

The Wicked Problem of Climate Change

with Karl E. Peters, "Living with the Wicked Problem of Climate Change"; Paul H. Carr, "What Is Climate Change Doing to Us and for Us?"; James Clement van Pelt, "Climate Change in Context: Stress, Shock, and the Crucible of Livingkind"; Robert S. Pickart, "Climate Change at High Latitudes: An Illuminating Example"; Emily E. Austin, "Soil Carbon Transformations"; David A. Larrabee, "Climate Change and Conflicting Future Visions"; Panu Pihkala, "Eco-Anxiety, Tragedy, and Hope: Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Climate Change"; Carol Wayne White, "Re-Envisioning Hope: Anthropogenic Climate Change, Learned Ignorance, and Religious Naturalism"; Matthew Fox, "Climate Change, Laudato Si', Creation Spirituality, and the Nobility of the Scientist's Vocation"; Christopher Volpe, "Art and Climate Change: Contemporary Artists Respond to Global Crisis"; Jim Rubens, "The Wicked Problem of Our Failing Social Compact"; and Peter L. Kelley, "Crossing the Divide: Lessons from Developing Wind Energy in Post-Fact America."

RE-ENVISIONING HOPE: ANTHROPOGENIC CLIMATE CHANGE, LEARNED IGNORANCE, AND RELIGIOUS NATURALISM

by Carol Wayne White

Abstract. In this essay, I introduce religious naturalism as one contemporary religious response to anthropogenic climate change; in so doing, I offer a concept of hope associated with the beauty of ignorance, of not knowing ourselves in the usual manner. Reframing humans as natural processes in relationship with other forms of nature, religious naturalism encourages humans' processes of transformative engagement with each other and with the more-than-human worlds that constitute our existence. Hope in this context is anticipating what possibilities may occur when human organisms enact our evolutionary capacities as relational organisms who can love, engaging in multilayered processes of changing behaviors, values, and relationships that promote the betterment of myriad nature.

Keywords: beauty; climate change; ecological world view; hope; humanism; ignorance; naturalized human; religious naturalism

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The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.

— Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

According to climate science the world has warmed by about 1.6°F (0.9°C) over the last 150 years (1865–2015); additionally, the spatial and temporal non-uniformity of the warming has triggered many other changes to the Earth's climate, including changes in surface, atmospheric, and oceanic temperatures. Almost daily in the news, scientific studies reveal some new aspect of global warming–related planetary change: an increase in atmospheric water vapor, coral bleaching, fires, ravaging storms, severe droughts, disappearing snow cover, shrinking sea ice, ocean warming, glacial melting, and rising sea level. Scientific consensus also indicates that human-induced climate change is real, and that significant, prompt action should be taken on a global scale to slow it down. Moreover, scholarly studies on climate change often present it as one of the most profound challenges to our current human, social, political, and economic systems. Many lines of evidence demonstrate that human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse (heat-trapping) gases, are primarily responsible for recently observed climate changes. The last few years have also seen record-breaking, climate-related weather extremes, as well as the warmest years on record for the globe. If scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change is so clear and the threat so real, what might be one hopeful response to help counter the typical ones of overwhelming despair, skeptical denial, and escapist disbelief?

In this essay, I introduce religious naturalism as one contemporary religious response to anthropogenic climate change; in so doing, I offer a concept of hope associated with the beauty of ignorance, of not knowing ourselves in the usual manner. As a capacious ecological worldview, religious naturalism challenges anthropocentric discourses within a trajectory of liberal humanism that have valorized exceptional human nature. Reframing humans as natural processes in relationship with other forms of nature, religious naturalism encourages humans' processes of transformative engagement with each other and with the more-than-human worlds that constitute our existence. Accordingly, religious naturalism functions as a fundamental orientation in life, and its practice is inspired by an aesthetic-ethical vision that acknowledges the inherent worth of all sentient entities. Drawing on these theoretical insights, I outline the fuller implications of viewing religious naturalism as a "learned ignorance" that enacts hope as a set of practices for addressing climate change. Through critical questioning of our nature, values, behaviors, and use of resources, humans can begin seeing themselves as part of an interacting, evolving, and genetically related community of beings bound together inseparably in space and time.

In the first section, I argue for the theoretical appeal of religious naturalism, which lies in positing humans as natural processes in relationship with other forms of nature. In the second part, I take this naturalized view of the human as the focal point for exploring the idea of “learned ignorance,” of “not knowing” ourselves in the usual manner. Associated with this learned ignorance is the question of hope, an important term many theorists associate with being human. Gleaning insights from various disciplines, I explore the concept of hope as an escapable aspect of being human and ground it in a non-metaphysical philosophical anthropology. The final section highlights central features of this concept of hope in light of the physical, social, and theoretical realities associated with climate change.

RELIGIOUS NATURALISM AND THE NATURALIZED HUMAN

In the contemporary era, religious naturalism features a synthesis of ideas and viewpoints that depart from traditional forms of religion. These perspectives include rejecting supernaturalism in any form, and following the dictums of science in understanding reality, including human life and culture. The model of religious naturalism I espouse is not centered in any specific tradition; rather, it is a mode of reflecting on, experiencing, and embracing one’s relationality with all that is. Here, I evoke the views of Peter Van Ness, who writes “the spiritual dimension of life is the embodied task of realizing one’s truest self in the context of reality apprehended as a cosmic totality. It is the quest for attaining an optimal relationship between what one truly is and everything that is” (Van Ness 1996, 5). In this context, spirituality is not so much belief in something greater or bigger than we are, as it is a human endeavor arising from the critical awareness that one is part of an inextricable network of natural processes that make the very category of the human itself intelligible. This awareness of our entanglement with myriad nature invigorates a fuller sense of our humanity. As suggested by Wesley Wildman, this truth for religious naturalists evokes our sense of nature as sacred in “its beauty, terror, scale, stochasticity, emergent complexity, and evolutionary development” (Wildman 2014, 41).

Operating on the assumption that the natural order is ultimately and finally real, I am essentially concerned about the human in its most concrete, basic terms: as a material process of nature in relationship with other forms of nature. The advances of science, through both biology and physics, have served to demonstrate not only how closely linked human animals are with nature, but that we are simply one branch of a seemingly endless natural cosmos. The general view of humanity I hold, on which I build my concept of hope, presupposes this verity. Donald Crosby states this insight in even more eloquent terms:

Nature requires no explanation beyond itself. It always has existed and always will exist in some shape or form. Its constituents, principles, laws, and relations are the sole reality. This reality takes on new traits and possibilities as it evolves inexorably through time. Human beings are integral parts of nature, and they are natural beings through and through. They, like all living beings, are outcomes of biological evolution. (Crosby 2008, ix-x)

With other religious naturalists, I believe that understanding the deep history of the cosmos is profoundly important for any basic understanding of the materiality of being human, of being alive in the manner we currently find ourselves. Humans are highly complex organisms, owing the lives we have to the emergence of hierarchies of natural systems. Expressed succinctly, humans are “ultimately the manifestations of many interlocking systems—atomic, molecular, biochemical, anatomical, ecological—apart from which human existence is incomprehensible” (Rue 2005, 25). Human life is also part of an evolutionary history showing a trend toward greater complexity and consciousness. As Stephen Jay Gould and other scientists have noted, there has been an increase in the genetic information in DNA and a steady increase in the ability of organisms to gather and process information about the environment and respond to it (Gould 1990; Deacon 2003, 2006).

In highlighting human animals as emergent life forms, I warn against a particular reading of this claim that concludes human beings are the triumphant summit of natural development. Rather, my position is best described by recent insights in ecological studies, aptly described by Crosby: “Organisms of various types, including human beings, are inextricably bound together in a web of mutual interdependence for their continual flourishing and survival as they make common if varied use of the energy of the sun” (Crosby 2013, 16). Within each web, each species of animal has a niche for which it is more or less adapted, and has attributes that others lack (Spiegel 1997, 22–23). This ecological bent challenges those who would use evolutionary history as the basis for deciding who is better than whom.

In light of these observations, the scientific epic becomes the starting point for developing a view of the human constituted by a central tenet: humans are relational processes of nature. As I have stated elsewhere, humans are nature made aware of itself (White 2016, 6). Our inexhaustible connections or entanglement with other natural processes, or with the more-than-human, constitutes the very notion of the human as such. I contend that our humanity is not a given but rather an achievement. Consider that, from a strictly biological perspective, humans are organisms that have slowly evolved by a process of natural selection from earlier primates. From one generation to another, the species that is alive now has gradually adapted to changing environments so that it could continue to survive. Our animality, from this perspective, is living under the influence

of genes, instincts, and emotions, with a prime directive to survive and procreate.

Yet, this minimalist approach fails to consider what some cognitive scientists, and many humanists, philosophers, and religionists tend to accentuate: our own personal experience of what it is like to be an experiencing human being. As I have discussed elsewhere, becoming human, or actualizing ourselves as human beings, in this sense, emerges out of an awareness and desire to be more than a conglomeration of pulsating cells. Our humanity is not reducible to organizational patterns or processes dominated by brain systems; nor is it structured solely by DNA, diet, behavior, and the environment. Rather, in posing fundamental questions of value, meaning, and purpose to our existence, human animals become human destinies. Our coming to be human destinies is structured by a crucial question: how do we come to terms with life? (White 2016, 34–37)

Humans are, by our very constitution, relational, and our wholeness occurs within a matrix of complex interconnectedness—in other words, in ways of conjoining with others that transform us. Utilizing the tenets of religious naturalism in conjunction with values discourse, I consider humans' awareness and appreciation of our connection to "all that is," as an expression of sacrality, or of what we perceive and value as ultimately important. Value in this sense refers to an organism's facility to sense whether events in its environment are more or less desirable (Dolan 2002, 1191). Minimally, this facility evokes the notion of adaptive value, which is the basic matrix of Darwinian theory (Gould 2000, 158). Within a larger ecological framework, however, this truth takes on fuller meaning. As Holmes Rolston observes: "An organism is the loci of values defended; life is otherwise unthinkable. Such organismic values are individually defended; but, ecologists insist, organisms occupy niches and are networked into biotic communities" (Rolston 2006, 911).

Humans seeking, finding, and experiencing community with others—and with otherness—is an essential aspect of our humanity that religious discourse tends to advance and reiterate again and again. As Ursula Goodenough writes:

We have throughout the ages sought connection with higher powers in the sky or beneath the earth, or with ancestors in some other realm. We have also sought, and found, religious fellowship with one another. And now we realize that we are connected to all creatures. Not just in food chains or ecological equilibria. We share a common ancestor. We share genes for receptors and cell cycles and signal-transduction cascades. We share evolutionary constraints and possibilities. We are connected all the way down. (Goodenough 2000, 73)

Furthermore, scientific theories feature the social character of cognition in animals and humans, providing various types of evidence for

understanding humans as symbol makers, creators of a world imbued with value, and as social organisms. According to Terrence Deacon, what is particularly interesting about the course of human evolution is that it has entailed the co-evolution of three emergent modalities—brain, symbolic language, and culture—with each feeding into and responding to the other two and generating particularly complex patterns and outcomes. In *The Symbolic Species* he explores the intricate connection between the evolution of human language and our brains, or what he calls their co-evolution (Deacon 1997).

The gist of Deacon's study is that language itself was part of the process that was responsible for the evolution of the brain. Language has changed the environments in which brains have evolved. We are a species that in part has been shaped by symbols, in part shaped by what we do. According to Deacon, ritual, mythology—ways of doing things that are organized conventionally, symbolically—are the hallmark of our species. Humans have transformed and even reinterpreted much of our biology through this symbolic system. So much of what we do—forming intimate bonds, engaging in conflict, as in warfare, or whatever—has been transformed by this linguistic tool that has, in a sense, taken over and biased all of our interactions with the world. Expressed succinctly, our brain has evolved very differently in some regards than other species' brains and in ways that are uniquely human (Deacon 1997, 36–37, 45–46).

Based on these insights from Deacon and other scientists, we can affirm that humans seek meaning by viewing their lives in a cosmic and religious framework that is itself a human symbolic construct—the brain is part of the cosmos and a product of the cosmos. Its structures reflect the nature of the cosmos and whatever ordering and meaning-giving forces are expressed in its history (Arbib 1989; LeDoux 1996; Brothers 1997). These naturalistic views of the human indicate a complex social organism that can love, connect deeply with others, and symbolize its environment (or engage in world formation) through values and language. They also lend support to my view of human individuals as multilevel psychosomatic unities—both biological organisms and responsible selves. Here, the focus is on humans' heightened awareness of our self-conscious ability to make decisions, act on those decisions, and take responsibility for them (White 2016, 39).

LEARNED IGNORANCE AS THE BEGINNING OF HOPE

A basic conception of the human as an emergent, interconnected life form amid spectacular biotic diversity becomes the focal point for embracing what I am calling “learned ignorance.” I associate this term with an ongoing process of awareness by which we begin to view and experience ourselves differently from what is presented in a dominant cultural fantasy of human

exceptionalism. This conceptualization is based on earlier, influential humanistic models that anchor humans on one side of the great divide, away from all other species. This premise of human exceptionalism assumes the human alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies, and it has lent theoretical support to popular myths of the self-made individual in the United States.

Rejecting this fantasy, religious naturalism leads us to learned ignorance. Here I acknowledge the paradoxical truth of the Nietzschean adage: We knowers are unknown to ourselves. Cultivating learned ignorance raises other important questions: How can we begin to know ourselves again? What are we, and who are we becoming?

Responding with new insights into the fuller nature of the human, religious naturalism encourages a critical and appreciable awareness of our intricate entanglement with other material processes. Consider this astute observation from philosopher of science Donna Haraway:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to become with many. (Haraway 2008, 3–4)

Adopting learned ignorance draws our attention to the strange, relational worlds of which we are constituted. Moreover, honoring our radical relatedness underscores a quintessential task: becoming human, or achieving our humanity that is inescapably structured by our relational materiality, can never be completed in our unfolding, mysterious universe. For me, this bit of wisdom pushes us toward a new concept of hope, a term that has long been considered an important part of being human.

At first glance, the concept of hope seems to be a simple term, often identified with a general disposition (a belief or feeling) that something a person wishes is likely to happen. However, the analytical literature on hope suggests a more complex phenomenon with diverse, nuanced meanings. This is especially true when the term is appraised from different standpoints in Western thought such as Christian theology, psychology, sociology, and health care. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it contains compelling theoretical perspectives that alert us to the richness and variety of the phenomena associated with hope. It is impossible to do justice to all the theories in detail in this essay; however, I engage some of their general principles in constructing a view of hope grounded in a non-metaphysical philosophical anthropology.

I begin with a brief discussion of the Christian theological conception of hope because of its emphasis on the “living faith” of individuals. In this religious context, hope operates as Christians’ expectation for a better life or transformed state, or even as their alternative vision to what is true here and now. Christian hope requires human activity, or reliance on the benevolence, wisdom, and faithfulness of the deity, in light of human vulnerabilities, fallibilities, limitations, and desires. From its inception, this conception of hope has been centralized in the teachings of Christian leaders. For instance, after the death of Jesus Christ, early Christians expected the new Messiah would come and save them (Brunner 1956). For Jürgen Moltmann, a leading twentieth-century theologian, the primary hope all Christians had (and still have) is the eschatological expectation of salvation offered as a result of Christ’s redemptive actions. In contemporary terms, this is the expectation of something positive happening due to the will and promise of God (Moltmann 1993).

Moltmann’s views are instructive here. He presents hope as the foundation and mainspring of theological thinking in the manner in which it keeps humanity in *statu viatoris*, in that unresolved openness to world questions, which has its origins in the promise of God in the resurrection of Christ and can therefore be resolved only when the same God fulfills [his] promise:

This hope makes the Christian church a constant disturbance in human society. . . . It makes the Church the source of continual new impulses towards the realization of righteousness, freedom and humanity here in the light of the promised future that is to come. This Church is committed to “answer for the hope” that is in it (I Peter 3:15). (Moltmann 1993, 22)

Whether or not one is persuaded by the metaphysical certainty or “divine promise” component of Moltmann’s equation, it is crucial to note that without the actions of the humans, the concept of hope lacks any real meaning and remains a vacuous term. In other words, embedded in Christianity’s theological formula is an important insight that invigorates the approach I take in this article: humans’ capacity to respond in a certain way to life’s sheer contingencies—its vicissitudes, challenges, and hardships that increase our vulnerabilities. This observation resonates with Ghassan Hage’s notion that hope is, or can be interpreted as, an inherent religious characteristic and capability of humans as humans (Hage 2003). In short, I contend that humans are fundamentally “hoping” subjects.

Building on the notion of humans as hoping subjects, I include psychological views on hope as encompassing the assumption that possibilities exist (Morse and Penrod 1999, 143). For example, Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi’s discussion of hope suggests that humans inhabit a modality of existence where possibilities are actively imagined, perceived, and desired to help foster well-being (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2010,

253–54, 257). These psychological perspectives emphasize both individual and group agency, will, and capacity to rise above certain circumstances and make adaptations to basic convictions as humans move forward with anticipation.

This human proclivity is not done in a vacuum, however. As some sociological observations suggest, hope exists in correlation to social settings, which include dominating beliefs, norms, values, and needs of individuals and groups. Building on Emile Durkheim's earlier views, one contemporary sociological approach to hope implies that the expectation attaches itself to something else. For example, Richard Swedberg identifies three distinguishing elements in understanding hope in this sociological context: (1) having the wish, (2) directing its focus on something specific, and (3) expecting that the wish will come true (Swedberg 2016, 43–44). These viewpoints associate hope with a dynamic psychological process that allows individuals in particular life situations to transcend or move through them with an expectancy of a brighter tomorrow for self and others.

These pivotal insights are featured in the analysis of hope in the health care profession offered by Elizabeth Tutton and others (Tutton et al. 2009). Building on previous work within the nursing field in its treatment of various kinds of patients, these scholars identified the various ways hope was conceived, specifically related to the type of patient and the care that was provided (Tutton et al. 2009, 121). The various studies they surveyed presented hope as a structural dynamic psychological process through which individuals (and often communities) willingly come together to address a life situation at hand. More specifically, the literature overview they examined associated hope with diverse forms of expectation, experiences of transcendence, and assorted feelings and cognitive reflections of persons actively working to overcome a health-related event and enacting positive perspectives for the future. Moreover, in a specific setting related to homeless people, Tutton and her colleagues also noted the importance of contextualizing hope within individuals' experiences:

From these studies the characteristics of hope were identified as moving forward and having the energy/power to do so. Hope was viewed within their experience of suffering, recovery, and life. The focus of hope was on general life changes and specific activities. Individuals' personal qualities were important in learning to live with their new situation and find positive experiences in the face of adversity. Some of the studies identified strategies that clearly supported the process of hope in individuals and those that led to feelings of hopelessness. This would suggest that there are key characteristics of hope, and that hope is located contextually within the individual's experience. (Tutton et al. 2009, 125)

These findings support a "social constructionist" approach that stresses the role of socialization and cultural differences in the conceptualization of hope (Averill et al. 1990). Moreover, as the depiction of hope in this field

also suggests, the term encompasses various processes within human beings that are not merely rational ones, but also aspirational ones that include awareness and enrichment of being. Finally, these various ways of conceiving hope show its multidimensional aspects: cognitive and emotional, active and passive, individual and social. They also lead me to think of hope as a distinctive human capacity to act in specific settings that present challenges to us; we respond by acting in ways that increase transformation, enact-self aspiration, and envision or imagine alternative forms of reality that inspire us onward in life. This emerging view of hope provides insight into the unique contributions religious reflection can bring to the wicked problem of climate change. The focus is on active human imagination and justice work vis-à-vis climate change, discerning possible opportunities for humans to reflect and change their behaviors in expectation of ushering in an alternative future. Hope is associated with the cognitive, emotional, and aspirational processes operating in human beings immersed in the dynamism of life. In short, I ground the concept of hope in a pragmatic, non-metaphysical philosophical anthropology.

Within the context of religious naturalism and my view of the material, relational human organism, a peculiar form of religious hope emerges. This concept of hope is identified with the myriad human processes that drive and enhance individuals' and communities' capacities to enact changes in our forms of relationality and to transform our self-perceptions as we address the dangers of climate change. In other words, I connect hope with the actions of relational, desirous, value-driven beings who, in learned ignorance, reject dominant notions of humans as being outside of nature. The views of Loyal Rue, another religious naturalist, are helpful here. Rue describes humans as star-born, Earth-formed creatures endowed by evolutionary processes who can seek, under the guidance of biological, psychological, and cultural systems, certain aims that are conducive to the simultaneous achievement of personal wholeness and social coherence within a wider community of biotic life (Rue 2005, 75). Accordingly, the conception of hope I endorse is not mere belief that things can change and get better, but rather a conscious, participatory process of coming to terms with the fullness, ambiguities, and challenges of life as we continue to achieve our humanity as material, relational organisms.

This phenomenology of hope underscores Jayne Waterworth's discussion of hope as anticipatory action, rather than mere expectation, on the part of humans. For Waterworth, hope as anticipation involves an active stance towards the objective in question. As she writes, "in anticipation, one 'seizes' or 'takes possession' of that which is conceived of, in advance of its arrival. When one hopes for an objective, its arrival is actively sought and prepared for prior to its coming" (Waterworth 2009, 14). Hope, in this context, involves a projective preparedness that reflects humans' immersion in and

engagement with other natural processes. In the final section, I explore the fuller implications of this conception of hope.

CLIMATE CHANGE, HOPING SUBJECTS, AND THE AIMS OF ECO-JUSTICE

In his discussion of the ambiguities of life and its aleatory nature, Michael Hogue evokes a framework for justice work that helps me illustrate the fuller implications of my notion of hope (Hogue 2013). He describes democratic principles that are agreed upon by willing participants as contemporaries come face to face with the uncertainties that characterize modern culture in the United States. Accordingly, Hogue evokes a notion of justice that is concretized and always incomplete:

[J]ustice cannot be realized in the abstract but must be lived. And living justice is impossible apart from the willingness and the ability of people with diverse life experiences to empathetically cross over to the experiences of others. Justice in this sense is not so much a moral principle or theoretical political ideal but an aspirational form of human relationship—the form of relationship upon which the flourishing of individuals and communities depends. (Hogue 2013, 268)

The pragmatic (albeit tentative) sense of justice Hogue conceives within the context of political theology is one that I find to be compelling in the wider context of enacting hope in response to the problem of climate change. Enacting hope as justice work, I believe, can help us address some of heightened vulnerabilities we feel in climate change's omnipresence.

Living in the Anthropocene alerts us to the fact that climate change is certain to increase certain forms of injustice already operating in our various sociological and cultural settings. As some climate theorists and environmental ethicists have reiterated again and again, with the reality of climate change existing vulnerabilities related to social inequalities will be exacerbated. Specifically, as Colin Polsky and Hallie Eakin have observed, recent “differential social outcomes associated with climate stress may have as much (or more) to do with historical inequities and disparities in the social and institutional contexts of human activity than with differential exposure to climate shocks” (Polski and Eakin 2011, 207). Climate change is sure to increase such problems. Consider, for example, the longstanding practices associated with structural racism in the United States that have led to what some have called the racialization of place (Cole and Foster 2001, 66–70). Both here and around the globe, eco-justice advocates have noted that the most vulnerable are the disadvantaged (often always poor and ethnic groups) who disproportionately live in neighborhoods with much higher environmental risks.

In North America, the proximity of certain groups to environmental disasters is not incidental. Poor rural communities and poor communities

of color are often strategically identified and targeted when decisions are made about facilities that spawn adverse ecological effects affecting myriad nature: incinerators, chemical manufacturers and radioactive waste storage areas, garbage dumps, diesel bus and truck garages, neighboring hazardous waste landfills, smokestack industries, industrial hog and chicken processors, oil refineries, and waste transfer stations. Decision makers, regulatory agencies, and local planning and zoning boards have too often made it easier to place such facilities in low-income African American or Latino communities than in primarily white, middle-to-upper-income communities. Economically challenged communities of color too often lack the resources (e.g., technical and legal expertise) required to challenge these sitings. They also frequently lack political influence that could help them advocate for their neighborhoods. Additionally, these communities seldom have access to crucial research and technical information that would relay the potential harm to humans' health that the proximity of the specific facility would bring to the community. Furthermore, in the case of Latino communities, important information in English-only documents prevents residents who speak only Spanish from learning about hazards (White 2017, 90).

In making crucial connections among problems that are perceived as isolated, eco-justice advocates underscore an important point: the need to have conscious, active care and concern for myriad nature, or to be aware of the effects of climate change on all of us. Awareness of this expansive vision generates the type of hope I introduce in this essay, which also involves challenging accounts of the typical metrics and stakeholders that are envisioned when measuring a violation of justice. Undue attention in public policy debates has been given to the social and economic merits for humans only. As Stephen Gardiner states: "Typically, policies are said to be good or bad 'for us' where the 'us' is either humanity as such, or particular countries or industries, and goodness and badness are measured by projections of economic costs and benefits in the present and future" (Gardiner 2011, 309). Advocating for climate justice must be done within the wider context of injustices that proliferate around the globe, such as "historical injustice (e.g. the legacies of slavery and unjust wars), international justice (e.g. trade and immigration), global justice (e.g. poverty, human rights), and the looming ecological crisis (e.g. species extinction, ocean acidification)" (Gardiner 2011, 312), as well as those related to systemic, discriminatory practices based on gender, gender expression, and embodiment. In other words, the hope that emerges here is not reducible to anticipating what might be good for human agents only, and, to certain types of human agents living in certain geographic locales. Rather, human agents enact hope when we recognize and expect better results than have occurred before as we continue to engage in multilayered processes of changing behaviors, motivations, and desires for myriad nature. Empathy

and affect are primary motivations in the human organism as we engage in forms of eco-justice.

Coalitions of compassionate, hopeful humans are willing to stay with the trouble, or to persist amid our uncertainty (Adamson and Davis 2016, 29). Intimations of this ethics of hope are already evident in the various mainstream religious traditions that have ushered in the current wave of religious environmentalism. In his timely article, “Snapshot of a Movement on the Move: The Paris Climate Talks and Religious Environmentalism,” Fletcher Harper provides an overview of this movement, charting its symbolic presence at the 2014 People’s Climate March. In September 2014 this march brought over four hundred thousand people into the streets of New York City to call for climate action from world leaders. As Harper notes,

Over twenty different Denominations and faith traditions collaborated to organize a kaleidoscopically-diverse multi-faith, with estimates that for at least 15,000 participants, faith was a primary motivation. Organized groups marched from the Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Unitarian Universalist, Sikh, Jain, Pagan, Humanist, Agnostic, Atheist, Indigenous, Baha’i, and Shinto communities. (Harper 2016, 3)

The concept of hope I identify with religious naturalism aligns with these symbolic forms of protest; it affirms foundational statements and influential encyclicals (e.g., Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’; On Care for Our Common Home*, which became the most widely-known religious statement on the environment in recent years).¹ Harper describes the papal encyclical as “the chorus of religious responses found in lyrical prose, incisive criticism, symbolic acts of solidarity, critiques of the unchecked neoliberal economic model that treats both the environment and the poor as disposable, and an embrace of ‘integral ecology,’ a holistic understanding of the relationship between people and planet” (Harper 2016, 2).

While sharing in the form of hope represented by these expressions of religious environmentalism, religious naturalism does even more. It celebrates the fact that being alive in the manner in which we find ourselves—as natural processes—compels humans to anticipate new possibilities as we prioritize our irreducible relationality. In doing so, we attend to Charles Long’s Tillichian-fused notion of religion as ultimate concern, or a mode of existing that is inescapably connected to human structures of “experience, motivations, intentions, behaviors, style and expression” (Long 1986, 7). This notion of religiosity as ultimate concern is also what I intend when associating hope with humans’ humble awareness of our place within a matrix of relational, myriad natural processes.

Conspicuously absent from this framework of hope is a guaranteed triumphalism. We acknowledge that certain possibilities *may* occur when

human organisms begin to align our actions with the deeper mystery that we are not at the center of all that is, but are rather a constitutive part of an interacting, evolving, and genetically related community of beings bound together inseparably in space and time. As scientist Chet Raymo describes it, “each of us is profoundly implicated in the functioning and fate of every other being on the planet, and ultimately, perhaps, throughout the universe” (Raymo 2008, 98). Hope in this context is persisting in our actions toward bettering the common good, invigorated by our moral imaginations. Granted, as Wildman suggests, religious naturalists reject “manipulative or unreflective supernatural authorization of moral claims and of the individuals and groups that make them” (Wildman 2014, 54). Rather, our moral imaginations are tentative articulations—ongoing, incomplete perspectives of how to enact our irreducible relationality with each other and with the more-than-human worlds that structure our being here. With appreciable awareness of how deeply embedded we are with myriad nature, and how our destiny is entangled with other natural processes, we continually revise, correct, or even forfeit older perspectives as newer forms of knowledge become available. This type of moral imagination sustains itself through our willing participation in “movements of scientific inquiry, movements of cultural expression, movements for global distributive justice, movements to eliminate needless suffering, and movements to preserve the ecology of our home planet” (Wildman 2014, 54).

As intimated above, there is a humbling, tentative uncertainty that pushes us toward becoming the change we desire. Thus, in conveying what sort of hope emerges when addressing climate change, I suggest it is not forgetting about our evolutionary capacities as biological organisms to love, and to create alternative systems of interaction and forms of relationality. Hope is dwelling in learned ignorance, recognizing our inextricable relationality with the more-than-human realities that share our destiny, and incessantly questioning our values, behaviors, and resource uses. Additionally, hope is not forfeiting the critical perspectives we can bring to any local forms of activism when protesting mountaintop mining for coal, drilling for oil/petroleum, and fracking for gas and oil. Grounded in learned ignorance, of knowing ourselves differently, these eco-conscious perspectives are crucial when deciding on the food we eat, determining how it is produced and transported, and considering ways of decreasing food waste in the United States. As hoping subjects embracing our relational materiality, humans continually increase the awareness that how we act from minute to minute, or how we achieve or become our humanity, has significant effects on other animals, plants, and eco-systems, as well as humans around the globe. This emerging view of hope is one, among other possible conceptions, that religious naturalism brings to the wicked problem of climate change.

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NOTE

1. <https://gbccc.org/buddhistclimate-change-statement-to-world-leaders-2015/>; <http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org/>; organized by the Bhumi Project, a joint project of the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies and GreenFaith, along with the Hindu America Foundation; http://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/COP21_Statement_englisch2.pdf; <http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/>.

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