises and the considerably slower pace at which remediation of trust, inequity, and imbalances of power happen between people within the colonial construct (Whyte, 2019). My aim is to confront this challenge drawing on the ideas of scholars Charles W Mills, Serene Khader, Deborah McGregor, John Borrows, and Kyle Whyte to overcome the limitations of the planetary justice model presented by political scholars John S. Dryzek and Jonathan Pickering (Dryzek, 2019). I then present a case study about protected areas in Canada to explore the need to identify Western values that underpin divisive and oppressive conservation practices and illustrate how an *anti-imperialist planetary justice*<sup>4</sup> lens unearths important histories and alternative approaches to justice. I conclude with a philosophy for planetary healing<sup>5</sup> that shifts the dialogue from the moral theorizing of environmental ethics to an interdisciplinary, multicultural approach to health and well-being in the

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<sup>4</sup> Building on the concept of ‘anti-imperialist justice’ presented by Khader in Decolonizing Universalism and the framework for ‘planetary justice’ proposed by Dryzek and Pickering, I construct the concept ‘anti-imperialist planetary justice’ in Chapter 3 of this project. Anti-imperialist planetary justice is not a concept that I found in my literature review.

<sup>5</sup> Similar to the term ‘planetary health’ which is increasingly being used in environmental philosophy and studies literature, I expect the term ‘planetary healing’ to grow in usage though I did not come across it in my literature review. For the purpose of this project, I construct a concept of planetary healing in reference to a philosophy that is concerned with justice, health, and well-being for all things in the Earth system.



Anthropocene. This philosophy centers anti-oppression and anti-exploitation and probes counterintuitive ideas for accelerated societal transformation to stay within safe planetary boundaries.

## CHAPTER 2: BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW

### 2.1 FORMING THE CONCEPT OF COLONIAL NATURE

This section offers an exploration of the concept of nature in legal philosophy and ethics to uncover the assumptions that underpin a *colonial nature* view in legal and academic narratives pervasive in Western natural laws and environmental ethics. Centuries of male, European-dominated perspectives on philosophy and science produced the *colonial nature* view which remains the dominant view of nature in the Western world. Aimed at revealing problematic assumptions about the natural world in philosophy, I unearth the concept of *colonial nature* and its three distinguishing features: the separation of humanity from non-human nature, the mechanization of nature, and the universalization of the concept of nature, such that nature's indigeneity<sup>6</sup> becomes unimportant. Through abstraction, we lose sight of a defining feature of nature: the recognition that ecosystems and individual entities in non-human nature such as a single milkweed plant or a gurgling stream, are native to particular places. This targeted literature review will explore the ideas beneath the Western concept of nature. Rational beings' dominion over irrational creatures and the appropriation of nature are fundamental ideas in Western ethics and law. As a contrast to *colonial nature*, I appeal to Cree and Haudenosaunee natural law and ways of relating to non-human nature from the Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan, aymara, and guaraní Peoples.

### NATURAL LAW PHILOSOPHY & 'THE UNCULTIVATED WASTE' OF AMERICA

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'indigeneity' is used throughout this project to describe the observation that all nature, human and non-human, has a unique relationship to place. The amorphous, disconnected concept of nature prevalent in the Western worldview diminishes or erases this defining feature of nature.

Two images of nature have co-existed in Western philosophy and religion throughout the ages: nature as a nurturing mother and nature as disorder or chaos to be dominated by human activity. (Merchant, 1989, p. 3) The concept of nature as life-giving and the earth as alive has the effect of strictly constraining the scope of ethical human activity while the idea that non-human nature is something to be subdued has very different ethical consequences. Industrialization and the scientific revolution evolved to be incompatible with the maternalistic concept of nature, instead nature has been divided into its component parts and reduced to an object for human cultivation, experience, and convenience. This section demonstrates the commitments to land ownership and rational progress that formulate the Western concept of the natural world.

In ethics, the term nature is utilized in two different contexts. In the first context, the terms ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ are used as normative standards of rightness and wrongness. (Vogel, 2015, p. 26-27) Understanding human nature or ‘natural inclinations’ has occupied philosophical discourse since the discipline’s origin. Claims about natural or unnatural characteristics or ways of being can be used interchangeably with normal and abnormal descriptors. These concepts have been used to propagate racist, sexist, and homophobic views and construct harmful stereotypes. Though further investigation into the use of nature in this way is necessary, the focus of this project is about the second context in which nature is used to describe non-human beings. In this context, the role non-human nature plays in contributing to the experience of human life is explored. What is ‘nature’ in Western thought? What is nature in other worldviews that retain their indigeneity to land? Natural law theories attempt to universalize cultural and religious concepts of nature through rule and measure. Natural laws in Western philosophy extol beliefs about human nature, providence, and subordination of all of creatures. Influenced by the doctrines of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths in the early thirteenth century, the writings of Christian priest St. Thomas Aquinas were concerned with human nature, universal ethical principles, logic, and theology. In the “Treatise on Law”, Aquinas constructs a foundational natural law theory in Western epistemology. In defining what law is, he argues that law pertains to reason because law is the

rule and measure that restrains and induces human action. According to Aquinas, law must be directed to the common good. The first precept of natural law reinforces the unique goal of human existence:

“Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.” (Aquinas, p.8)

Belonging to natural law are all the “natural” inclinations: preserving human life, reproduction, education of offspring, as well as, knowing the truth of God and living in society. (ibid., p. 8) As a rational creature, humans are inclined by nature to seek that which is good, assuming that nature is a normative standard for goodness or rightness. The practical reason that is unique to human beings is founded on the notion of good. In Aquinas’ view, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence and critically, *partakes* in the share of providence by its power over itself and over other creatures. Natural law aims to promote certain human behaviours and activities while restricting others. Proximity to God, shared providence over other creatures, and the rational pursuit of the good distinguishes human beings from all other animals. For Aquinas, rationality is a defining feature of human nature – carefully and clearly delineating human action and pursuits from the action and pursuits of all other living things. Humans are extricated from the natural world by their relationship with God which is evidenced by their rational nature.

A new generation of natural law philosophers have taken up the tradition of assuming the human and non-human nature dualism. In *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980), John Finnis identifies seven basic human goods which are positioned as the basic aspects of well-being in a human life. These are Finnis’ self-evident, nonreducible, non-hierarchical human goods: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, friendship or sociability, practical reasonableness, and ‘religion’. (Finnis, 1980, p. 85-90) Neither relationship nor connection to non-human nature is considered a basic human good under this view. Nature is mentioned as an example of where one might find beautiful form in seeking aesthetic experience, but it is notably absent from the definition of the basic goods of life and ‘religion’. He describes the latter as “a recognition of (however residual), and concern about, an order of things ‘beyond’ each in every man.” (ibid. p. 90). This transcendent order-of-things and of human freedom and

reason is a divine or transcendent other with which we should live in harmony. Curiously, this order-of-things neglects to relate human and non-human nature. Evidently, according to Finnis' natural law, human life, though dependent on nature, does not need a relationship to nature in order to achieve a good human life. Moreover, he argues that the first principles of natural law in Western philosophy enable humans to tap into these basic goods, thus they encompass "everything one could reasonably want to do, to have, and to be." (ibid. p. 97)

More than merely neglecting non-human nature as fundamental for a good human life, the "Father of Liberalism", John Locke, propagates the view of nature as a subordinate, chaotic entity that should be controlled. Locke's views on nature, made explicit in his political writings on natural law, and the lasting influence of his political ideology allows another critical assumption about nature to take root in Western law and philosophy: God has *given* the earth and all the inferior creatures to 'men' in common for the benefit and convenience of human life. It is crucial to note that the term 'men' is intentionally exclusive of most people. This view of nature promotes its subordination and lays the foundation for reducing complex ecosystems into mere 'natural resources' – Locke triumphantly commits nature to centuries of exploitation for the benefit of rational human progress:

"God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and the rational (and labour was to be his title to it). (Locke, 2003, p.277)

One enduring legacy from Locke's political writings is solidifying the desired relationship between humans and nature as land ownership and extraction. According to Locke, 'men' can push the boundaries of their ownership so long as they do not infringe on the rightful ownership of another man. In other words, 'men' have a right to as much land as they can make useful so long as they do not claim right to the property of another 'man'. Locke assumes liberty and equality of 'men' in the state of nature, thus natural law binds and supports the common interests of all individuals, and facilitates peace, and

security of possessions. (ibid., p. 178) These claims demonstrate that nature is only valuable once it is owned and cultivated. The labour of ‘men’ introduces value to all things in nature, especially land.

Labour is the process through which the common good becomes the property of individual ‘men’, according to the natural law. But Locke’s influential thesis has specific ideas about what human activities constitute ‘labour’. Locke emphasizes that God gave the world to men to be used *industriously* and *rationaly* which he understands as tillage, planting, improving, and cultivating for production. (ibid., p. 275-276) In a bold statement, Locke reveals his biases about the people and ways of living with land in the Americas in the sixteenth century and his conviction that uncultivated land is wasted:

“For the provisions serving to the support of human life produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land are ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land, of equal richness, lying waste in common...For I ask whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants<sup>7</sup> as many conveniences of life as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well-cultivated.” (ibid., p.279-280)

Far from providing a deeper understanding of the ecological relationship between humans and the non-human natural world, Western natural laws firmly anchor the concept of nature as something to be controlled, appropriated, and exploited in service of a specific type of human progress. Locke’s claims about the rational use of nature reflect the transformational change that the concept of nature was undergoing in Western thought between 1500 and 1700.

Propelled by the Scientific Revolution and influential philosopher-physicists Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, Western thought developed toward a mechanical philosophy of nature which regarded the natural world as “material and efficient causes – matter and force” that obeyed

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<sup>7</sup> Locke makes a disparaging and harmful reference to the people living in the Americas in contrast to people living in England. From my interpretation of the literature, I take Locke to be referring to early settlers and Indigenous people.

principles and laws of physics. (Merchant, 1989, p. 277) The mechanization of the world sounded the death knell for the view of nature as a life-giving mother. The living earth view that had underpinned an organistic philosophy of nature imbued with “spatial hierarchy, value, purpose, harmony, quality and form” was replaced with the view of nature as uncultivated natural resources. (ibid.)

For Leibniz, human progress and civilization were inextricably linked to the rational understanding and management of nature. In the *Death of Nature*, ecofeminist philosopher and science historian, Carol Merchant argues that classical physics, the legacies of Newton and Leibniz, bestowed upon the Western world an atomic representation of nature that could be rearranged and manipulated. She notes that commentators have noticed in Leibnizian philosophy parallel ideas with the fundamental principles of capitalism. Echoes of capitalism and Locke’s liberalism are evident in Leibniz’s ideas:

“In addition to the general beauty and perfection of the works of God, we must recognize a certain perpetual and very free progress of the whole universe such that it advances always to still greater improvement. It is thus that even now a great part of our earth has received cultivation and will receive more and more.” (ibid., p. 280)

Merchant concludes that societies transformed from structuring themselves around the concept of nature as organic to the concept of nature as something that can be divided into its parts, tamed, and manipulated to create something new – something useful. In other words, the parts are put before the whole. From the corpse of nature as the life-giving mother, capitalism emerges with organistic traits of a living entity, such as growth and decay. Rational progress breathes life into capitalism. The survival of capitalism justifies the exploitation of nature and people. Merchant’s concluding argument that the exploitation of nature and oppression of people are linked was reflected by influential ecofeminists throughout the 1980s. (Gaard, 2011, p. 29)

“Increasingly capital and the market would assume the organic attributes of growth, strength, activity, pregnancy, weakness, decay, and collapse obscuring and mystifying the new underlying social

relations of production and reproduction that make economic growth and progress possible. Nature, women, blacks<sup>8</sup>, and wage laborers were set on a path toward a new status as “natural” and human resources for the modern world system. Perhaps the ultimate irony in these transformations was the new name given them: rationality.” (Merchant, 1989, p. 288)

Since the mid-twentieth century, feminists and environmental justice activists have questioned foundational assumptions in the Western worldview and critiqued the patriarchy for establishing exploitative modes of production. They uncovered harmful characterizations of nature widely assumed by dominant thinkers in Western epistemologies. Eco-feminist scholars criticized the masculinization of Western science and technology and drew parallels between the violence of colonization and the violent excavation of the natural world. Ecofeminism revealed the ways in which culture, language, and religion legitimized exploitative and oppressive conquests. (Gaard, 2011, p. 30) Women, like environmental justice activist Hazel Johnston, lead the movements that exposed racist and classist political decision-making for siting toxic dumps, hazardous waste disposal, coal mining, and other industrious or waste management activities with associated harms to human and environmental health.

Since Aquinas, philosophical ideas have contributed to important theoretical commitments in natural law and scientific explanations of nature. Patriarchal arrangements in Western societies propagated theoretical commitments that underpin the dominant concept of nature in modern Western philosophical and scientific epistemologies. Though patriarchy and colonization are historically and theoretically intertwined, the focus of this thesis is to uncover the colonial roots of Western thought. The features that define the Western concept of nature, or what I call *colonial nature*, and their implications are:

- Separation of humans and non-human nature

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<sup>8</sup> The term ‘blacks’ used as noun in this quote is outdated and offensive. When referring to a person’s or people’s race, the capitalized adjective Black is preferred.

- Implication: non-human nature is valuable insofar as it satisfies human interests and goals
- Mechanistic epistemology of nature
  - Implication: epistemic goals emphasize understanding the parts of nature, rather than seeking to understand nature holistically
- Universal and disconnected from indigeneity
  - Implication: global conquests for ownership of nature are rationalized

The features and implications of *colonial nature* will be explored further throughout this project. The next section reviews the arguments of environmental philosophers attempting to challenge the rationality and morality of unlimited cultivation, expansion, and destruction of *colonial nature*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people in the West were re-evaluating the role that nature played in their lives and philosophers began questioning the morality of a reductionist concept of nature as a natural resource. But many philosophers striving to develop an ethic for humanity's various interactions with the environment, retained the *colonial nature* view, thus rendering their theories incapable of seeing humans and non-human nature in a fundamentally different relationship.

## NATURE LOVING AND THE EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

David Peterson Del Mar's book *Environmentalism* surveys the evolution of nature's role in Western thought and culture throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Del Mar describes the "cultural history of nature loving" in which he demonstrates the irony of increasingly successful preservation and conservation efforts amidst continued exploitation of the environment. (Del Mar, 2013, p. 4) Industrialization and urbanization in Europe throughout the nineteenth century created the conditions in which city dwellers romanticised about nature as a means of reverent escape from their increasingly mechanized lives. But colonial commitments to the unfettered cultivation of land thwarted early efforts to conserve forests, marshes, and other wild spaces throughout colonial and colonized nations. Instead,



governments invested in urban parks and gardens and wealthy citizens kept aesthetically pleasing private gardens. These alternatives had the advantage of offering space where people could enjoy nature without significantly disturbing economic progress. (ibid. p. 20-21) Preservationists, seeking to maintain undisturbed landscapes and protect populations of certain species, and conservationists, seeking to utilize natural resources sustainably, emerged from shifting cultural ideas about nature. The idea to turn wild spaces into parks where people could recreate – hike, hunt, fish, camp – proliferated in North America after the Second World War. (ibid., 33-34)

Throughout the ebb and flow of Western environmentalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nature provided a place to escape lives otherwise preoccupied with economic and rational progress. When industrialization and consumption are the dominant modes of thinking, the aesthetic beauty and freedom in natural landscapes offer an essential reprieve. Environmentalists are people who recognize that unlimited, extractive human activity threatens their reprieve. Philosophers took up the task of justifying why the exploitation of nature as an essential feature of rational progress was morally wrong. In North America, conservation and preservation emerged as the intuitive answers to ecological woes: conserve natural wilderness and wild spaces or restore lands from ecological damage by securing ownership of land and controlling the types of activities that people are permitted to engage in. Reaching beyond borders, conservation and protection of wild spaces proliferated to other colonized or previously colonized nations with devastating implications for local Indigenous communities. (Domínguez, 2020) Dominguez and Luomo argue that colonization has been a mechanism of dispossession of lands from Indigenous Peoples first, through exploitation for economic gain and development, then through the remedial project of conservation to protect and restore land.

“The introduction of individualised property regimes and the emphasis placed on cultivation as the only “productive” form of land use worthy of legal protection created insecure land tenure and enabled colonisers to exploit [I]ndigenous peoples, their lands and their resources. Colonial powers then

sought to remedy the ecological damage caused by their overexploitation through conservation models premised on removing [I]ndigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.” (Dominguez, 2020)

Del Mar identifies a cultural phenomenon of ‘nature loving’ developing in the Western world throughout the twentieth century. It is critical to recognize that ‘nature loving’ is an attitude cultivated against the backdrop of colonization and the mechanization of nature. Thus, I suggest describing the cultural phenomenon that emerges within the Western worldview as an attitude of *colonial nature loving* toward non-human nature. The features of *colonial nature* allow environmentally minded people to cultivate an appreciation for parts of nature, such as certain species with aesthetic appeal or landscapes that evoke awe and creativity, while ignoring other parts of nature, such as swamps that can be transformed into farmland. It is completely consistent for the attitude of *colonial nature loving* to seek to protect distinct parts of the natural world for purely aesthetic or recreational purposes. In contrast, a holistic view of non-human nature cannot justify the exploitation of non-human relatives for human gain.

The attitude of *colonial nature loving* was legitimized and substantiated in philosophical discourse through environmental ethics. As a field of study, environmental ethics as we know it today took hold in the years after three influential writings in the 1960s brought attention to environmental degradation by human activity: Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, Lynn White Jr’s article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, and Garrett Harding’s “The Tragedy of the Commons.” (Kawall, 2015) These writings ignited academic debates about the value of nature, ontology of nature, non-anthropocentrism, and human responsibility to the natural world. Philosophers wrangled ideas of respecting and valuing nature into traditionally anthropocentric ethical theories. They were seeking moral justification for propagating *colonial nature loving* by investigating normative claims for why it ought to be morally right to prevent degradation of the natural world. Philosophers could easily talk about non-human nature as a universal separate from human beings because the concept of *colonial nature* in Western epistemology had the defining features of nature as normative and disconnected from the indigeneity or relationship to place shared by human and non-human entities in the Earth system.

In his comprehensive book, *Respect for Nature*, Paul Taylor rigorously employs the tools of contemporary ethics to develop a biocentric outlook. The biocentric outlook claims that each living thing, regardless of consciousness, has its own way of pursuing the good. He argues that we can understand that each living thing is a teleological center that organizes its behaviour toward protecting and maintaining its own existence. (Taylor, 1986, p. 79) Observation and Western scientific discovery help us better understand the behaviours of other living things so that we may recognize how human activity disrupts an individual organism's good. According to Taylor, the natural world becomes morally relevant when we accept the intrinsic value of plants and animals and view them as teleological centers and reject a human-centered approach to ethical questions. (ibid., p. 78) Aquinas argued that the first precept of natural law is to pursue the good and this pursuit of the good set humans apart from nature. Taylor attempts to dissolve the distinction implicit in anthropocentric ethical systems, like that of Aquinas' natural law, by demonstrating that nature participates in the pursuit of a good of its own. This conceptualization projects the Western formulation of individualistic pursuits of the good over all nature without consideration of the unique web of life originating in specific lands.

Taylor formulates the attitude of respect for nature into an ethic called the biocentric outlook. He addresses what he calls the general problem of competing claims. These are the conflicts that arise when the good of wild living things involves a cost to human benefit. To illustrate the conflict, Taylor chooses examples where the situation apparently does not involve a violation of *human* ethics, these include "cutting down a woodland to build a medical center" or "removing the side of a mountain in a strip-mining operation". This monocultural version of human ethics ignores the natural laws of Indigenous peoples that may be infringed upon in the examples provided. Yet, Taylor asserts that we are only presented with a moral dilemma when the exercise of human rights requires some cost to nature that involves "direct and irreversible" harm to other living things. (ibid. p. 157) Cost-benefit analysis to ethical questions is an intuitive approach in Western philosophy, such as weighing the amount of perceived good against the amount of perceived bad in order to determine how a moral agent must proceed. Holding a

universal, mechanistic view of nature in the analysis of competing claims permits human-centric concessions that overlook the interconnectedness of people and nature in a given place.

To address the human tendency to exploit nature, Taylor proposes that accepting the inherent value of non-human nature will constrain human activity to some degree. In particular, he wants moral agents to be moved to limit human population, consumption, and use of technology. The type of moral dilemma described by Taylor and prescriptions to constrain common culprits to the environmental crisis continue to capture the attention of Western environmentalists and environmental ethicists who reject the subordination of nature to human interests but retain features of *colonial nature loving*. Though the biocentric outlook rejects the belief that nature is inherently inferior to humans, Taylor's attitude of respect for nature shares all the features of *colonial nature loving*. His theory relies on Western science and epistemology of nature; humans are fundamentally separate from non-human nature by their moral agency; and he approaches non-human nature from a global perspective, ignoring the origin of nature to a place and relationship to place, generally.

Some philosophers have taken a different tact: proposing an anthropocentric environmental ethic. Bryan Norton's paper *Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism* exemplifies this strategy. Norton argues that claims to the inherent value of nature are not essential elements of an environmental ethic. He aims to provide an ethic for the protection and non-exploitation of nature that refers only to human values. Strong anthropocentrism suggests that any human desire or need that can be satisfied is enough for value formation, thus there is no way to constrain or criticize consumptive human activities that satisfy human desires or needs. Weak anthropocentrism, on the other hand, integrates human desires or needs that are considered within the context of a rationally adopted worldview. The *colonial nature* lens is evident in Norton's definition of such a worldview:

“a world view which includes fully supported scientific theories and a metaphysical framework interpreting those theories, as well as a set of rationally supported aesthetic and moral ideals” (Norton, 1984, p. 134)

He proposes that weak anthropocentric environmental ethics is consistent with a worldview that recognizes the close relationship between human and nonhuman entities and rejects the exploitation of nature. Not only would weak anthropocentrism provide an ethic of non-exploitation of nature, but Norton claims it would be consistent with protecting nature as a source of value formation within human lives. Weak anthropocentrism prioritizes human experiences that form values for living our lives well. Norton theorizes that if environmentalists demonstrate that experiences of nature inspire or teach something about human values, then a framework for the protection of nature is possible under a weak anthropocentric environmental ethic. (ibid., p.135) This theory hinges on adopting the cultural commitment to *colonial nature loving* into a rational worldview.

The prescriptions from Taylor and Norton about how we ought to value nature do not grapple with the problematic features embedded in the Western concept of nature. Their intuitions concentrate on solving the problems their worldviews enable them to see: the notion of progress and the unsustainability of unlimited human activity as the measurement of rational progress. For this reason, environmental ethics are intuitively aimed at limiting human use of the environment and sometimes, human population growth. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, Bill Devall, and George Sessions criticized the dominant modern worldview for treating the Earth as a collection of natural resources and for enforcing the idea that humans dominate nature. They were critical of human-centered ethics that encouraged technological progress without limit. (Devall, 1985, p. 43) Drawing on Western, Eastern and Indigenous epistemologies for inspiration, Bill Devall and George Sessions, aimed their anthology at demonstrating an ethic for cultivating a deep, long-range ecology perspective and ecological consciousness. They recognized the wisdom in diverse cultures relationships with nature and advocated for drawing “from the Earth wisdom of Native Americans and other primal cultures” (ibid. p. 61). The language used in this quote to describe Indigenous cultures was common at the time that Devall and Sessions published their work on deep ecology. The use of “other primal cultures” insinuates that the authors viewed Indigenous cultures as unchanging and historic. This is an inadequate and offensive characterization. It is important to recognize

that Indigenous practices, philosophies, and epistemologies are not stagnant; they are complex and change over time. By ignoring their positionality and systemic power imbalances, deep ecologists firmly defended a problematic overpopulation thesis. The overpopulation thesis holds that solving ecological collapse and nurturing the flourishing of non-human life requires a significant decrease and intentional stabilization of the human population. An intuitive idea for scholars from powerful, wealthy nations, restricting population growth overlooks inequality of resource allocation and patterns of consumption. It conveniently ignores the reality that a very small percentage of people on earth hoard most of the wealth from natural resources for their own benefit.

Environmental ethics, such as deep ecology, which identify human overpopulation as a main threat to the planet are easily co-opted by racist political objectives to promote violent acts and exclusionary policies. Kristy Campion describes ecofascism as a romanticization of an imagined past society in ecological harmony that can only be returned to through the restoration of a “natural order” that segregates races and discriminates against immigrants. Ecofascists employ the overpopulation thesis to promote racist, anti-immigration rhetoric that discourages procreation among races perceived by ecofascists to be “inferior”. Incidences of violent, fatal attacks in the name of ecofascism are increasing. Because Western institutions’ ignorance of non-Western voices and perspectives is so pervasive, I am skeptical that we would ever achieve human population reduction or stabilization in a non-exploitative or non-oppressive way. And I warn those who maintain the overpopulation thesis to be hyper vigilant about the motives, intentions, and impacts of their arguments to mitigate the possibility of inspiring destructive ecofascist rhetoric.

For philosophers in the first few decades of environmental ethics, the interesting questions were about value attribution to nature and human morality with respect to nature. Does nature have intrinsic value or is it valuable to the ideal continuation of human life and consciousness? Western intuitions and questions germinated the anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric debate. This debate does not lead us to question the assumption of ownership in the relationship between humans and non-human nature.

Philosophers on either side of the debate assume the Western scientific concept of mechanistic nature and are unable to overcome the distinction deeply embedded in certain religious and cultural beliefs that nature is subordinate to humans. Environmentalists and environmental philosophers are stuck on how we ought to incentivize or motivate human beings to limit their impact on *colonial nature* instead of exploring alternative ways to relate to the natural world. So long as limits are set on human activities and population, our systemic commitment to rational progress need not be challenged. Thus, environmental ethics is preoccupied with the question of how we *ought* to cultivate the attitude of nature loving toward an unexamined concept of nature, rather than questioning how to live well *with* thriving, healthy non-human nature.

*Colonial nature* is a reductionist concept that is divisible into component parts. Therefore, *colonial nature loving* produces environmental ethics that treat certain parts of nature differently from other parts: protecting species at risk or conserving parcels of land while permitting other areas to be plundered for natural resources. Preservation and conservation movements have succeeded in protecting specific areas of land from large-scale industrial exploitation by restricting human activity, but it has not renewed our relationship with the Earth in a meaningful way. In many instances, these restrictions have had devastating consequences for local Indigenous peoples. The ecological crises of today reveal that alongside decades of debate among environmental ethicists, enacting environmental laws, and protecting of biodiverse regions, Western political and legal systems continue to permit the ravaging of non-human nature.

In contrast, in the “wild woods and uncultivated waste” referred to by Locke, millions of Indigenous people lived in a fundamentally different relationship with the land and animals. Many Indigenous natural laws share the notion of human interconnectedness with non-human nature which inspires respect for the natural world and cultivates a sense of responsibility to all things from perspectives that are deeply connected land. Natural law theories in Western philosophy and dominant environmental ethics do not describe a sense of responsibility to the non-human natural world. *Colonial*

*nature loving* prescribes that humans have the responsibility to care for nature insofar as it can continue to produce goods for human recreation, consumption, and convenience. Western environmental ethics and natural law theories fail to advance a philosophy capable of claiming that humans will inevitably have interests with respect to nature and yet, we must reject a human-centric view of the world.

## INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS OF NATURE

Indigenous Peoples survived and thrived in their respective lands for millennia prior to contact with colonists who propagated colonial laws, religious ideologies, and ideas. In North America, contact between Europeans and Indigenous communities has been devastatingly destructive to Métis, Inuit, and First Nations people and their ways of life, languages, and cultures. Colonists justified their conquests through the assertion of Christian values and promulgation of racist beliefs about Indigenous Peoples. Ideas at the very heart of this dispossession were the devaluation of Indigenous ways of being in relationship with the land and the view of their lands as disorderly, uncultivated, and wild. Recall that Locke's theory of property rights and land ownership relied on culturally monistic definitions of cultivation and labour (tillage, planting, improving, and cultivating for production). Indigenous philosopher Dale Turner asserts in *This is Not a Peace Pipe* (2006) that Eurocentric understandings of property have been used in the Americas to permit and justify the theft of land from Indigenous people. According to Turner in 2006, Indigenous scholars and intellectuals were only beginning to unpack how the assumptions about property were used as tools of dispossession. (Turner, 2006, p. 24)

Cree natural law assumes that humans are part of nature and that humans relate to the Creator through a relationship with the non-human world. One distinguishing feature from the *colonial nature* view is how humans relate to the non-human environment and our position with respect to nature. In a video published by BearPaw Media and Education, Cree Elders William Dreaver, Isaac Chamakese, George Brertton, and Fred Campiou share their knowledge of natural law passed down from their elders through the Cree language. Wahkohtowin is the natural law of the Cree people. It governs and guides the



relationships between people and all living things on earth to ensure respectful relations. Elder George Brertton introduces Wahkohtowin by describing the Cree Peoples' foundational conceptualization of the interconnectedness of all things:

“All things that were created are related – trees, grass and rocks. We are related to everything.”

Many Indigenous philosophies share this notion of interconnectedness which is incompatible with the features of *colonial nature* and, therefore, has vastly different implications. The Cree elders describe the relationship as familial. The rocks and the trees are part of a family with their people and Indigenous' notions of interconnectedness with nature require cultivating a sense of responsibility to all things. The Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs conceive of ownership of land as an encounter, similar to marriage, between the chief and the land:

“Each Chief has an ancestor who encountered and acknowledged the life of the land. From such encounters come power. The land, the plants, the animals and the people all have spirit - they must be shown respect. That is the basis of our law.” (Turner, 2006, p.66-67, and footnote p. 151)

The Iroquoian or Haudenosaunee people observe the natural cycles of renewal and recognize that renewal is an essential component of healthy relationships. Nature is valuable not simply as a resource for industrious and rational labour, but as a guide for living well; living in peace and harmony with the world around us.

“The main idea behind the principle of renewal is that change is a natural part of any relationship whether that relationship is spiritual, physical, or political. This is because nature moves in cycles of renewal life and death; the four seasons; planting cycles; migration patterns, and so on. Relationships between people go through natural changes as well. For the Iroquois, it is important to periodically recognize affirm and renew a relationship in order to revitalize it so that peaceful coexistence can be preserved.” (ibid., p. 50)

It is not merely humans who have the right to exist and to live as they are in this world.

Haudenosaunee scholar John Mohawk states:

“The Indian<sup>9</sup> cultures accept the legitimacy of the animals, celebrate their presence, propose that they are ‘peoples’ in the sense that they have an equal share in this planet and, like peoples have the right to a continued existence. Animals have the right to live as animals. If all of the above are true humans have no right to destroy animal habitat or hunt or fish them to extinction.” (Boyd, 2017, p. xxx)

Indigenous perspectives reveal a relationship of respect and responsibility between humans and nature that is more profound than the attitude of *colonial nature loving*. Indigenous philosophies conceptualize human beings as part of the natural world that sustains and nourishes us physically and spiritually. Living well with the land involves communal rights to shared gifts rather than subordination or providence over other living things by claiming individual decision-making power through ownership. It requires getting to know the land as a relation, rather than a resource.

As a contrast to colonial ideas of rational progress and individual rights to land ownership, Eduardo Gudynas presents a multicultural, Indigenous concept that challenges Western approaches to industrial development in South America.

“The approach is multicultural, and Vivir Bien is referred to the aymara concept of *suma qamaña*, but also to the guaraní ideas of the harmonious living (*ñandereko*), good life (*teko kavi*), the land without evil (*ivi maraei*) and the path to the noble life (*qhapaj ñan*).” (Gudynas, 2011, p. 442-443)

Vivir Bien or Buen Vivir is a Spanish word, most often used in Latin America, which reflects multiple cultural identities expressing Indigenous knowledge and traditions in innovative alternatives to the scheme of boundless progress upon which Western development depends. Gudynas describes the term

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<sup>9</sup> Positionality and identity are important when considering whether the term ‘Indian’ is offensive or outdated. Some Indigenous people in North America continue to use the term ‘Indian’ and the term has legal significance in Canada because of the *Indian Act*. It is generally offensive for non-Indigenous people to use the term ‘Indian’. The preferred practice is to specify the identity of the person, community, or cultural entity being described as Métis, Inuit or the specific First Nation or use the term ‘Indigenous’ when referring generally.

as a plural concept that includes a critical response to Western development theory while offering multicultural, Indigenous approaches to development. In chapter 4, I will further explore the concept of Buen Vivir as well-being within the context of community – a community that includes nature. (Gudynas, 2011)

I have defined the key features of the *colonial nature* view and identified some problematic implications for environmental ethics. I have shown that alternative concepts of nature exist outside the Western philosophical tradition and that cultural monism rendered many philosophical theories ignorant of alternative environmental philosophies. Another important criticism of the dominant theories in environmental ethics and the discipline itself is the exclusion problem. The attitude of *colonial nature loving* is uninterested in power dynamics or environmental injustices faced by communities oppressed by the supremacy of Western thought. The next section introduces critical ideas from communities that have been structurally oppressed and whose voices have been dismissed by systems rooted to colonial commitments and concepts.

## 2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE & OPPRESSION

Colonization is a regime of land appropriation which consumes people, cultures, and non-human entities in the name of rational progress. It continues to exist within the governance structures, laws, and philosophies of dominant institutions in the Western world and it is a root cause of ecological degradation globally. In North America, these structures exist among complex and diverse histories of settlers, colonizers, Indigenous Peoples, people brought to these lands as slaves, people forced from their homelands by famines, oppressive regimes, and wars, and people searching for a better life. Stories of displacement and resettlement characterize the people who call Turtle Island or North America their home. This section reveals the layers of environmental injustice in the Western world – injustices that were perpetrated by colonizers then structurally engineered into legal and political systems – but the

broken relationships left in the wake of colonization illuminate stories of resilience and environmental justice in the face of structural oppression and racism.

The consequences of the degradation of the natural world and the waste produced from the consumption inherent in the Western world's rational progress are not experienced equally among all people. The decision-makers and the communities they choose to prioritize avoid the worst impacts from environmental harms and are the first to receive relief in response to extreme weather events. Grassroots environmental justice activism emerged in the 1970s at a time when the cultural phenomenon of nature loving was taking hold in the consciousness of a largely white population of North Americans. *Toxic Wastes and Race* (1987) was the first national study to identify the link between race and proximity to landfills by correlating the locations of waste facilities with demographic characteristics. (Bullard, 2008, p. 373) In a 1994 symposium entitled *The Legacy of American Apartheid and Environmental Racism*, Robert Bullard, known as the father of the environmental justice movement, defines environmental racism:

“Institutional racism influences local land use, enforcement of environmental regulations, industrial facility siting, and, where people of color live, work, and play. Racial and ethnic inequality is perpetuated and reinforced by local governments in conjunction with urban-based corporations... Environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color. Environmental racism combines with public policies and industry practices to provide benefits for whites while shifting costs to people of color.” (Bullard, 1994)

While Black and Indigenous populations raised their voices in protest of the suffering being inflicted upon their communities, white environmental ethicists debated how one ought to conceive of the value of nature with little mention of the environmental justice movement or the displacement of Indigenous communities. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that another driver of global ecological crisis is the

exclusion of voices from the consciousness of the Western environmental movement and environmental ethics.

European imperialist powers deeply fractured relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through systemized and deliberate efforts to eradicate Indigenous culture and language to seize land and exploit natural resources. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada published their findings from a six-year process of documenting the stories of residential school survivors and their families and uncovering government and Christian institutions' records from the ideation of residential schools to the closure of the last school in 1999. Imperialist powers justified their conquest by proclaiming European beliefs and values as universal moral values that needed to be imposed upon people around the world. In Canada, this commitment to universalizing imperial, Christian values rationalized the residential schooling system. (TRC, p. 49) The horrific legacy of assimilation, abuse, and death of Indigenous children in residential schools is described in hundreds of pages of the TRC's Executive Summary. The Commission also intended to set out a pathway for reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Métis, First Nations, and Inuit people who share these lands. Métis, former Canadian Senator Gerry St. Germain was quoted in the report calling for reconciliation to shape a common future of a humanitarian society in Canada:

“There can be no doubt that the founders of Canada somehow lost their moral compass in their relations with the people who occupied and possessed the land.... While we cannot change history, we can learn from it and we can use it to shape our common future.... This effort is crucial in realizing the vision of creating a compassionate and humanitarian society, the society that our ancestors, the Aboriginal, the French and the English peoples, envisioned so many years ago—our home, Canada.” (TRC, 2015, p. 184)

Ninety-four calls to action for the people of Canada and specific institutions – academic, government, religious – were identified to redress the injustice experienced through the residential school system and

advance reconciliation in the country. Seven years later, efforts have been made at various levels to realize commitments to these calls to action, but most have been left unanswered.

The broken relationship between humans and non-human nature, described in the *colonial nature* view, reflects the broken relationship between colonial institutions and Indigenous knowledge, language, and traditions. Locke's concept of non-human nature as "uncultivated waste" permeated through Eurocentric ideologies as settlers crashed ashore Turtle Island from the seventeenth century to modernity. Within the context of concurrent ecological crises, Anishinaabe legal scholar Dr. Deborah McGregor calls for a distinct Indigenous environmental justice to confront the injustices embedded into global legal and political arrangements that exploit and oppress Indigenous peoples.

"Global economic systems and their 'false solutions' aggressively undermine Indigenous peoples, in particular Indigenous women, in systemic, ongoing, and violent ways. It is therefore simply not rational for Indigenous peoples to rely on these global, national, and regional economic and political frameworks for climate justice and a sustainable future." (McGregor, 2020)

The residential school system in Canada was cultural genocide designed to extinguish ways of being in the world that did not fit with Eurocentric ideology and blocked their rational progress toward claiming more and more land. The project was unsuccessful. The resilience of Indigenous people in Canada, and across the globe, to colonization is demonstrated by the those who continue to demand political recognition and rebuke systems that remain in service of colonial commitments. In Canada, early institutional responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report promised action that has yet to manifest. But empty promises will not pass as justice in a rapidly deteriorating planetary system. Climate catastrophe exposes inaction and injustice. Though the collapsing Earth system demands urgency, rebuilding trust and healing broken relationships between communities takes time. This tension is at the very heart of my project and will be further explained and explored throughout.

Another converging history of environmentalism and oppression in North America is the legacy of anti-Black racism in urban planning and environmental decision-making. The environmental justice movement emerged in response to systemic racism and inequitable policy-making that left Black communities in the United States disproportionately exposed to environmental harms. Hazel Johnson was born and raised in an area of Louisiana now called “Cancer Valley” due to the increased rates of cancer affecting communities that lived in close proximity to a growing chemical industry. She moved with her husband to Chicago in 1955 and they built their life in the Altgeld Gardens neighbourhood. This is where Johnson founded one of the first environmental justice organizations in the country after investigating the suspiciously high incidence of lung cancer and other respiratory conditions her family and neighbours were experiencing. She discovered that Altgeld Gardens was located in the middle of a ring of landfills, chemical incinerators, steel mills and other industrial processing plants that pumped toxic pollution into the air above the largely Black neighbourhood. From the tragedy of losing her own husband to lung cancer emerged the beginnings of a national movement at the intersection of health, justice, and the environment. Johnson founded People for Community Recovery in 1979 and she became known in the proceeding decades as the Mother of the Environmental Justice Movement. (Hazel M. Johnson’s Legacy, n.d.) Environmental justice activists have exposed the statistically supported geographical links between race, class, and environmental degradation and pollution in North America.

The phenomenal scenes of Hurricane Katrina ravaging New Orleans in 2005 reached around the globe. The devastating impact of environmental injustice against Black and poor communities should have served as a wake-up call to the rest of the world. Not only were low-income communities of colour more vulnerable to extreme weather events like Katrina, but they were also the least resourced to re-build after the storm. (Bullard & Wright, 2009, p. 19) Decades of racist and classist decision-making exacerbated the impacts of a devastating extreme weather event. ‘Cancer Valley’ was fought by Black communities in the 1990s and early 2000s seeking environmental justice for the proximity of landfills and dumpsites to their homes and schools. Wetlands around New Orleans that would have acted as natural buffers to hurricanes

and flooding had been replaced with industrial development, offshore drilling, pipelines, highways, and agriculture. Unjust policy, band-aid solutions, and inequitable economic decisions created the conditions that made Hurricane Katrina more deadly and harmful to the poor and to communities of colour than neighbouring white communities. As Bullard and Wright wrote years after the storm:

“Racism has taken an unmeasured toll on the lives of minorities and the poor. We say unmeasured because institutionalized racism has influenced policy that discriminates in ways that better serve the white and more affluent populations and communities. Katrina and its impacts, in a very powerful and revealing way, showed the world how race and class are intrinsically tied to policy.” (Bullard, 2009, p. 39)

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina demonstrates how global ecological crises, such as climate change and rampant biodiversity loss, are threat multipliers that interact with environmental injustice at the local level to produce horrific consequences. Distrust in government and economic institutions is justified when these institutions enable ongoing suffering, displacement, and economic disparity, through decision-making that reinforces existing power dynamics and increases profits for those in positions of power.

## 2.3 THE TENSION BETWEEN ECOLOGICAL AND RELATIONAL TIPPING POINTS

*Go slow, we are going too fast, too fast.... We have many tears to shed before we even get to the word reconciliation. - words of residential school survivor Evelyn Brockwood (TRC, 2015, p. 16)*

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) recent report, *The Physical Science Basis (2021)*, human influence on the rise in global average temperature is *unequivocal*. Sea levels are rising, the chemistry of the ocean is changing, and human-induced climate change is leading to more frequent and intense weather events. The effects of the climate crisis are witnessed in every region of the world, but these effects are uneven and exacerbated by social and historic injustices.



Despite decades of political posturing by global leaders, concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere were higher in 2019 than they have been in 2 million years (IPCC, 2021). But the rise in global average temperature beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius is only one ecological tipping point of concern; there are nine planetary boundaries that define a safe operating system for humanity within the Earth system. (Rockström et al. 2009, p. 472) In 2015, Will Steffen and colleagues present an updated analysis of the planetary boundaries in which climate change and biosphere integrity – formerly “biodiversity loss” – are defined as core influencing boundaries on the stability of the Earth system. Other boundaries are land-system change, freshwater use, biochemical flows, ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosol loading, stratospheric ozone depletion, and novel entities. (Steffen, 2015)

These nine planetary boundaries present one way to conceptualize the global ecological conditions at a given time in history. In *The Politics of the Anthropocene* (2019) Australian social science scholar John S. Dryzek and philosopher Jonathan Pickering challenge the utility of planetary boundaries in the dynamic and unstable Earth system conditions of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is a proposed geological time period characterized by the change in influence of human activity on ecological and planetary systems (Steffen, Broadgate et al. 2015). In contrast, the Holocene, the preceding geological period, was characterized by relative stability in the biological, chemical, and physical processes of the Earth System. *Colonial nature* is a concept constructed by scientific and philosophical observations and intuitions developed within the context of the Holocene. Dryzek and Pickering argue that the “inescapable” reality of the Anthropocene requires a reconceptualization of the functional characteristics of governance, justice, and sustainability. The boundary model can lead people to believe that solutions, political will, innovation, and technology can bring us back within boundary limits. But they argue the unpredictable conditions of an unstable Earth system are not fully captured by this modelling, thus political institutions and practices must adopt a permanent capacity to rethink everything. (Dryzek, 2019, p.19)

Kyle Whyte, who is an environment and sustainability scholar and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, published an article entitled “Too Late for Indigenous Climate Justice: Ecological and Relational Tipping Points” in response to the IPCC’s 2018 *Special Report on Global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius*. In the article, Whyte identified a critical tension between the urgency for societal transformation required to mitigate and adapt to ecological crises and the pace at which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can overcome centuries of broken and battered relationships. He wrote:

“[W]e are looking at a future where we have Scenario 1, which has substantial clean energy, but at the expense of continued injustices. Or we may have Scenario 2, where commitments to kin relationships are made, but the slow onset of achieving these relationships forecloses the global capacity to avoid climate disruptions. Are there additional possible futures, and ones that do not sacrifice indigenous consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity? Can these qualities and kin relations be established at the pace of urgency?” (Whyte, 2019)

Residential schools in Canada and the environmental injustice in New Orleans are deadly examples of cross-societal disfunction at the relational tipping points between structurally oppressed communities and powerful, majority white communities with the most economic and political influence. Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and institutions lack qualities of consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity, especially with respect to environmental justice. Distrust and lack of accountability and reciprocity is embodied in centuries of political disrespect of Indigenous rights to self-determination and self-governance, and disregard for treaty rights. Economic decision-making continues to lack participation and consent from communities who live on the land being ravaged and fractured for industrial projects. Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental justice activists have advocated and fought for policies to protect communities of colour from the degradation of environmental conditions to the point where their health and quality of life are severely negatively impacted. Bringing us back from beyond relational tipping points will take generations of intentional commitments to foster qualities of consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity.

Efforts to seek justice in the Anthropocene raise critical questions about socio-economic equity issues, political power-imbalance, and colonial roots at the heart of the Great Acceleration, both between and within countries. We can extend the planetary boundary model, imperfect as it may be, to socio-economic problems driving broken relationships between those privileged by Western world systems and communities historically and currently oppressed by those same systems. Justice in the Anthropocene is not limited to questions of blame and responsibility but must also inform accelerated just societal transformation to stay within safe planetary and relational boundaries. I take Whyte's point to be that there is a tension between the rapid societal transformation required to mitigate and adapt to the current ecological crisis and the considerably slower pace at which Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people can overcome centuries of bad relations. On the one hand, Indigenous environmental justice involves a gradual and deliberate process of developing trust and kin relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, but the urgency of the ecological crisis demands swift, accelerated transformative action on the other. Whyte questions whether it is still possible in the age of ecological crises, or the Anthropocene, to imagine a future where broken relationships with non-Indigenous decision-makers do not sacrifice Indigenous ways of being in the world. This thesis is an attempt to provide a diagnostic tool for philosophies that are failing to address this tension and to persuade Western-trained environmental philosophers to rapidly shift their aims, in order to precipitate the ideological trajectory change needed in the Anthropocene. Whyte concludes this essay with the claim that the urgency to avoid surpassing ecological tipping points must be met with an equal urgency to address relational tipping points. Though in Whyte's first scenario we may achieve advances toward clean energy, which would undoubtedly lower global greenhouse gas emissions and delay the worst impacts of climate change, I argue that ultimately efforts to mitigate climate change, biodiversity loss, and other ecological crises will fail if we sacrifice relationships with people facing systemic oppression and exploitation. The systems driving ecological collapse were designed for conformity, not disruption. And we are hurtling toward a future of disruption.

## BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW

Foundational assumptions at the heart of Western legal and philosophical thought permit environmental destruction and undermine efforts to prevent the continued exploitation of nature. The concept of *colonial nature*, the dominant view of nature in the Western world, separates human and non-human nature, views nature as mechanistic, and permits the division of nature into resources for the promulgation of industrious and rational activities. *Colonial nature loving* creates the conditions for the anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric debate, which overlooks the roots of ecological destruction, and holds up conservation practices that often reinforce colonial conquests for land ownership, appropriation, and use. These foundational commitments appear too important to Western legal and political systems to denounce. Instead of seeking systemic changes, environmental ethicists discuss why people ought to be motivated to restrict their activities or choose better activities. Nature is divided into component parts and different value is placed on those components by people who hold an environmental ethos. A species labelled ‘endangered’ warrants ample attention from environmental activists, local community groups, politicians and more, but other species in the same ecosystem have little value in legal, political, or social mechanisms of protection. How do we save the bald eagle from extirpation? Which forests are we permitted to clear cut? What percentage of old-growth forest must remain intact? These types of questions tempt political, economic, and environmental leaders into value formation based on a view of nature as something that can be pulled apart and molded to serve anthropocentric goals. If people care about the iconic bald eagle, politicians will value that species and work to protect it. Valuing bald eagles is not wrong or misguided, but *only* valuing bald eagles while other species’ populations plummet around them is neither pragmatic nor consistent.

Nature is not better understood when divided and isolated into component parts. Nature should not be viewed solely from a human-centric lens. Conservation efforts focused on restricting the types of activities permitted in protected spaces have failed to curb the worst ecological impacts from human activity. Dominant political and legal frameworks are ill-equipped to diagnose the problem because

*colonial nature* is so deeply and systemically entrenched. Debates in environmental ethics have discussed why humans should limit destructive activities while few questions have been asked about how to live in an entirely different relationship with nature. Reconceptualizing nature to integrate the interconnectedness of humans and the non-human natural world and adopt a holistic view of nature, deflates the significance of the anthropocentric – non-anthropocentric debate. From the recognition of the indigeneity of nature it follows that decisions must meaningfully include the perspective of those who are indigenous to the lands in question. Renewing this relationship with the natural world requires elevating perspectives and worldviews that see beyond *colonial nature loving*. Key to this relationship are commitments to respect and responsibility towards nature that cannot be reconciled with Western ideas of land ownership and resource extraction.

It is an unequivocal fact that human activity, largely in the name of ‘rational progress’, is having a profound impact on the entire earth system, which includes the atmosphere, ocean chemistry, biodiversity, and ourselves. The Western world’s conceptualization of *colonial nature* remains a mechanism of exploitation and *colonial nature loving* attitudes exclude and, in many cases, oppress people who hold different worldviews. Rational progress in the Anthropocene would be to embody an attitude of non-exploitation and non-oppression in our human activities, full stop. In practice, this means we are committed to limiting human activities that cause irreversible damage to the environment or coming up with schemes for resource allocation that prevents the overconsumption of the environment in conjunction with activities proposed by people who have multi-faceted histories and experiences with the land.

Questions that challenge the status quo will not be asked if the people around the proverbial table have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Ideas that challenge intuitions from a dominant epistemology will not surface if alternative epistemologies are not equally considered. To understand the complexity of exploitation necessarily involves listening to people whose values and ethical frameworks provide diverse theories, activities, and ways of relating to the world. People who have been oppressed by

colonization and exploited under capitalism have perspectives that people who have been privileged by those systems do not. The problem proposed by Whyte is precisely a question that reflects a different perspective on climate change and climate action. The Western world is in a broken relationship with many human beings on this planet and non-human nature. How do we heal battered and broken relationships with each other and with non-human nature? This question grapples with interconnected systems of exploitation and oppression. It begins to shift our mindset and changes the emphasis of environmental philosophy. In the next chapter, guided by this question and scholars who have challenged the Western worldview, my aim is to explore a conceptual framework for decolonizing planetary justice that centers anti-oppression and anti-exploitation in the context of accelerated societal transformation to stay within safe planetary boundaries and to illustrate justice in the Anthropocene through a case study.

## CHAPTER 3: ANTI-IMPERIALIST PLANETARY JUSTICE

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-IMPERIALIST PLANETARY JUSTICE

Under Anthropocene conditions, human activities interact to disrupt Earth system stability, but the negative impacts of feeding the capitalist machine are having increasingly destructive consequences on people and ecosystems around the world. These consequences are not just borne by those whose activities have been the most destructive to planetary boundaries. Instead, those who have gained little economic advantages or increases in well-being from the globalization of capitalism are the populations who are already experiencing devastating flooding, droughts, high temperatures and severe weather events from climate change. Contemporary state-based justice models are not up to the task of providing frameworks for justice in the Anthropocene. Powerful political, social, and economic arrangements of a globalized marketplace were built on injustice, exploitation and oppression of people and nature. The ideas that created widespread ecological demise are incapable of solving the issues on their own. Thus, it is imperative that political leaders and decision-makers rethink the very principles and concepts that underpin contemporary theories of justice. In this section, I argue that to stay within planetary boundaries

and avoid greater injustices against people and non-humans, we must exercise an anti-imperialist planetary justice lens that can urgently respond to changing environmental, societal, and economic conditions without sacrificing the trust, consent, accountability, and reciprocity between people in positions of power and people who are oppressed under these systems. Essential to this anti-imperialist lens is the universalization of anti-exploitation and anti-oppression values. This section grapples with a critical question for institutions and systems in the Anthropocene: what could decolonized decision-making look like at the pace and scale needed to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and other urgent ecological crises?

To begin sketching an anti-imperialist planetary justice framework, I will explore decolonized justice philosophies and draw on scholars who reveal the prevalence of inequality, inequity, and racism in Western societies, politics, and theoretical frameworks within the colonial construct. This sketch will contrast the planetary justice model proposed by Dryzek and Pickering in *The Politics of the Anthropocene* (2019). Dryzek and Pickering argue that existing theories of justice are insufficient mechanisms given the instability of ecological conditions in the Anthropocene. They offer the planetary justice model which expands the scope of justice along three important dimensions: beyond national borders; across generations; and to non-humans. Indeed, this expansion of scope is necessary to begin deciphering the complexity of intersecting planetary boundaries, global and generational human impacts, and sustainability of non-human nature. By framing the challenge for justice in the Anthropocene in these concepts, the theory is limited in its capacity to view alternative interpretations of problems, questions, and possible futures. Reconceptualizing theories of justice along these three dimensions does not unearth the colonial commitments in Western justice models. This leaves their framework vulnerable to repeating mistakes that undermine the future they want to achieve.

I argue that *anti-imperialist* justice theories along these three dimensions address the deficiencies of the route to planetary justice proposed by Dryzek and Pickering. Their planetary justice is concerned with:

1. **Justice beyond national borders:** Theories of justice bound to nation states struggle to find their footing in a global society where the actions of individuals in one state have consequences for the lives of members of different states. These theories waver in the face of the profound impact certain collective actions have on the stability of our Earth System. Justice beyond national borders challenges us to think about responsibilities, obligations, rights, and governance in relation to the global community.
2. **Justice across generations:** Many of the ecological crises humans face today are caused by centuries of human activity and production. The implications of future consequences from present human activity creates a problem of temporal moral distance. This dimension of justice involves thinking about the responsibility that present generations have toward future generations and their responsibility to solving the problems caused by past generations. This will require deciding on the future conditions of the Earth System that it would be just to bring about for the next generation.
3. **Justice to non-humans:** In the Anthropocene, it is necessary to rethink human responsibility toward non-humans, defined by Dryzek and Pickering as living things and non-living components of an ecosystem. To motivate obligations of justice toward non-humans, we need more than the traditional appeals by environmental ethicists. They offer a capabilities-based theory of justice in which flourishing is applied to human and non-human life, like plants, animals, and whole ecosystems.

The concept of planetary justice presented by Dryzek and Pickering holds that we need an account of responsibility for both individual and collective liability in contributions to the destabilization of the Earth system. Societal values such as justice require an ability for individuals and systems to co-evolve with the changing ecological conditions of the Earth. (Dryzek et al., p. 79) A key component of planetary justice is the procedure for reaching consensus on questions of justice. Procedural justice protects the participation of diverse viewpoints and representatives from groups with various degrees of



culpability in ecological damage as well as those who gain the least and suffer the most from ecological degradation. (ibid., p. 78-79) They note the value of looking to non-Western understandings of morality in these discussions: “engaging culturally diverse understandings in this contestation can help to reveal and correct blind spots in conventional approaches to justice.”

Central to their concept of planetary justice is humanity’s relationship to the Earth system and expanding justice beyond national borders, across time to future generations, and to the whole Earth system. At first glance, it appears flexible enough to be a vehicle for anti-oppression and anti-exploitation, but decolonized, non-anthropocentric justice is neither a central feature nor a necessary condition. This decentralization is a pervasive shortcoming of political commitments in response to ecological tipping points in the Anthropocene. Few anthropocentric decision-making mechanisms adequately acknowledge the relational tipping points that have been crossed through centuries of injustice. We must look to scholars who argue for decolonizing theories of justice for alternative pathways forward.

## THE ROOTS OF INJUSTICE

*The world of politics can be made sense of only through ideas. No matter how hard one looks, one cannot see the social and political dimension of the world directly, but only mediated through ideas. (Boran, 2019)*

Ideas have the power to transform societies and pivot intellectual pursuits into completely new directions. The mechanistic view of nature that emerged from the Scientific Revolution in combination with the prevailing colonial commitment to cultivate land in the name of rational progress created a colonial nature worldview that reordered and reconstructed the planet. At the start of the second millennium, nearly all land on Earth was owned by humans, with the exception of Antarctica and Bir Tawil. (Boyd, 2017, p. 131) Two ideas converge in the proposed concept of anti-imperialist planetary justice: beneath the surface of philosophical theories of justice lie imperialism-promoting commitments and much of the Western environmental ethos perpetuates *colonial nature loving*. The proceeding sections offer alternative justice models put forth by Dr. Charles W. Mills (1951-2021), a philosopher of race and politics raised in Kingston Jamaica, Dr. Serene Khader, an American moral and political

philosopher and feminist theorist, Dr. John Borrows, an Anishinaabe and Ojibway legal scholar specializing in Indigenous law and Canadian constitutional law, and Dr. Deborah McGregor, an Anishinaabe environmental and legal scholar with a focus on Indigenous environmental justice from Whitefish River First Nation.

John Rawls is known for revitalizing Anglo-American political philosophy and reorienting the field from discussions about political obligation to questions of social justice with his ground-breaking publication *A Theory of Justice*. In a critique of Rawls, Mills identifies the central ideas in Anglo-American political thought that have retained their allegiance to colonialism. Mills notes the profound impact that Rawlsian ideas about justice had on the field of political philosophy, and with “liberalism seemingly globally triumphant over its Marxist challenger, it is spreading around the world.” (Mills, 2015, p. 14) The task of decolonizing Western political philosophy requires the capacity to recognize socio-political and normative assumptions that are rooted in colonialism. Mills argues that the thought-experiment constructed by Rawls to demonstrate how social justice should be conceived is inadequate. Rawls’ assumptions about cooperation and mutual advantage of individuals within society ignore the prevalence of oppression across human history and renders the theory incapable of conceptualizing the realities of colonization and racism in existing Western societies:

“In the opening pages of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls says we should think of society as “a cooperative venture for mutual advantage,” which, though “typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interests,” is nonetheless regulated by rules “designed to advance the good of those taking part in it. “He also states that “for the time being,” he will be conceiving of society “as a closed system isolated from other societies.” The point is this: from such a theoretical starting point, it is impossible to arrive at a colonial society and a colonial world.” (ibid., p. 14)

Mills argues that Rawls conceptually excludes historical realities from social justice discussions, saving racial privilege and structural colonial power imbalances from scrutiny. He asserts that the displacement of racial justice from normative theories of justice in political philosophy discourse is a

conspicuous manifestation of the persistence of colonial thought in the discipline. Ignoring the colonial roots of contemporary political power shields the oppressors from needing to confront the past and reckon with existing structural and theoretical commitments that uphold colonial oppression. “Rectificatory justice opens the question of where the bodies are buried and seeks to raise the dead, and these are not issues the West wants to talk about.” (ibid., p. 23) Western political philosophy must rethink narratives, categories, and vocabulary with awareness of existing power dynamics. We must revise the global justice framework to include those with the least political power or the “non-political” Others described by Mills who have been oppressed through colonization. He calls for a “Dialogue of Equals” that would be positioned to acknowledge and remedy the ignorance of political philosophy as a discipline.

Rawls’ liberalist ideology spread beyond borders through international policy frameworks and organizations that embrace Western values and export them as solutions to political and social problems around the world. Global policies must also undergo a reckoning and self-reflection on the cultural values and commitments that form universal moral values. Important parallels can be drawn between globalized environmental policies, like conservation, preservation, and climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, and other global policies that strive to eradicate hunger, reduce poverty, or empower feminist revolutions. In *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic*, Serene Khader criticizes feminist theories and activism for not recognizing deeply held commitments to ethnocentrism, justice monism, and a tendency to propagate Western cultural values as morality. Her analysis of transnational feminism demonstrates that the applications of global justice theories are limited by their covert imperialism-promoting ideas. Modern feminist theories are implicit in imperialism because of unacknowledged commitments to ethnocentrism - the view that one’s culture is morally correct – and to justice monism which seeks justice according to one set of cultural norms and strategies. (Khader, 2018)

Neither Mills nor Khader argue that the crux of the problem is the explicit endorsement of imperialism and colonization by modern political philosophers, feminist activists, and politicians, but rather that underlying assumptions favoring Western values, justice frameworks, and societal models are

unexamined in contemporary theories of justice. Khader notes that moral ideals are born and utilized in specific sociocultural contexts with the help of descriptive content which can make it difficult to translate ideals to other situations. Imperial feminism assumes that justice as conceived in Western culture is morally superior and associates Western values with goodness. Non-Western values from different cultures that conflict with Western values can be seen as bad for women. In addition to ethnocentrism, imperialist feminisms are also committed to justice monism approach in which there is one ideal way to organize society. (ibid., p. 125) These implicit commitments impair critics and proponents from reflecting on the colonial roots of Western philosophy and theories of justice.

Khader identifies important criticisms of imperialism-promoting models of justice that are present in many contemporary theories of justice beyond borders, across generations, and in extending justice to non-humans. Anti-imperial feminist justice requires looking at how power operates in different contexts to exercise control over women, which includes imperial assertions of power over women *and* men in sociopolitical contexts. Colonial oppression interacts with sexist oppression to create an environment where the implementation of Western ideas can do more harm than good.

“Further, historical and ongoing imperialism raise particular efficacy considerations of which Western feminists need to be aware. “Other” women often need strategies that combat imperialist oppression and deprivation of basic rights in addition to strategies that combat sexism.” (ibid., p. 134)

Khader’s anti-imperialist feminism is a justice-enhancing mechanism to universally resist sexist oppression in different cultures rather than universalizing one set of cultural norms and values. For example, Western interventions focused on seeking autonomy from “other” traditions and cultural practices that limit women’s choices can require women to break kinship ties or make exiting their communities the only option. These interventions are insensitive to the vulnerability of the situations women find themselves in without these relationships and supports. Especially for Indigenous women these feminist interventions are seen as replicating colonial dispossession and cultural genocides of recent

pasts. (ibid., p 55-57) Just as some environmentalists sought to imbue plants and animals with individual goals and goods of their own, imperialist feminists assume that individualism is the ultimate form of self-realization for women. Individualism through independence from culture and kinship is the key to Western feminism. Rather than comparing social progress toward Western ideals like individualism and values of justice, Khader argues that women's participation in social decision-making as well as other gains in power should be measured against the historical or diachronic baseline within a pluralism of social and cultural contexts. Anti-imperialist feminism is tasked with reconceiving the normative commitments of feminism and decoupling feminism from imperialism.

It is useful to apply Khader's analysis of feminism to North American and European environmentalism. As described in chapter 2, European anthropocentric ethics applied to the environment are committed to a mechanistic view of a universal concept of nature. Nature is divided and disconnected from its parts. Each piece is valued based on anthropocentric goals. Areas that are valuable for the objectives of environmentalists are protected and conserved. Preservationist and conservationists impose their ethic of *colonial nature loving* on countries across the globe, physically displacing local communities to protect individual species that are valued by people in the West. Commitments to liberal values of land ownership and individualism exist beneath the surface of sincere attempts to protect and restore the environment. This critique of environmentalism is not meant to describe the environmental movement as objectively wrong or fundamentally ill-intentioned. Promoting the empowerment of women and protecting biodiversity are worthwhile and important goals but, as Khader emphasizes for feminists, *how* activists achieve those goals is of utmost importance. It is not good enough to have well-intended objectives – the impacts of justice frameworks and ethical theories on communities and non-human nature must be central to justice.

This examination of justice frameworks modelled after Western social and political norms and values has multiple functions. *Anti-imperialist planetary justice* identifies the root causes of global injustices across borders and generations. It integrates the calls to action from communities oppressed by

global systems who ought to determine what anti-oppression looks like. Mills and Khader reveal that universally imposing unexamined Western values undermines the justice these policy frameworks are seeking to secure and leave people vulnerable to further injustice. Another function of the *anti-imperialist planetary justice* lens is to visualize different ways for people to relate to one another and to other entities in the world.

## INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings*, John Borrows argues that resurgent relations with the natural world are key to Indigenous reconciliation with non-Indigenous people. (Asch, Borrows, and Tully, 2018) Covert colonial narratives in societies enable national governments to suppress Indigenous sovereignty and laws and disregard their free, prior, and informed consent on matters pertaining to Indigenous territories and self-governance. Borrows argues that Indigenous epistemology and ontology are essential to the protection of Indigenous social and physical environments. Legal systems that recognize Indigenous laws create an avenue for a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples as well as the earth.

“When Indigenous language, culture, history, and traditional knowledge are respected, standards for judgment are created that protect Indigenous environments. In the process, national or provincial regulations adapt to local circumstances to allow Indigenous legal insights to shine through. When the cultures, customs, symbols, and traditions of Indigenous peoples form part of Canadian law, this helps to facilitate two kinds of reconciliation: with the earth, and between humans who occupy particular places on that earth. This is why reconciliation with the earth is a vital part of Indigenous peoples’ reconciliation with other peoples.” (Asch et al. 2018, p. 61)

Indigenous environmental justice is unique from the environmental justice being advocated by Hazel Johnson and Robert Bullard on behalf of non-Indigenous racialized communities. Bullard, Johnson, and other environmental justice activists expose the racist and classist roots of the Western legal system,

nonetheless adopting the laws and political systems as their own. McGregor argues that a distinct Indigenous environmental justice is necessary. Indigenous Peoples have their own laws and governance structures deeply interconnected with land and waters of Turtle Island and around the world. Indigenous legal and cultural traditions, ontologies, and philosophies provide an entirely different way of imagining relations between humans and non-human beings. (McGregor, 2020) The well-being of mountains, rivers, caribou, and people are considered in relation to each other. It is from this interconnected and relational vantage point that Indigenous laws and ontologies see injustices where the Western framework is deficient.

“Not only do current global, national and local systems of governance and law fail Indigenous peoples, they fail all life. Indigenous peoples over the decades have presented a distinct diagnosis of the planetary ecological crisis evidenced in the observations shared as part of Indigenous environmental declarations.” (ibid.)

“Indigenous peoples assert that a just path to a sustainable future must consider all relations, an approach best expressed through Indigenous knowledge systems, legal orders, governance and conceptions of justice. These systems offer a diagnosis and path forward that answers the call for the ‘transformative change’ needed to alter global society’s current trajectory.” (ibid.)

In part, this is a claim that Indigenous knowledges, languages, and ways of being in the world make it possible to visualize transformative problems and solutions that Western epistemological and ontological limitations prevent us to see. To illustrate this point, consider the sticky philosophical problem of temporal moral distance. What is our moral responsibility to future generations? Temporal moral distance poses a significant epistemic puzzle to philosophers of the Western tradition. Stephen Gardiner’s famous formulation of the Pure Intergenerational Problem (PIP) thought-experiment encapsulates this puzzle. He presents it as such: distinct groups of people occupy sequential generations and have access to the production of goods that provide a benefit to the current generation, but at a significant cost to all future inhabitants. The sequence of distinct generations with distinct individual

interests is consistent with European or Western concepts of individualism and linear time. The PIP is meant to represent the epistemic puzzle of determining obligations toward proceeding generations in the real-world. Gardiner concludes that this scenario presents a similar problem of fairness as in other philosophical thought-experiments like the Tragedy of the Commons or the Prisoner's Dilemma. There is collective incentive for all generations (except for the first group) to cooperate and limit production of goods that impose substantial costs on future generations. However, at the individual level, it is rational for all generations to concern themselves only with the interests of the current generation and produce the goods that benefit them within their generation.

Inherent limits from Indigenous legal frameworks play an important role in maintaining balance between humans, non-human relations, and future generations. Many Indigenous legal systems recognize the consideration of future generations as an inherent limit. For example, the Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation Law or principle obliges decision-makers to think beyond the interests of people presently alive to the interests of the next seven generations. Indigenous epistemology challenges decision-makers to look “downstream and around the bend in the river.” (Williams, 2018, p. 358) In contrast to the European concept of time in which temporal landmarks, like dates and events, are important features of collective and individual histories and memories, the Haudenosaunee concept of time is both linear like a river and cyclical like the seasons.

The epistemic puzzle posed by temporal moral distance in Western philosophy does not have the same puzzling effect in Haudenosaunee philosophy which accepts that change is a natural part of life, including the change of relationships over time. At its core this philosophy holds values of respect, reciprocity, and renewal for all things past, present, and future. To maintain peaceful coexistence, the Haudenosaunee periodically recognize, affirm, and renew relationships and display renewal and reciprocity in public through various forms of the Condolence Ceremony. (Turner, 2006, p. 50) Through annual ceremonies collective *and* individual interests emphasize what is being maintained or continued, rather than what has happened in the past. (Williams, 2018, p.79) Consideration of the Haudenosaunee



perspective on renewal, reciprocity, and maintenance of relationships and responsibilities across time reinforces the need to search beyond Western ontologies and philosophy to conceptualize the full human capacity to be in relation with one other and the earth system across cultural and temporal boundaries.

The colonial roots of Western institutions, concepts, and values continue to shape global systems and theories of justice. Whyte argues that the political urgency to develop and implement climate strategies puts Indigenous people at risk of facing further injustice. The factors which are listed as causes of climate change, namely energy sources, land-uses, economic structures, and capitalist values and cultures, necessitate the implementation of solutions in the same categories, such as incentivizing capitalist markets to lower emissions and increase sustainability. (Whyte, 2018) Given the pervasiveness of ethnocentrism and justice monism in global justice-seeking initiatives spearheaded by Western scholars, activists, and politicians, the solutions to these factors are likely to impose unjust strategies on those who hold the least economic and political power. In the same way that ethnocentrism leads feminists to idealize Western societies as the gold-standard for feminist justice, environmentalists tend to idealize an ecologically conscientious, pre-Anthropocene Western society as the measure of progress toward ecological goals.

## THE ROUTES TO ANTI-IMPERIALIST PLANETARY JUSTICE

Environmental ethics built from the human-centric attitude of *colonial nature-loving* are preoccupied with the idea that swift societal transformation to address ecological challenges will bring us back to an ideal, ecologically stable society. There are two major problems with this path: one, as Dryzek and Pickering note in their critique of the planetary boundaries model in the Anthropocene, this type of framing misleads people into thinking that we can go back to Earth System conditions of the past; two, the “ideal society” will replicate Western societal values and concepts held by those with the most influence on decision-making at the global and state levels. Thus, alleviating the tension identified by Whyte begins with decoupling urgent action to prevent further ecological degradation and continued

abuse of planetary boundaries from deeply held commitments that reinforce Western idealism.

Environmental ethics and the environmental movement can learn lessons about decolonized justice frameworks from the calls to action of philosophers and legal scholars in other disciplines. The routes to anti-imperialist planetary justice therefore start by heeding the recommendations of those scholars, activists, and knowledge holders who challenge imperial ideals:

1. Charles W Mills calls for the history of political philosophy to be re-written to reveal the pervasiveness of justice monism and ethnocentrism.

**Mills' Call to Action:** "A revisionist history needs to be undertaken, which will not only recognize alternative non-Western political traditions, both outside and inside the West (thus redrawing the "West"), but make central how the non-recognition of the equality of others has, from modernity onwards, distorted the West's own descriptive mapping of and prescriptive recommendations for the local and incipiently global polities it has constructed." (Mills, 2015, p. 23)

**Route to anti-imperialist planetary justice:** Philosophers expose the problematic history of environmental ethics, the culturally monistic concept of *colonial nature*, and the exclusion of environmental justice activism and Indigenous philosophy. The assumptions are revealed that enable Western political and legal systems to ignore communities demanding justice for environmental harms. Alternative justice frameworks to the dominant theories are brought to the surface and given equal consideration such that meaningful dialogue can occur and reconciliation with the earth and its people can begin.

2. Serene Khader argues that feminists engaged in global justice need to question the values underneath their feminism.

**Khader's Call to Action:** "The way forward can only be to articulate a normative position that criticizes gender injustice without prescribing imperialism. We need greater clarity about which values feminists should embrace when engaged in transnational praxis, and we need to be able to explain why these values do not license projects of Western and Northern domination often

undertaken in their name.” (Khader, 2018, p. 2) “The only way out of unreflective assumptions that Western values are the feminist answer is to raise explicit questions, and consider arguments and empirical evidence, about which values can motivate reductions in sexist oppression under conditions of global injustice.” (ibid. p. 5)

**Route to anti-imperialist planetary justice:** Environmentalists and the environmental movement undertake an audit of the values and assumptions embedded in environmentalism. Commitments to a *colonial nature loving* attitude undermines goals to maintain or restore a thriving biodiverse environment by enforcing individualistic, fractured, and reductive protection schemes. Assumptions about land ownership and the mechanistic properties of nature enable oppression of local communities through displacement or control of their activities in the name of environmental protection. Attempts to universalize the notion of intrinsic value of nature rooted in liberal individualism ignores existing human and non-human relationships existing in places and lands around the world. Meanwhile the exploitation of nature continues unencumbered on a massive, devastating scale globally. *Anti-imperialist planetary justice* seeks to establish values, such as anti-exploitation and anti-oppression, that meaningfully reduce the propensity and breadth of the degradation of non-human nature.

3. Deborah McGregor, Steven Whitaker, and Mahisha Sritharan call for Indigenous environmental justice to take an elevated position in environmental decision-making in national and global frameworks.

**McGregor’s call to action:** “To achieve environmental justice, the voices of Indigenous peoples and their stated numerous recommendations for a sustainable future must be heeded at every level... Indigenous peoples call upon the world to return to dialogue and harmony with Mother Earth, and to adopt a new paradigm of civilization based on Buen Vivir — Living Well.” (McGregor, 2020)

**Route to anti-imperialist planetary justice:** Indigenous communities have, with devastating consequences, resisted the proliferation of a pervasive narrative about the desired economic and political future in colonial states. Environmental philosophers who adopt a commitment to anti-

imperialist planetary justice are prepared to approach their work with a different mindset from *colonial nature loving*. Justice seekers in the Anthropocene must have a critical eye to the assumptions underpinning the Western worldview along with an openness to learning from the recommendations of structurally oppressed groups, especially those who hold a concept of nature that expresses its relationship to place and time. *Anti-imperialist planetary justice* resists the centrality of Western ideas within oppressive systems of governance by shifting the focus to decision-making by Indigenous communities at local, national, and global levels.

4. Kyle Whyte asserts that the urgency to avoid the dangerous tipping points of climate change must simultaneously be aimed at addressing relational tipping points between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

**Whyte's call to action:** "Indigenous peoples will continue local actions and strengthen solidarity globally, as we have always done in relation to the previous lost or disrupted relationships with hundreds of species and the need to adapt to novel ecosystems in our homelands. I know few Indigenous persons who are willing to sacrifice quality kin relationships for the sake of swift or urgent action. It's in fact the establishment of kinship that will make it possible, at some point in the future, to behave urgently when the need arises. But for now, it seems like there is little attention paid to what quite a few Indigenous peoples are conveying about the factors that make climate change dangerous. Urgency must be aimed at addressing ecological and relational tipping points together." (Whyte, 2019)

**Route to anti-imperialist planetary justice:** Other futures are possible. The dominant discourse focused on urgent action to fix ecological problems endangers Indigenous Peoples around the world. Unexamined Western ideas for 'solving' the climate crisis are intensifying injustices against oppressed groups and negatively impacting the health and well-being of everyone. *Anti-imperialist justice* is capable of urgency aimed at healing broken relationships at the tipping points identified by

Whyte. Reframing the problem, reframes the possible solutions. Renewal at the human relational level invites learning across cultures that can produce unexpected ideas.

When these calls to action are centered, the weaknesses of the three-dimensional planetary justice proposed by Dryzek and Pickering are obvious. Transformative societal and economic change is required to respond to the planetary crises pushing the Earth beyond various ecological tipping points. Incremental changes and surface level solutions implemented by national and global governance structures and legal systems have failed for decades. Transformative change starts at the roots and requires transformational ideas. Rethinking justice requires the recognition that colonial oppression has a profound impact on the history of relations with place and people and systems of ordering society, such as legal traditions. Without concerted efforts to decolonize our thinking, alternative theories of justice remain inconceivable.

### 3.2 CASE STUDY OF PROTECTED AREAS IN CANADA AND ANTI-IMPERIALIST PLANETARY JUSTICE

Conservation practices forged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries failed to prevent the degradation of nature on Turtle Island and around the world. Canada has not met a single biodiversity target committed to in the Aichi Agreement for 2020 and further biodiversity loss due to climate change is inevitable. The ulterior motives of capitalizing settlers are not the only reasons that preservation and conservation efforts have failed on a global scale. Influential environmental thinkers and activists have sincerely loved nature and genuinely desired to protect it. But, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the Western world holds a certain concept of nature that starves people of their interconnectedness to non-human nature. The attitude of *colonial nature loving* led to the protection of certain parts of nature and made it easier to ignore the voices of those who were not privileged by wealth, titles, and race to hold this mechanized and universal concept of nature. This case study seeks to apply an *anti-imperialist planetary justice* lens to the problem of protected places in Canada by contrasting an Indigenous-led effort to protect and conserve the ecologically, culturally, and spiritually significant Sahtu, or Great Bear Lake, with one of Canada's most celebrated national parks: Banff Springs National Park. Crucially, this case study

provides an example of what we are able to see with *anti-imperialist planetary justice* lens. The case study follows a line of questioning informed by the four calls to action presented in the previous section.

**1) How have historical imbalances of power shaped the lands and people in each place?**

The creation of Canada's oldest national park, Banff Springs National Park, in 1885 is a story of nation-building, suppression of the Nakoda peoples' practices, and conflicting knowledge systems and interests for land use. The Canadian government displaced the Nakoda peoples, rewriting histories of the Banff Hot Springs to erase traditional ways of interacting with the hot springs and their spiritual significance, for a narrative of Western explorers' discovery of the significance of the springs. The so-called discoverers of the hot springs saw the opportunity to capitalize on social attitudes of *colonial nature loving* because people were desperate to swap the soot and smog of the city for the pristine mountain air. Conservation rhetoric among settlers in Banff was concentrated on conserving large mammals for sport hunting. Scientific wildlife studies pointed to Indigenous hunting and fishing practices as the main cause of decreasing large mammal populations. Tourism was growing more lucrative as railways were built and developments proliferated toward the West coast of Canada. With that, the incentive and means to displace the Nakoda peoples and restrict their cultural hunting and fishing practices increased.

“[B]iological science was taken up in ways that produced knowledges which contributed to conservation discourse that effectively excluded Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing. The findings of the report, founded in the rigour of scientific inquiry, added to the support for the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from park lands and the repression and assimilation of their cultural practices.” (Mason, 2014, p. 56)

Mason argues that conservation principles shifted from localized wildlife management to increasingly state-controlled management in the twentieth century. Conservation policy in Canada, supported by influential sport hunters and the burgeoning tourism industry, excluded local knowledges

and bolstered colonization. Western conservation principles and park creation effectively displaced Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories, ignored treaty rights, and discriminated against Indigenous subsistence practices. The impact of displacement within the history of protected areas in Canada is the widespread loss of language, culture, intergenerational knowledges, and laws among Indigenous communities. (We Rise Together, 2018, p. 27)

At the edge of the Arctic Circle, the remoteness of Sahtu or Great Bear Lake has not shielded it from colonialism and capitalist exploits. A unique confluence of colonial history, Western science and Indigenous knowledge, and modern co-management schemes have interacted along the shores of Sahtu, the home of the Dene people of Dǫ́łı́nǫ́. The Sahtuto'ine, the Bear Lake People, have lived in relationship to Sahtu for over ten thousand years. In 2016, the 9-million-hectare area in the Northwest Territories of Canada known as Tsá Tué was designated a UNESCO international biosphere reserve in recognition of the high degree of ecological integrity in and around Sahtu.

The first European settlement was established on Sahtu in 1799 as part of the fur trade. Much later, children from the community were taken to residential schools and disconnected from their land, language, and culture. The discovery of a source of uranium and radium called pitchblende in Great Bear Lake led to opening of a mine by Eldorado Mining and Refining Limited to extract uranium oxide and other chemicals. Eldorado operated a mine along the shores of the lake between 1932 and 1962. (Muir, 2013, p. 297-298) By the 1990s, Dǫ́łı́nǫ́ had become known as “the village of widows” because so many men who had carried sacks of uranium dust had developed cancers later in life and died. Few men lived past the age of sixty-five in Dǫ́łı́nǫ́. Many children and women died from cancer and other illnesses related to exposure to toxic uranium that was brought home in the men's clothes after a long day of work or passed down through their genes. As with many mining developments and industrial projects where the environmental harms on human health are discounted, downplayed, or outright ignored, generations of suffering resulted from the uranium mine. But unlike other stories of industrial exploitation, Eldorado wasn't just any mine. In a convergence of devastating histories, the Sahtuto'ine discovered years after

World War Two that the dust dug out of the earth beneath their feet and carried by them to the waiting barges was used to make the two most destructive weapons in human history. The bombs that dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima contained the uranium mined from Sahtu. For the film, *Village of Widows*, Gina Bayha, who worked on the Uranium Committee of the Sahtu Dene band council in the 1990s, spoke about the Sahtu Dene's experience grappling with the suffering caused thousands of miles away:

“To us the land and the resources are very sacred because of the fact that we rely on it to continue to live. And that very source is going to actually cause damage to other people... It's very hard to comprehend. People here, I think, basically want to make amends and be able to acknowledge this actually happened. And yet, at the same time we acknowledge that something as, as sacred as that which came from the land could be just as harmful.” (Blow, 1999)

Historical context is essential to understanding present and future Indigenous-led conservation in Sahtu. The banks of Sahtu near the dilapidated mine still record high levels of radioactivity to this day. The mine, the residential school, the atomic bomb, these are not scars of a disconnected past. These histories inform justice-enhancing milestones like the Great Bear Lake management plan developed in 2013 or the UN biosphere designation secured in 2016. And in 2030, one century after uranium was discovered, the Sahtu Dene will still carry the scars of colonization and industrialization in their bodies and in their sacred land. Sitting on the Arctic circle, the Dene are experiencing new and intensifying struggles: climate change is impacting Great Bear Lake in complex ways and caribou populations are collapsing. These changes to the environment around Délı̨ne are caused by intersecting global forces that are largely out of their control.

## **2) What are the foundational values and assumptions beneath these two conservation practices?**

The *anti-imperialist justice* lens is essential to begin disentangling the values that resist oppressive and exploitive relationships with humans and non-human nature from the values that have permitted social and ecological harms. The history of the creation of Banff Springs National Park reveals



over a century of commitments to justice monism and epistemological supremacy. Decisions to restrict access and displace the Nakoda People to create Canada's first National Park demonstrates this unreflective approach within the system of environmental values. To this day, the vision for Banff National Park retains a commitment to these values:

“Banff National Park reveals the majesty and timelessness of the Rocky Mountains and embodies the intrinsic value of natural landscapes: a place where nature comes first and where people can experience, learn about and be moved by it on its own terms.” (Parks Canada, Banff National Park of Canada Management Plan, 2022)

Deeply embedded in the vision for Canada's most beloved park is the attitude of *colonial nature loving* and the separation between people and nature. The attitude attaches value to parts of nature that are beneficial to human interests or well-being. Nature is abstract and valued insofar as it improves the human experience, and pristine nature unspoiled by human activity is valuable. The emphasis on the “intrinsic value of natural landscapes” or the intrinsic value of nature glosses over the troubled histories that have unfolded in nearly every inch of the planet. By focusing on the pristine essence of nature, we can look away from how nature holds the traces of human processes of colonization, industrialization, and mechanization. But humanity is intrinsic to nature – it is a mistake to pretend that nature has some intrinsic value distinct from the realm of human. The Management Plan for Banff National Park published in 2022 includes respect for a “diversity of people, perspectives, knowledge and cultures” and the acknowledgment that the “ongoing Indigenous presence is a core part of the park's richness and sense of place.” (Banff National Park of Canada Management Plan, 2022) These words are indicators that government decision-making schemes are committed to creating space for greater dialogue. However, these management strategies are far from Indigenous –led conservation practices and protected areas.

In contrast, the Great Bear Lake Management plan was co-created by a working group comprised of Dëjıne elders, representatives of the Dëjıne First Nation, other Dëjıne stakeholders, and representatives from relevant Canadian federal and provincial ministries, boards, and councils. The plan is grounded in

Dene values and the Sahtugot'ine “universal law” about the interconnectedness of all things, respect for other beings, and the need to cooperate among people. (GBL Management Plan, p. 18) Generations of elders have told the story of Kayé Daoyé and the water heart, communicating a philosophy and law that understands the Great Bear Lake Watershed as one organism united by the flow of water. The Elder's stories pass along the values and philosophies of their people to the next generation of Dene from Déłıne. This philosophy says that the use of nature and the respect shown to nature has a direct impact on people and all aspects of the land. (ibid. p. 10) Charlie Neyelle communicated this story for the Great Bear Lake Management plan in January 2004:

“The elders of Déline have passed down a story through many generations. In times past, their spiritual teachers were often “mystically tied” to different parts of the environment: some to the caribou, some the wolf, some the northern lights and some the willow. Kayé Daoyé was one such person. He lived all around GBL or “Sahtu” in the Slavey language, but made his home primarily in Edaiila (the Caribou Point area), on the northeast shores of the Lake. Kayé Daoyé was mystically tied to the loche. One day, after setting four hooks, he found one of them missing. This disturbed him — in those days hooks were rare and very valuable — and that night he traveled in his dreams with the loche in search of the fish that had taken his hook. As he traveled through the centre of GBL, he became aware of a great power in the lake — the heart of the lake or the “water heart”. Contemplating this heart, he became aware that it is connected to all beings — the land, the sky, plants, other creatures, people — and that it helps sustain the entire watershed of GBL.” (ibid. p. 4)

### **3) How are the voices of the Déłıne leading environmental decision-making locally and on a global level?**

The lives of the Sahtuto'ine are deeply connected to Sahtu and all that embodies these lands, waters, and non-human beings. Their ontologies and epistemologies recognize the indigeneity of nature, in contrast to the Western concept of nature that is applied universally to all non-human nature. The local, interconnected perspective held by the people of Déłıne situates them in relationships of respect and

reciprocity with the living organism, known to them as Sahtu, with the trout, the caribou, and so on. When this perspective is respected and centered, Western science can complement Indigenous knowledges. If stakeholders approach a problem from shared values and acknowledge a plurality of histories that interact to create the problem, solutions can be co-created that enrich human and non-human lives. The Indigenous Circle of Experts identified etuaptmunk or “two-eyed seeing” as a pathway forward in the shared effort by Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders to protect and conserve areas in Canada. Translated into English by Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, etuaptmunk is the concept that one eye sees with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and the other eye sees with the strengths of Western knowledges. Etuaptmunk uses both eyes to guide decision-making and centralizes reciprocity among all relations in the process. (We Rise Together, p. 57) Building this capacity into our systems of governance, laws, and sciences is key to overcoming the imperialism-promoting models of justice identified by Khader. Etuaptmunk provides a strategy for imagining possible futures that center anti-oppression and anti-exploitation of human and non-human beings.

The elders and people of Délı̨nę forged this example of Indigenous-led conservation through the Sahtudene and Métis Land Claim Agreement in 1993 and adequate representation and decision-making power in the Great Bear Lake Working Group between 2002 and 2003 which culminated in the Great Bear Lake Management plan published in 2005. Most recently, the Sahtudene secured global recognition through the creation of the UNESCO Tsá Tué Biosphere Reserve in 2016 (UNESCO website). The future of the Sahtu will be directed by the Délı̨nę and Métis people.

#### **4) What are the possibilities for Indigenous-led environmental justice to lead strategies in Canada for mitigating and addressing ecological collapse?**

We Rise Together (2018) is a report developed by the Indigenous Circles of Experts (ICE) to demonstrate the need for Indigenous epistemology, law, and cultural practices to guide strategies for protecting and conserving land and biodiversity in Canada. The ICE report was developed through consultations with Indigenous people across the country in regional gatherings hosted by the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, the Bear River First Nation in Mi’kma’ki, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, and the

Métis Nation in the traditional territories the Anishinaabe, Ininew, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota. (ibid. p. 20) The concept of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) is envisioned to be a living example of reconciliation in contrast to the framework of Western laws and conservation practices that have been used as tools of oppression and displacement. By elevating the authority of Indigenous decision-makers, IPCAs present an opportunity to create space in Canadian laws and policy for a different concept of nature – a different way of relating to non-human nature that is absent from the framework of existing environmental law.

“Creating space means asserting our nationhood and sovereignty because we are in a colonial situation. We have been made subjects of a country we never agreed to, laws that we never had anything to do with. Our laws, our way of doing things, our ways about how we take care of ourselves, how we relate to one another, other people, our land, our wildlife, have been set aside. So you have to push back, not in the way of ‘please can you give me a little bit of room?’ as that hasn’t worked.” – Elder Stephen Kakfwi during a gathering in August 2017

The people of Délı̨nę’s success in creating space within Canadian and global governance structures for alternative ways of thinking and relating to non-human nature demonstrates the strength of Indigenous environmental justice. After the last mines closed and residential school survivors returned home, the Sahtuto’ine began a long healing journey which emphasized the restoration of their community’s spiritual connection to Sahtu, the caribou, and the lake trout. Despite the industrial and colonial activities that settled and unsettled in Sahtu, the lake remains the largest fully functioning cold-water ecosystem on earth. (Melnick & Drebert, 2020) Sahtu is remote therefore development and commercialization has been limited. Commercial fisheries were investigated but deemed unviable due to the scarcity of fish. (Muir, 2013, p. 299-300) The Sahtuto’ine have continued to rely on harvesting wildlife and fish for subsistence, clothes, and cultural nourishment and programs were developed to create opportunities for young people to learn about their land and language with their elders. The people of Délı̨nę in the Great Bear Lake Working Group had decision-making power to direct the conservation

management plan. The scientists from the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans modified their research methodology to respect the spiritual relationship between lake trout and the Dene people. On the waters of Sahtu, research methodologies bring together knowledge from Western sciences, the Sahtugot'ine “universal law”, and generational knowledge passed down by elders of Délı̨ne.

#### **5) What obstacles to justice remain or intensify under Anthropocene conditions?**

The Sahtuto'ine have effectively carved out space in colonial law and Western science for Indigenous-led conservation and protection of Sahtu. But they face other challenges driven by forces outside the scope of the Great Bear Lake Management plan, such as the effects of climate change. Obstacles to *anti-imperialist planetary justice* remain because local communities are not intentionally included in global decision-making frameworks. The designation of Tsá Tué as an UNESCO biosphere reserve will help elevate the voices of Délı̨ne in global forums but does not give them decision-making power over national government action or inaction on climate change. The Dene people are not in control of rising average temperatures that impact ecosystem health and the ecological integrity of Sahtu. Whyte argued that climate change demonstrates the intensification of colonization. He observed that rapid societal transformations in response to global climate change are dangerous for Indigenous people. Thus, another challenge for an *anti-imperialist planetary justice* approach is to facilitate ideas for change at the pace required to reduce the loss of life in an increasingly unstable planetary system. In the next chapter, I turn attention toward a philosophy for planetary healing in the Anthropocene.

## **CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING A PHILOSOPHY FOR PLANETARY HEALING**

My arguments thus far have been aimed at diagnosing the root causes of our current ecological crises and sketching a framework for justice given the parameters of the Anthropocene. But justice can only begin to address the complexity of the ecological problems at hand. Questions of justice aside, many people find themselves experiencing anxiety, grief, and stress about the ecological crises, extreme

weather events, and loss of life they hear about on the news. People are experiencing the devastating effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution in their homes, families, and communities. People express hopelessness or apathy about the social and ecological collapse they are witnessing and wonder whether one person can make a difference. In this chapter, I will explore a philosophy of planetary healing for health and well-being in the Anthropocene. The attitude of *colonial nature loving* is laden with problematic assumptions that contribute to imperialism-promoting ideas in environmental discourse and action. Attitudes of hopelessness and apathy toward the future are responses to anxiety about the instability of the Earth System, as evidenced by increasingly intense and frequent extreme weather events. These attitudes are dangerous in the Anthropocene because the status quo is driving climate change, biodiversity loss, and the pollution crisis. Inaction is life-threatening.

To orient this discussion, I will start by making three general claims, for which I have provided evidence in earlier chapters, that I take to be premises for a philosophy of planetary healing. These premises are relatively true insofar as they are general claims about the world from my position at a certain time in history. It is not my intention to prove that these claims are universally true. These premises establish a common ground upon which I invite the reader to join me in:

1. In the Anthropocene environmental philosophers must widen the scope of their work beyond borders, across generations, and to integrate the non-human world.
2. The Anthropocene is exposing the breadth and totality of broken and abused connections between people and all things.
3. There is an inequitable distribution of ecological burdens and access to resources across the globe.

From the first premise it follows that philosophical problems and considerations must be approached with a multicultural, historic, and interconnected lens. A task for philosophers will be to uncover the historical roots of activities that are driving ecological disaster and rethink the concept of nature in Western philosophy. From the second and third premises it follows that philosophical

discussions within this theory must recognize human culpability and vulnerability. Chapter 3 demonstrates how philosophy of planetary healing would be applied to questions of justice in the Anthropocene. Humanity is experiencing great loss of life and disconnection – some people are experiencing it sooner and with more devastating consequences than others; some people have contributed more to the problem than others. Systems of exploitation and oppression have resulted in fractured relationships with each other and with non-human nature. Coming to grips with this reality can cause paralyzing emotions like apathy, guilt, denial, or sadness to set in. Healing can be an antidote to this paralysis by giving people the tools to convert dangerous attitudes into attitudes about changing the things within their control and investing their skills, ideas, and power into imagining possible futures that avoid ecological collapse. Justice and healing are necessary components of environmental philosophy in the Anthropocene.

I will be unable to provide a full account of the philosophy of planetary healing within the confines of this work. My aim is to begin exploring the possibilities of doing environmental philosophy differently in the Anthropocene. This project unearths questions that other philosophers exploring a philosophy for planetary healing may find useful to pursue. The breaches of ecological and relational tipping points are interconnected with colonization and industrial, capitalist life. Ironically, our current ways of living are killing us. Tragically, we are also killing at least a million species around us. First, I will make a case for shifting the philosophical dialogue about nature from morality to well-being. I will briefly investigate well-being theories in Western and Indigenous philosophies and make some claims about philosophy of planetary healing. Potential objections to these claims will be addressed and illustrated with an example of interdisciplinary planetary healing.

Environmental ethicists tend to project value and rights onto non-human nature in order to give us reasons to protect and conserve it. Centuries of dominant scientific, ethical, and legal theories treating nature as lacking intrinsic value until it has been cultivated for human use reduced the concept of nature in the Western world to natural resources. To settlers, industrialists, entrepreneurs and explorers, the

abundance of trees, rivers, lakes, and animals in the Americas were taken for granted and signalled the possibility of endless growth. Globalization in the twentieth century made nearly every inch of the earth available for human consumption and utility as natural resources. The view that nature ought to be controlled and cultivated for human gain intensified with the Scientific Revolution and subsequent Industrial Revolution. When environmental ethics emerged as a distinct field, philosophers were focused on combatting the narrative of boundless natural resources within increasingly intertwined global economic systems by describing the protection, preservation, and restoration of nature as moral imperatives. Do things in nature have goods of their own? How ought we live in harmony with nature? These are moral questions aimed at shifting individual human behaviours and perspectives. Environmental ethics has been primarily concerned with the moral status of nature and how we ought to behave to conserve the wild. The logic being that if humanity could just agree on the moral status of the animals, plants, rivers, and mountains, then humanity could implement a robust ethical framework to govern how individuals ought to relate to nature.

Prior to the early 1990s, science, technocratic considerations, and economics dominated international negotiations and treaties around climate change. Political philosophers proclaimed that global warming was indeed a moral problem and climate change justice frameworks emerged with questions about fairness, rights, and responsibilities within the complex web of planetary political connections and multi-lateral governance structures. (Boran, 2019, p. 15-19) Here, political philosophers were aimed at uncovering basic ethical principles from which to construct a persuasive model of international cooperation to solve the problem of climate change.

In the early 2000s the public relations team for British Petroleum introduced the concept of individual carbon footprints. (Kaufman, 2021) It was a sneaky idea: shift the narrative away from blaming fossil fuel producers for the negative impacts of climate change to blaming fossil fuel consumers. The logic here being that if climate change is a moral problem, then each individual consumer choice that directly or indirectly leads to the burning of oil, gas, or coal is morally wrong. Each individual person has



a moral obligation to change their behaviour to avoid climate catastrophe. Humans are moral agents – not fossil fuel companies. The carbon footprint theory frames the problems and solutions to climate change around individual choice rather than focusing attention on the vast web of economic systems that rely on complex global supply chains beyond consumer control. Critically, the theory conceals the imbalance of power in entangled global political and economic systems.

A major flaw with the morality approach, which oil companies capitalized on, is the fact that global greenhouse gas emissions are mostly produced by industrial and development processes, not individual activity. Even if we crack the code for the value of nature and develop an ethical theory for how individuals ought to relate to the natural world, most people could not control the greenhouse gas emissions attributed to their “carbon-footprint”. Crucially, global inequalities that limit access to resources cannot be dismissed in the quest to arrive at universal moral frameworks for solving ecological collapse. To choose the ethical option, people must have the privilege of choice. People can only choose not to drink out of plastic water bottles if the water in their tap is clean and not toxic. People can only choose lower emissions travel if reliable infrastructure exists in their community to bike or take transit.

The history of environmentalism and climate change justice demonstrates that we have failed to achieve individual behavioural constraints by appealing to morality. Framing climate change as a moral problem alongside an expanding list of constraints and burdens born by individuals has not had the intended impact to reduce our collective destruction of the natural world. We have surpassed multiple ecological tipping points and continue to increase global greenhouse gas emissions each year.

*Anti-imperialist planetary justice* sets us up to begin imagining possible futures in which people live in healthy, meaningful relationships with each other and with the non-human nature. Environmental ethicists seek to sketch that future by providing guidelines, moral principles, and debating the universal end state at which human goals ought to be aimed. But without the weight of oughts and moral principles, a philosophy of well-being explores what makes a life go well (human or non-human). I suggest shifting the project of environmental philosophy from ethics to philosophical inquiries about well-being in the

context of the Anthropocene. Well-being can focus the project on empowering people to imagine a possible future in which their lives go well for them. Instead of constructing and universalizing a moral framework, philosophers could ask questions at the intersection of justice, health, and well-being in the context of ecological collapse. What makes a life go well in the Anthropocene? What concept of nature inspires ecological and human health? What can we do to enable the conditions for the lives of other people and non-human nature to go well?

It is not the aim of this project to endorse any one theory of well-being. Philosophers who accept the premises of philosophy of planetary healing can take up the work of developing a theory of well-being from that starting position. Imagining possibilities for what will make life go well in the Anthropocene can help motivate the transformational change needed to manage and minimize the negative impacts of ecological crises. But approaches to well-being in Western philosophy suffer from cultural monism and colonial nature-loving (though, there are few Western theories of well-being that reference our connection and relation to non-human nature).

Theories of well-being in Western philosophy either fall into one of three categories or they offer a theory that blends categories. The first is hedonism, a theory that pleasure is good for humans and pain is bad for humans. Pleasure and pain are ultimately the only things that matter to your well-being which is determined by the balance of each in your life. Friendships, money, a good job, and anything else that you may intuitively think is good for you, are means to pleasure or “instrumental goods”. Pleasure is the only non-instrumental good and pain is the only non-instrumental bad. A major objection to hedonism is that we seem to want more from our lives than simply the experience of pleasure. We want to do the things that bring us pleasure. Nozick’s famous Experience Machine thought experiment captures our intuitions about well-being. In the case of the experience machine, you are asked whether you would rather live a simulation with only pleasurable experiences or be free to experience your life as you do now with a mix of pleasurable and painful experiences. The thought experiment makes a highly compelling case that there

is more to well-being than merely experiencing a higher balance of pleasure in your life than pain.

(Fletcher, 2016)

The second theory is desire-fulfillment, which claims that something is good for you if you desire it, and the world is such that you can satisfy your desire. For something to be a good, you must desire it and be able to fulfil that desire. Objections to this theory rely on counterexamples that pose problems for the theory's basic claims. A notable objection to this theory is that it is forced to say that only things you desire can be good for you. Not everything we desire is good for us and there are things in life we don't desire, but they turn out to be good for us. (Fletcher, 2016)

The third category of well-being theories in philosophy is the Objective List theory. Its central claim is that there are some things that are good for a person even if they do not desire those things. There are things that are objectively good for humans, whether we desire them or not, and philosophers can make a list of the things that correlate to better lives. This list is objective thus it is independent from any one person's desires or interests. Opponents of these theories often take aim at the items in the list or the plausibility of an objective list for well-being. Finnis' seven basic human goods, described in Chapter 2, provide an example of an objective list theory of well-being because they are presented as universal aspects for what makes a human life go well.

In recent years, philosophers have begun developing theories of well-being that do not fit neatly into any one category. Valerie Tiberius' exploration of well-being as value-fulfillment could provide an interesting framework for discussions of well-being in the Anthropocene. Tiberius argues that human lives go well to the extent that individuals pursue and fulfill values that matter most to the individual's system of values over their lifetime. (Tiberius, 2018, p. 34) The three main parts of the theory, values, fulfillment, and time, make this a compelling place to start developing a notion of well-being for planetary healing philosophy. Values, fulfillment, and time are important aspects for contemplating how a life can go well in the Anthropocene. Furthermore, Tiberius investigates how we can support other

people's well-being and her theory emphasizes the perspectives of other people in our determinations of whether our lives are going well:

“A life rich in value fulfillment is not a clear and vivid destination like a painted target, or Disneyland. Rather, we fill in the details as we reflect on our lives, our values, our circumstances, and our options, often together with people who care about us and our point of view, but who also bring their own understanding of what matters to the conversation. As merely human friends, we can't avoid bringing our own values to the conversation, but we can be more helpful in this process if we have some humility about this. We should acknowledge that we do not tend to be very good at grasping the intricacies of other people's value systems and we are frequently just ignorant of the facts that are relevant to how another person's life could be improved.” (ibid. p.175)

Tiberius, like most philosophers discussing well-being in the Western tradition, neglects the non-human world. The notion of well-being available in the Western philosophy is incomplete, thus on its own, well-being as value fulfilment is inadequate for a philosophy of planetary healing. Given the conditions of instability and inextricable interaction of planetary systems and human activity, to begin answering the question of what makes a life go well in the Anthropocene will require an interdisciplinary, multi-cultural approach to explore innovative ideas across science, law, and politics. The notion of well-being in a philosophy for planetary healing will need to accommodate the interconnectedness of human and non-human nature and recognize deep power imbalances inherent in the socio-economic systems that drive climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and result in inequitable burdens. Many Indigenous epistemologies have philosophies of well-being that transcend human-centric ways of thinking and Western individualism.

A multicultural collection of ideas and principles from the guaraní, aymara, kichwa, and other Indigenous communities in South America, Buen Vivir or Vivir Bien is a concept that roughly expresses the idea that well-being is only possible within a community that includes nature. Buen Vivir has emerged in South America as a platform for discussing critical views on neo-liberal, capitalist development ideals

that are destroying ecosystems and communities. The core ideas within Buen Vivir come from Indigenous traditional knowledges as well as more recent evolutions of Indigenous traditions. In formulating the concept of Buen Vivir, Gudynas translates ideas from various cultures into English:

“*Sumak kawsay*, the kichwa wording for a fullness life in a community, together with other persons and Nature.” (Gudynas, 2011, p. 442)

Recently developed by aymara sociologist Simón Yampara’s concept of *suma qamaña* is an elaboration on traditional knowledge. “*suma qamaña* is not restricted to material well-being, as expressed in the ownership of property or consumption at the heart of capitalist societies, but is a harmonious balance between material and spiritual components, which is only possible in the specific context of a community, which is social but also ecological.” (ibid. p.444)

Buen Vivir is a way of capturing the plurality of ideas specific to cultural and ecological communities, offering alternatives to Western philosophies which produce capitalism, neo-liberalism, and unlimited development. Gudynas identifies that material well-being is at the heart of capitalist societies – ownership of property and consumption are the expressions of material well-being. But Gudynas notes that we need not position Buen Vivir as being comprised of exclusively Indigenous knowledge. Rather, the concept is akin to a platform of ideas that support or enhance traditions in search of alternatives to Western commitments to growth and development. In Buen Vivir ideas are produced, highlighted, and discussed for the purpose of replacing the idea of development as we know it. Common values ground this shared platform. These values express a contrast to utilitarian values that tend to reduce life to economic values. The intrinsic values of nature are recognized such that nature becomes a subject. “Human beings as the only source of values are therefore displaced.” (ibid., p. 446) Buen Vivir dissolves the division between nature and society and expands the concept of citizenship to include non-human nature.

We can draw many lessons from Buen Vivir: the integration of multicultural ideas which share common values and offer ideas for rethinking core concepts within the dominant political and economic narrative; the rejection of materialism, utilitarian reductionism of life to economic values; and the dissolution of the dualism of human systems and ecosystems. A philosophy of planetary healing must be grounded in core values of anti-oppression and anti-exploitation of people and non-human nature. Questions about how to engage in a fulfilling and meaningful life can emerge from shared values. Planetary healing approaches will be recognizable by the three premises of planetary healing, an emphasis on Indigenous epistemologies and histories, and an interdisciplinary scope of epistemologies. I suggest adopting a planetary healing mindset that reframes the objectives of environmental philosophy and environmentalism. Rather than focusing on individual behavioural constraints, such as limiting greenhouse gas emissions by biking to work, I suggest shifting the emphasis to collective value expression, such as aiming to create, inform, and support something like socio-ecological solutions that are aligned with the values of anti-exploitation and anti-oppression.

Philosophers and scientists from the Western worldview might object to the philosophy of planetary healing because it intentionally swerves away from mainstream ways of doing philosophy or science. As noted in Tiberius' value fulfilment theory, it will not be easy to co-create ideas with openness to improving how our lives go for each of us. The methodologies and claims proposed for planetary healing can appear counterintuitive. For example, it may seem counterintuitive to emphasize well-being rather than pursuing the search for universal moral imperatives in the face of a global, moral problem like climate change. The claim that a faster way to achieve societal transformation in the Anthropocene is by introducing more decision-makers to the global debate and conversation seems unlikely when everyone knows that executive decision making is the fastest way to get to action. The concept of planetary healing engages with science and philosophy in an unfamiliar way. The scientific method demands objectivity in experimentation and scientific experiments are constructed by isolating variables to determine correlations, causes, and effects. In contrast, a philosophy of planetary healing introduces variables like

local histories and alternative knowledges and creates space for subjectivity. The emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches within the proposed philosophy of planetary healing might be accused of not using appropriate data and methods for practicing philosophy or science. Both disciplines have sought to simplify complexity rather than complicate our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Making things more complicated to understand them better seems both counterintuitive and inefficient. Thus, critics of this view may point to the counter-intuitiveness and impracticality of the proposed philosophy of planetary healing.

To the charge of counterintuitive claims, I return to an important premise in Dryzek's and Pickering's *The Politics of the Anthropocene*. Present-day institutions, epistemologies and ontologies emerged in the Holocene – a period of geological time characterized by relative stability in earth systems.

“For nearly all of human history, the presence of the Earth system has not been recognized by political actors and thinkers, even if a few of them have thought about the importance of maintaining the environmental basis of human societies. It is still routinely ignored by most of them.” (Dryzek, 2019, p.2)

Our current, dominant intuitions and institutions developed within Holocene conditions. But we are venturing further into the Anthropocene - an epoch characterized by increasing instability and “potential catastrophic shifts in the character of the whole system.” (ibid.) Dryzek and Pickering argue that institutions and people need to rethink everything in the Anthropocene. It is logically consistent that ideas and claims for planetary healing in the context of current ecological conditions will look counterintuitive.

In response to the implausibility of the interdisciplinary scope of a philosophy of planetary healing, I will illustrate the practicality of this approach with a real-world example of Indigenous epistemology and Western science intersecting to pursue radically different questions. In the Anthropocene, the antidote to broken relationships is intentional connection-making. Investing time and

resources into interdisciplinary approaches is an efficient way to generate novel ideas to complex problems. When the core values of planetary healing interact with health sciences, ecology, technology, economics, and other disciplines the idea of rapid societal transformational change seems more plausible. I will provide an example of experts from health sciences who have reimagined ways of doing and thinking about their work. This innovative, collaborative, and unique interdisciplinary approach demonstrates a methodology and results that overcome the failures of Western environmental movement and health sciences.

### **Example: Indigenous perspectives on planetary health**

In 2022, researchers and experts in law, medicine and health sciences, family medicine, and Indigenous wellness published a paper in order to widen the scope of determinants of health and center Indigenous perspectives. The dominant framework for determinants of health identifies power differentials in society that impact health outcomes and incorporates social justice into health sciences research. But to date, this human-centric framework has lacked Indigenous perspectives and the language for discussing planetary health.

“This call to action conceptualises the determinants of planetary health from an Indigenous perspective, which prioritises Indigenous-specific methods of knowledge sharing from around the globe. A group of Indigenous scholars, practitioners, land and water defenders, respected Elders, and knowledge-holders have led this effort to answer the question: what are the determinants of planetary health?” (Redvers et al., 2022, p. e157)

The authors used Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous-led approaches to engage with a broad base of Indigenous Peoples across the globe, including the Sahtu’ot’ine. They used a deep listening method, described as “a way of learning and working in a state of togetherness that is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity.” (ibid. p. e157) They were seeking consensus on the guiding principles for determinants of planetary health that is accessible to lay people and professionals.



As a result, the group identified ten deeply connected determinants of planetary health that elevated existing knowledges from specific communities to a global framework. There are two Mother Earth-level determinants, four interconnecting determinants, and four Indigenous Peoples' level determinants. The multi-disciplinary, epistemologically plural approach identified key indicators of sustainability, health, and well-being that are interconnected with non-human nature and human societal constructs. Many Indigenous communities have been monitoring these indicators for thousands of years and consider them integral to long-term sustainability and planetary health.

The authors propose that future research examine, with an Indigenous lens, the implementation and practical application of the ten determinants of planetary health to wider networks. They conclude with a call to action:

“As equitable and inclusive societies, institutions, and fields are built, embracing diverse knowledges will get us closer to a well and just planet for all. Indigenous voices are a powerful and beneficial solutions-orientated force for Mother Earth's well-being and for all living beings that inhabit her. We therefore call for an inclusion of wisdom that is not mere knowledge or information but is an insight that comes from the heart—from the heart of Mother Earth.” (ibid. p. e161)

This example offers a response to potential criticism questioning the practicality of widening the scope of environmental sciences to ask philosophical questions, and vice versa. The researchers developing the ten determinants of planetary health from an Indigenous perspective may not necessarily call their work ‘philosophy’. Environmental philosophers can collaborate across disciplines and engage with Indigenous knowledges that invite them to rethink methodologies and concepts, like nature and well-being. Philosophers can start to uncover the theoretical assumptions or terms in Western knowledge systems that gloss over important histories and ignore oppression and exploitation. Shifting dangerous attitudes of *colonial nature loving* and apathy and hopelessness about the future in the Anthropocene, to attitudes that promote planetary healing will not be easy. Interdisciplinary approaches that prioritize

healing fractured relationships and overcome epistemic barriers will likely produce counterintuitive ideas. These counterintuitive ideas are key to imagining possible futures in which rapid societal transformation do not sacrifice oppressed communities for the sake of mitigating ecological crises.

## CONCLUSION

*“Sahtudene Elders’ Story: A group of people comes upon a huge stone. They must somehow move the stone. It blocks their way utterly. They are unable to go around it, over it or under it. Nor are they able to move it working individually or in small groups. They will only be able to move the stone if they all work together, each according to his or her role in the larger task. Only the truth, discovered by all people working together, can move the stone and establish a “road for all humanity”. ” - Morris Neyelle, supplemented by Charlie Neyelle (GBL Management Plan, p. 9)*

Climate change and biodiversity loss will be part of our futures no matter what we do now.

Ecological processes set in motion centuries ago as colonization, industrialization, and the mechanization of nature proliferated around the globe will cause further damage. The reality of the unavoidable Anthropocene is profoundly sad. In many ways, to understand this reality is akin to coming to grips with a death - the death of a possible future without Earth system instability and widespread loss of human and non-human life. People will need time to grieve and heal, but current global processes do not make that time. People will need to create space to care for one another, but current social infrastructure does not prioritize that space. Thus, people will forge ahead with ungrounded political promises and unreflective technological climate solutions. They will look to the very epistemologies that perpetuate exploitation and oppression of human and non-human nature for solutions to the failing of our planetary systems. Or they will carry on with business as usual for as long as they can, preferring to ignore rather than confront their pain. These unreflective and negligent responses are part of a future that intensifies injustices on people who hold the least power and extinguishes as many as one million species on the planet.

There is, however, another way to respond to the reality of the Anthropocene. People unlearn faster than systems. People choose to uphold systems that do not make time or space for healing relationships with human and non-human beings. Instead, people can choose to work together to forge alternative ways of relating to each other and to the natural world. The Dene youth who experience Sahtu with the Elders of Délı̨nę to reconnect with the land and waters and learn their language demonstrate resistance to colonial repression. The non-Indigenous scientists and Elders of Délı̨nę who go out on Sahtu together to better understand the lake trout through story and data collection demonstrate etuaptmumk.

The Elders who pass on the language and stories of the water heart beating life into Sahtu to future generations demonstrate resilience to ecological crises. Looking through the *anti-imperialist planetary justice lens* enables environmentalists and environmental philosophers to see that the Tsá Tué biosphere reserve symbolizes an imagined future – where the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges intertwine to carve a pathway forward for all beings. It is possible to transform mindsets with respect to the environment from a shallow *colonial nature loving* to a sense of profound connectedness with non-human nature and responsibility to one another. A philosophy for planetary healing challenges us to convert anxiety or apathy into the action needed to make positive change from our own sphere of influence, privilege, and expertise. Western environmental philosophy cannot ignore its colonial roots, nor can it continue to exclude the calls to action from communities facing oppression and exploitation. Futures where broken relationships between people and non-human nature are healed and continually renewed are still possible. But only if we ask ourselves with curiosity and humility: what would make all life, human and non-human, go well in the Anthropocene? To transcend the dominant ideas produced by disparate groups of individuals, I invite philosophers to engage thinkers across cultures and disciplines, center ideas that appear counterintuitive to Western epistemology and hold values that resist the oppression and exploitation of human and non-human beings.

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