



**NOT GIVING UP**  
A FEMINIST CASE FOR PRISON ABOLITION  
**ON PEOPLE**

BARRETT EMERICK AND AUDREY YAP

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*For the ones who never gave up on us.*



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## *Chapter 7*

# Not Giving Up

The world is a mess, but we can make it better. In this book, we have argued that we ought to reject retributive ideologies and embrace alternative methods of holding each other to account. We are fundamentally social, vulnerable, fallible beings, and everyone ought to have the opportunity to try to make up for their past wrongs and go in a new way. As we have stressed throughout, it doesn't mean that any particular person ought not give up on any particular other, but it does mean that society should be structured in such a way as to enable rather than foreclose agency. People should be able to tell new stories with their lives moving forward. The set of social arrangements against which we have argued includes both what is formally codified and reified (American and Canadian carceral systems) and informal (the retributive ideology that frames how we think of wrongdoers and helps to justify those formal systems). Rejecting such an ideology and changing such social arrangements are not only a job for individuals; our aim has not just been to give an account of interpersonal, normative ethics that lays out how individual actors ought to respond to others. Though it is true that individuals ought to jettison retributive ideologies, their doing so is far from enough. Individuals also need environments—human ecosystems—that are conducive to their reparative efforts. In short, not only should individuals nurture their relationships with each other and resist retributive ideologies, but so too should communities and whole societies become places where this can happen. What we need is to remake the world.

### **BUILDING NEW WORLDS**

This book began with a quote from Paulo Freire and the aim of creating a world in which it is easier to love.<sup>1</sup> We have also argued for being “extremists

for love” in Martin Luther King Jr.’s sense,<sup>2</sup> where love, as we outlined in chapter 2, is interpreted as *agape*. King saw this extremism as a matter of urgent necessity. We simply are, as social beings, in relation with others, and as such we will have to decide how to respond to and interact with them. The reactive attitudes we take toward others (such as anger, discussed in chapter 2) express our natures as relational beings and treat others as moral agents. This is not something we can step out of except by stepping away from society altogether—not a feasible task (nor a desirable one) for most people.

It is often hard to treat others well when you yourself are suffering. To create a world where we don’t engage in moral abandonment, we need to understand how moral abandonment is institutionalized by carceral systems that neither serve victims nor rehabilitate wrongdoers. And then we need to replace those systems with others in which our landings are softer and the tools for repair are closer to hand.

Abolition is a matter of both tearing down and building up. We might find it in what Elizabeth Spelman notes are blurry places between repair, creation, and destruction. If carceral systems are in fact working as intended, then abolition is not the work of repairing them, but the work of creating better systems in their place.<sup>3</sup> The point is not to make gentler prisons but to change the background conditions that enable them in the first place. Abolition, then, sees the world as in an undesirable state of brokenness and attempts to muster repair as “the creative destruction of brokenness.”<sup>4</sup> The deeply contextual nature of repair points to why the work of abolition has no overarching recipe but is grounded in the everyday work of people in their communities.

A world in which it is easier to love can only be built by considering the background conditions that shape our ordinary relationships and the ways we engage with others. This means understanding the factors that lead us to react with love, anger, joy, disappointment, or a range of other moral emotions. It also means recognizing a pair of related claims: first, we need to be working at this *now*, rather than waiting for the right time or a better political climate; and second, we need to give up on a dream of perfection or purity. The desire to wait for the right time is often bound up with the desire to take perfect action, free from any kind of moral compromise. Unfortunately, in the world in which we live, virtually all of our actions will be compromised in some way, and waiting for an opportunity to act that is morally pure means letting ourselves off the hook for acting at all.

After all, though at many points our discussion has been theoretical, our aims are not speculative; it is a question of the world we are living in now. In light of that, it makes sense to join King in rebuking those who worry about radical change. King’s main targets in his own time were the “white moderates” who failed to join the Civil Rights movement on the grounds that the country wasn’t “ready” for what it proposed; these moderates felt that it was

important for King and his comrades be patient in waiting for culture to catch up to them before pushing for something more radical.

King was having none of it. For him, the white moderate position was even more disappointing than the position of the outright racist. When the society around you is unjust, any choice you make—including the choice to do nothing and thereby uphold the status quo—is a moral and political choice. And in an unjust world, aiming at justice will be seen as an extremist position. The only choice, then, for King, is what kind of extremist to be.<sup>5</sup>

To be an extremist, however, does not mean being committed to only accepting complete and immediate success in your efforts. Nor does it mean being disallowed from celebrating the small victories that might come along the way. Though it is urgent for us to act against injustice, one of the challenges of that struggle is that we won't always see the results of our actions right away. This is importantly different from accepting the stance of the white moderates that King criticizes. They advocated for patience *before* starting to work for justice. We acknowledge the need for patience *in* the work of justice—what Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò calls “revolutionary patience” that simultaneously rejects complacency and acknowledges that the work of worldmaking is always ongoing and by its very nature imperfect.<sup>6</sup>

Mark Lance and Matt Meyer offer another helpful example that illustrates how the need for urgent action can be at odds with a desire for pure, perfect action. Imagine that there is a landlord who jacks up the rent on an apartment complex in order to try to drive all the tenants out so they can gentrify the building.<sup>7</sup> As a community organizer you might take yourself to have two options: raise funds to hire a lawyer to represent the tenants in suing the landlord or work with the tenants and help them get trained so they can represent themselves in future inevitable disputes. This sounds like a choice between treating a mere symptom or trying to cure the disease; if you merely hire a lawyer the tenants might not be evicted this time, but the landlord will likely try to do the same thing again down the road (with more legal preparation, to boot). Lance and Meyer argue that this way of seeing the situation is a false dichotomy. While we should indeed aim for a cure, it is a mistake to think that the *only* thing we should work for is a cure. Maintaining such a position is like saying that, if you happen upon someone on the street who is bleeding out from a stab wound they endured during a mugging, you shouldn't treat them because the real problem is systemic crime. Of course you should try to stem the bleeding and save the victim's life, and afterward you should try to tackle the root causes of crime in the area that resulted in that violence in the first place! In the same way, Lance and Meyer argue, you should *both* aim to see to it that the particular tenants are not evicted from their homes *and* train them to organize on their own behalf (and on behalf of others) so that in the future they will be less vulnerable to predatory land development schemes.

The main point here is that we ought to resist purity politics, in which we refuse to engage in any activity that might in some way contribute to injustice or insist on only engaging in activities that will ensure complete revolutionary success. In many ways this stance would leave us in the same position as the white moderates King criticizes: waiting for the right opportunity to come along while people suffer all around us. Although it is important to be judicious in choosing what to do to work against injustice, we're also in for disappointment if we expect there to be perfectly ethical choices all the time.

We are, after all, embodied beings who need to consume resources to survive, and most of us have little (if any) say about the infrastructure that gets us resources like our electricity.<sup>8</sup> In her discussion of what it would take to develop an ethic appropriate to the dynamic and complex world situation in which we live, Alexis Shotwell firmly resists even striving for a kind of moral purity. Shotwell's argument against purity politics in that sphere rests on background commitments that we also share:

I argue that to be embodied is to be placed, sustained, affected by the world, and in turn to affect the world. I fill out the ethical demands embodiment implies, focusing on the ethical entanglement of one's body with suffering bodies that at first pass seem to be quite far away . . . An ethical approach aiming for personal purity is inadequate in the face of the complex and entangled situation in which we in fact live.<sup>9</sup>

This means that while we ought to aim at abolition, there might be some moves along the way that leave us complicit in injustice. But in a messy and unjust world, we should not expect to be able to keep our hands perfectly clean. Most political actions we might take will be in some way or another fraught. But that's because we're trying to build a new world; we don't live in it yet. The kinds of actions and choices available to us today will hopefully not be the same actions and choices available to our descendants—at least not if we're successful. But we can't know now what their world will be like. The best we can do at this point is to try and create the conditions for them to continue the work and to thrive as much as possible in the world they have.

To this end, *Táiwò* encourages us to “think like an ancestor” when we're engaged in worldmaking projects. Projects of abolition are large-scale endeavors that will not be completed in a single lifetime. It is doubtful that any of us alive today, as we write this book, will live to see a world without prisons. But fortunately, we can learn from others who are already engaged in projects on scales like these. *Táiwò* tells the story of Takeshi Ueshiba and Yasuo Yamamoto, both artisans engaged in the long-term process of fermentation. Ueshiba makes *kioke*, wooden barrels of Yoshino cedar, and Yamamoto uses those barrels in the fermentation of foods like miso and soy. The two men work in partnership with each other, but we can also see them as

working in partnership with many generations of people who came before and who will come after. The cedar trees whose wood is used for the barrels may be centuries old, and that wood in the barrels contributes crucial microorganisms to the fermentation process. The hoops used in the barrels are made from bamboo planted by Yamamoto's grandfather, and the technology used for this entire process has been developed and refined over millennia. Táiwò writes:

I like to think that Yamamoto and Ueshiba's ancestors acted in equal parts faith and responsibility. We don't have to think that they blindly assumed that kioko-based fermentation would never die. Their responsibility was what they did know for a fact: the very possibility of enjoying a good, beautiful thing eighty years into the future depended on their actions today. We can explain their trust in terms of that responsibility—doing their part in a larger, multigenerational project in faith and trust that the future would take up their contributions in a good and beautiful way.<sup>10</sup>

There are two senses of “thinking like an ancestor.” The first is genealogical, where you might adopt a mindset in which you think about your literal familial descendants. You would do this if you think about passing on wealth or a family business to your children or grandchildren, or if you consider how to “continue your line” or “pass on your name.” The second is moral, and it has both a backward- and forward-looking component as we think of ourselves as descendants and future ancestors simultaneously. In the forward-looking sense, you consider what commitments or projects to start and lay the groundwork for your descendants to join you in that effort.<sup>11</sup> That's what happens when someone plants trees that will eventually be used to build barrels for fermentation or breaks ground on a site that will centuries later be a cathedral. These kinds of projects have historically been multigenerational.

It's worth noting, though, that this kind of thinking doesn't necessarily require literal ancestry. While we take our lessons from traditions that have been passed down through family lineages, what thinking like an ancestor in this second sense requires is acting across generations. In the backward-looking sense, we can then choose, as descendants, which projects we will take up from our ancestors:

What defines our relationship to our ancestors is not what calls they made, but which of them we answer. Regardless of what we've genealogically or even morally inherited, we can seek upward paths right now with our own actions. We can make our projects and decisions the source of moral inheritance for those who come after us. While many of us owe the responsibility to continue struggles for justice to our genealogical ancestors, all of us without exception owe it to our moral descendants—those who inherit the world that results from our successes and failures, regardless of parentage.<sup>12</sup>

Just as we cannot expect our own ethical landscape to be morally pure, we can't expect our genealogy to be morally pure either. It's almost certain that some of our biological ancestors were engaged in projects that we, in building more just worlds, ought to reject. Yet we can still take up the projects of our ancestors, or other long-term projects that have been passed down, with thoughtfulness and care about what we take on and what we leave to others. When we are engaged in worldmaking projects—like the general project of creating a world in which it is easier to love, or more specific projects of building a world without prisons—we are engaged in projects of collective action with people who have died as well as those who have not yet been born. Yamamoto's grandfather, having planted the bamboo, is engaged in a project with his grandson and presumably his grandson's own descendants, including those he will never meet. As Táíwò says, "We should think about our ancestors. But we will win and lose our own ethical battles based on what we do for our descendants. *We are defined by what kind of ancestors we choose to be.*"

The principle of thinking about and with our relations, including those who are not currently living, isn't unique to Táíwò's thinking. Plenty of others, particularly Indigenous thinkers, describe complementary approaches. Kyle Powys Whyte describes counterfactual dialogue as a form of questioning that arises naturally from many Indigenous philosophies:

It is a dialogue in which—without full information—we speculate on how our ancestors and our future generations would interpret today's situations and what recommendations they would make for us as guidance for our individual and collective actions. What we determine to be right or wrong actions in our lives stems importantly from the results of these dialogues that involve currently living persons, memories and stories of past persons and the anticipated interpretations of future persons. The philosophical places of counterfactual dialogue are endless, given many dialogues are possible depending on which generations of ancestors or descendants we choose to begin with.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, the idea of thinking in terms of seven generations (forward and backward) can be found in the guiding principles of many Indigenous nations like the Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee.<sup>14</sup> This shift toward ancestor thinking also means a change in how we ought to think about patience. While we reject the patience of King's white moderate, who wants the conditions to be just right before they choose to act, we endorse the patience of the land steward, tending the cedar trees that might not mature in their lifetime. The important difference has to do with the target of our patience. The moderate exercises patience with respect to joining the movement. On the other hand, the land steward exercises patience with respect to seeing the results of their actions within the movement since "no previous generation has won the

struggle for justice outright, in one stroke—if they had, we wouldn't be in this position."<sup>15</sup> But this kind of patience doesn't come easily to many people. It's often very tempting to avoid projects that don't promise quick results.

## HOPE AND FAITH

For many, committing to a multigenerational project requires hope. As we described it in chapter 2, hope is tightly connected to agency. Creating the conditions for others to hope well means sometimes helping to provide some imaginative scaffolding, as Victoria McGeer described. This might mean holding someone in a desired identity even when they might not be able to do so themselves—at least not yet. One reason to do so is provided by King: when we have agape for all others, we see in them the unsettled horizon of possibility, so that even if they have acted wrongly in the past, in every moment they could choose to go in a new way. That recognition forms part of the scaffolding required, in part because it can create material opportunities for them to live a better life, and in part because it creates or contributes to their own self-understanding as having the ability to do so.

When we talk about hope in this way, we are thinking primarily about the hopes we have for ourselves. However, we sometimes also invest our hopes in others, say to do the right thing morally.<sup>16</sup> Our ancestors might have hoped that we (or someone) would continue to nurture the seeds they had planted, just as we might hope that others will take up those responsibilities once we are gone. For Katie Stockdale and others who write about the potential value of hope, it can sustain someone in their struggles, both little and big. Hope can give someone reason to continue working toward some distant and unlikely goal and can be an antidote to despair. Stockdale defines despair as “seeing in a wholly unfavorable light the possibility that a desired outcome obtains.”<sup>17</sup> If someone is in despair (and if they stay there very long), there is a very good chance their despair will be justified (and perhaps come to be more and more justified over time). So, hope can help us avoid turning our despair into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hours we spend doomscrolling, after all, could be spent in the struggle.

But even though hope can be valuable for many people, it's certainly no requirement for people involved in the struggle against oppression. Stockdale uses the example of the activist and scholar Derrick Bell as someone who had no hope that injustice would end but maintained his motivation to fight against racial injustice regardless.<sup>18</sup> To generalize the question at stake here: what if none of this is going to work? We can take part in these multigenerational projects, take up the tools our ancestors passed down, and carefully prepare a place in the movement for our descendants. But none of

these actions guarantee anything. Even as she writes about the value of hope in our lives, the writer Rebecca Solnit notes the fundamental uncertainty at the heart of it all:

The world gets better. It also gets worse. The time it will take you to address this is exactly equal to your lifetime, and if you're lucky you don't know how long that is. The future is dark. Like night. There are probabilities and likelihoods, but there are no guarantees.<sup>19</sup>

Solnit is here encouraging us to reject certainty that our work will bear fruit. Instead, she argues, we should accept that the future—and what will come from our effort—is unknown. It is tempting to believe that there is something inevitable about moral progress that rolls always onward and always upward; that there is a kind of cosmic order to the universe and that things are fated to improve, to become more just. Kate Norlock encourages us to give up on the idea that there is a moral trajectory to history and let go of the belief that things are destined to get better (or for that matter to get worse). Instead, Norlock says:

There is no hill. There is no upwards and no backwards. Our attraction to directional metaphors betrays a wishful thinking that moral progress and ambitious policies are achievements with endpoints that we can reach if we just get closer to them.<sup>20</sup>

Rejecting such directional metaphors (and the hope that enables them) leaves us in a position to recognize that if large-scale change happens it is because people worked to make it happen, to challenge injustice and combat oppression. We admit that it can be tempting to take the long view of history and see some common thread weaving its ways through a series of events, ideological developments, or changes in the social imaginary that give you the feeling that things are fated to get better or become more just. However, as compelling as perceiving moral progress through that lens might be, we should be careful not to forget that if things get better it's not because they were destined to get better but because people *worked* to make them better. What might sustain us instead of hope, then, is what Stockdale calls “intrinsic faith.” This is “a deep belief in the intrinsic value of one’s pursuit and a commitment to acting on that basis.”<sup>21</sup> This type of faith takes three forms: what Stockdale calls spiritual faith, faith in humanity, and moral faith. We will focus just on the second and third forms here.

In defining faith in humanity Stockdale adopts Ryan Preston-Roedder’s account where it is:



A disposition to evaluate others' actions, intentions, or characters by giving them the benefit of the doubt, trusting that they will act decently or at least that right action is attainable for them in the face of evidence to the contrary.<sup>22</sup>

One might ground their faith in humanity by way of witnessing: observing the good works of others and recognizing ways that people can be virtuous. Sometimes this can come by observing people doing extraordinary things, risking a great deal in the name of justice. For example, many ordinary Russian citizens risked long jail terms and other serious repercussions for publicly protesting the war in Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> But we also think just as important to this type of faith are the often quiet, small acts of kindness, generosity, and care that don't make headlines. Many people sort and deliver groceries for their neighbors in small acts of mutual aid that are easy to overlook but remain life sustaining.

As we understand it, faith in humanity is not just a static thing, nor is it backward-looking (where you observe someone else doing good works and then come to have that faith). Instead, faith in humanity helps to justify your forward-looking ways of regarding and interacting with others. Stockdale says:

People who have faith in humanity are thus committed to demonstrating the goodness of humanity in their own actions not only as a means to an end but because they deeply believe in the intrinsic value of relating to others with love, kindness, and other virtues.<sup>24</sup>

Having such faith is not without risk, Stockdale argues, since putting such trust in others can open you up to exploitation or harm. Despite that, faith in humanity counsels a willingness to take on such risks, since doing so can be transformative both for the other and for the world. We see this, for instance, in the work of Freire (who Stockdale quotes). Throughout his work, Freire appeals to such faith and encourages teachers to regard their students as having within them the capacity not just to learn but to teach. But any teacher who has gone into a seminar with only an open-ended discussion (rather than a decisively crafted lecture) in mind knows that can feel risky. It involves giving up control and opening oneself up to the possibility that the conversation will go off the rails, that students won't have done the reading, or that they won't rise to the challenge. It can be tempting to thoroughly script a lecture and thereby retain control, lowering the chance that things will go awry. But, as Freire argues so beautifully, it is in giving up such control and in having faith in your students (treating them as knowledgeable and insightful people) that you create the opportunity for a trustful epistemic community to be born, in which everyone can learn from

each other and do transformative work of the kind that is needed to remake the world.

We want to turn now to faith in morality, which Stockdale defines as “faith that living a moral life is intrinsically valuable despite the effects one’s moral actions have on the world.”<sup>25</sup> This is where Stockdale primarily uses Derrick Bell’s work, and the meaning he found in the struggle despite his enduring pessimism. Stockdale describes Bell’s position as being one that says that continuing to fight is simultaneously futile and necessary. It is the “conviction that something must be done”<sup>26</sup> even absent any hope that such efforts will bear fruit. Admittedly, sometimes we don’t know whether our efforts have borne fruit. Solnit points out, describing her work as an activist, that the aim of organizing is often to prevent something back from happening—it is about preventing disaster or harm. She says:

[V]ictories were largely those of what *hadn’t* happened to the air, the water, the land, and the people of Nevada. And the history of what the larger movements have achieved is largely one of careers undestroyed, ideas uncensored, violence and intimidation uncommitted, injustices unperpetrated, rivers unpoisoned and undammed, bombs undropped, radiation unleased, poisons unsprayed, wildernesses unviolated, countryside undeveloped, resources unextracted, species unexterminated.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Bell’s pessimism came from his deep understanding of oppressive social structures. Paying attention to the horrors of the world can certainly leave us without hope that things will get better. Perhaps there is no clearer case than climate change. Every few years a new IPCC report comes out, each progressively more dire and explicit about the profound devastation toward which we are hurtling. Despite such warnings, governments and corporations continue to emit at record rates, making it seem as if averting climate disaster is almost certainly impossible. And yet we agree with Stockdale here that despite the near certainty, still we should fight. Indeed, we should have faith in the belief that doing so is right even absent any hope that our efforts will have a positive effect. This is encapsulated by a quote from the environmentalist Aldo Leopold with which Norlock begins her “Perpetual Struggle”: “That the situation is hopeless should not prevent us from doing our best.”<sup>28</sup> Then even if faith does not lead us back to hope, as Stockdale suggests it might, it gives us a reason to go forward nonetheless and to keep walking in the way that Solnit suggests:

You don’t stop walking because there is no way forward. Of course there is no way. You walk the path into being, you make the way, and if you do it well, others can follow the route. You look backward to grasp the long history

you're moving forward from, the paths others have made, the road you came in on. You look forward to possibility. That's what we mean by hope, and you look past it into the impossible and that doesn't stop you either. But mostly you just walk, right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot. That's what makes you unstoppable.<sup>29</sup>

On Stockdale's account, intrinsic faith can become important when one is in the depths of despair. She says:

In moments in which all hope seems lost or out of reach, some other attitude—in many cases intrinsic faith—emerges and prevents [people] from all-encompassing despair and its characteristic feelings.<sup>30</sup>

[It] helps us to continue striving for what we believe is right and just in a world that so often fails to meet our moral expectations and realize our hopes. It prevents us from falling into all-encompassing despair even when hope is lost or out of our reach.<sup>31</sup>

This provides us with a lifeline even in a world where hope is absent.

Part of what is so damaging about despair is that it can leave people unable to continue. If we cannot perceive—or maybe even conceive of—a way forward, where things are better, then it feels as though there is very little we can do. By way of remedy, intrinsic faith refocuses our attention on what is within our power. We can do our best to act rightly and trust other people with whom we are in community and solidarity to do the same, even if the trajectory of the world as a whole does not change.

The two threads of this final chapter might seem to be in tension with each other. We have urged a multigenerational outlook on the projects we undertake, envisioning ways that we could build new worlds. But we have also acknowledged that if history is any guide, it's not so clear that we will ever succeed. We end this book by arguing that not giving up on people—not giving up on each other—is still the most important thing we can do. And this is true even if—especially if—our projects are doomed. Note that the “our” when we talk about the end of our world is also contextual. Even if humans disappear from the earth altogether, other species will remain, evolve, and likely thrive in our absence. And even in the human realm, not all humans are at the same stage of seeing our societies fall or fail. Inhabitants of the Maldives, an island nation, risk their country disappearing entirely within this century if sea levels continue to rise.<sup>32</sup> And for many Indigenous people, the end of the world started many years ago. To quote Kyle Whyte again:

[T]he hardships many non-Indigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of

colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Indigenous people are still here, continuing to build new worlds and working to reclaim lands and traditions that were taken by force; people from the Maldives are fighting to keep their country safe and get the richer, more heavily polluting nations, to do their part as well. We don't need to believe—and probably shouldn't—that settler states will give the land back or that large wealthy nations will take the plight of small island nations seriously. We are also writing this book at a particular political moment, just after the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe vs. Wade*, jeopardizing many people's lives and bodily autonomy in ways that might previously have seemed unthinkable. So maybe things will not get better after all, no matter how hard we try.

Yet we think Leopold is right: we should do our best even if the situation is hopeless, and Freire is right: we should put faith in others and trust that they will live up to it. In that way, intrinsic faith seems to be action-guiding in a way that hope is not. If we have seen others who restored our faith in humanity we can aim to emulate their behavior. If we think about why they acted the way they did and why we think they were right to do so we can aim to abide by those same moral principles as well, recognizing the intrinsic value in doing so. Even if the world as a whole doesn't change that much, we can still care and work alongside those with whom we are already in the community. The world is a mess, but we can make it better.

### AFTERWORD: JUST SHOW UP

We work here in unfinished places, and in doing so must give up on certainty about what the future will look like.<sup>34</sup> This is why some abolitionists explicitly argue that we need to be wary of reflexive optimism about a noncarceral future. As Liat Ben-Moshe writes, on the value of living in the “perhaps,” “Not knowing how things end up is not a disadvantage but in fact opens up possibilities of other life worlds that cannot be imagined right now.”<sup>35</sup> But at least some of the work that can be done right now might help our descendants imagine those worlds and bring them into being.

What does a lack of attachment to particular outcomes look like in the present? Recognizing the importance of care even (and especially) when we have no confidence that things will improve might initially seem counterintuitive but is in fact central to many care practices. When we think about how we can embody intrinsic faith in our efforts, it is helpful to think of those who, by the nature of their work, must avoid attachment to particular outcomes, even as they try to bring them about.

Those who work in palliative or hospice settings are generally caring for people who will soon die. And while their work might end up prolonging someone's life, their main orientation is to ease the life that remains. As such, their focus is often on managing pain and reducing suffering for the dying person and those around them.<sup>36</sup> The practices they describe for doing so bear striking similarities to the ways we have argued for cultivating moral solidarity with one another and avoiding moral abandonment.

For example, one of the pitfalls in cultivating empathy for another person is our tendency to project ourselves into their situation and imagine how we (as ourselves) would feel in their place rather than how they feel in that place. An analogous challenge in end-of-life care is for caregivers to let go of their own hopes and expectations about what a good death would look like and simply respond to the dying person's needs as they arise. This, as some interpret it, is another meaning of love. For Simone Weil, "The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: 'What are you going through?'"<sup>37</sup> If we care for someone who is dying, the point is not how we think we might feel in their place, but what *they* are feeling in their place.

For Roshi Joan Halifax, this question necessitates bearing witness to another as we care for them, recognizing our interconnectedness, and giving no fear. This doesn't mean ignoring what we go through ourselves—after all, the process of bearing witness to another's pain is a challenge in its own right. But it does entail refusing to turn away from them just because their suffering might be difficult for us to witness. She describes the practice of not giving fear in terms of images drawn from Zen Buddhism. One such image, the wooden puppet, represents one particular kind of symbol for compassion:

The puppet simply responds to the world as it is. There is no self; there is no other. Someone is hungry; food is given. Someone is thirsty; drink is offered. Someone is sleepy; a bed is made. For the wooden puppet, the world is the puppeteer to which she seamlessly responds without strategy, motivation, or thought of outcome. She can always be counted on because her front is soft and open; to be a wooden puppet is to bear witness and respond to suffering with a tenderness that knows no bounds.<sup>38</sup>

For the wooden puppet, food is not offered just because of some imagined future in which no one is starving. Though we might have desires for such a future, what is important is that there is a need for food *now*, and it can be given. What this reminds us of is that we are capable of responding to suffering in the present moment, even knowing that we might have to do so again and again, and that there may never be an end to the work. The worlds we are attempting to build may never come to pass, but the things we do to build them are worthwhile nonetheless.

And as the last few chapters have emphasized, one of the things we will do in the process is build communities of care—things that are necessary whether we are building new worlds or caring for those that are dying. As Halifax asks:

Instead of isolating ourselves, can we share the responsibilities of giving care? Can we find creative ways to bring the entire community into the experience of care, educating them if necessary? Can we make space so that all those who want to serve can do so? Can we share our compassion reflectively and supportively?<sup>39</sup>

Though she asks this question in the context of people preparing for an impending death, the questions are relevant for any project centered around care. After all, though we will get there at different times and in different places, all of our deaths are impending.

The question then becomes what should we do now, while we're alive? What kind of descendants have we been? And what kind of ancestors will we be?

## NOTES

1. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 40.
2. King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 175–76.
3. Kaba and Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*, 16.
4. Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*, 134.
5. King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 172–76.
6. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*, 204.
7. Lance and Meyer, *Revolution as Nonviolently as Possible*, work in progress.
8. Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 115–16.
9. Shotwell, 107.
10. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*, 193.
11. Táíwò, 207.
12. Táíwò, 207.
13. Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene," 229–30.
14. Borrows, "Seven Generations, Seven Teachings"; LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 197–200; "Values."
15. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*, 199.
16. Adrienne Martin, "Normative Hope," and Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression*, 37–40, both treat the question of hoping that others will meet our normative expectations in much more detail.
17. Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression*, 149.
18. Stockdale, 138–41.

19. Solnit, "Acts of Hope."
20. Norlock, "Perpetual Struggle," 16.
21. Stockdale, 148.
22. Stockdale, 157.
23. Pinson and Talmazan, "Russians Opposed to War in Ukraine Face Their Own Battle: Kremlin Crackdown on Dissent Targets the Russians Protesting Ukraine War."
24. Stockdale, 159.
25. Stockdale, 164.
26. Stockdale, 165.
27. Solnit, "Acts of Hope."
28. Norlock, 6.
29. Solnit, "Too Soon to Tell."
30. Stockdale, 149.
31. Stockdale, 166.
32. Pal and Ghoshal, "'We Can't Wait.'"
33. Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene," 226.
34. Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 125–27.
35. Ben-Moshe, 130.
36. Heilig, "Hospice with a Zen Twist"; Halifax, *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death*.
37. Weil, *Waiting for God*, 115.
38. Halifax.
39. Halifax.

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